

<b>Series:</b> Lent: The Power of the Gospel	<b>Reference:</b> Matthew 9:2-8	<b>Title:</b> Forgiveness 101	<b>Date:</b> 03.13.2022
<b>Website Writeup:</b>			
In declaring the paralyzed man's forgiven, Jesus declares His authority equal to His Father's. The forgiveness of sin wrought by Jesus on the cross confers on us a responsibility to extend it to others as we give witness to His authority in our lives.			

## COLOR CHANGES IN TEXT INDICATE SLIDE CHANGES

Join me in opening to Matthew 9:2-8 on p662 of your pew Bibles. This is the story of the paralyzed man brought to Jesus on a mat for healing. A man who got more from Jesus than he or his friends expected. It begins...

*Some men brought to him a paralyzed man, lying on a mat. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the man, "Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven."*

Stop there for a moment, seems an innocuous thing to say...this would seem to be a story of healing, but throughout this dialogue the word healing isn't even uttered not in any of the gospel accounts concerning this story.

It's obvious though, these friends bring their buddy to Jesus to be healed. An episode found not only here in Matthew, but also in Mark 2:1-12 & Luke 5:17-26. Only Matthew removes the details of the decision to punch a hole in the roof in order to lower the paralyzed man to Jesus. It took a great deal of determination to get him to Jesus persevering in the hope Jesus would heal him, but we will see Jesus does much more than that.

So, that was in their minds, healing, not forgiveness, since that's what Jesus proclaims first. But this statement from Jesus conjures the ire of the teachers of the law. It continues...<sup>3</sup>*At this, some of the teachers of the law said to themselves, "This fellow is blaspheming!"*

Blaspheming because only God can forgive sins. If ever Jesus claimed divinity, this is one. To say your sins are forgiven to someone else is to equate Himself with God, a big no-no for these teachers of the law. It continues...<sup>4</sup>*Knowing their thoughts, Jesus said, "Why do you entertain evil thoughts in your hearts? <sup>5</sup>Which is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up & walk'?*

It would be easy to make either statement to a healthy man, but to a guy who couldn't walk only the former is much easier to utter - the latter would be impossible. The question is rhetorical, everyone knows the answer, so he doesn't wait for them to give one. It continues...<sup>6</sup>*But I want you to know that the **Son of Man** has authority on earth to forgive sins."* So he said to the paralyzed man, "Get up, take your mat & go home."<sup>7</sup>*Then the man got up & went home. <sup>8</sup>When the crowd saw this, they were filled with awe; and they praised God, who had given such authority to man.*

Such authority to what kind of man? Well you may not see it in your initial reading, but there are things going on here which need explanation. When Jesus declares the paralyzed man's sins to be forgiven, Jesus declares His own authority equal to God the Father. Jesus is referred to as the "Son of Man" 88 times in the New Testament. In fact, *Son of Man* is the primary title Jesus used when referring to Himself (e.g., Matthew 12:32; 13:37; Luke 12:8; John 1:51).

The only use of *Son of Man* in a clear reference to Jesus, spoken by someone other than Himself, came from Stephen as he was being stoned to death in Acts 7:56 which says... *"But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven & saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. <sup>56</sup> And he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."* We'll see why Stephen had this vision in a moment...but let's focus on that term, Son of Man. What exactly does that mean?

Firstly, ***Son of Man* is a title of humanity.** Other titles for Christ, such as *Son of God*, are overt in their focus on His deity. *Son of Man*, in contrast, focuses on the humanity of Christ. God called the prophet Ezekiel "son of man" 93 times. In this way, God was simply calling Ezekiel a human being. *Son of man* is simply a roundabout term for 'human'. In other words, Jesus Christ was truly a human being 'in the flesh' (1 John 4:2).

Secondly, ***Son of Man* is a title of humility.** Jesus is the Second Person of the Trinity, eternal in nature, who left heaven's glory & took on human flesh, becoming the Son of Man, born in a manger, "*despised & rejected by mankind*" a prophecy of the Messiah from Isaiah 53:3. The Son of Man had "*no place to lay his head*" (Luke 9:58). Ate & drank with sinners (Matthew 11:19). Suffered at the hands of men (Matthew 17:12). This intentional lowering of His status from King of Heaven to Son of Man is the epitome of humility.

This we see in Philippians 2:6-8 which says... "*Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; <sup>7</sup>rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. <sup>8</sup>And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death - even death on a cross!*"

Thirdly, ***Son of Man* is also a title of deity.** Ezekiel may have been a son of man, but Jesus is *The* Son of Man - and refers to Himself as such. The Second Adam - the supreme example of all God intended mankind to be, the embodiment of truth & grace (John 1:14). In Him "*all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form*" as indicated in Colossians 2:9.

For this reason, the Son of Man was able to forgive sins (Matthew 9:6). Is Lord of the Sabbath (Mark 2:28). Came to save lives (Luke 9:56; 19:10), rise from the dead (Mark 9:9), and execute judgment (John 5:27). *At His trial before the High Priest, Jesus said, "I say to all of you: From now on you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand*

*of the Mighty One & coming on the clouds of heaven” (Matthew 26:64). This statement immediately ended the trial, as the court accused Jesus of blasphemy & condemned Him to death (verses 65-66). Which is exactly what Stephen quoted as he was being stoned. But why did Stephen say that, and why was it such a controversial thing for Jesus to proclaim during His trial?*

Well...**Son of Man is also a fulfillment of prophecy.** Jesus’ claim before the high priest during His trial to be the Son of Man was a reference to the prophecy of Daniel 7:13-14 which says, *“In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days & was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory & sovereign power; all peoples, nations & men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.”*

Daniel saw glory, worship & an everlasting kingdom given to the Messiah - here called the “Son of Man.” Jesus applied this prophecy to Himself. Jesus also spoke of His coming kingdom (the rule of an eternal, sovereign God over all the universe) on other occasions (Matthew 13:41; 16:28). The author of Hebrews used a reference to the “son of man” in the Psalms to teach that Jesus, the true Son of Man, will be the ruler of all things (Hebrews 2:5-9; cf. Psalm 8:4-6). The Son of Man, in fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy, will be the King. **The first Adam fell into sin, and abdicated his special place in God’s Kingdom affecting the human race in bringing it low. Jesus as the Second Adam lived sinlessly, and in that became the model of what humanity was to be, elevating it to where it was intended to be, and rightfully takes His thrown as such.**

Fully God (John 1:1), fully man (John 1:14). As Son of God & Son of Man, He’s deserving of both titles.<sup>1</sup> Some theologians make a separation between the nature of Gods kingdom now, and its nature in the future calling the here & now the Kingdom of Grace, and the future as the Kingdom of Glory, which makes sense.

In this story, Jesus demonstrates His authority with the less spectacular, though arguably more powerful, act of forgiveness. Since no one could forgive but God Himself, and by forgiving this man’s sin, and proclaiming Himself to be the Son of Man from Daniel’s prophecy, Jesus is saying, “I’m God, I can do this. And it’s evil of you to say otherwise.” The faith of the people, as well as the authority & power Jesus holds, creates the conditions for this man’s restoration. Surprisingly, Jesus not only heals, but even more importantly, forgives sin. Much of the focus is on the faith of the people, since the building up of their faith is a significant purpose of these demonstrations of power. **Faith comes by hearing the word of God, and is strengthened by seeing Christ work!**

**Jesus’ claim to have forgiven the man’s sins was unprovable in & of itself, but Jesus seals the claim by healing him, and both the man’s forgiveness & healing are proven when he picks up his mat & goes home (Matthew 9:7). It’s easy to say the words, “Take heart,**

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gotquestions.org/Jesus-Son-of-Man.html>

*son; your sins are forgiven.*” But it’s altogether a different thing to make an invalid walk.

Some would argue this is Jesus’s greatest of all His demonstrations of power. “People can’t just go around telling other people that God holds nothing against them. Claiming to know & to deliver divine amnesty comes close to presumption. Yet Jesus authoritatively tells another human being how he stands with God!”<sup>2</sup>

Jesus states the act of forgiveness declares His authority as the Son of Man, and as this same episode is narrated here & in the other Gospels, it’s Jesus’s act of forgiveness that most unsettles the Pharisees & Scribes - not the healing. They were upset before He healed him & in the other two accounts they say, “Who can forgive sins except God alone.” They name His act as blasphemy. They hear Jesus slandering God when He claims the same authority, when in reality, this forgiveness gives witness to the shared authority & His oneness with God the Father. “The paralyzed man is put right, simply on the basis of the faith of his little company of friends. The deepest salvation is mediated to the man gratis, because of Christ, through faith.”<sup>3</sup>

Forgiveness is a multifaceted challenging topic. We must consider God’s gracious forgiveness of us through the mediation of Jesus Christ, as well as Jesus’s commandments to forgive. (see Matthew 6:14-15). For instance, *Matthew 18:21-22* says, “*Then Peter came to Jesus & asked, “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?”* <sup>22</sup>*Jesus answered, “I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.”* In other words, an unlimited amount of times.

Donna Tartt’s book *The Goldfinch* & its film adaptation follow a young man, Theo Decker, in the aftermath of a terrorist attack which kills his mother. “Though everything that’s happened to me since then is thoroughly my fault,” he narrates, “still when I lost her I lost sight of any landmark that might have led me someplace happier.”<sup>4</sup>

His self-blame drives a host of destructive behaviors which brings him no resolution. Theo is just as unable to forgive himself at the end of his story as he was at its beginning. He denies all meaning & purpose in life, as many deny it in today’s society, yet he acknowledges there’s love in the midst of the meaninglessness. The love, if nothing else, compels him to continue living.

We know “God is love” from 1 John 4:16, and that love holds us even when we can’t find the strength to forgive ourselves or others around us. We love because He first loved us. We forgive because He first forgave us, but forgiveness for us can take time. However,

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<sup>2</sup> (Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary*, vol. 1, *The Christbook: Matthew 1–12*, rev. ed. [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004], 413)

<sup>3</sup> (Bruner, *Matthew*, 413)

<sup>4</sup> (Donna Tartt, *The Goldfinch* [New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2014], 7)

the forgiveness of sin wrought by Jesus on the cross confers on us a responsibility to extend it to others as we give witness to Jesus's authority in our lives.

Let's hover there on that statement God is love for a moment. What does that mean? What is love? Love is certainly not the freedom to do as you please, that's destructive & hurtful - the opposite of love. Love has boundaries & directives. Love is a decision. It comes with risk in relationship. It's decisive & determined.

You don't get married with a guarantee you'll be happy together for ever. You make a decision. You stick a marker in the ground of life & say I choose to love this person for better or worse. Love has the best interest of the other in mind. It looks at the other & says I'm going to give the best of myself so they can become the best of themselves.

God is love, meaning love originates with & is God. We love because He loves. We know love & are aware of love, because God is love. Sin distorted that image in us. God wants the best for you, which is why He sets boundaries for our good. It's why He forgives so lavishly in Christ, since He wants us free to be the best we were created to be! He is the prodigal father to the prodigal son. He loves so He forgives.

Therefore, we love so we forgive. In Him we live, move & have our being - Creator imprinted Himself on Created, and what we were originally created to be is found in the likeness of Jesus - Fully man! God with us! We love because He first loved us, we forgive because we've been forgiven by Him! Jesus' coming is to empower & reorder us to be what God's original intention was for humanity - hence He's the second Adam, the perfect Human! He enables us to love & forgive!

In one of the novels of the *Outlander* it includes a powerful, prayerful meditation on the meaning of forgiveness in the person of the male lead, Jamie Fraser, who is sexually assaulted by a British officer. The author describes forgiveness as a practice, happening over time, until the day when he'd call to mind the attacker's face, and the rage was replaced with pity. It says...“Waited, in emptiness, in faith. And then grace came; the necessary vision...And he felt once more the gift of pity, calm in its descent as the landing of a dove.”<sup>5</sup> Of his attacker, Fraser could say, “He had been a man...nothing more. And in the recognition of that common frail humanity, all power of past fear & pain vanished like smoke.”

In much the same way, Jesus's offer of forgiveness to us is the ultimate act of pity for our human condition. We're all sinners who've made, sometimes, terrible mistakes, but in the end, we're all just people in need of the strength which only comes by faith in Jesus.

In his teachings, Jesus insists on the need to forgive (e.g., Matthew 18:34-35) but forgiveness can take a long time. Still, Jesus gives us the clear command to pursue & practice it in faith as per His model. Sometimes we need to pray for the ability to forgive, and for Christ to fill our hearts with love for that other person.

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<sup>5</sup> (Diana Gabaldon, *Drums of Autumn* [New York: Bantam Books, 2014], 675)

Throughout the season of Lent, a simple practice like The Prayer of Examen can be a really helpful way to examine our own hearts & grow in compassion for others as we seek to practice forgiveness.

In his Spiritual Exercises, Ignatius urged that everyone be taught the Examen, a daily prayerful reflection on our responses to the events of the day. The purpose of this reflection was to see God's presence & to discern His direction for us. Ignatius believed the key to a healthy spirituality is to find God in all things & to work constantly to cooperate with God's will. He said our responses to daily events fall into two categories: our consolations (what connects us with God, others & ourselves) and desolations (what disconnects us). Ignatius believed God would speak to us through these two feelings.

The Examen helps us to acknowledge sad or painful feelings & hear how God is speaking to us through them. To overcome a pessimistic outlook by encouraging us to notice the good in each day. To tell the truth about who we truly are & what we need, rather than who we think we should be. And to become aware of seemingly insignificant moments which ultimately can give direction for our lives.

The Prayer of Examen takes about fifteen minutes & involves three parts. Find a place you can relax comfortably and...

1. Ask God to bring to your awareness the moment today for which you're most grateful.
  - If you could relive one moment, which one would it be?
  - When were you most able to give & receive love today?
  - Ask yourself what was said & done in that moment which made it so good.
  - Breathe in the gratitude you felt & receive life again from that moment.
2. Ask God to bring to your awareness the moment today for which you are least grateful.
  - When were you least able to give & receive love?
  - Ask yourself what was said & done in that moment which made it difficult.
  - Relive the feelings without trying to change or fix it in any way.
  - Take deep breaths & allow God's love to fill you just as you are.
3. Give thanks for whatever you've experienced. If possible, share as much as possible of these two moments with a friend. It's also helpful to record your thoughts in a journal. Rereading these notes will help you see God's grace at work in your life even when things seemed impossible.<sup>6</sup>

*(Pray)* Lord Jesus, we want to be faithful followers as we await your return under Your Kingdom of Grace. However, we long for the future Kingdom of Glory You'll bring about by Your authority & power. Let us recognize the power & authority we have in You to forgive others now.

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<sup>6</sup> (<https://www.upperroom.org/resources/the-examen>)