

The Forgiveness of Jesus

Matthew 9:1-8

Little Johnny along with his sister Sally visited their grandparents who lived out in the country. On his arrival, they gave him his first slingshot. He spent hours practicing, but try as he may he could never hit the target. As he came back to the house, he spied Grandma's pet duck. On impulse he took aim and let his projectile fly hitting the duck which fell over dead.

Johnny panicked. Desperately he hid the duck in the woodpile. He turned to see his sister who had seen everything, but said nothing. After lunch that day, Grandma asked her to help with the dishes. But she insisted that Johnny wanted to help in the kitchen as she leaned over and whispered "remember the duck." And so, he washed dishes.

Later Grandpa asked if they wanted to go fishing, but Grandma said she needed Sally to help make supper. Smiling, she said that Johnny really wanted to help, again, whispering to her brother "remember the duck." He stayed while his sister went fishing. After several days of doing both his and her chores, Johnny couldn't stand it anymore and confessed to his Grandma what he had done to the duck. She gave him a big hug and said she knew because she saw the whole thing from the kitchen window. She went on to say that she had forgiven him because she loved him. She just wanted to see how long he would let his sister make a slave of him.

The topic of forgiveness is where we turn to today as we consider yet another characteristic of Jesus. There are any number of accounts we could turn to, but I have chosen **Matthew 9:1-8** as our text.

From an article in the *Greater Good Magazine*, they site that "psychologists generally define forgiveness as a conscious deliberate decision to release feelings of resentment or vengeance toward a person or group who has harmed you, regardless of whether they actually deserve your forgiveness."

Okay, that sounds pretty good so far. They go on to also describe what forgiveness is not. "Experts who

study or teach forgiveness make clear that when you forgive, you do not gloss over or deny the seriousness of an offense against you. Forgiveness does not mean forgetting, nor does it mean condoning or excusing offenses."

But here is where I depart from their definition of forgiveness. They say that while "forgiveness can help repair a damaged relationship, it doesn't obligate you to reconcile with the person who harmed you or release them from legal accountability. Instead, forgiveness brings the forgiver peace of mind and frees him or her from corrosive anger. While there is some debate over whether true forgiveness requires positive feelings toward the offender, experts agree that it at least involves letting go of deeply held negative feelings" blah, blah, blah.

Ok, so there is some truth to what they say, like gaining peace of mind or that forgiveness doesn't release the offending person from legal accountability, like forgiving someone who robbed you or caused an injury to you or worse yet murdered a loved one. There are still legal ramifications for those actions even though forgiven.

Where we part company is that forgiveness doesn't obligate you to reconcile with the person who harmed you. Here's what Jesus said earlier in His teaching during the Sermon on the Mount.

Matthew 5:23-24 "Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift."

It seems clear to me from what Jesus is saying that reconciliation is the end goal as you first seek forgiveness in order to be reconciled. Now, that said, you can't always guarantee that your efforts to be forgiven will result in the other person forgiving or that he will desire reconciliation. But on the whole, you have done what is necessary. We'll see as we continue that it is always our obligation to forgive and do what we can to be reconciled.

Ephesians 4:32 “Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.”

Let me just say here, that first, this is a command not a suggestion. We don't get to pick and choose who we forgive based on what someone else has done to us. We can't say “I'll forgive this, but not that” or “I'll forgive this person, but not that person.”

The second thing I want to say is that forgiveness is always paired with love. Love is the root factor in our ability or desire to forgive. Insinuated in Jesus coming to seek and save the lost is first His love followed by His willingness to forgive us all even though we offended Him through our sin. That's why He could say on the cross **“Father, forgive them”** and then to thief **“this day you will be with Me in paradise.”** Although it doesn't always happen, forgiveness and reconciliation are the goal. There were those Jesus forgave who didn't want to be reconciled.

We will see from our text that Jesus is always willing to forgive for the purpose of being reconciled with those who come to Him. With your Bibles turned to our text in Matthew, let's consider first our Christ who forgives.

I. OUR CHRIST WHO FORGIVES

You will never find in the Bible a definition of forgiveness, but the Bible does show us many examples of forgiveness in action, so from them we can understand what forgiveness is. The closest definition of forgiveness can be found in **Psalm 103:8-12 “The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. He will not always accuse, nor will He harbor His anger forever; He does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His love for those who fear Him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.”**

From a Biblical perspective as we consider forgiveness, it always functions in the area of sin. Why else would there be a need to forgive if no offense has been committed. But because we have

all sinned, there is a need for forgiveness and if you look again at **Psalm 103**, you will notice that forgiveness is fostered by love, and in the case of God, if He was not loving, He would not have any reason to forgive. He would instead hold our sins against us and mete out His judgment because we deserve it. So, forgiveness is always accompanied with sin.

Genesis 50:17 “I ask you to forgive your brothers the sins and the wrongs they committed in treating you so badly. Now please forgive the sins of the servants of the God of you father.”

Exodus 32:32 “But now, please forgive their sin.”

Leviticus 4:35 “In this way the priest will make atonement for them for the sin they have committed, and they will be forgiven.”

When we consider both a non-biblical or biblical understanding of forgiveness, a simple definition is that forgiveness is a release or dismissal of something. In the case of the Bible, **“the forgiveness we have in Christ involves the release of sinners from God's just penalty and the complete dismissal of all charges against us.”** (GotQuestions.com)

We clearly see that from passages like **Romans 8:1: “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”** That's forgiveness. Forgiveness pardons the condemned. Because we are in Christ, we are forgiven. **Colossians 1:14** says that **“in Christ we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”**

Speaking then of Jesus from our passage in Matthew, we see first His action to forgive.

A. His Action To Forgive – vv. 1-2

Looking back at chapter 8, we notice that Jesus was engaged in performing a number of miracles. He healed a man with leprosy. He healed the daughter of a centurion. He healed many people of diseases, including Peter's mother-in-law. He calmed the storm. He healed two men of demon possession after which, He along with the disciples climbed into a boat to return home in Capernaum.

Jesus had been teaching and miraculizing (that's a word I made up, but one I would let you use in Scrabble) down in the southeast corner of the Sea of Galilee. The healing of the two demoniacs took place in the town of Gadara about 6 miles from the Sea of Galilee. **Verse 1** tells us they got in a boat and headed to Capernaum, which is located in the northwest corner where we see Him doing the same thing.

In Mark's account (chapter 2) of this event, he tells us that Jesus was preaching the word to them. He also indicates that in the house where He was teaching, there was standing room only. He says that there was no room left, not even outside the door. I'm sure that gives you a mental picture that the place was crowded. People standing shoulder to shoulder, craning to both look and listen to what Jesus had to say. What Matthew doesn't include, but we see it in Mark is that there is a commotion up on the roof as chunks of debris begin to fall from the ceiling. In that day Houses had flat roofs. There was often an outside staircase that led up to the roof where people could go and rest in the cool part of the day. That's where we find Peter in the book of Acts when he receives his message from the Lord. When all the dust had settled, four friends had carried their paralytic friend up on the roof, cut a hole in the roof to lower him in front of Jesus because they couldn't get through the thick crowd.

Let's pause for a moment and think about what the crowd must have thought and seen at that moment. Their teaching had just been interrupted with this unconventional method of getting Jesus's attention. Some were probably perturbed. Others were incensed by the rudeness. Others may have been filled with contempt at these 5 intruders and perhaps even more so toward the paralytic. There may have been some who were sympathetic to his plight, but make no mistake, the prevailing thought of the day was that a person who was in some way diseased or handicapped must have sinned for him to be in that kind of condition. That's what the disciples thought when they asked Jesus who sinned that a man was born blind. Was it him or his parents? That's also the same thought Job's friends had about his plight.

So while it's not directly stated by the gospel writer's, you can well imagine that's what they must have thought. But let's be reminded of what the Lord said to Samuel when he went to anoint a new king from the sons of Jesse. As he sized up the men before him, he came to some erroneous conclusions, much different from those of the Lord who told him that man looks on the outward appearance, but God looks on the heart.

So while the crowd looked on this paralytic from an outward perspective, Jesus had already sized up His heart. He had a greater need that wasn't visible to the crowd. When Jesus saw the man, He knew the real need of the paralytic. It was forgiveness of sins, so that's why He responded: **"Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven."** It literally means your sins have been forgiven and are forgiven.

At that moment, we see His antagonism to forgive.

B. His Antagonism To Forgive – v. 3

At that moment of Jesus's declaration of forgiveness, there was a stir in the crowd. Luke 5 tells us that Pharisees from every village of Galilee as well as from Judea and Jerusalem had also come to hear Jesus. They didn't have to say a thing because their thoughts were written all over their faces. They were accusing Jesus of blasphemy. To them, Jesus was just a man and for a man to claim to do what only God could do, was blasphemy. Blasphemy is to speak irreverently about God. It is also claiming to be God. The religious leaders believed and taught that only God could forgive sins. So they attributed what Jesus said as blasphemy since He was doing something only God could do. It was from this point on in Jesus's ministry that He faced severe opposition and antagonism from the religious leaders.

Jesus didn't need to see the shock and horror written on their faces, He knew their thoughts and that's when He shows His authority to forgive.

C. His Authority To Forgive – vv. 4-6

Either Jesus is an arrogant blasphemer, or He is God in the flesh.

Jesus asked them a question. Is it easier to forgive a man of sin or tell the paralytic to get up and walk? If you had a choice between having your sins forgiven or having a disease or disability healed, which would you choose?

The obvious answer to Jesus's question is that it's easier to forgive someone their sin. It's intangible. It's something you can't verify. If Christ was only a man, they would have been correct because in the case of forgiveness of sins, only the divine can forgive. Alexander MacLaren states **"Jesus's words are divine love wiping out man's sins."**

What the religious leaders failed to see in Jesus's authority both to forgive sin and heal the man is that forgiveness is an exclusively divine act because they could not and would not see that Jesus could be both divine and human, God and man. So Jesus does something in **verse 7** to affirm that He has the authority to forgive.

D. His Affirmation To Forgive – v. 7

"You can't see if this man's sins are forgiven, but you can see if I tell this man to get up and walk out of the room. If I can't make this man walk again, I can't forgive His sin. The proof that I have authority to forgive sin is by seeing him healed, so get up and go home."

Performing the miracle was the way Jesus would show He could forgive sin. If He couldn't perform the miracle of healing the man, it would prove to them that He was just a charlatan. If He couldn't heal the man, neither could He forgive the man. It would be clear.

Now let's fast forward in time a couple years from this event and say that if Jesus couldn't forgive this man from his sin, neither would His death on the cross result in forgiveness of our sin.

Jesus healing the man physically demonstrated His ability and authority to forgive the man of sin spiritually. It was a declaration that He was who He claimed to be – God in the flesh, who has the power to forgive sins. This Christ forgives.

There is nothing we have done He cannot forgive.

There is nothing we have done He won't forgive.

But what does that forgiveness do for us?

Notice from our passage our comfort from forgiveness.

II. OUR COMFORT FROM FORGIVENESS – v. 2

Let's take a look at the Lord's proclamation because what He has to say brings us comfort.

A. The Lord's Proclamation

"Take heart, My son."

The KJV says **"be of good cheer."**

The Amplified says **"take courage."**

To put it in our terms – "cheer up."

It refers to courage that is deep and genuine. There is another Greek word that refers to outward boldness like when you are facing a tough situation by gritting your teeth to endure some pain or when you whistle in the dark to keep away the fear you might otherwise have. This kind of courage tries to overcome fear through your own sheer willpower.

The courage Jesus is speaking of here is the courage to eliminate fear. Jesus is literally saying to the man "don't be afraid, because you don't have anything to be afraid of."

When He tells the man to **"take heart, your sins are forgiven"**, He is saying that when a person repents of sin, he no longer has to fear God's judgment.

I John 1:9 "If we confess our sins (to God), He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

We can take comfort in the proclamation of Jesus. There was a chorus we sang at camp that says:

My sins are gone

And will not be remembered,

God in mercy tenderly forgives.

He lives within, assuring my salvation

giving confirmation that his Word is true,

Someday heaven I will see, all its joys forever

share,

But until that eternity, I will tell it everywhere
 It's real, it's sure, His *promise is secure*
 Since He said it's so, by faith I know...
 My sins are gone.

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Do those words bring you comfort? They should because in what He proclaims there is His promise.

B. The Lord's Promise

“Take heart, my son, your sins are forgiven.”

Numbers 23:19 “God is not a man that He should lie. Neither the son of man that He should repent. Hath He not said, and shall He not do it? Or hath He spoken and shall He not make it good?” In **John 14:6** He said He is the Truth.

When Jesus told the dying thief next to Him that he would be in paradise, Jesus was telling the man that his sins had been forgiven and promised him an eternal home in heaven.

When Jesus told this paralytic that his sins were forgiven, He meant what He said. He didn't give the man false hope so his death would be easier.

When missionaries in northern Alaska were trying to translate the Bible into the language of the Eskimos, they discovered that there was no word for forgiveness. After patient listening, they discovered a word that meant *“not being able to think about it anymore.”* That word was used throughout the translation to refer to forgiveness, because God promises repentants sinner **“I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.”** (**Jeremiah 31:34**)

Psalm 103:8-12 “The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. He will not always accuse, nor will He harbor His anger forever; He does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His love for those who fear Him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.”

Where Jesus says elsewhere **“I tell you the truth”**,

the same is true here even though it's not stated. He gives us the same promise as He does to this man – our sins are gone.

When the Bible says that God forgets, He does not somehow develop some kind of divine amnesia. It's not that He forgets our sin, instead He chooses not to act on the basis of those sins because we have been cleansed in the blood of Jesus and because He is faithful to His promise He forgives us. We see that principle in **I Corinthians 13:5** where it says that **“love keeps no record of wrongs.”** That means that the person who does the forgiving chooses to continue by not holding sin against the wrongdoer or add it to future accounts.

“Take heart, My son; your sins are forgiven.” In that we not only see the Lord's proclamation and His promise, we also see the Lord's pardon.

C. The Lord's Pardon

I think we all know and agree that words can be cheap.

How many times have we either said or heard “I promise”, but nothing happened. We didn't get what we were promised or we didn't give what we had promised.

I promise to give you a million dollars.

I promise to clean up my room.

I promise to have the report done by the end of the day.

I promise to stop...

I promise to start...

Someone once said that **“Broken promises are like broken mirrors. They leave those who held to them bleeding and staring at fractured images of themselves.”**

You've also heard it said that we shouldn't make promises we can't keep.

Someone else observed that **“Promises are like crying babies in a theater, they should be carried out at once.”**

So when Jesus says He will pardon the man of his sins, you should know that it's a promise He not

only intends to keep, but one He will keep.
 We never have to wonder if His words are true.
 We never have to wonder if He will follow through.

John MacArthur writes that “the most distinctive message of Christianity is the reality that sin can be forgiven. That is the heart and lifeblood of the gospel, that men can be freed from sin and its consequences...the supreme, overarching good news is that sinful man can be fully (and I want to emphasize that word – FULLY) cleansed and brought into eternal fellowship with God...forgiveness of sin is God’s greatest gift because it meets man’s greatest need.”

His forgiveness is complete. His forgiveness is not temporary. His forgiveness is not conditional in that He won’t change His mind. No other world religion offers forgiveness like Christianity. They are all based on the hopes of some meritorious action on our part hoping that what we do can absolve our guilt. Only Christianity offers forgiveness based on the work of someone else, the person and work of redemption on the cross by Jesus. Our faith in His shed blood is the only means by which we can be forgiven.

But forgiveness comes with a challenge. It’s not on Christ’s part because He is willing and able to forgive our sins. The challenge is on our part.

III. OUR CHALLENGE IN FORGIVENESS

The first challenge for us is to be humble with the Lord.

A. Be Humble With the Lord

James 4:10 tells us to “**Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord.**”

When the tax collector entered the temple, he humbled himself before the Lord and pleaded with God for mercy (**Luke 18:13**).

Because of his physical condition, the paralytic came in a prostrate position. But I think that because he came in faith, his heart was also humble before the Lord.

We must come with a heart of reverence and humility before the Lord when seeking forgiveness.

Psalm 51:1-2

Let me come back to **James 4:10** because the verse continues by saying that when we are humble before the Lord, He will exalt us or lift us up. And isn’t that what the Lord did for the paralytic? He told the man to rise up. Physically he walked out a healed man. Spiritually he walked out a forgiven man. He came in humbled, he left exalted. He came in a sinner, he left forgiven.

Akin to being humble, the second challenge for us is to be honest with the Lord.

B. Be Honest With the Lord – Psalm 51:3-6

1. God knows our sin – vv. 3-5

2. God knows our soul – v. 6

Psalm 139:1-12

It doesn’t matter where we go, what we do or even what we think, God knows it, so we might as well be honest with Him. When God asked Adam where he was, it wasn’t because God didn’t know, God wanted Adam to be honest with Him and with himself. So when we come to God about our sin, we need to admit our wrongdoing. We need to own it instead of making excuses for it. We need to be honest, but we also need to be heartfelt, which is the third challenge.

C. Be Heartfelt With the Lord –

Psalm 51:10-12, 14, 17

We need to be sincere, genuine, remorseful. There are a lot of people who are honest when they confess something, but they are not heartfelt. We need to be both. We see that in David’s confession from **Psalm 51** where we see his sincerity as he seeks God’s forgiveness. He wasn’t just telling God what He wanted to hear so he could keep his job as king. His confession was heartfelt, truly repentant.

Psalm 32:1-5

Why does Jesus choose to forgive us? Because He loves us.

A couple who had been married for 15 years began having more than usual disagreements. They wanted their marriage to work so they agreed on a plan the wife came up with. Each had a “fault” box. When something irritated them, they were to write it on a slip of paper and drop it in the spouse’s box. The wife was irritated when her husband left the lid off the jelly jar, forgot to hang up a wet towel, or fail to put dirty clothes in the hamper. The month rolled by, and they emptied their boxes. The husband read and reflected on all the things he had done wrong in the month that irritated his wife. Then she opened up her box and on each piece of paper he had written “I love you.”

Every time we sin, Jesus writes on a piece of paper “I love you” written with every drop of blood He shed on the cross, the confirmation of His forgiveness of our sin.

When we choose not to seek forgiveness, we remain a slave to sin and will not experience the love of Jesus. But when we come to Christ seeking forgiveness, we have His promise that our sins are gone and gone forever because He loves us.

You can choose to walk out today chained to sin or free in Christ.

In the 14th Century, Robert the Bruce was fighting for Scotland to become free of English rule. Near the end of the war the English wanted to capture him to keep him from becoming king of Scotland. They put his own bloodhounds on his trail. When they got close, Bruce could hear the baying of the bloodhounds. His aide feared they were done for betrayed by the dogs who would reveal their position. But Bruce told him not to fear and jumped into the river. They waded upstream for a short distance and climbed out to the other side. When the dogs came to the river they stopped, even though they were urged on. But they had lost the scent because the waters covered their tracks.

Satan comes along and accuses us of sin, but the scent is lost in the flowing stream of the Savior’s shed blood, and we stand both free and forgiven.

We all come to Jesus paralyzed by sin. What we need is His forgiveness.

Will you come to Him today, whether it’s seeking His forgiveness for salvation or forgiveness to be reconciled from a broken relationship with God due to unconfessed sin?

IV. OUR CALL TO FORGIVE

Ephesians 4:32

Colossians 3:13

Do you need to seek forgiveness from the Lord?

Do you need to seek forgiveness from someone?

Do you need to forgive someone?

Christ stands ready, willing, and able to forgive all sin. We must do the same.