

9:2-8

THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

C. The Crowd's Reaction: "Nothing ever seen like this in Israel!"

D. The Pharisees' Reaction: "Jesus is in league with Satan."

VII. JESUS EVANGELIZES GALILEE AND SHARES HIS VISION WITH THE DISCIPLES (9:35-38)

A. Situation: Jesus goes on a preaching and healing tour of Galilee.

B. Jesus' Motivation: His compassion and intelligent love for the leaderless multitudes.

C. Jesus' Challenge: Pray for helpers to reap the waiting harvest.

Section 18

JESUS FORGIVES AND HEALS
A PARALYTIC

(Parallels: Mark 2:1-12; Luke 5:17-26)

TEXT: 9:2-8

2. And behold, they brought to him a man sick of the palsy, lying on a bed: and Jesus seeing their faith said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, be of good cheer; thy sins are forgiven.
3. And behold, certain of the scribes said within themselves, This man blasphemeth.
4. And Jesus knowing their thoughts said, Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts?
5. For which is easier, to say, Thy sins are forgiven; or to say, Arise, and walk?
6. But that ye may know that the Son of man hath authority on earth to forgive sins (then saith he to the sick of the palsy), Arise, and take up thy bed, and go unto thy house.
7. And he arose, and departed to his house.
8. But when the multitudes saw it, they were afraid, and glorified God, who had given such authority unto men.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Why do you suppose so many theologians began to gather around Jesus on this occasion? Were they slowly becoming His disciples too?
- b. Why did Jesus declare first the forgiveness of the man's sins? Would it not have been better first to heal the man and then declare his sins forgiven? It certainly would not have scandalized the religious

leaders so drastically. What do you think about Jesus' method? What was He trying to accomplish by this abrupt approach? Did He not know that He would shock them by this method?

- c. Why did Jesus command the man to carry off his pallet?
- d. Why could not the four men have waited until Jesus finished teaching and dismissed the crowds? What was so important about their friend's illness that demanded that they interrupt Jesus' teaching?
- e. If the four men had had the opportunity to express their desire to Jesus regarding their sick friend, would they have been more likely to ask for healing for him or forgiveness? Why do you say that? If you think they would have asked for healing, then why does Jesus give them what they would not have requested? Is not He being a bit presumptuous?

PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

After several days He returned to Capernaum. On one of those days the news spread that He was at home, and so many people gathered together that there was soon no longer room for them even about the doorway. He was preaching the word to them. Now as He was teaching, there were some Pharisees and teachers of the law sitting near Him. They had come from every town in Galilee and Judea, even from Jerusalem. The power of the Lord was with Him to heal people.

Meanwhile, there came some men bringing to Him a paralytic lying on his pallet which was carried by four men. They were trying to bring him in to lay him down before Jesus. However, finding no way to get near Him on account of the crowd, they went up on the roof. They removed the roof above Him, and when they had dug an opening, they lowered the stretcher on which the paralyzed man lay, down through the tiles into the midst of the crowd in front of Jesus.

When Jesus saw their faith, He addressed the paralytic, "Take courage, my son, your sins have been forgiven you."

At this some of the scribes and Pharisees who were sitting there began debating in their minds, saying to themselves, "This fellow is blaspheming. Who is this blasphemer? Why is he talking this way? It is blasphemy! For who can forgive sins but God alone?"

Now Jesus, knowing their thoughts, realized in His spirit that they were reasoning in this fashion within themselves, answered them, "Why do you argue this way and think evil in your hearts? For which is easier to say to a paralyzed man, 'Your sins have been forgiven you,' or to tell him. Get up, take up your stretcher and begin walking?"

But, to make you know that the Son of man has on earth the right to forgive sins" (He then said to the paralyzed man) "Stand up, I tell you; pick up your pallet and return to your home!"

And immediately he stood up in their presence, took up the pallet he had been lying on, and went out in the sight of them all. He walked home, giving praise to God.

When the crowds saw what had happened, they were afraid, for astonished amazement seized them all. They began praising God who had granted such authority to men. They were filled with awe, saying, "We have never seen anything like this! We have seen wonderful things today!"

SUMMARY

Jesus returned to Capernaum after His first general tour evangelizing Galilee. While teaching, He was the center of immediate attention, especially of investigating committees from all Palestine. Four friends of a paralytic show real ingenuity in placing their friend before Jesus. The Lord took the opportunity to demonstrate His divine prerogative to forgive sin, by showing Himself to possess power that only God could claim. This He did by healing the paralytic.

NOTES

9:2 And behold, they brought to him a man sick of the palsy. The brevity of Matthew here emphasizes the fact that he has sharpened this story down to the barest facts in order to set in sharp contrast just the major points. Mark and Luke, however, add the following details:

1. There were four men who carried the paralytic on a portable mattress or pallet-type bed, easily rolled up and carried over the shoulder.
2. The room in which Jesus sat teaching was packed with people, primarily the Pharisees and teachers of the law who had come from many cities. Secondly, other people jammed into all the rest of the available space, blocking all entrance to the house. This concentration of religious leaders around Jesus is probably no accident. This is a "congressional investigation" carried out by these recognized authorities in Israel. Certainly these rabbis had gathered at this time in Capernaum from as far away as Judea and Jerusalem! Considering the distance, we may conclude that they were not merely dropping in on Jesus after a Sunday afternoon

jaunt! They had probably walked the 75-100 miles to be here in Capernaum at this moment. Why? There is a revolution afoot, not only religious but possibly political, for all they knew about it. They were here to hear Jesus and arrive at some definite conclusion about Him: what is the general trend of His doctrine? What of His authority or right to teach? Where is His movement leading? What does He say about himself? For these reasons what occurs on this occasion becomes the more significant. Jesus is literally on trial before the leaders of Israel and He well knows that their report will be circulated throughout the higher echelons of the highest governing body of Judaism. One can not be too careful how he talks before such an august assembly. But observe well how Jesus comports Himself in their presence! Luke (5:17) records that "the power of the Lord was with Him to heal." Is this a simple, general statement, prefacing what is to follow or does this imply that other miracles had been wrought that day prior to the climactic cure of the paralytic? If the former, then it is made abundantly clear by Luke that Jesus' power to work miracles was not at all hindered by the critical disbelief of the opponents present. This incident, along with other similar situations, becomes the best kind of evidence that Jesus' miracles are historic fact, since they were done in the presence of enemies who had everything to gain by successfully disproving the reality of the miracle.

3. The four men, finding they could not enter by usual means, went up on the roof of the house. They either climbed the outside stairway leading to the flat roof, or else they went from roof to roof over the neighboring, contiguous houses until they stood above where Jesus was teaching. Then, by removing the roof tiles, they made an opening just above Jesus through which they lowered their friend into Jesus' presence.

Why did they not simply wait until Jesus' message was over and the crowds dismissed, before they brought their helpless friend to Jesus? These men's hearts were probably so burdened with the real need of their friend, that they were driven by the urgency to seize this precious opportunity to help him. Nothing else is said in the text of the seriousness or urgency of the man's condition, except the hurry of these his friends to take emergency measures to get help for him fast. Was his paralysis of such nature as to lead to heart stoppage and death? If so, it was now or never. Certainly, the one element that caused these men to overcome the practical obstacles, even the objection

that they should have waited until Jesus were free to help them, is their great faith in Jesus Christ as Healer. Such a One as He, could also be merciful about interruptions.

Though Jesus was concentrating all His efforts and attention upon teaching the word to this representative cross-section of His people, He did not regard the interruption, caused by the four men's de-tiling the roof above Him, as an unwelcome intrusion. As the event which follows indicates, He saw it as but the opportunity for perfect confirmation of the authority of His teaching. Also, since the entire event takes place in a private house (for this is the distinct impression given by Mark 2:1, 2), the entire situation was less formal than would be a synagogue service. Thus, the interruption would be less offensive, however unusual the method used by four men to make their need known.

sick of the palsy (*paralytikon*) Luke (5:18) follows better medical terminology, apparently, since he uses the more specific phrase "a man who was paralyzed," whereas the other two call him a **paralytic**. (See Plummer, *Luke, in loc.*) **Lying on a bed**: this oriental bed consisted of perhaps no more than a low mattress upon which the man was carried by his four friends, each one holding up a corner. For lowering the pallet into the presence of Jesus, they may have tied ropes to the four corners.

Jesus, seeing their faith. Mark and Luke tell in detail what hindered these intrepid friends of the paralytic and to what lengths they went to overcome these obstacles. **Jesus saw their faith** and was pleased. Their vivid, detailed planning which they dared execute is more eloquent than words. No great confessions or pious words were uttered. All three Gospel writers unite here in describing their deeds as **their faith**. Jesus apparently spoke first. Either the paralytic had no strength to utter his request for healing or else Jesus gave him no opportunity, his faith being so obvious. He had permitted himself to be laid before Jesus, regardless of the unusual method or the social or physical obstacles they must overcome. **Their faith** cheered Jesus too, because of the contrast to the unbelief and critical prejudices in the scribes and Pharisees in the room with Him.

Jesus . . . said unto the sick of the palsy, Again, Jesus may have spoken first in order to speak, not about the obvious disease of the man, but about forgiveness of sins. Jesus seizes here the initiative, temporarily taken from Him by the interruption caused by the four men's digging through the roof. Dust and small clods of dirt had been falling down on the Pharisees' fine robes and while they were

brushing themselves off, half laughing at the interruption Jesus' followers brought Him, half complaining at the disagreeable soiling of their clothes and warm air in the crowded room, Jesus graciously takes charge of the moment. He knows what He will ultimately do about the paralytic's disease, but He must speak first, before the request for healing is made, lest this cloud the issue He has chosen to bring before the critics in the room; His identity and consequent authority.

Son, or as some Greek texts have it in Mk. 2:5, **My son**, as well as **Man**, (Luke 5:20) all indicate that Jesus is being especially friendly, speaking in this kind, familiar way to the man lying helpless at His feet.

In the article *anthropos*, Arndt and Gingrich, 67, say that "in address *anthrope*, *friend*, indicates a close relationship between the speaker and the one addressed, Lk. 5:20." However it can also have a reproachful connotation, as well as express some familiarity between the one who uses it and the one addressed. (See Lk. 12:14; 22:58, 60.)

Jesus did not hold Himself aloof from sinners, as might the reverend doctors from Jerusalem seated around Him. He dared show his affection for these weak, helpless sinners who came to Him!

Be of good cheer, your sins are forgiven. Jesus saw more than their faith: He saw also the despair of a guilty conscience facing judgment. He saw the discouragement of an enslaved heart that has learned, through long experience of failure, to take sin for granted. With a gesture of loving tenderness, Jesus dealt with the man's greater need for forgiveness. **Your sins are forgiven.** This was no mere wish or description of some future pardon, but a declaration of fact. Jesus speaks as a kindly Father ("Son") and an acquitting Judge ("your sins are forgiven.") For the moment Jesus turns His full attention on this man, seemingly ignoring the scribes and others around Him, disregarding their attention almost as if it mattered not what they thought, while He took time to encourage and save this lost soul hanging between the hospital and hell. The urgency with which the man was brought suggests that his paralysis was critical and could become fatal if not helped immediately. If so, this man, staring death and judgment in the face, needed pardon before God, even if he were NEVER healed! Jesus gave him both pardon and healing!

Why did Jesus address the man first in relationship to his sins, and not rather regarding the healing of his paralysis? Because a man who is right with God and KNOWS it certainly, can endure all manner

of suffering and waiting. (Consider 2 Cor. 12:5-10) He can even face death calmly, though horribly paralyzed, because he knows that death in God's grace is his final freedom and highest joy. But a man who is merely healed but not forgiven before God does not share this certainty, until he makes it right with God. But why had not Jesus forgiven other people before He healed them prior to this occasion? Why begin here? Why not forgive, then heal, in every case? There had been many other opportunities to say it before now. It is obvious that Jesus has a special purpose at this time and place:

1. Jesus deliberately brought up the question of forgiveness for clarification and teaching. He must communicate the message to men that He has authority on earth to forgive sins. This is as good a time as any to start telling them. But this fact, that He must clarify this doctrine for the scribes, must not obscure the greater truth that He was helping the sinner who had the need.
2. Jesus needed, in the nature of evidence, just such occasions to connect His claims to divine prerogatives with demonstrations that verify His claims as true. He had come to earth, not to work miracles, but to identify Himself as the Forgiver of sins.
3. The fact that Jesus mentioned forgiveness in place of a declaration of the healing of the paralytic must not be taken to mean that Jesus sees a direct and necessary causal connection between one's individual sickness, disease or death, and his personal sins. Even though Jesus declared the man's sins forgiven, he was not immediately healed. A discussion about Jesus' alleged blasphemy intervened before the man was casually released from his paralysis.

However, it is true that in SOME cases diseases are directly attributable to a course of indulgence in certain sins or vicious practices, as for example, intemperate eating and drink, fornication or any other misuse of the body. (See Ro. 1:24-27; I Co. 6:13-18) If this is the case with this paralytic, then Jesus removes whatever fears the paralytic may have had that Jesus would not help so great a sinner. The Lord speaks forgiveness to his soul, a far greater need than mere freedom from his paralysis.

One may well doubt whether the man's paralysis be caused by a consciousness of guilt, even though psychosomatic paralysis is not impossible. One may doubt the psychosomatic connection, since Jesus' argument is based on the evidence presented through a real healing uniquely produced by the instantaneous exercise of the power of God. But, even if the man's paralysis were 100% psychologically based, still the obvious instantaneity of his total

cure, without weeks of consultations and therapy, is miraculous, in the supernatural sense of the word.

And even if all the rabbis in Palestine had taught, as some of them actually did (see citations by Barclay, *Matthew*, I, 334), that there is no sickness without some transgression back of it, is it necessary for Jesus to accommodate Himself to that view, in order to deal with this paralytic whose personal views may have been influenced by that thinking? (Cf. Jn. 9:1-3) While it is true that Jesus dealt with men in their own situation and culture, yet it is not necessary to conceive of Him as leaving men in this belief, if He knew it were not true. While it is true that disease and death are in the world because of sin (Ro. 5:12), yet we err greatly in presuming to describe as sinners everyone whom we find personally afflicted, as if God had smitten them on the basis of the greatness of their sins. If this paralyzed man has been attacked by some malady that is paralyzing him, then there may be no direct connection between his present condition and specific, past sins. A person who is bitten by a poisonous spider or serpent is not morally responsible for the physical results that ensue.

Whatever Jesus' reasons may have been, the scribes' personal views certainly affected their understanding of Jesus' words. Barclay (I, 334) notes:

Rabbi Alexander said, "The sick arises not from his sickness, until his sins are forgiven . . . Rabbi Chija ben Abba said, 'No sick person is cured from sickness, until all his sins are forgiven him.' This unbreakable connection between suffering and sin was part of the orthodox Jewish belief of the time of Jesus. . . . Now remember that these scribes believed that no one could get up and walk unless his sins were forgiven. If Jesus was able to make this man get up and walk, then that was unanswerable proof that the man's sins were forgiven, and that Jesus' claim was true.

9:3 And behold, certain of the scribes said within themselves, this man blasphemeth. If they had been surprised at the intrusion, and disgusted by the discomfort of dust falling down into the room around them, and contemptuous at Jesus' common familiarity with the paralytic, this is all forgotten in the greater shock caused by Jesus' claim to forgive sins. Not only is this a surprise to the Jewish scholars present, since the Mosaic law of pardon was then in vigor. But this would surprise Jesus' closest disciples also, since this is apparently the first of very few times in Jesus' personal ministry when

He pronounced a person forgiven. (See Lk. 7:48; 23:43). We moderns can share this sense of shock only to the extent that we have learned to feel deeply the horror for and heinousness of blasphemy. This depends upon the depth of our jealousy for God's honor. But Jesus' purpose for risking this jolting of the conscience of all present is clear and necessary (9:6a). Jesus could have eased tensions by simply healing the man without a word about forgiveness. The oppositions and anger He aroused might have been avoided. But Jesus must reveal the astounding truth that the whole human race has Someone who understands them perfectly, whose perfect life condemns all their sins, but whose divine prerogatives qualify Him to bring forgiveness and righteousness to all who trust Him. This is truth in which not only that generation was interested, but which all honest men have longed to hear. And, best of all, Jesus announced this truth "in the presence of those most interested in exposing it, if false, and most able to explode it, had it not been true. Whether His words were truth or blasphemy, was the controversy between Christ and the rulers from that day to the end of His Ministry, Mt. 26:65." (McGarvey *Fourfold Gospel*, 186)

The scribes said within themselves. See on 9:4

This man blasphemeth. This secret declaration of their consciences signalled the beginning of the scribes' hostility and opposition to Jesus. The criticisms developed into open confrontations in five specific areas:

1. Alleged blasphemy: here
2. Having common fellowship with people with whom no self-respecting rabbi would ever be found: (Mt. 9:11; Lk. 7:36-50)
3. Neglect of traditional religion with its ascetic practices, such as the ablutions (Mt. 15:1-20); the fasts (Mt. 9:14-17)
4. Violation of the sabbath: (Jn. 5:15-18; Mt. 12:1-14)
5. Being in league with Satan: (Mt. 9:34; 12:22-45)

Although from a Jewish standpoint, all these charges were serious enough, it was this charge of blasphemy for which they crucified the Lord. (See Mt. 26:63-66)

There are two means of blasphemy: direct, by which one calls God unjust or unholy, or disparages anything that speaks of the sovereign majesty of God; or indirect, by which one holds anything or anyone as equal with God, hence, placing oneself in the place of God, or assuming any of His unique prerogatives. Thus, Jesus deserved to die, if He were not the very incarnation of God Himself! The Jews were right in their attack. Their horror in the presence of this apparently common human being, who lays claim to one of God's unique

rights, is proper. But when they refuse the evidence that He IS the Son of God, then THEY become the blasphemers. But their horror was not so innocent as it may seem at first glance. Their contempt is unwarranted, since all Jesus' other miracles should have identified Him to them as possessing this right without further proof. **This man**, on the lips of these accusers, is decidedly emphatic: "Who does this guy think He is anyway?" (Cf. Lk. 4:22; 7:39, 49; 9:9; 14:30; 15:2; Jn. 9:33 for other emphatic uses of *houtos*, "this one, this fellow, this man.")

The Pharisees arrived at this conclusion through a syllogism perhaps similar to this one:

Major Premise: "No man can forgive sins but God alone."

Minor Premise: "But Jesus of Nazareth is not God in any sense."

Conclusion: "Therefore, Jesus is blaspheming God in arrogating to himself authority to forgive sins, a prerogative which is God's alone."

Their major premise is a right principle. (Isa. 43:25; 44:22 etc.) The fundamental question lay in the minor premise: is Jesus God in any sense that affects the truth of His claim to forgive sins? For the correction of this false conclusion drawn by the Jews, see on 9:5, where Jesus' argument shows the fallacy of their minor premise and conclusion.

9:4 And Jesus knowing their thoughts said. Several factors combine to lead us to the unshakeable conviction that Jesus supernaturally perceived the content of their mind. While the probability is great that anyone could have read the minds of these scribes, given the knowledge of their views on blasphemy and the overt expressions on their face and perhaps the tearing of their garments, yet the capacity to divulge with unerring accuracy what had not been said is an obvious miracle of omniscience. At first view Luke (5:21) gives the impression that at least some of the scribes expressed their thoughts openly in words, which are, in fact, reported by all three Evangelists. Or is Luke's expression to be interpreted in light of the supposedly fuller statements reported by the other two? This is the case here, for, as Plummer (*Luke*, 155) demonstrates, *legontes*, "saying," may be used of thoughts, even when not uttered. (See Lk. 12:17; Mt. 21:25) So, if we conclude that the scribes said nothing about what was going on in their minds, although they were deeply agitated, this event identifies Jesus as God who knows men's hearts, come in the flesh. (Cf. I Sam. 16:7; I Chron. 28:9; 2 Chron. 6:30; Ezek. 11:5; Jer. 17:10; Acts 1:24; Rev. 2:23; Jn. 2:24, 25) While Jesus did not here directly claim

omniscience, yet he challenged their thoughts with such pointed reference to them, that had this not been the direction of their thoughts, the scribes could have objected to Jesus' misrepresentation of their reaction to His words. No such objection is recorded. Rather:

1. Matthew and Mark describes the objectors as "saying to themselves" or "questioning in their hearts."
2. All three Evangelists picture Jesus as "knowing their thoughts," or "as perceiving in His spirit that they thus questioned within themselves," or "perceiving their questionings."
3. Jesus did locate openly the place where their evil thoughts and questionings arose: "in your hearts," a fact cited by all three Gospel writers.

This power to pronounce with certainty the hidden, innermost thoughts of the human mind, qualifies Jesus as the perfect Judge, not only of the Pharisees and scribes whose hearts He has just laid bare before them all, but He, as Judge, can acquit the paralytic too!

Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts? The scribes' conclusion was not illogical, granted the premises. But they refused to admit the evidence which would have corrected their minor premise and led them to a different conclusion. Their reasoning was evil, not merely faulty or incorrect, since it was produced by hearts bent upon rejecting evidence, bent upon destroying Jesus. Jesus' question, therefore, challenges the motivations and purposes behind their rejection of His deity. These hidden reasons for their objections were morally indefensible. And their objections lay in their own pre-conceived notions about what God's Messiah had to be like. The evil lay in adhering to these prejudices rather than follow the clear evidence He had so faithfully and continuously presented of His divine right.

Note that Jesus does not object to the right principle upon which the theologians state their case. He respected their zeal for God's honor, by claiming to forgive sins, not in His right but upon God's authority. He tacitly admits that they are right in affirming that anyone who would presume to forgive sins on his own authority would be guilty of blasphemy. As we follow Jesus' method of argument, we see that if He had claimed to forgive this man's sins, without God's authority to do so, He Himself would be what they had claimed, a blasphemer. The fact that He virtually accepts their way of stating the case, makes His further declarations and proof of His right so much stronger.

9:5 For which is easier, to say, Thy sins are forgiven; or to say, Arise, and walk? The twice repeated expression

to say, is the key to Jesus' meaning. Even though Jesus asks which is **easier** to claim, His obvious intention is to place both claims on the same level, because both statements are ridiculous claims for the man who can do neither. Both claims demand the identical power and authority of God, before either can be seriously meant. Jesus is not asking which is the easier to do, but which is easier to claim. Naturally, the **easier to claim** is to forgive sins, for none can examine any external, visible evidence that proves it. But to claim to heal a paralytic is capable of visible, immediate verification. It is here that the real test of Jesus' authority will lie, if He can demonstrate through this latter claim that He is God and possesses therefore the proper and personal authority to forgive sins. This He proceeds to do, because, even though He has proven it over and over again, Jesus would not ask these present to believe without evidence. They must have a rational ground on which to rest their faith in His word. Though they have more than enough evidence to convince the honest heart, mercifully Jesus gives them more. But this is not simply more evidence, since it is inextricably linked with His majestic claim to forgive sins here on earth.

9:6 **But that you may know**, i.e. with the specific purpose of making my authority clear and obvious to you. Here Jesus draws the direct, immediate connection between His works and His claims. (See Jn. 10:38; 14:10, 11) **that the Son of man** (See Notes on 8:20) This use of this title by Jesus forms the conclusive proof that Jesus does not intend thereby to identify Himself with mankind, in the sense of making the title equivalent to "man" or "Everyman," as opposed to "Son of God." The authority to forgive sins does not belong to men. Jesus uses this title in its true Messianic sense, determined from Daniel (7:13, 14). For fuller notes on "Son of man," see also Plummer (*Luke*, 156, 157).

But that you may know that the Son of man hath authority on earth to forgive sins (then saith he to the sick of the palsy), Arise, and take up thy bed, and go unto thy house. Jesus establishes hereby His entire claim to the possession of personal authority to forgive sins on the reality of this miracle. In effect, He was saying to His critics: "You presume that it is a safe, easy thing for me to pretend that I can forgive sins, since no one on earth can verify whether, when I address this paralytic, saying, 'Your sins are forgiven,' they are actually pardoned or not. So, let me provide you a test that you can verify. You know that only a person possessing God's full authority could say to this paralyzed man, 'Rise and walk,' with the result that he be actually healed, in exactly the same way

that it really demands God's authority to say, 'Your sins have been forgiven you,' with the result that he has the certainty that God really has forgiven him. Now, if a physical cure of his paralysis takes place when I say to him, 'Get up, pick up your bed and go home, then you can be certain that when I say to him, 'Your sins have been pardoned,' his forgiveness is a reality. In which case, of course, I am not guilty of blasphemy, as you charge. On the contrary, my high claim to God's authority shall be vindicated."

The logic of Jesus' argument may be stated like this:

Major Premise (tacitly): "No man but God can heal paralysis with a word of power."

Minor Premise (demonstration): "But I have power on earth to heal paralysis with a word of power."

Conclusion: "I possess on earth the authority of God to heal paralysis."

This conclusion becomes the minor premise of further argument:

Major Premise: "None can forgive sins but God alone."

Minor Premise: "But I have shown that I possess God's authority."

Conclusion: "Therefore, I have power on earth to forgive sins."

Or, the alternative, implicit reasoning arrives at the same conclusion:

Major Premise: "Only those who pretend to divine prerogative without right or authority are guilty of blasphemy."

Minor Premise: "But Jesus has demonstrated by this miracle that He does possess the proper right or authority to exercise divine prerogatives."

Conclusion: "Therefore, Jesus is not guilty of Blasphemy."

Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thy house. There could be no bolder challenge than this. It is at this point that Jesus' claim to the right to exercise divine prerogatives stands or falls. If the paralytic can do what Jesus says, then his forgiveness is real. Jesus healed the man, not merely because He was anxious to vindicate Himself, but out of great tenderness and mercy He felt for the man's need. Instantly He healed him, that the people might have the required evidence upon which they could base their trust in Him.

9:7 **And he arose, and departed to his house.** That settles the question. One fact is worth more than a thousand theories. Luke (5:25) reports the man as arising immediately on the presence of the people. Then he probably rolled up his pallet and walked through the amazed crowd. The point to be noticed is that Jesus knew with

unerring certainty exactly what would happen before anything took place. In one sense He was taking no chances, for with divine foresight He could see the paralyzed man arising even before He forgave him. But from a strictly human point of view, Jesus had taken an awful chance of losing everything He had won! Who but Jesus could have had the necessary knowledge? Who but Jesus could have had the power demanded to heal the paralytic? Who else could have given the required proof of His identity?

Whereas the man's friends could not even carry him into the house due to the crowd jammed into the doorways, now the astounded people open the way for him to leave. Luke (5:25) reports that this grateful ex-paralytic walked out glorifying God. Whereas the scribes had accused Jesus of blasphemy, this man had nothing but praise for God. Had he understood the connection between Jesus and God? Whatever he may have understood, his exuberant example of rejoicing and praise was contagious.

9:8 But when the multitudes saw it, they were afraid, and glorified God, who had given such authority unto men.

This mixed reaction stands in perfect harmony with human nature and is psychologically sound, since these people felt their own sinfulness in the almost touchable presence of God. They knew they were standing in that no-man's land, that twilight zone between the natural world and the supernatural. They knew that this earth had just been invaded from outer space where they supposed God dwells. And they recognized the Invader as God, and they feared. Yet the joyful surprise and marvel of the seemingly impossible healing drew out of them this glorifying praise for the God they feared so near. They had heard Jesus pronounce that word which the honest heart of sinful mankind longs to hear more than any other. They had not believed Him. Rather they had concluded that He had blasphemed, saying something incapable of proving. They had questioned His right to say something they could not accept as truth. Now they had to reckon with the shock of truth breaking into their personality: they could not deny its reality without denying the dependability of their own senses with which they observed it. In response to this manifestation of God's presence seen among them, **they glorified God.** (Compare similar experiences of the Jews on mount Carmel as the fire fell from heaven after Elijah's prayer, I Kgs. 18:36-39, and Peter's reaction to the miraculous catch of fish with his own nets and boat, Lk. 5:8.)

They glorified God, saying in their amazement and awe, "We never saw anything like this—we have seen strange things today!" (Mk.

2:12; Lk. 5:26) They had seen things transcending ordinary human experience and reason: sins forgiven, omniscience and healing of paralysis. But they had also seen the greatest difference between Christ's religion and the message of all other isms: while all other philosophies glorify and save the fittest through survival of all natural forces or through perserverence in progression through an infinite number of stages or steps or through the endless accumulation of an undefined number of merits or, to sum them all up, while all other systems "save" the powerful, the good and the worthy, the greater glory of Jesus' mission lay in His stooping to concentrate divine attention upon the lowly, the sinful, the poor, the weak, the damned. He brought forgiveness within reach of all. And this miracle proved it! The crowd is convinced that the charge has been disproved and that Jesus is acting with the full authority of God. What effect this miracle produced in the theologians present is not mentioned in the text, but it may be suggested from their growing opposition on later occasions that they remained unconvinced.

God who had given such authority unto men. Though Matthew does not cite the words of the crowd directly, it is probable that he is quoting the content of their praise, even as Mark and Luke cite directly their words: McGarvey (*Matthew-Mark*, 82) well says: "It was to the **man**, Jesus, that the power was given, and to **men** only as He was contemplated as one of the race." These people were honest enough to admit that God had actually granted such authority to Jesus. His claim was vindicated in their eyes.

What does this miracle prove about Jesus? It proves that Jesus has the right to speak with all the authority of God. It means that He can be relied upon to speak authoritatively the message of God. It means that we must accept Jesus' word provided by this miracle and we do not need to ask for more miracles to back up everything else He may affirm. It means that we may be 100% certain that what we had asked of God, i.e. forgiveness, we may now ask of Jesus of Nazareth, for He is God come in person to tell us that He is the real Ruler who is able to present us without spot or blemish before God, forgiven, pardoned, cleansed, fit for fellowship with God.

COMPARE

For a similar case which touches this narrative at several points, see the healing of the paralytic in Jerusalem. (Jn. 5:1ff.) Edersheim (*Life*, I, 500) suggests the following interesting points of similarity:

1. "The unspoken charge of the Scribes, that in forgiving sins

Jesus blasphemed by making Himself equal with God, has its exact counterpart in the similar charge against Him in St. John 5:18, which kindled in them the wish to kill Jesus;

2. "as in that case the final reply of Jesus pointed to 'the authority' (*exousia*) which the Father had given Him for Divine administration on earth, (Jn. 5:27), so the healing of the paralytic was to show the Scribes that He had 'authority' (*exousia*) for the dispensation upon earth of the forgiveness of sins, which the Jews rightly regarded as a Divine prerogative.
3. "the words which Jesus spake to the paralytic . . . are to the very letter the same . . ."
4. "alike in the words which Jesus addressed to the Scribes at the healing of the paralytic, and in those at the Unknown Feast, He made final appeal to His works as evidential of His being sent by, and having received of, the Father 'the authority' to which He laid claim." (Jn. 5:36; cf. Mk. 2:10)

FACT QUESTIONS

1. Locate this incident in the chronological history given by Mark and Luke. When did this miracle occur during Jesus ministry?
2. Identify the city meant by Matthew when he used the cryptic expression "His own city." Prove your answer.
3. Describe the situation on this occasion, borrowing materials from Mark and Luke, which give clarity to the situation here narrated by Matthew. In other words, explain why it was necessary for the four men to bring their paralyzed friend to Jesus in the exact manner they used.
4. What more important need did this man have than the cure of his paralysis?
5. State the evidences of Jesus' deity expressed in this passage.
6. What kind of bed did the four men hoist up on the roof? How did they manage to get the friend into the presence of Jesus? What was hindering them?
7. Is there any evidence in the narratives of this miracle that the paralytic himself expressed any faith in Jesus? If so, what is the evidence?
8. What did Jesus see, when, as the Gospel writers put it, "He saw their faith"? What was visible about so invisible a quality as faith?
9. What was the effect of the miracle on the crowds present?
10. State the response of Jesus to the expression of faith on the part

- of the four men who had brought their friend. What did Jesus actually say?
11. What was the response made by the Pharisees and theologians to Jesus' declaration? Express the principles behind their assertions about Jesus' declaration. Though you may disallow their application to Jesus, justify their conclusion when applied to anyone else who said what Jesus said. Quote Jesus' answer to their complaint.
 12. Show the conclusiveness of Jesus' rebuttal of the theologians' conclusion. Explain the relationship between what Jesus said and the miracle He performed in the presence of these people.
 13. What did Jesus mean by the expression: "authority on earth to forgive sins"?
 14. Explain why these "reverend doctors from Jerusalem" were even present on this occasion. What was their special interest in Jesus' message and ministry?
 15. What kind of roof do Mark and Luke describe the house as having, wherein Jesus sat with the crowd of people? What does this fact have to do with the event itself?

Section 19

JESUS CALLS MATTHEW LEVI

(Parallels: Mark 2:13-22; Luke 5:27-39)

TEXT: 9:9-17

9. And as Jesus passed by from thence, he saw a man, called Matthew, sitting at the place of toll: and he saith unto him, Follow me. And he arose, and followed him.
10. And it came to pass, as he sat at meat in the house, behold, many publicans and sinners came and sat down with Jesus and his disciples.
11. And when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto his disciples, Why eateth your Teacher with the publicans and sinners?
12. But when he heard it, he said, They that are whole have no need of a physician, but they that are sick.
13. But go ye and learn what *this* meaneth, I desire mercy, and not sacrifice: for I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.
14. Then come to him the disciples of John, saying, Why do we and the Pharisees fast oft, but thy disciples fast not?
15. And Jesus said unto them, Can the sons of the bridechamber