

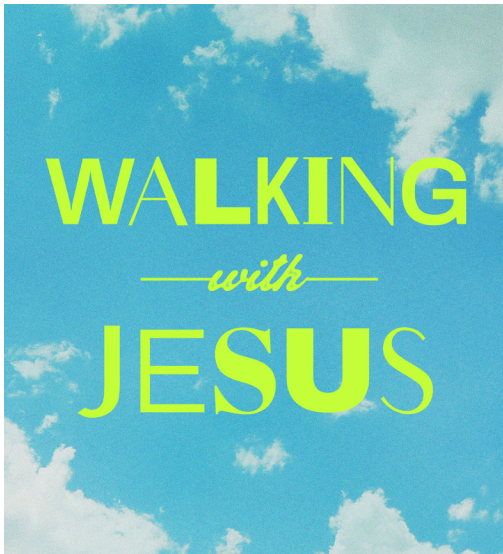


WALKING
—with—
JESUS

Sermon Growth Guide

June 4, 2023

Forgiveness



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Walking With Jesus - Forgiveness

Matthew 9:1-8

Key Verse: Matthew 9:6 “But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.”

Big Idea: Walking with Jesus means walking the path of forgiveness. We might see other needs at hand, but our deepest need underneath all the others is a need to be made right with God.

Foundations

This week, we begin a five-week sermon series in Matthew 9: ***Walking with Jesus***. Each week, we will look at a different story in this chapter that can help us to cultivate a desire to walk with Jesus through this season.

As we look at each story, the invitation is to “step into” the story and look around. Where are you? Where is Jesus? What do you notice? And what about Jesus captures your heart?

In this chapter, we will discover five miracle stories, a teaching on fasting and Matthew’s own conversion story. The chapter ends with Jesus telling the disciples that the “harvest is plentiful but the workers are few...” What story will Jesus write in your life as you walk with him for the next five weeks?

Chapter 9 begins with Jesus stepping into a boat and traveling from the Gentile territory of the Gadarenes to his hometown of Capernaum. As soon as He arrives home, some men come to Him bringing a paralytic. It’s a common pattern for people to bring those in need to Jesus (Matthew 4:24). But this healing is different than the others. As you read this passage, explore together what Jesus sees, what He says, who is upset by this, and how Jesus proves His authority.

Understanding God’s Word

Together, read Matthew 9:1-8.

What is going on here?

What does Jesus see? What does He do?

And what could a paralytic possibly need forgiveness for?

Applying God’s Word

Sometimes it’s difficult to bring ourselves to Jesus. Why is that?

Who are the people in your life that would bring you to Jesus if you couldn’t get there? How would they do that, and what might Jesus say to you?

Witnessing God’s Word

Theologian Dale Bruner writes about this passage: “The way we carry friends to Jesus today is by praying for them” (*The Christbook*, p. 412). Who are you “carrying” to Jesus currently?

The people who bring the paralytic to Jesus don’t say a word in this passage. Only Jesus speaks. Practice quiet, listening prayer for your friends, asking Jesus how He is praying for them. Share what you hear Jesus saying to you.

Today we begin a five-week sermon series called **Walking with Jesus**. We are taking a walking tour through Matthew chapter 9 where we find five miracle stories, a teaching on fasting, and Matthew's own conversion moment. It's a chapter with a lot of walking. Jesus moves from place to place to see what God has for Him. The invitation is for us to walk with Jesus, and to see what God has for us.

Hear the Word of God, Matthew 9:1-8:

Jesus stepped into a boat, crossed over and came to his own town. 2 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."

3 At this, some of the teachers of the law said to themselves, "This fellow is blaspheming!"

4 Knowing their thoughts, Jesus said, "Why do you entertain evil thoughts in your hearts? 5

Which is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'? 6 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 and go home." 7 Then the man got up and went home. 8 When the crowd saw this, they were filled with awe; and they praised God, who had given such authority to man.

What is Going on Here?

Chapter 9 opens with a story about a paralyzed man. I think it's ironic that we begin our "walk" with Jesus with a man who literally cannot walk. Or move. Or do anything for himself. Matthew tells us he is paralyzed, and he lies on a mat. Jesus encounters him because a group of people decides to pick him up, mat and all, and carry him to Jesus.

By the end of the story, the man gets up and walks home on his own. But this is not just a story about physical mobility, this is a story about spiritual freedom. This is a story about forgiveness, but it's also a story about need.

In our text today, we see a man in need of physical healing, but Jesus sees that something else is needed first. You see, sometimes what we think we need and what we really need are not the same thing. Our passage opens with Jesus stepping into a boat and sailing from Gentile territory to His hometown, which is Capernaum. It's about a five-mile boat ride. Just enough, perhaps, for Jesus to catch His breath, be still and feel the wind and sun on His face. I'll let you explore the story that comes before this—it's about demons and floating pigs (if you're a teenage

boy, you'll love this story). But I think you'll understand why Jesus needs a moment to be still before He gets home.

When was the last time you had a moment to catch your breath, to be still, to feel the sun on your face and rest deeply? Friends, if we are going to walk with Jesus this summer, or take a boat ride with Him, we will find very quickly that His pace is quite different than ours. He moves slowly. He is never in a hurry. He gets up early to pray. He always has enough time.

Sometimes we think we need God to do something big in our lives. But what if Jesus' invitation today is to simply step into a boat with Him? Or to walk with Him, or hike with Him? What if the invitation is to find a rhythm of slower movement, of breathing and resting with Him and feeling the sun and trusting His pace and His path?

The Paralyzed Man

Upon arriving in Capernaum, we read that "some men" brought to Jesus a paralyzed man lying on a mat. So far, this pattern is familiar in the gospel of Matthew. In Matthew Chapter 4, we discover...that as Jesus went throughout Galilee preaching and teaching, ..."news about him spread and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures and the paralyzed, and he healed them" (Mt. 4:24). Large crowds from all over the region followed Him. Nothing new in this story...yet.

But here is where we get an up close and personal look at the healing process. And this is where the story takes a different turn. The text reads that "...When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, 'Take heart, son, your sins are forgiven'" (9:2). *Your sins are forgiven.*

We look at this man and see a broken body in need of mending; Jesus looks at the man and sees a soul in need of repair, someone in need of forgiveness. What could this man possibly need forgiveness for? He's lying still on a mat. For goodness' sake, he can't even move without the help of others. It's a fair question. What's going on here?

Jesus has just finished giving the Sermon on the Mount (chapters 5-7) where He has reinterpreted the commandments of the faith not just to be about our actions, but also matters of the heart. Anger, unforgiveness, lust, swearing, lying...all live deep in the human heart. Without God's forgiveness, sin

will paralyze us from the inside out. We see a paralyzed body; Jesus sees a paralyzed soul. Theologian Dale Bruner writes, “Jesus reaches down beneath the man’s paralysis to his guilt, and, removing that, cures him at his roots” (Bruner, *The Christbook: Matthew 1-12*). Sometimes, friends, what we think we need, and what we really need, are two different things.

We are in graduation season and celebrating all of our graduated seniors—great job you all! Some of you are getting ready to start college, some of you are hopping into new jobs, or taking a much-awaited gap year! But in my senior year of high school, I had decided there was one college I wanted to attend. I had my hope set on that school. If I could just get in there, my life would be great. Well, you know what I’m going to say. I didn’t get in. I was heartbroken. I had to rewind my expectations, grieve the path that wouldn’t be, and make a different choice and go to another college. God knew what I needed most. During those four years, I learned to walk with Jesus more closely. I grew in being part of Christian community. Looking back, I’m grateful for the path He opened up that was different than what I thought I needed. Sometimes what we think we need is not what we really need. Maybe you have a story like that. Maybe today you are in the middle of a story like that.

Here’s some things “I’ve heard” some people say they need (Not you or me, of course!): A bigger house, a better car, a new kitchen, more time, more sanity, a husband who knows how to fix a toilet, a cell phone, a Tik Tok account, more money, a better job, the Denver Nuggets to win, peace, sleep, a puppy, a waterfall in my back yard, better grades, a better school...you fill in the rest!

But as we get underneath our external desires, it gets pretty tender pretty quickly: to heal from sickness or trauma, deeper friendships, to love myself, to get a hold on my addiction or anxiety or despair, healing for a loved one, a restored relationship with my kids, a different body, a different life, not to have to depend on others so much, do over—you get the idea. And hear me—Jesus receives all of these needs. The men bring the paralyzed man to Jesus, and they lay him before Jesus with all of his need: his ache, his longings, his brokenness, his shattered hope. They bring him “mat and all.” Sometimes what we think we need isn’t what we really need, but we don’t know how to sort through it all—and that’s OK. Jesus knows. In our story today,

somehow this man’s friends knew what he needed. I mean, maybe not exactly, but they seemed to know he needed to be in Jesus’ presence. This is a pretty special group of people. So, let’s talk about them.

The Company of Friends

What do we know about these guys? The Greek text simply reads, “they brought.” Who is this “they”? And this is where we get to play a little game called “I don’t know.” Sometimes when we come to Scripture, we have to learn to say the words: “I don’t know.” Can you say that with me? “I don’t know.” Good. Here’s how this game goes...I ask a question and you say, “I don’t know.”

- Who are these people? I don’t know.
- How many are there? I don’t know.
- Are they friends of the man? I don’t know.
- What do they want Jesus to do? I don’t know. (They don’t say anything.)

OK, let’s change tactics here...What do we know? We know they had faith. Anything else? Nope. The text says (v. 2), “...Jesus saw their faith.” That’s what we know. Their faith compels them to bring a man who cannot move to Jesus.

Now, a quick sidetrack. If you know this story in the Gospel of Mark, you will know that Mark tells us much more about these men. It’s helpful to compare and contrast these stories across the Gospel accounts. What Matthew tells us in two verses, Mark expands to five verses. Or rather the other way around. Mark is the earlier writer and he gives us five verses about what’s going on. Matthew, writing later, takes Mark’s version and strips it down to two verses. That’s interesting.

Mark tells us that the home where Jesus is preaching is so full of people that there was no room to even get through the front door. So, the four men carrying the paralytic (Mark does tell us the number) have to tear through the roof to lower him down. That’s what their faith compels them to do. On seeing the crowd and realizing there was no way to get their friend to Jesus, they could have packed up and gone home. But they don’t. They invent a new path, they make a new door, and they get that paralyzed man to Jesus. But Matthew doesn’t tell this part of the story. I mean, this is the cool part of the story—these four men bust down barriers, they do what it takes, they tear apart a roof to get to Jesus. This is what faith in Jesus looks like in Mark’s version.

Why doesn't Matthew tell us this part? I don't know. Maybe because Mark's Gospel is already out there, everyone already knew this part. Maybe. Maybe because Matthew is more interested in what Jesus does as opposed to what we do. This would be consistent with Matthew's writing. Maybe because Matthew has a different purpose for telling this story and he wants to get rid of all the surrounding details and get us quickly to the heart of the matter. And what is the heart of matter? Jesus knows what we really need, and He has the authority to give us what we really need. Jesus clearly states the heart of the matter (vs. 6): "But I want you to know that the Son of Man has the authority on earth to forgive sins."

In their own way, this little company of friends had faith that getting this man into the presence of Jesus was what was needed that day. We don't know what they are thinking. They don't say anything. But Matthew does tell us that there is another group in the room. We learn that this group has very loud thoughts. There is a group of religious teachers thinking to themselves: "...This fellow is blaspheming." Which basically means that someone is claiming to be God who is clearly not God. Someone is saying things that only God can say. To them, Jesus is clearly *not* God, not *from* God, and has *no* authority to forgive anyone. He is a fake. It's a serious offense. But they are also seriously wrong. Maybe if they had just spent some time walking with Jesus, they'd get it all sorted out...I don't know.

The Community of Christ

I'm going to show you a picture of Matabele ants. They live in sub-Saharan Africa (and are often called Paramedic Ants). They are the first non-human species, observed by scientist, to carry their wounded home after battle and literally nurse them back to health. They raid termite colonies for food, and in that attack many ants get hurt, they lose a leg or two. When the attack is over, the wounded ants send a signal of distress and when they are found by their fellow ants, they tuck their remaining legs in so they can be carried back to the nest. The ants carry their wounded home. But that's not all. There, the healthy ants take turns holding the injured legs while other ants lick their wounds for hours on end until they are healed. Their nest becomes a hospital of healing. The flourishing of this ant colony is literally carried by the whole community.

Writer Andy Crouch, in his book *Strong and Weak*, writes that flourishing is never the

property of an individual, it is the property of a community. Our health does not simply belong to us. We thrive when we are both vulnerable and strong together. Sometimes we are part of the crew who carries others, sometimes we are the ones needing to be carried. The church is a community of Christ-followers bringing each other before Jesus, trusting that He alone is the source of life and health and peace. Sometimes what we think we need is not really what we need. But with the help of our community, we do what it takes to bring each other into the presence of Christ.

The gospel writer, Mark, indicates it takes four men to bring the paralyzed man to Jesus. So, who are your four? Who are the four who would carry you to Jesus (no matter what your condition) and simply lay you down in His presence. And not use a lot of words to tell Jesus what to do or what you need, or how He should help or fix you. But simply carry you with a faith that says, "Jesus, you got this. We have no idea what she needs, but we know that you do." *Who are your four?* Look around. I think anyone in the room this morning today would be part of your four.

I close with this...

Maybe the final miracle in this passage is that nobody says a word except Jesus. His Word is enough. It's a discipline not to talk or explain or give directions to God. It's a discipline to be quiet before Jesus. Open and listening. These men in our story today show us it's possible. They don't say a word, and it seems to be a sign of faith. I might call it "the spiritual practice of shutting up." But we don't say that in our family, so maybe we'll just call it "the spiritual practice of listening to Jesus."

Practice: I'm going to invite us today to be quiet before Jesus for 30 seconds. To simply ask Jesus: "Is there a Word you have for me today?" And then just be quiet. (30 seconds of silence). Sometimes what we think we need and what we really need are two very different things. Maybe what you really need today is simply to have an experience with Jesus. Right here. At this table. To eat and feast. And rest. And receive. Friends, eat with joy today. **Walk with Jesus** today. God's got this. Jesus sees you and He knows exactly what you need. Amen.