

The Authority of Jesus

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[0 : 0 0] Please be seated. You may like to have open before you the Bibles again at page 789 to the reading from Matthew's Gospel.

And we're in the middle of a sermon series through Matthew chapters 8 through to about 11 or 12 through to June. Let's pray that God would speak to us and give us understanding and faith.

Heavenly Father, your word is given to us to make us wise for salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ. And we pray now that your word will work in our hearts and minds, bring us to faith in Jesus and the assurance of sins forgiven.

We pray this for his glory. Amen. Amen. Maybe this has happened to you that you go to the doctor with one complaint and you find in fact a whole range of bigger issues dealt with.

So you go there thinking you've just got a headache and you end up with something much more sinister. You go there because you're complaining about an ingrown toenail and you end up with tablets for a heart condition or something like that.

[1 : 1 2] Of course, there are many people who don't go to the doctor at all. Usually they're men and usually they resist stubbornly the urges of their wives and mothers and so on.

I'm okay. I'm not sick. The fact that I've lost my leg, I've got blurred vision and pain and headaches every day doesn't mean a thing. I'll get better. Well, in this case today, they bring the sick to Jesus, something we've seen in the last two weeks as well.

But now in a sense, Jesus ups the ante a little bit. What happens here in this story is that they bring a man with one condition to Jesus, but he ends up getting something much deeper, bigger and much more profound dealt with.

There's a pattern of people bringing the sick to Jesus. Back at the end of chapter 4, we're told that Jesus' fame spread throughout all of this area in the north of Israel into Syria.

And they brought to him all the sick, those who were afflicted with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics and paralytics, and he cured them. And we've already seen instances of that in the last two weeks as they've brought to Jesus a man or a man who was a leper came to Jesus.

[2 : 3 1] He healed a paralyzed servant from a distance. He healed Peter's mother-in-law. He cast out demons from two demoniacs. He calmed a storm in the middle of all of that and healed a range of other people who were sick.

All of them healed immediately, fully, amazingly. People were astonished at his authority to heal, as well as having been astonished at his authority in teaching through the Sermon on the Mount, which is chapters 5 to 7, before this section of Matthew's Gospel.

Well, now they come to Jesus, the physician in a sense, for healing. He's come back to Capernaum, his hometown. Last week we saw that he was across the other side of the lake where he cast out the demons from two demoniacs and that sent those two men into the demoniacs, rather, the demons, rather, into the swine, which raced down into the lake and drowned.

Now we're told at the beginning of chapter 9 he's come back across the river to his own town, to Capernaum, which was his base, back in more Jewish territory, in the territory of Herod Antipas.

And here he cures a man. They bring to him a paralysed man lying on a bed. In Mark's Gospel we know the famous story where they lower him down through the roof, having dug away a hole in the roof.

[3 : 56] Same account. Matthew doesn't tell us about the roof. He just gives us the bare details of this healing. And Jesus saw their faith and he says to the paralysed man, Take heart, son.

Your sins are forgiven. Sins forgiven? But I came here because I'm paralysed. I want to walk again. I didn't come here for my sins to be forgiven.

What's going on? Well, to forgive sins is a preposterous claim. Preposterous because it belongs in the domain of God's privilege alone.

And here is this man, Jesus, admittedly a popular man with various healings to his credit already, claiming something that belongs in the preserve of God's authority alone.

No wonder some of the scribes who are some of the Jewish leaders who are sitting around, no wonder that they are outraged. In verse 3 we read that they said among themselves, This man is blaspheming.

[5 : 05] Which he was. If indeed he couldn't forgive sins. But if it's true that he could, well it's not blasphemy.

But to claim in a sense a prerogative of God alone, was in a sense blasphemy, punishable by death. The Old Testament makes it clear in various places that God alone is the one to forgive sins.

I am he alone to forgive in effect, is what we read in the prophet Isaiah for example. Now Jesus challenges them back. He perceives their thoughts.

Maybe he's seen them all huddled and frowning and so on. He knows what they're saying. Maybe he's even overheard their words. Maybe he even understands what's in their hearts more supernaturally than we would normally recognise.

And he says back to them, Why do you think evil in your hearts? Now they would have said, Well, we're not thinking evil, we're thinking actually righteous thoughts.

[6 : 13] You're blaspheming, that's evil. And we're opposed to that. Which is not evil. Jesus turns it around. Because of who he is, and the fact that he is divine, their thoughts, mumblings, mutterings amongst themselves, are in effect evil.

The rejection of what is actually true, and from God. And he challenges them now with, in a sense it's a bit like a riddle.

He says to them, in verse 5, Which is easier to say, Your sins are forgiven, or to say, Stand up and walk?

Which is easier? Now let's think about it. We might argue, Well, it's actually easier to say, Get up and walk. Because there are a few people, who've done miracles.

Jesus himself has healed a paralyzed man, we saw in the previous chapter. So maybe that's the easiest thing, to say get up and walk. On the other hand, we might say, Well actually it's easier to say, Forgive sins.

[7 : 25] Because after all, anyone can say that. I can say to you now, All your sins are forgiven. And you might think, Well thank you very much. And go home happy. And then you might think, Realize, How do I know?

How do I know, He's not just a charlatan, Saying empty words. After all, You could say to anybody else, Your sins are forgiven. That's fairly easy to say actually. We could all walk around, Saying your sins are forgiven.

None of us would know the difference, Whether they are or not. That's pretty easy to say. Now whichever is the easier, And there's a debate, About whether there is, A particular easier one, Or whether Jesus is in a sense, Just giving them a riddle to ponder.

Jesus brings the two things together. He says in verse 6, To the scribes, The Jewish leaders who are grumbling, So that you may know, That the Son of Man has authority, On earth to forgive sins, I say to you, The paralyzed man, Get up, And go home.

Take up your bed, And go to your home. Whichever is the easier to say, Jesus brings the two, Together. The one, Is proof of the other.

[8 : 42] So that you, Who are complaining against me, Know that I can forgive sins. That is, Otherwise, How do you know, That somebody is forgiven, If I say your sins are forgiven? I will demonstrate that, By saying, Get up and walk.

The fact that the man, In the next verse, Just gets up and walks, And goes home. Healed, Proves not just that, Jesus has the power, To heal the paralyzed man, But more importantly, Has the power to forgive sins, As well.

Now this is very significant. Not just what Jesus says, But of course that he backs it up, With what he does. The man gets up, Healed, Walks and goes home.

Jesus says, That you may know, That the son of man, That the son of man, That the son of man, The son of man, That the son of man, Has authority. The son of man, The son of man, Is a title used in the old testament, Anticipating one to come, Like God, In effect divine, With heavenly authority.

But Jesus says, About himself, In effect, I am the son of man, And I have authority, Not simply up there in heaven, But so that you may know, That the son of man, That the son of man, Has authority on earth, To forgive sins.

[9 : 56] I say to you, Get up and walk. Jesus is claiming here, A divine power. He's exercising, A divine prerogative, To forgive sins.

The scribes on the side, Grumbling, Recognize that, That's why they think, It's blasphemy. But the very fact, That the man gets up, And walks and goes home, In effect proves, It's not blasphemy, But is actually, God's power in Jesus, At work.

As we saw two weeks ago, There is a connection, Between sickness, And sin. We saw that at, The end of, The first section of, Matthew 8, Where after healing, Three people, Jesus, Well Matthew says that, This was to fulfill, The old testament prophet, Isaiah, When he's predicted, That one would come, To carry, Our sicknesses, Bear our sicknesses, But that passage, In Isaiah we saw, Is part of a bigger panorama, Of what a servant of God, To come would do, Not simply to carry, Sicknesses, But ultimately to die, For sin, That is, The reason why, There is sickness in this world, The reason why, You and I get colds, And arthritis, And cancer, And heart attacks, And so on, Why there's natural disasters, And why this earth, Is subject to, Decay and, Futility and frustration, And why there's evil, In the world, All stems back,

To the original, Sin of Adam and Eve, Spreading, Corrupting this world, It's not simply that, My cold is because, God's punishing me, For my particular sin, Or, Some particular illness, Is God punishing, For a particular sin, But rather more generally, The spread of sin, A contagion, A virus in our world, So to speak, Has come through, The original sin of humanity, In Adam and Eve, That was certainly, The thinking of Jews, Of Jesus' day, One of the rabbis, Of that day, More or less, Had written, The sick shall not rise, From his sickness, Until his sins are forgiven, Presumably said, By a rabbi, Who was pretty well, And in John's gospel, With a man born blind, People ask, Is this because, He or his parents have sinned, So there's a very clear connection, In the thinking of Jesus' day, That a particular sickness, Came from that person's, Particular sin, Jesus in the New Testament, Make it clear, That it's not so specific,

But more general, But when Jesus heals, Sicknesses in general, It's pointing to a greater, Dealing with human sin, And that's what again, He's making the connection here, This man's not paralyzed, Presumably because of his own sin, Or though maybe, That could be the case, But rather to show, A greater, More profound, Dealing with sickness, Jesus comes in effect, To its root cause, Which is the sinfulness, Of humanity, Your sins are forgiven, Get up, And walk, The sick man, Paralyzed man, Was brought to Jesus, To heal his physical condition, But he goes away, With much more than that, Healed, His spiritual condition, As well, So no wonder, That the people were amazed, And filled with, Or, Or even really fear, Is what that word suggests, In verse 8, They glorified God, Who'd given such authority,

[13 : 30] To men, To human beings, To humanity, Represented in Jesus, Himself, Now we ought not, To be so surprised, Matthew made it very clear, Even before Jesus was born, That this mission of Jesus, Was about dealing with human sin, In words that are well known to us, From Christmas time, Joseph is told, That Mary shall bear a son, And, Do not be afraid, To take her as your wife, She will bear a son, And you are to name him Jesus, For he will save his people, From their sins, And here is Jesus, Fulfilling exactly that mission from God, Saving people, From their sins, Indeed, He is that servant, Predicted by Isaiah, 700, 800 years before, The one who would carry, Both sickness and sin, Illness and iniquity, By dying,

So that, Many would be made, Righteous, Well that same mission, Of saving people from their sins, Continues in the next paragraph, Though without a miracle, In the next paragraph, Jesus was walking along, And he saw a man called Matthew, Sitting at the tax booth, And he said to him, Follow me, And he got up and followed him, Capernaum, Where Jesus is based, Was almost a border town really, It was on the shore, Of the sea of Galilee, And therefore it had boating trade, Across the lake, It's not a very big lake, A bit like Eildon, Probably with a bit more water in it, And, But around the lake, Were three different territories, All in a sense, Under Roman rule, But where Capernaum was, The Jewish area, Under Herod Antipas, The son of Herod the great, The Herod Antipas, Was the Herod around, When Jesus was crucified, Next door, Just near Capernaum, Across the top end, Of the Jordan river, Was the area of Herod's,

Half brother Philip, Who ruled over the Golan Heights, And further north, Caesarea Philippi, For example, Was a town he built, Partly named after himself, And then further around, To the south more pagan area, Where Jesus was, In the previous episode, Where he sent all those demons, Into the swine, Who then waste into the water, The area of what's called, The Decapolis, Ten city states, Combined together, So whether you came by boat, Or whether you crossed over, The northern end of the Jordan, By road, You'd be crossing into, A different territory, And paying tax or custom duty, On trade and travel, And so Matthew is a tax collector, Either with the boat trade, Or perhaps a little bit out of town, Towards Bethsaida, Which was into Philip's territory, Dealing with taxes and customs there, The other gospels talk about Matthew, As being called Levi, But often Jewish people, Had more than one name, Like Peter Kephas, For example, And so on, And so possibly here, It's clearly the same person, Maybe with a different name,

And this Matthew, Is presumably the Matthew, Who writes this gospel, Later on in his life, Matthew's a tax collector, And they were despised people, By the Jews, Despised because many of them, Had to collaborate with the Roman rule, Despised because they dealt with Gentiles, In dealing with money and trade, Despised because corruption was rife, And tax collectors on the whole, Were wealthy, Because of the corruption and extortion, That they levied even against Jews, And so they regarded a bit like, The scum of the earth in a way, Almost like criminals, Which many of them were, Well if Jesus by healing that paralyzed man, Upset the scribes, Who are some of the leaders, Of the Jewish community, Now he upsets the other key dominant group, The Pharisees, Matthew, Amazingly just gets up and follows Jesus, Presumably he's heard something about him, He can hardly fail to have done that, Given the crowds that have heard Jesus teaching,

And followed him as he's healed people, But now Jesus goes to dinner, With Matthew it seems, As Jesus sat at dinner in the house, Many tax collectors and sinners came, Presumably Matthew's bringing all his friends, To come and introduce them to Jesus, Whom he's now become a disciple of, And Jesus was sitting with him, And with his disciples, And when the Pharisees heard this, The Pharisees are the very zealous, Jewish leaders of the community, We often think of Pharisee as being, Really bad, But actually in Jewish society, They were the best, They were the most ardent religious people, The most devout religious people, They tried to keep every single law, And many more besides, When the Pharisees saw this, They said to his disciples, Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors, And sinners?

[18 : 26] Well they don't, They're objecting to the fact, That Jesus is eating with others, And to them, Jesus gives them now not so much a riddle, As a parable, He says to them, Those who are well, Have no need of a physician, But those who are sick do, Well that's fairly obvious, Those who are well, Have no need of a physician, But those who are sick, Do, That is you don't go to a doctor, If you think you're well, And you don't go to Jesus, If you think you are righteous, For Jesus came to call sinners, Is what he's saying, Like the paralyzed man, Like Matthew, Like these sinners and tax collectors, Who are gathered around him, At this meal, Now note that Jesus is not saying, You Pharisees, You're righteous, You're okay, I've come for others, Because he goes on then,

To say to them, In words that are, Full of rebuke, And irony, Go and learn, What this means, I desire mercy, Not sacrifice, For I've come to call, Not the righteous, But sinners, Go and learn, What this means, I desire mercy, Not sacrifice, What does it mean, Jesus is quoting, From an Old Testament prophet, Hosea, Seven or eight hundred years, Before him, A contemporary of the prophet Isaiah, Mercy, Not sacrifice, In Hebrew idiom, Means not one, But not the other, But rather, I desire mercy, Not sacrifice, Is I'd rather mercy, Than sacrifice, Mercy is more important, Than sacrifice, That's what the idiom, Really means, When Hosea, Uses those words, He's rebuking, Some of the leaders, Of his day, Who've become in effect, Apostate, Drifted away from the faith,

Worshipping other gods, And so on, Jesus here, Maybe not so subtly, Is saying to these Jewish leaders, The Pharisees of his day, You think you're righteous, You think you're righteous, But you are no better, Than the leaders that Hosea rebuked, When he said these words, I desire mercy, Not sacrifice, You see the Pharisees, Were the most zealous religious group, But ironically, They don't actually understand, The very Bible, The Old Testament, As we would call it, That they teach, They're meant to be the ones, Who teach others, Jesus says to them, Putting them down, Humiliating them really, Go and learn, Something fairly basic, Go and learn, How humiliating, For a Pharisee, Who teaches the word, What's the issue, The Pharisees, You see, Were on about the external form, The rituals, The rites, That's what they're on about here, Eating with a sinner, And a tax collector, That'll make you ritually unclean,

But Hosea quoting God says, I desire mercy, Not sacrifice, That is, I desire the heart, To be right, Not the external form, You see, The Pharisees, Were on about the external form, The keeping up appearances, The rituals, The rites, And the ceremonies, And the show, And all the details, Of the law, But they'd lost the heart, Of what it's all about, Mercy, And compassion, And love, For the outcasts, And the poor, And the sinners, And the tax collectors, Jesus is not saying, The Pharisees are righteous, And therefore, They have no need of him, But rather, He's actually rebuking them, Saying, You are sinners, Needing me, And you don't see it, Your self-righteousness, Has blinded you, In your pride, And you fail, To recognise your sin, And your need, For forgiveness, Like these tax collectors, And sinners, Like Matthew, Like the paralysed man, You see, We think it's stupid, When a person, Who has symptoms of sickness, Doesn't go to a doctor, It's even worse,

Far worse, When people do not go to Jesus, Because they do not see, Their sin, And their need, Most people think, They are spiritually healthy, Most people think, They're pretty decent people, I never try and harm anyone, I'm a pretty good bloke, I'm a good person, Loving, Caring, I often hear people, Say those sorts of words, When I'm dealing with funerals, And so on, But very often, It's a foolish blindness, A false diagnosis, You see, We need Jesus, All of us, No matter how good we are, No matter how religious we are, No matter whether we're young or old, We need Jesus, Because none of us, In our own strength, And ability, And piety, Is righteous, Jesus, The suffering servant, Came to die, To make many righteous, That was what the Old Testament prophet,

[23 : 34] Anticipated, And what Jesus fulfilled, We need Jesus, Because we need, Our sins forgiven, I took a funeral this week, Of a 67 year old man, Who died of cancer, He with his wife, And sister-in-law, Had come here just, Two or three times, In recent months, I'd not really got to know him, At all, But apparently in his, Dying months, One of the things he said, A few times to his wife, Was this, I'm not good enough, Now he was a man, Who by all accounts, Loving, Caring, Generous, Helping other people, Never harming anyone, A loving, Faithful husband, Etc, Typical good bloke, But he knew, Rightly, I'm not good enough, And God in his mercy, I think, Was bringing him back, To God, Some roots,

I think, That he'd left, Many years before, He was coming back, To the physician, Of our souls, To Jesus, Knowing he needed, His sins forgiven, Early in the sermon, On the mount, In Matthew 5, Jesus says, Blessed are those, Who hunger, And thirst, For righteousness, They shall be filled, Not those, Who claim to be righteous, Those who are self-righteous, Not at all, They're blind, And do not see, The symptoms, Blessed are those, Who hunger and thirst, For the righteousness, That Jesus brings, The forgiveness, From Jesus Christ, Jesus does not, Underestimate, The significance, Of what he's come to do, It's quite radical, By contrast, To the Jewish practices, Of his day, The disciples, Of John the Baptist, Asked to him, With some element, I think, Of complaint, Why do we,

And the Pharisees, Fast often, But your disciples, Do not fast, And Jesus replies, With another, Little parable, In a sense, He says to them, The wedding guests, Cannot mourn, As long as the bridegroom, Is with them, Can they, That's a strange thing, To say in response, But it's something, That the disciples, Of John the Baptist, Ought to have understood, Because John the Baptist, Himself, The forerunner of Jesus, Remember, Said these words, He who has the bride, Is the bridegroom, The friend of the bridegroom, Talking about John the Baptist, Himself, Stands and hears him, Rejoices greatly, At the bridegroom's voice, For this reason, My joy has been fulfilled, He must increase, But I must decrease, Jesus is the bridegroom, But it's saying something, Much more than just, A little illustration, Of a wedding, Because the Old Testament, Has got several occasions, Where it likens God, To be the bridegroom,

And the people of God, To be the bride, So when Jesus says, I am the bridegroom, Let's have a party, Again, He's claiming, Fulfillment of something divine, Here is God Himself, In human form, Let's celebrate, We don't fast and mourn, When the Son of God, Is on earth, We celebrate, Is what He's saying, Now again, This would be blasphemy, Except for the fact, That it's true, He's claiming, To be the Messiah, And then He gives, Two more, Parable illustrations, Really, Of the significance, Of what He'd come to do, In verse 16, He says, No one sews, A piece of unshrunk cloth, On an old cloak, For the patch, Pulls away from the cloak, And a worse tear, Is made, That is, Put new and old together, And they, Don't gel, They tear apart, The same in the next illustration, Neither is new wine,

Put into old wineskins, Otherwise the skins burst, And the wine is spilled, And the skins are destroyed, But new wine, Is put into fresh wineskins, So that both the new wine, And the new wineskins, Are preserved, Wine skins in those days, Were made out of animal skin, You'd kill the animal, You'd gut it, You'd take off all the meat, You'd end up with a skin in effect, You'd block up the legs, And through the neck, You'd use it as the part, For pouring in liquids, And fluids to keep them, Stop it up, And so on, After all the skin's been treated, But after some time, The skin becomes brittle, And if you put new wine, That is still fermenting, And bubbling, And perhaps expanding, The old skins, Will actually fracture, And you'll lose what's inside, Again, It's an illustration, Of the new and the old, That are incompatible, It's tearing it apart, And what Jesus is implying here, Is that his own ministry, As the king from heaven, As the Messiah from heaven, Come in fulfillment of the Old Testament, Actually breaks the structures, Of the Old Testament,

[28 : 38] The priests, The sacrifices, The temple, The rituals, The cleannesses, And uncleannesses, The food laws, And so on, They all actually, Can't cope with, What Jesus has come to do, The one who dies, On the cross, For an atonement of sin, So that the Old Testament, Sacrificial system, Is no more, He rises from the dead, As the living temple of God, So the old temple in Jerusalem, Is no longer needed, He brings together, Jew and Gentile, Clean and unclean, All welcomed together, Into his kingdom, As we've seen in the last couple of weeks, As well, So the Old Testament food laws, And laws about ritual cleaners, They're no longer needed anymore, So that the old is actually, Broken apart, By the glory of what Jesus comes, Anew, He comes to welcome sinners, Jew and Gentile, Men and women, Clean and unclean, Tax collectors and sinners, Ultimately it's a welcome, Through his death, That carries away our sins, And brings us into a relationship, With God through faith, Forgiven, There's a strong emphasis, On faith, The men who bring them, Paralysed man, Have faith, And it's in response to that, That Jesus heals him, And forgives him, We've seen that in the last two weeks, As well, Faith that anybody, Can exercise, In Jesus, The physician of our souls, If we went to see a doctor tomorrow, I wonder what he'd diagnose, If we went to see Jesus tomorrow, Would he diagnose a state of sin in us, Well yes he would, Without exception, Then it begs the question, Do you go to Jesus, To have that state of sin forgiven, Unless we appreciate the diagnosis, We will not appreciate the cure, You see if we practice our religion, With a sort of pharisaic righteousness, That we like the religion, The form,

The externals, The trappings, The rituals, And the ceremonies, But have not the heart, Mercy as Hosea said, We don't actually love Jesus, Or think we need him, Or want him, Or love him, Or worship him, But rather we practice, Something that is spiritually dead, But we love the external form, Like the Pharisees, But if we know, That we're not good enough, And we know that Jesus forgives us, We will love him, We will show mercy, Because we know that we're a sinner, Like anybody else, We're all on an equal footing, And we will welcome, And embrace other sinners, In the party that Jesus invites us all to, Ransomed, Healed, Restored, Forgiven, Who like me, His praise should sing, This Jesus still invites us,

To his table, To his banquet feast of heaven, Do you see your diagnosis of sin, Have you come to Jesus, The physician of your soul, To your heart o'er King, Healed, Not all the hell, But...

To his ■As, Then make.' Do you see your mother, Or heimporteone, Heational, He ■yder, And now I reality, For your, TheBenji, The Evan Vitrase,