

“Amazing Authority”

Matthew 9:1-8

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Jackson Jungwirth: Excuse me, Pastor Dan, would you sit down please? I am going to give the sermon today.

Pastor Dan: Hold on there, Jackson. What in the world are you talking about?

Jackson: Well, your sermons have been kind of boring lately. Since I played you in the Christmas program, I figure I can probably give a pretty good sermon. Just go take a seat and I will preach today.

Pastor Dan: No, you will not, young man! You don't have the authority to decide who preaches a sermon here. That is up to the Church Board, and they want me, not you, to preach this morning.

Jackson: Now, Pastor Dan, don't be difficult. I have decided I am going to preach today, and you can't stop me.

Pastor Dan: Well, Ok, Jackson. You win. Go ahead preach your sermon...just kidding. Get back to your seat!

Well, I suspect you all realize that was just a little skit. It would be pretty crazy if someone, especially a kid, tried to hijack the pulpit. Yet, in many ways it would be no less shocking than what Jesus did one day when He healed a paralyzed man and told him his sins were forgiven.

This morning, our journey through the book of Matthew brings us to chapter 9:1-8. This passage highlights the amazing authority of Jesus Christ, something we have noted in other parts of Matthew. Yet, this is a truth worth continually pondering because it provides nourishment and encouragement for our souls. Let's pause and pray God would help us understand this text and what it means for our lives today.

Matthew 9:1 And getting into a boat he crossed over and came to his own city. Jesus leaves the reign of the Gadarenes and returns to Nazareth of Galilee. **Matthew 9:2a And behold, some people brought to him a paralytic, lying on a bed.**

Matthew gives a very condensed account of this event. Some of you are familiar with Mark and Luke's versions of this story where four men lower their paralyzed friend down through the roof in order to bring him to Jesus. Matthew's focus is not

on what this fellow's friends did but on *what Jesus is about to do.*

Matthew 9:2b And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, “Take heart, my son (or young man); your sins are forgiven.” We don't know what these sins might have been. Maybe this man was an axe-murderer. Or perhaps he had simply stolen a toy from a playmate when he was a child. Most likely his sins were somewhere in between. His friends probably didn't think of him as an especially good or bad person. The important thing is that whatever sins had been committed by this man, *Jesus forgave them.*

Matthew 9:3 And behold, some of the scribes (religious teachers, likely Pharisees) said to themselves, “this man is blaspheming.” I can hear the grumbling, much like would occur if Jackson really tried to preach the sermon today. Who does this guy think he is? No one has the right to forgive sins! God alone can do that. It is blasphemy to say to someone, “Your sins are forgiven.”

Now, I have to admit their logic is sound. Only the one sinned against has the right to forgive. Let's say on the way out the door this morning Pastor Bryan gives me a good kick in the shin, on purpose. It makes me a little irritated. Yet, what really irritates me is when I hear Pastor Mark say, “Oh, that's okay, Bryan. I forgive you for kicking Pastor Dan.” I am ready to yell, “Wait a second. What do you mean, you forgive him? I'm the one who was kicked in the shin. You have no right to forgive Bryan.”

Friends, when we sin, we sin against God. Though other people may be victims of what we do, and we certainly do wrong them, God is ultimately the one we have offended. That is why in **Psalm 51:4** as David confesses his sin of adultery with Bathsheba, he prays to the Lord, **Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight.**

Because our sins are against God, a violation of His law, He is the one who has the right to forgive

sins. The Lord is able to say, **Isaiah 44:22a I have blotted out your transgressions like a cloud and your sins like mist.** However, no human being has the authority to say that. If anyone other than Jesus would have said to the paralyzed man, “Your sins are forgiven,” the reaction of the religious teachers would have been totally appropriate.

Matthew 9:4 But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, “Why do you think evil in your hearts?” Whether through natural or supernatural observation, Jesus knows exactly what these fellows are thinking, and He sees the self-righteous, judgmental, really evil, attitude behind those thoughts. So, He says **Matthew 9:5 For which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Rise up and walk?’**

A tough question. Both are quite easy to say. Each sentence contains only four words. Yet both are difficult, actually impossible, to do. Only God can forgive sins, and only God can instantly heal a crippled man so he can walk.

Matthew 9:6a But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins” Jesus doesn’t really complete that sentence **9:6b he then said to the paralytic “Rise, pick up your bed and go home.”** Pretty wild instructions, yet Matthew simply says **9:7 and he rose and went home.**

Now, when Jesus refers to Himself as “the Son of Man,” He is using a very unique title. When I first started reading the Bible, I assumed that this phrase was simply a contrast to “Son of God.” I thought “Son of Man” referred to Jesus’ human nature, while “Son of God” spoke of His divine nature. Not quite.

“Son of Man” is a messianic title. It is used in Daniel 7:13 to describe the eternal Judge and King who would rule over all the earth. By uttering those words, Jesus is claiming to be the Messiah, the Savior, that God had promised His people for centuries.

This claim infuriates the religious leaders even more. Yes, by healing the paralyzed man, and showing His authority over a physical disability, Jesus demonstrates that He is the Messiah.

Because He is the Messiah, He also has the authority to pronounce forgiveness of sin, since He has come to save His people from their sins.

Telling someone their sins are forgiven is indeed something only God can do. Yet, because Jesus the Son of Man, the Son of God, He has the right to forgive sin. **Matthew 9:8 when the crowds saw it, they were afraid, and they glorified God, who had given such authority to men.**

Though the religious teachers remained skeptical and very upset, the larger crowd has a much different attitude. The ESV says they were afraid. Other versions say they marveled or were in awe, but “afraid” is usually what the Greek word means. This direct exposure to Jesus’ authority was an overwhelming emotional experience for the people.

But it was a good one, because it caused them to glorify God. They found it amazing that this one man had been given authority by God to heal paralysis and to forgive sin. Maybe Jesus was the Messiah God had promised. Perhaps, we can get a clearer picture of their reaction if we think back on our little skit this morning. Let’s say, I did sit down and let Jackson preach the sermon, and he went on to preach the most dynamic and profound sermon you have ever heard. If that happened, there would likely still be some of you shaking your heads in disgust thinking, “Who does this kid think he is? He had no right to speak today.”

Yet, most of you would be amazed by Jackson, by his authority. You would be thinking, “Wow, that Jackson is quite a kid. I think maybe God wanted us to hear what he had to say. We should probably still keep Pastor Dan around, but from now on when Jackson speaks, everyone better listen.”

Folks, if we would have been in the crowd and heard Jesus speak and saw Him heal that man, I think most of us would have thought, “What amazing authority. When He speaks, we had better listen.” Yes, almost 2000 years have gone by since Jesus forgave the paralyzed man’s sins and healed him, but here are some very important lessons for us in this text. Let’s focus on three of them.

#1 Jesus is indeed the Son of God. He is the Messiah sent by God the Father. He is the eternal Son of God. In our post-modern era many think it doesn't matter what you believe as long as you are sincere. Thus, those of us who insist Jesus is the unique Son of God are seen as narrow-minded.

Some folks ask, "What is wrong with thinking of Jesus as a prophet or great moral teacher like many Jews or Muslims do? What is so terrible about viewing Jesus as an ascended master or angelic being as a lot of new age adherents do? What is the problem with saying Jesus is the created Son of God as the Jehovah Witnesses do? Why are Christians so offended when 'the Jesus Seminar' claims Jesus was a social reformer with a good sense of humor?"

Well, because these beliefs are wrong. They do not describe who Jesus was or is. When people maintain that it doesn't matter whether or not Jesus is the eternal Son of God, it is a total insult to Biblical Christianity, and to every true Christian.

C. S. Lewis explained it this way. *"People often say, 'I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God.' That is one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said, would not be a great moral teacher. He'd either be a lunatic, on the level of man who says he is a poached egg, or else he'd be the devil of hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God; or else a madman or something worse. Let us not come up with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.*

Friends, I have used that quote before, but Lewis hits the nail right on the head.

Why is it so important that Jesus is God the Son? Because only as the eternal Son of God could Jesus die on the cross as a substitute for sinners. As someone said, "a savior not quite God is like a bridge that doesn't quite reach to the other side." We can be confident He is indeed God the Son.

In our day, many people are more comfortable with a generic spirituality. I remember Chuck Colson telling about going on a network morning

news show and being told it was fine if he wanted to talk about God, but that he must not mention Jesus Christ. Colson talked about Jesus and was never invited back to that program.

I remember the wonderful TV show "Touched by An Angel," which ran for nine seasons, 1994-2003. It was produced by a Christian and was delightful. The angelic characters often talked about God, but *never mentioned Jesus.*

Yes, without Jesus Christ, Christianity would be less offensive to Jews, Muslims, Hindu's, and "spiritual" people, but it would not really be Christianity. Though we should strive to be kind to all and should never needlessly offend people who have other beliefs, we cannot pretend Jesus is someone other than who He really is, the Eternal Son of God.

#2 We should be in awe of Jesus. The big problem out in the world is that people don't acknowledge Jesus as the Son of God. A big problem in the church is that some of us are never in awe of Jesus. We are not amazed at His authority. Theologian Michael Horton wrote a book a few years ago entitled, "In the Face of God."

In it he argues that many evangelical Christians lack a balance in their attitude toward Jesus. He notes that for the past 150 plus years the dominant theme in church music has been that Jesus is our friend or even our lover. Old hymns like, "What A friend We Have in Jesus" or "In the Garden" fit that description. "I come to the garden alone to walk and talk with Jesus." More recently, there are popular worship songs like "Oceans," "when oceans rise, My soul will rest in Your embrace, For I am Yours and You are mine," or a song we used to sing here, "In moments like these I sing out a song, sing out a love song to Jesus."

Now, there is nothing wrong with thinking of Jesus as your friend, or as the one who loves you. Because folks, if you are a Christian, that is who Jesus is. He truly is.

But Horton notes this is only part of who Jesus is. That is one dimension of His character. Because we seldom think about some of Jesus' other

qualities, He fears we can become a little too comfortable, a little too cozy, in our relationship with the Lord.

Friends, how often do you feel in awe of Jesus? Are you amazed by authority? I don't think I am in awe of Jesus as much as I should be.

Let me ask this question. What do you think Jesus looks like? How do you picture His face? Do you think He always has warm, kind, gentle expressions? It is interesting, thousands of artists have painted or drawn pictures of Jesus, yet the Bible doesn't really tell us anything about what Jesus looked like when He was on earth.

The only descriptions of Jesus are in the book of Revelation, such as **Revelation 1:13-17a** **And in the midst of the lampstands was one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. 14 The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, 15 his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. 16 In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength.**

No friends, that is not how Jesus is portrayed on The Chosen. And it is not what Jesus looked like while He was on earth. But it does reflect some things about who Jesus really is and what He is really like.

Again, I am not suggesting you should not think of Jesus as your friend. He is the greatest friend one could ever have. I am saying that a healthy relationship with Jesus Christ is more than a cozy relationship. Yes, it is rooted and bathed in love, but it also includes wonder, awe, reverence and even fear.

I sometimes put it this way: It is wonderful to stand on the edge of the Grand Canyon and look at that massive, colorful gorge. It is an awesome sight. But, if you have any sense at all, you would be afraid, be absolutely terrified, to step over its edge. Likewise, we ought to be afraid to step away

from Jesus Christ. We ought to be terrified by even the thought of living life apart from Him. Because, though He is our friend and brother, He is also King of kings and Lord of lords. He is the Sovereign Judge of the Universe and sometimes we should simply stand in awe of Jesus.

#3 A wonderful lesson for each of us: **Jesus can meet your need.** The paralyzed man had two major problems. He was very much aware; one, his physical problem, he could not walk. His other problem was spiritual, he was a sinner. We are not sure to what degree he understood that, but it was still a very real problem.

In our text we see Jesus taking care of both of these problems. He did exactly what that fellow needed to have done. Jesus healed the man's body so he could walk and forgave his sins so that his soul could be healed.

Folks, all of us have problems. Some of them are big problems. Some of them are problems we very much know we have, others are below the surface, but still very real.

Friends, the Lord Jesus can solve any problem. If you turn to Him, He will meet your need. Oh, He will not always do it the way you want Him to do it. Yet, if by God's grace, you turn to Him in faith and ask for His help, you can be sure He will ultimately not let you down. And do you know what? Some things have not changed in the past 2000 years. One of the biggest needs any human being has is to be forgiven for sin, just as the paralyzed man was forgiven.

Some people realize that. They feel guilty, very guilty, for things they have done or failed to do. Guilt is a terrible feeling, but it can be constructive. If your guilt causes you to turn to Jesus and seek His forgiveness, you are in much better shape than the person who experiences no guilt at all, even when he is living in rebellion against God. Friends, if you have not received the forgiveness of sin God offers through Jesus Christ, believe me, you need it.

The Bible promises that if you stop trusting in yourself and start trusting in Jesus as your Savior and Lord, you will experience that forgiveness. If you have not done that, I encourage you to do so

today. Perhaps some of you, even as Christians, still struggle with guilt. Yet, you know Jesus is your Savior, but there are some things in your life for which you feel very ashamed. It may be a sexual affair, an out-of-control temper, a habit of worrying all the time, a tendency to shade the truth or simply a selfish attitude.

Friends, if that is the boat you are in, remember what **1 John 1:9** says, **If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.** Friends, whatever you need, forgiveness, healing, guidance or hope, Jesus can meet that need if only you will turn to Him.

Folks, I hope today, through His Word and Spirit, God has enabled you to see a little more clearly who Jesus is. I hope you have a little more awe toward Him than you did an hour ago. I think it was Spurgeon who said, "If the King of England were to walk into this room today, we would all stand up. If Jesus Christ, the Kings of kings, were to walk into this room, we would all fall down on our knees."

As we close with our last song, I don't expect you to fall to your knees, though it is fine if you do. But I do hope you feel a sense of awe as we worship the Lord Jesus and sing....