

Learning to Walk Again in Freedom

Thomas Robinson, *Learning at Jesus' Side*, 4, June 17, 2012

Matthew 9:1-13

Jesus Forgives and Heals a Paralyzed Man

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, seeing 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**.

Jesus Calls Matthew, a Tax collector; Jesus Dines with Sinners

⁹ As Jesus passed on from there, he saw a man called **Matthew** sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, *“Follow me.”*

And he **rose and followed him**.

¹⁰ And as Jesus reclined at table in the house, behold, **many tax collectors and sinners** came and were reclining with Jesus and his disciples. ¹¹ And when the **Pharisees** saw this, they said to his disciples, *“Why does your teacher **eat with tax collectors and sinners?**”*

¹² But when he heard it, he said, *“Those who are well have no need of a **physician**, but those who are sick. ¹³ **Go and learn** what this means,*

‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.’ [Hosea 6:6; Mt 12:7]

For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.”

Hosea 6:4-6

⁴ What shall I do with you, O Ephraim? What shall I do with you, O Judah? Your love is like a morning cloud, like the dew that goes early away. ⁵ Therefore I have hewn them by the prophets; I have slain them by the words of my mouth, and my judgment goes forth as the light. ⁶ For **I desire mercy (*hesed*) and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.**

Matthew 6:9-15

⁹ Pray then like this: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. ¹⁰ Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. ¹¹ Give us this day our daily bread, ¹² and **forgive us our debts**, as we also **have forgiven our debtors**. ¹³ And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.”

¹⁴ For **if you forgive others** their trespasses, your **heavenly Father will also forgive you**, ¹⁵ but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

Psalms 103:2-4; 130:3-4

103:² Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, ³ **who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases**, ⁴ **who redeems your life** from the pit, who crowns you with **mercy (*hesed*)** and compassion.

130:³ If you, O LORD, should **mark iniquities**, O Lord, **who could stand?** ⁴ But **with you there is forgiveness, that you may be feared**.

Jesus and the Limits of Unlimited Authority

We watch in Matthew as he step by step reveals Jesus' authority. His teaching with authority! Purifying the unclean leper. Authority beyond the centurion. Suffering servant bearing our infirmities. Royal Son of Man with no home. One who speaks to earthshaking storms like their creator. Even demons flee before him without a struggle. All must obey – except people. Some people respond to Jesus' call and follow. Some send him away. Some watch suspiciously, skeptically. These are those who believe they understand God best and know what he wants and rejects. They defend God's rights and feel strongly the dangers of sin/sinners. In these two brief narratives, Matthew shows Jesus' authority in a crucial new focus, dealing with human sin, alienation from God – Jesus' identity (1:21). The first uses the healing of physical paralysis as a sign of his authority to deal with sin. In the second Jesus draws physically healthy sinners to himself in order to bring them healing as their physician.

The Paralyzed Man and the Forgiving Son of Man

People bring a paralyzed man to Jesus. No description of the setting as in Mark, only faith . Just a word/touch is all that's needed. But Jesus moves in close to the man – too close – not just to his body but his identity, his life. Take heart, child, your sins are forgiven. Such presumption! Who does he think he is? Why it's blasphemy! Everyone knows that forgiveness of sins belongs to God, given through sacrifice in the Temple. Exactly! What Jesus says can't be right unless God is doing something radically different and new. Jesus "sees" that the scribes are taking this badly. Who knows what the man thought? But for Jesus this step is crucial. We aren't told what Jesus knows of this person. But he is a person, with human brokenness, sin, alienation from God. In Jesus' ministry, physical healings were signs pointing to deeper, greater healing of the whole life. Jesus is not saying that his paralysis was caused by sin. But all that is broken and destructive in human life is subject to God's healing. Jesus is revealing the deep unity of authority that unites all his actions from teaching to calling disciples, stilling storms, healing disease, and forgiving sin. All authority! Jesus tells the man to rise! For the whole crowd the reality of God's authority present is this man Jesus break over them – God's ancient promise. They tremble before God and glorify him.

Tax Collectors and Sinners Need Healing Too

If the tradition that Matthew is the author of this Gospel is true, this may be his signature. Earlier a scribe came to Jesus. That's normal. Here, Jesus taps a tax collector. That's not! A tax collector was not expecting the Kingdom of God. He had cast his lot with the powerful (Herod) helping maintain revenue and paying for his security with the hatred of other Jews. For Matthew, rising to follow Jesus was whiplash of his life. He left Herod's employ to follow a Messiah/king with no territory, army, possessions, or home. Yet he felt the authority of his call. He rose and found himself standing, walking, following with new life. Matthew shared his call/healing with his friends, and many like him and other "sinners" came to know Jesus and eat with him. Jesus welcomed them. This reversed every idea of how to bring renewal to Israel that religious leaders followed. Not a pure community, but sinners! But sin is dangerous and rubs off! Jesus knows the power of sin. He sees it in the Pharisees as well as the tax collectors. Yes, they've sold out, paralyzed, but can walk again. This is where the real healing God wants happens. With Jesus is the real temple where people meet God. Here mercy and forgiveness toward sinners are God's true service. Go and Learn!