

# Matthew 9:1-8

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/matt/matt-9/matthew-91-8/>

*Jesus returns to Capernaum, where He publicly and dramatically heals a paralytic. Before Jesus heals this man, He tells him that his sins are forgiven, which causes some of the scribes in the crowd to silently accuse Jesus of blasphemy in their hearts. Jesus calls out their blasphemous unbelief and demonstrates that He is Who He claims to be by healing the paralytic, telling him to get up and go home. Accordingly, the crowds are amazed that God has given this authority to men.*

The parallel accounts of these events are described in Mark 2:1-12, Mark 5:21, and Luke 5:17-26, Luke 8:40.

Jesus's sojourn to the other side of the sea was brief. The Gadarene people living there begged Him to leave after He healed two demon-possessed men. Jesus had sent the demons into a herd of swine that then drowned itself, so the locals were afraid of and angry at Him. *Jesus got into a boat and crossed back over the sea and came to His own city* on the northern shore. Mark 2:1 confirms that *His own city* refers to the *city* of Capernaum where *His* ministry was headquartered along the northern shore of *the sea*, rather than the *city* of Nazareth, where *He* grew up. (See Mark 2:1-12 for a more detailed account of this episode.)

While *Jesus* was back in Capernaum, *they brought to Him a paralytic lying on a bed*. Mark tells us that *they* were four friends (Mark 2:1). The *paralytic* was unable to move, which was why *they brought him on a bed* (pallet). Matthew tells us that *Jesus* saw *their faith*. It is not entirely clear in this context who *their* includes. At a minimum it seems *their* refers to the *they* who *brought the paralytic lying on a bed to Him*, but it could include the *paralytic* that *they brought* as well. The *faith* that *Jesus* saw was their act of love and expression of hopeful belief.

*Their faith* was simple and remarkable. *Their faith* simple, in that *they* believed *Jesus* had the power to heal *their* friend. And *their faith* was remarkable, in that it required a degree of thoughtfulness, much effort, and ingenuity to place him *on a bed* and carry him to *Jesus*. *They* even had to cut a hole in the roof to get to *Jesus* because the crowds surrounding *Him* prevented them from coming near (Mark 2:2-4). *Their faith* demonstrated both belief and love and put those things into good action. *Their faith* displayed the “serve-first” lifestyle and righteousness that *Jesus* described when *He* delivered *His* kingdom platform in the Sermon on the Mount.

“In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets.”  
(Matthew 7:12)

*They* were serving their friend, who was physically unable to come to *Jesus* on his own, in the belief that *He* would heal him. *Their faith* in *Jesus* and love for their friend moved *Jesus*.

*Jesus* addresses the *paralytic* with a surprising and startling remark, *Take courage* (be cheerful), *son; your sins are forgiven*. This is surprising because the *paralytic* was brought to *Jesus* to be healed of his paralysis, not for *Jesus* to forgive his *sins*. The remark was also startling because the only people who could forgive a wrong would be someone injured by the *paralytic* and God Himself. The context strongly indicates that this was the first encounter between *Jesus* and this *paralytic*. In that case, there would have been no opportunity for the *paralytic* to have wronged *Jesus* and need forgiveness. By telling the *paralytic*, *your sins are forgiven*, *Jesus* is acting as though He is the chief party who has been offended by the *paralytic*'s *sins*. In other words, by making this statement, *Jesus* is speaking as though *He* is God.

This disturbed *some of the scribes* who were present and offended by *Jesus*'s remark. *They* thought to themselves, *This fellow blasphemes*. They rightly understood Who *Jesus* was presuming to be. When *Jesus* told the *paralytic* that his *sins were forgiven*, these scribes correctly perceived that *Jesus* was acting as though He were God. But at least *some of these scribes* did not believe that *Jesus* actually was God. The irony is that *their evil* thoughts accusing *Jesus* of blasphemy were themselves acts of blasphemy.

This is the first time in Matthew's narrative that *Jesus* directly confronts religious leaders. As we recall, John (the Baptizer) did so earlier (Matthew 3:7-10) and *Jesus* only mentioned *the scribes* and Pharisees in a negative light when teaching His disciples during the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:20). But up to this point, Matthew has not recorded *Jesus* challenging them in person. Though it is the first time, it will not be the last. Throughout this chapter, Matthew introduces the established religious authorities as the primary earthly opponents of *Jesus*'s kingdom message. It is not all the *scribes*, but *some of the scribes*. There will be leaders who believe in *Jesus* along the way, including Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea (John 3:1-2; Mark 5:43).

Even though *some of the scribes* did not believe that *Jesus* was God, they were wrong. *Jesus* was and is God. *Jesus* knew *their thoughts*. *He* understood the *evil* within *their hearts* that was driving their unbelief. *He* calls out the *evil* of *their hearts*' unbelief. *Jesus* said to the unbelieving *scribes*, *Why are you thinking evil in your hearts?* The word Matthew uses for *thinking* is "enthymemai" (G1722) from which we get our term "enthymeme" (which is a form of logical syllogism). In His rhetorical remark, *Jesus* is accusing *their hearts* of silently "enthymeme-ing" or reasoning *evil* deductions about *Him*. Their *evil thinking* might have been something like this: "If *Jesus* is saying this, then He is claiming to be God, and He cannot be God because He does not fit our preconceived notions of God, therefore He is blaspheming."

*Jesus* followed up this charge with another question. *Which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, and walk'?* They likely dared not answer *Him* out loud. From an earthly point of view, it is much *easier to say* to someone *Your sins are forgiven* than it is to tell a *paralytic* *Get up, and walk*. No one can measure whether *forgiveness* has occurred. You could claim it and no one could prove whether or not it has happened. It is therefore *easier to say* and claim that *forgiveness* has occurred. On the other hand, if someone says to a *paralytic* *Get up, and walk*, everyone will see rather quickly if healing has taken place, based on whether or not the *paralytic* can then walk. If the *paralytic* is healed, it proves that the person who told him to *Get up, and walk* had the power and authority to do so.

*Jesus then tells the unbelieving scribes, But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins He heals the paralytic. Jesus makes clear that the healing of the paralytic is intended as a testimony to the scribes that Jesus does indeed have the authority on earth to forgive sins. Jesus then turns to the paralytic and says, Get up, pick up your bed and go home. Jesus offered them conclusive evidence of His power. Jesus made clear that seeing these works created a higher responsibility to believe (Matthew 11:21-23).*

Christ demonstrates that *He* has the authority *to forgive sins*, that He is *the Son of Man* (a common term meaning both “someone” as well as a biblical term for “the Messiah”), and that He is in fact God. Jesus demonstrates all of this by healing the paralyzed man so that he can walk *home* with his *bed*. Matthew then succinctly tells us, that the *paralytic* who was *brought* by his friends *lying on a bed* then *got up and went home*. This episode should have altered the *evil thinking* of the *scribes*. The *scribes’ thinking* or reasoning should have changed to something like, “Well this is clearly God’s power at work, so our preconceived notions must be wrong.” That appears to be the reaction of the *crowds*.

*When the crowds of onlookers saw this* take place, Matthew relates that *they were awestruck*. There is little doubt that *they were* amazed at the miracle that healed the *paralytic*. But their amazement was likely over more than just this miracle. *They were* probably amazed at the confrontation between *Jesus* and the unbelieving *scribes*. The *scribes* were established authorities who thought Jesus was a blasphemer. Jesus revealed the healing power of God, as well as the power to forgive sins. He scored an undeniable victory, while the *scribes* suffered humiliating defeat. But the crowds *were* also amazed, Matthew tells us, at *God*. Having seen the good works of *Jesus* and the *paralytic’s* friends, they *glorified God*, the Father in heaven. And they marveled at the fact that *God had given such authority to men*. The *crowds* may not have understood that Jesus was claiming to be *God*, as *some of the scribes* did, but they recognized and acknowledged what was obvious, that *God* was miraculously working through Him and *had given this Man authority to heal incurable afflictions—and to forgive sins*.

## **Biblical Text**

**9:1-8 Getting into a boat, Jesus crossed over the sea and came to His own city. And they brought to Him a paralytic lying on a bed. Seeing their faith, Jesus said to the paralytic, “Take courage, son; your sins are forgiven.” And some of the scribes said to themselves, “This fellow blasphemes.” And Jesus knowing their thoughts said, “Why are you thinking evil in your hearts? Which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up, and walk’? But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”—then He said to the paralytic, “Get up, pick up your bed and go home.” And he got up and went home. But when the crowds saw this, they were awestruck, and glorified God, who had given such authority to men.**