

XXXIX. Matthew in Biblical Perspective  
*A Royal Manifesto of the Kingdom from the King*  
“The Sovereign Sufficiency of Christ and the Sufficiency of Saving Faith”  
Matthew 9:1–8  
Dr. Harry L. Reeder III  
June 30, 2013 – Morning Sermon

This is our series in the Gospel of Matthew. Matthew 9:1–8 says [1] *And getting into a boat he crossed over and came to his own city.* [2] *And behold, some people brought to him a paralytic, lying on a bed. And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, “Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven.”* [3] *And behold, some of the scribes said to themselves, “This man is blaspheming.”* [4] *But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, “Why do you think evil in your hearts? [5] For which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Rise and walk’? [6] But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”—he then said to the paralytic—“Rise, pick up your bed and go home.”* [7] *And he rose and went home.* [8] *When the crowds saw it, they were afraid, and they glorified God, who had given such authority to men.* The grass withers, the flower fades, God’s Word abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

The two minute warning for a preacher is not at the end, it is at the beginning. Basically I have two minutes at the beginning to say something that will keep you from coloring in the zeros in your bulletin and to stay focused with me throughout the study. There were multiple metaphors that came to my mind as I arrived at this passage from Matthew 9:1–8. Matthew has written a treatise on the life of Christ designed to affirm that Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God having come in the flesh, the Messiah and that He’s the Messiah sent by the Father, verified by the Holy Spirit and He is to be proclaimed as King to all the nations until He comes again. That’s the purpose of this biographical treatise called the Gospel of Matthew. In our next study of Matthew we’ll get to see his conversion.

Matthew sets up his Gospel into five books. The first book covers Matthew 1 through 4 and we see that ten prophecies are fulfilled in the birth and early life of Christ. The second book is known as the Manifesto of the Kingdom covering the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5 through 7. Then we get to the third book of Matthew and that’s where the metaphors just begin to flow from the text. On the one hand this is a fast paced narrative. Jesus is up on the mountain, crowds are following Him and then when He comes down from the mountain after preaching the Sermon on the Mount crowds are still following. In less than mile to a half a mile from the likely spot of where He gave the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus has three healings that Matthew points out. He touches a leper and the leper is cleansed. He speaks the Word and the centurion’s servant is healed and then He banishes fear from Peter’s mother in law while He comes to the house she occupied there in Capernaum.

After that as the crowds are still with Him, He immediately begins to do a crowd thinner when He talks about what it means to be a disciple. He tells them to follow Him and it could mean you don’t have a place to lay your head, even as He didn’t have a place to lay His head. You don’t come to Him for the things of this world, but you come to Him to seek first the Kingdom of God and He’ll add things as you need them to follow Him. You don’t come to Me for things but you come to Me for Me and that’s what it

means to follow Me. So you not only count the cost but remember that nothing is before Me, above Me, or beside Me. I am not on your list, at the top of your list but I am your list. You come to Me and then I make the list for your life that you live unto Me. That is the cost of discipleship.

Many still stayed with Him and got into the boats to take a short mission's trip to the Gadarenes. On the way across the sea they meet the sovereignty of God, using winds and waves to affirm Christ and teach His people as well as the intimidation of Satan who doesn't want them to cross over to the Gadarenes that has become a satanic stronghold, even legions of demons are occupying that area. Christ calms the sea, the waves and winds and the disciples say "What kind of a Man is this that even the winds and waves obey Him?" Then when they get out of the boat they meet two demoniacs who wouldn't let anyone pass but they're not going to stop Christ from passing. Not only does He cast the demons out into the pigs over the cliff into the sea consigning them to the abyss symbolically as well as in reality but He also transforms the demoniacs from no clothes to clothes, from being out of their mind to being in their right mind, then from the disorder of sin to the order of life and these men who were mission fields now becomes missionaries as He sends them in to the Gadarenes to speak of the glory of what Christ has done for them.

Now we come to Matthew 9. They got back in the boat and went back across the sea. They get back home. Now what happens at this point? This text in Matthew is also found in Mark 2 and Luke 5. I won't be looking directly at those passages but I will draw from them. Matthew 9 is actually the shortest version of this account because it has a very fixed purpose. You get the larger accounts from Mark 2 and Luke 5.

In Matthew 9:1 it says that Jesus arrived back at His home city. Jesus was born in Bethlehem and raised in Nazareth but He never owned Bethlehem as His city and He was run out of Nazareth when it said a prophet has no honor in his home town. He hasn't owned Nazareth but He owned Capernaum. Capernaum becomes His headquarters, His base of operations, His own city for His three year life and ministry. Not only that there is a place in the Gospels called 'the house' and that's very likely where this event takes place. 'The house' is Peter's mother in law's house. If you ever go to Israel there is a church that sits on top of this house where you can look down, see the ruins of a fourth century church, below that you see the ruins of a second century church and then you see the ruins of the original house. Because of all the things that took place there, after Jesus' life, death, burial, resurrection and ascension it wasn't long that they made that a place to gather for worship. That's where Jesus had gathered them continually during His ministry.

The reason I give you this background is every time I stand in that church and look down I realize about where I'm standing on that glass floor is about the spot of what I'm about to describe too place two thousand years ago. When Jesus got back to His city, Mark 2 and Luke 5 tell us that He began to preach and teach in "the house" and people are coming from every village. Because people are coming from all over that house is SRO – standing room only. Matthew just says some men brought a paralytic but Mark and Luke say four men brought a fifth man who is a paralytic. This man's paralysis has very likely been life long and it's absolutely debilitating to him because he can't be carried anywhere other than on the stretcher of his bed. So his bed is his mobility and stretcher if someone will carry him. We don't know where they brought him from but

they have come from a distance. When they arrive they want to get him to Jesus because they believed that Jesus could heal their paralytic friend.

When they got there it was standing room only so they went to the roof. When they got up on the rook they started some demolition work, some deconstruction work. In one of the other texts it said they took tiles off the rook. Once they made an opening they let the paralytic down and very likely they followed him down. They put him down right in front of Jesus. Try to imagine that moment. Here is Jesus teaching all these people and all of a sudden here comes a bed with a man in it down in front of Him. Nobody says anything yet. Jesus says the first words.

Matthew 9:2 says *And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven."* After He saw their faith He said three things. One was "Take heart (courage)." This is said five times in your Bible and every time but one Jesus alone says it. Only Jesus can say this to your heart and soul. Secondly, He said "My son." Thirdly, He said "Your sins are forgiven." Notice that He doesn't look at the paralytic man and say "Take courage, believe enough and you'll be healed." He doesn't say "Be healed." He says, *"Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven."* Take courage, joy, joy to your heart.

We are told that Scribes and lawyers are there. I'm holding back here with my lawyer jokes but in my first year at Briarwood someone was having heart problems in the lobby and I said "Is there a doctor here in the sanctuary" and a third of my congregation got up and went to the lobby. Then another third of the congregation went out and those were lawyers going to see if they had a case or not back in the lobby. Lawyers in this text though are teachers of the law. So here are the experts in this house not necessarily there to learn from Jesus but to catch Jesus.

When Jesus said "Take heart, my son, your sins are forgiven" the Scribes and lawyers began to verbalize a charge against Jesus. Matthew 9:3 says [3] *And behold, some of the scribes said to themselves, "This man is blaspheming."* According to their perspective they are right because they know what the Bible says. The Bible says that only God can forgive sins ultimately and finally. First of all logically, the only person that can forgive a sin is the one who has been sinned against. So if you sin against me or I sin against you and we ask each other for forgiveness, at that level we give forgiveness but while some sins may be against us or we may sin against others, all sins are against God. He is holy and just and will be no means leave the guilty unpunished.

It is this God who has sent His Son on the earth, among men, who now says in the presence of men "your sins (not my enemy), my son, are forgiven." So they immediately assume He is being blasphemous because since all sins are against God only God can forgive sin. They are wrong ultimately because He is God, having come in the flesh and He does have authority to forgive sins. He will do what is necessary to forgive sins and God's holiness be vindicated. We are right in the middle of Isaiah 43:25, the prophecy of the Messiah in which Isaiah says "The Lord will come and the Lord will say 'I will remember your sins no more. Your transgression will be removed as far as the east is from the west.'" This is why when John the Baptist saw Jesus in John 2 said "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." So it is this Christ who has come to take away the sins of His people in this world, is now declaring that this one is His, His son. Jesus, on the cross will accomplish what needs to happen, therefore your sins (to the paralytic) are forgiven.

Jesus not only knows what they're saying among themselves but He actually knows what's in their heart. Matthew 9:4–5 says [4] *But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, "Why do you think evil in your hearts? [5] For which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise and walk'?"* They're not only accusing Jesus of blasphemy out loud but they're thinking something else in their heart. They are thinking Jesus is an imposter. They not only think He's a blasphemer claiming the prerogative of God to forgive sins but they believe He's an imposter.

Why did these four men bring this paralytic to Jesus? They came to Jesus because they wanted their friend healed. Here is a paralytic, utterly debilitated and can only move on his bed. Here he is let down in front of Jesus with his four friends their and Jesus doesn't say "rise and walk" but says "you're sins are forgiven." They think Jesus can't pull this off and that He's pulling a slight of hand. Instead of dealing with the man's paralysis He's making this easy statement that's blasphemy but who can disprove it. They believe Jesus is flippantly demonstrating that He's an imposter because in their mind it's easy to say 'you're sins are forgiven' but the difficulty would be for the paralytic man to rise up and walk. In reality they are dead wrong. There is nothing more difficult than for men and women where everything is wrong with God to be made right with God. A healing for a temporary period of time until you die, dare I say, for the God of glory is a piece of cake. To save sinners from the power, the dominion, the penalty, the practice and the presence of sin is impossible, except for God.

So in reality what they think is harder is actually easier. So Jesus goes to what they think is harder, which is actually easier and He is going to do it in order to make a statement that the greater work of making men right with God and their sins are forgiven, but that He has the power, prerogative and ability to do that. So now He backs up to a healing in this context. Why is He doing this miracle? It's not to give cheer and courage because He has already given that to the man. Matthew 9:6 says [6] *But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—he then said to the paralytic—"Rise, pick up your bed and go home."* This is a miracle. It isn't miraculous. He doesn't need therapy after he's healed. Here is a man who has been paralyzed his whole life and the bed he used to be carried on he now picks up, carries it out and goes home. No four friends are necessary. He doesn't need to lean on anyone. This is a miracle. God has intervened and He has brought the paralytic man back to health as Christ the Son of God spoke the Word.

Now what happens? Matthew 9:7–8 says [7] *And he rose and went home. [8] When the crowds saw it, they were afraid, and they glorified God, who had given such authority to men.* Why did they glorify God? Now the Divine Authority to forgive sins had come to earth among men. This text is so rich. Pastorally it's so difficult for me because there is so much in this text that you and I need to know. This would be a great text for our mission's conference. Here are four men that know there is a man that needs to get to Jesus. So what do they do? By faith, they do everything they can to get him to Jesus because they know he needs to get to Jesus. When they arrived and were met with seemingly insurmountable obstacles all they sought was a way to surmount them.

What would happen if churches, by God's grace, were committed personally to bring to Christ in personal evangelism and laid down our own private agendas, personal fascinations and like these four men, worked together to overcome anything and

everything to get men and women to Christ? What would happen if we began to understand what the Bible teaches about when God does a miracle of healing? We might do away with the stuff about faith healing. When Jesus calmed the waves and wind did the disciples by faith call upon Jesus to do that? No, they thought Jesus didn't care. When the demoniacs were delivered miraculously by the hand of the Lord were they believers? No, sometimes Jesus does a miracle in response to faith, to affirm faith, or to enlarge faith but Jesus is not dependent upon our faith. If there is a lack of faith then He can withhold His hand in order to point out our lack of faith but there are instances after instances where Christ does the miracle either in response to faith to affirm faith or enlarge faith or in spite of a lack of faith so let's stop with telling people they don't believe enough when a miracle doesn't happen. May God deliver us from the stupidity of that statement.

The second thing is that whenever we see adversity, death, disease, sin, or bodily disjointed positions like this paralytic, we need to understand something. All of these adversities or climactic catastrophes are all there because of original sin, the sin of Adam. Because Adam sinned this world has been subjected to futility and not only is the world groaning but our bodies are groaning. There may be times that it is a result of our actual, personal sin but we don't immediately assume that when someone is sick, dying, debilitating in some way or have this or that, then that's because of your personal sin. It may or may not be but it is because of Adam's sin. If Adam hadn't sinned there would be no sickness, death or adversity but because of his sin the world has been subjected to it and all of these things are present.

Why did God subject the earth to futility and our bodies to groaning? It was not because of our will but He did it by His own will. Why does He do that? He does it for a very specific reason. It is so that when we see the consequences of original sin in this world we are driven to Christ for salvation. The man is driven to Christ because of his paralysis and what he gets immediately is not the healing of his body but the healing of his soul. So when the catastrophes come, where do we go? We go to the Lord. The Lord has done these temporary, physical manifestations of the consequences of sin to ring the bell in our heart to tell us to get to Christ because there is a greater calamity because of our personal sins that we're all standing before. It is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment (Hebrews 9:27 ESV).

Therefore we don't stupidly tell people that they are sick because of their actual sin. That may be true but that is between them and the Lord and for them to find out. We can tell people that all the brokenness in this world is here because of sin but the same God who subjected everything to futility in order to send you to Himself, has also sent His Son into a suffering world that He might be broken so that you can be saved from the wrath to come. So there is a purpose that is there. There are all kinds of things in this text that are crucial but I want to enumerate just a couple of them as takeaways for this study.

The first one is the singular ultimate need of men and women, is to be delivered from their sins into a personal relationship with Christ. I did not say the singular need, but the singular ultimate need. In other words, when did Jesus tell the paralytic to be of good cheer and take heart? It was before he was healed and He told him when his sins were forgiven. He called him 'my son.' Here is the joy of your heart. You who were an enemy are now My son – the Messiah, the Everlasting Father, the Son who will bring

many sons to glory. It is this Christ who says to him “My son, your sins are forgiven.” There is his joy, his singular ultimate need. It’s not whether you get a spouse, a promotion, children, a raise. They may be valid needs for life but they are not the singular ultimate need that controls the need of our heart. It is that we who are wrong with God are now right with God and we’re in the family of God as the sons and daughters of God.

The second takeaway is this. Who can possibly accomplish this? How can men and women who are all wrong with God be made right with God? How can we who don’t seek Him and are His enemies, be His children? The second takeaway is the singular sufficient Savior of sinners is Jesus Christ, the Son of Man and the Son of God, who “takes away the sins” and “takes you away from your sin” to Himself. I know I’m inadequate but please hear me. You and I are sinners with no hope except through the sovereign mercy and grace of God and that’s the bad news. The good news is I’m not telling you about a man made religion that tells you what you have to do to get to God but I’m here to tell you what God has done to come to save you. He has given His Son. By a man (Adam) came death and by a Man (Jesus Christ) comes the resurrection of the dead. This is a New Adam, God’s Son who has come in the flesh. He is the Son of God, Son of Man.

In this text the Christ who says He forgives sins, identifies Himself with the Messianic title once again. Matthew 9:6 says [6] *But that you may know that the **Son of Man** has authority on earth to forgive sins*— And not only that but He demonstrates that He’s the Son of God. How does He demonstrate He’s the Son of God? He does it three ways. First of all He declares to the man that his sins are forgiven. Only God can forgive sins. Secondly, He knows what the evil thoughts of their hearts are. Only God knows the thoughts of the heart. Thirdly, He performs a miracle to put the exclamation on it. There isn’t another option out there but there is a sure Savior. He is a sufficient Savior. He is Jesus Christ and that’s why John the Baptist said “This is the Lamb of God, He will take away your sins.” He’ll go to the cross, cancel the debt and pay for all of your sins so that you can be forgiven and wrapped in His righteousness. Not only will He take away your sins but He’ll take you away from the power and presence of sin into glory to Himself so that where He is there you can be also. He will conquer the enemies of your soul. He had defeated all enemies that you might have life in Him forevermore.

Thirdly, how can you be saved? It is by faith and repentance and in this text you can see the earmarks of saving faith. The text says *And when Jesus saw their faith*, meaning the four men and the paralytic. As they come to Him and He saw their faith, He didn’t immediately go to a healing. He immediately went to their soul. Then He said to the paralytic “My son, your sins are forgiven.” There are three things here about saving faith. Number one is the sufficiency of saving faith is observable. That’s why we have the book of James in the Bible. Your good works don’t save you but your good works validate saving faith. Saving faith is not simply a feeling. It is demonstrated in life. He saw their faith. Secondly, their saving faith was focused on Christ. They came to Christ. They knew they had to get him to Christ and that is the third evidence of saving faith. Saving faith is relentless. Are there obstacles? Saving faith given by God destroys the obstacles because of the power of God’s grace in your life. So saving faith is an observable, Christ focused, relentless faith.

The fourth takeaway is the love of God that saves sinners by the grace of God inevitably leads to the fear of God and the praise of God. When the people saw what Jesus did it says the fear and awe of the Lord was upon them and they glorified Him. It is because salvation by grace had come to earth among men. It seems to me for some reason that we no longer sound the note of grace that produces the fear of the Lord and the lives of God's people. The love of the Lord motivates us. The fear of the Lord reverences us. Where is it? Was it seen in us when we gathered for worship today? Every time Jesus shows up in the Bible and His grace and power shows up, the next words out of His mouth are "don't be afraid. Get up." When you meet Christ the initial response is awe. There is none like Him. The reason I have no other fears is that I know the love of the Lord and the fear of the Lord that banishes all other fears, but I don't see that in us.

I see a flippancy about our language, hell, salvation and even about worship. I'm not talking about morbidity in worship. There is joy joined with reverence but the joy isn't to the demise of reverence and the reverence isn't to the denial of joy. They had the fear of the Lord and they glorified the Lord. It is shown in the joyful praise of God with the fear of the Lord. I'm not picking on this worship service. I praise the Lord for all of you but the point is who is here today. *For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them* (Matthew 18:20 ESV). Jesus showed up today. Do we have the love of the Lord by the grace of the Lord for the fear of the Lord to the praise of the Lord or have you been sitting out there passing judgments on the orchestra, the choir, the praise team, etc.? It's really all about us, isn't it? God, deliver us from this. Deliver us from the self-absorbed Christianity and give us a self-denying, Christ-exalting Christianity where we are consumed with Him out of the love of the Lord, by the grace of God, to give us the reverence of the Lord to the praise of God.

That brings me to my final thought. I want to be careful how I say this final thought because I know I may be misunderstood. Many of us believe that the reason Jesus came into this world was to be our coach for success or to be our therapist for our emotional inabilities or to be our physical therapist. Our God is gracious and kind and yes following the Lord can bring effectiveness and success in life, parenting, your business and all of that. I'm not diminishing that. I hope and pray you'll understand what I'm saying here. I know I need the peace of the Lord in the anxiety moments of my life and I need Him to speak that balm of Gilead to my soul but what I want you to grasp is that Jesus came to save you from your sins to Himself and that's all you need. All you need is Him. The people that go through life with a broken body are not missing out on something if they know Christ.

Here is what I'm trying to say. If there had been no Scribes or lawyers there when Jesus healed the paralytic or if He had not even healed the paralytic man, He would have left that place that day undiminished in the blessing of God and the joy of the Lord. I'll never forget giving Joni and friends ministry their first offices in our church. Here was this athletic young woman who dove in a lake and broke her neck. She becomes a quadriplegic and she is standing in front of these people with broken bodies. She is telling them that God does miracles and the miraculous sometimes through Providence.

When I talk about the miraculous I want to give you an example before I finish about talking about Joni. The elders recently prayed for me before I went for my treatments on prostate cancer. One of the elders very powerfully prayed "God, I pray

when Harry gets there and they do the test that they won't see any cancer but God if you don't do that would You use those things You ordained" in other words give Harry the miraculous healing of Your Providence. Jesus sometimes will say to a blind man that he has his sight and that's a miracle. Sometimes to show us He uses means, He picks up mud, spits on it and puts it on their eyes where God's healing is miraculous through means. He is teaching us something. I get down there, they do the test and there are my cancer cells still there. So I said "Okay God You didn't do plan 1 so let's go to plan 2" which is Providential miraculous healing. So I told my oncologist that he may now start using "mud." God didn't do it directly so He can do it through means but if He says 'no' then I'm promoted. My joy is undiminished. My blessings have not been subtracted. On the contrary they have been added to.

That's why Paul said "I don't know whether to go or stay. I'd rather go but if I stay He's got more for me to do. To die is gain." Everybody who gets healed physically in this world won't last. They are going to die eventually. The greatest joy is to know that you're His, "My son" and to know that your sins are forgiven. If He doesn't heal you directly with a miracle or intermediately miraculously in His Providence, He hasn't diminished His love for you. Your joy is not gone. You are in Christ. If He hadn't healed the paralytic he would have left with joy and courage in his heart. So you and I realize that Christ came and He will give blessings to our bodies but He came that it might be well with your soul.

O the bliss of this glorious thought – my sin, not the part but the whole is nailed to the cross for He has taken it away, I bear it no more. He has taken away my sins and He is taking me away from my sins. I bear it no more. Bless the Lord, bless the Lord O my soul! That's why Joni Erickson said to those with broken bodies, "Your hope is found in Christ, not in a whole body. It's amazing what God will do with what the world says is broken. If I could go back to that day when I dove into the water and broke my neck and undo it, I wouldn't. The brokenness of the neck brought me to Christ and it's opened up ministry that a whole body would have never enjoyed." Bless the Lord O my soul. It is well with my soul. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments we could be together in Your Word this Lord's Day. Please go with Your people. Fill them with joy that they are called sons and daughters that their sins are forgiven. Let them know Father that we can bring any and all of our needs to You but that You have met the joy filling the ultimate singular need of our life. We are right with You and You have taken away our sins. You are taking us away from sins to Yourself. If anyone reading this has not come to You, today may they flee to the sufficient Savior with saving faith who will meet the true need of life and fill their soul, so that no matter what we face in the tribulation of life nothing separates us from the love of God in Christ. I pray in Jesus' Name, Amen.