

Jesus Forgives and Heals a Paralyzed Man

Matthew 9:1-8; Mark 2:1-12; Luke 5:17-26

DIG: Who was there from all over Judea and Jerusalem watching intently? Why? What risks did the men take who carried the paralytic? Why were the Scribes furious when Jesus forgave the sins of the paralyzed man? Why did Messiah forgive his sins before healing his body? How did people respond to the miracle? How is their response different from the way people respond to God's work today? In light of this passage what does it mean to be healed spiritually?

REFLECT: In what ways can you identify with the paralytic? Think of a time when you experienced Yeshua's healing touch in your life. How did it affect you? Many people need God's spiritual, emotional, or physical healing. In what ways can you share ADONAI's love and forgiveness with them? Messiah's attitude and the Pharisees' attitude varied greatly. What does this story illustrate about your attitudes that honor God? When has the Lord exceeded your expectations and provided you with more than you could ever imagine?

The most distinctive message the Messiah came to give is the reality that **sin** can be **forgiven**. That is the heart and lifeblood of the Gospel, that people can be freed from **sin** and its consequences. Our **faith** has many truths, values and virtues, each of which has countless applications in the lives of believers. But its supreme, overarching Good News is that sinful mankind can be fully cleansed and brought into eternal fellowship with a holy **God**. This is the message we have before us.⁴¹⁸

A few days later, Jesus stepped into a boat, crossed over and again entered Capernaum. That was a long way from Jerusalem, the center of pharisaic Judaism. Capernaum is on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee, which is a good three-day walk from Yerushalayim. He had possibly been gone for some months, and returned to Capernaum quietly. When the people heard that He had come home they gathered in such large numbers that there was no room left. The greeting was phenomenal, there was no room even outside the door, and He preached the word to them (Matthew 9:1; Mark 2:1-2). The verb preached is in the imperfect tense, emphasizing continuous action. The beauty of His voice, the charm of His manner, and His tenderness and love, obvious to all, must have come to that weary, sick group of people like a breath from heaven.

One day Jesus was teaching, and the Pharisees and Torah-teachers, or the scribes, were sitting there. This is the response to the healing of a Jewish leper, the first messianic miracle (see Cn - **The First Messianic Miracle: The Healing of a Jewish Leper**). Therefore, the Great Sanhedrin (see Lg - **The Great Sanhedrin**) had to follow their own rules, which was **the first stage of observation**. They had come from every village of Galilee and from Judea and Jerusalem (Luke 5:17a). Rather than send a small delegation like they had with John the Baptist (see Bf - **You Brood of Vipers, Who Warned You to Flee the Coming Wrath**), most, if not all, came. Why had the Pharisees all come to Capernaum? Everybody knew what healing a Jewish leper meant. It was serious. The stage was set. The battles were drawn and it was no accident that the Galilean Rabbi would make a claim that could only be made by **God Himself**. What was He up against?

The Pharisees focused their activities on the synagogue and on the study of the Bible. They were primarily from the middle class and had the following of the people. The word Pharisee probably came from the word meaning *separated from the sinful or unclean*. The pious one, the *chasid*, would tuck in their flowing robes when walking to avoid even touching anyone or anything *unclean*. They belonged to the influential, the most zealous, and the most closely connected religious fraternity, which in the pursuit of its goals spared neither time nor trouble, feared no danger, and shrunk from no consequences. The fraternity, however, was by no means large. According to Josephus (Antiquities 17.2,4) their number at the time of Herod amounted to about six thousand. Comparably small when compared to the entire nation, yet the plague of Pharisaism dominated Jewish culture in most every respect.⁴¹⁹

Education was widespread in the second Temple period. Most all boys and girls were given some form of education up to the age of nine. At that time they were supposed to be getting prepared for adulthood. So the girls would go to the home to be given training by the mothers and the boys would go with the father to learn his trade. Most would be married by the age of twelve. The boys who showed promise would not only learn their father's trade, but would be *separated* for additional educational training that would center on the TaNaKh. By the age of nine such a *separated* boy would have memorized **Genesis**. By the age of twelve even those who had memorized **Genesis** were *separated* even further. Those who showed extreme promise would then spend concentrated time with one of the rabbis. By this age they would have memorized the Torah: **Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers** and **Deuteronomy**. Memorized *all* of it. At the age of twelve!

Then by the age of sixteen they were *separated* again. The young men who showed real promise went into formal training to be a rabbi. By that time they would have memorized *the entire* TaNaKh. They would be able to debate the finer points of the Scriptures from memory. Then they were ready for serious study, focusing on the interpretations of the

Scriptures. During that time binding interpretations began to be developed by different rabbinical schools in Isra'el. For example, even though nothing in the TaNaKh suggested that hand washing was necessary before eating, rabbi so-and-so would declare that **they** were to wash so many times, and the water is to be poured in a certain manner. That is called *halakha* and is usually translated *the path that one walks*. The word is derived from the Hebrew root *hei-lamed-kaf*, meaning *to go, to walk or to travel*. **The rabbis made many additions and binding interpretations to the Torah that also had to be memorized.**

This became the basis for the Oral Law that **Yeshua** talked about. **They** maintained that the Oral Law was equal with, if not superior to, the written Torah (see **Ei - The Oral Law**). About AD 200 these Oral Laws were written down and today are called *the Mishnah*. The **Pharisees** believed in the resurrection, immortality of the soul, and the overruling of fate. **They** expected **the Messiah** to deliver **them** from their foreign oppressors. The Sadducees were not present that day because they did not believe in **Christ** anyway, so there was no need to investigate **Jesus** to see if **He** was **the One**.

The Torah-teachers, or the scribes, were interpreters of the Torah (Second Chronicles 34:13; Ezra 7:12) because of their familiarity with and understanding of the Scriptures (First Chronicles 27:32). Although some **Torah-teachers** belonged to the party of the Sadducees, most were **Pharisees**, which explains **their** frequently being mentioned together. **They** were **Torah-teachers**, posing questions for the student to answer. **They** were addressed as **rabbi**. **The Torah-teacher** sat on a raised area and the pupils on rows of benches or on the floor. **He** repeated **his** material over and over again so it would be memorized. When the student mastered the material and was competent to make **his** own decisions, **he** was a non-ordained student. When **he** came of age, (at least 30 years old), **he** could be received into the company of **Torah-teachers** as an ordained scholar. Some served as lawyers and some were members of the Great Sanhedrin.⁴²⁰ **The Torah-teachers** worked out the regulations of the Oral Law and **the Pharisees** dedicated their lives to keeping them.

And the Bible tells us that the power of ADONAI was with Jesus to heal the sick (Luke 5:17b). As a doctor, **Luke** was particularly interested in this. This comment clearly reveals **Luke's** emphasis of **the Spirit's** coming upon **Jesus (Luke 3:21-22, 4:1, 14, 18-21 and 36)**. It prepares the reader for the miracle of healing that is to follow.⁴²¹

The Lord's arrival caused quite a stir. **Four men came carrying a paralyzed man lying on a mat.** Whether **he** was born **paralyzed** or became **paralyzed**, the end result was the same - total dependence on others. When people looked at **him**, they didn't see **the man**; they saw a body in need of a miracle. That's not what **Jesus** saw, but that's what the people saw. And that's certainly what **his** friends saw. So they did what any of us would do for a

friend. **They** tried to get **him** some help. **So they tried to take him into Peter's house (Mark 1:32-33 and 37) to lay him before Yeshua.**

But by the time **his** friends arrived, the house was full. People jammed the doorways. Kids sat in the windows. Others peeked over shoulders. How would **they** ever attract **Jesus'** attention? **They** had to make a choice. Were **they** going to find a way in or give up. **When they could not find a way to do this because the Pharisees** were blocking the doorway, **they went up on the roof.** In those days, the oriental **roof** was flat, and served as the porch of the house. There was normally an outdoor stairwell and they managed to get the **paralyzed man up to the roof.** That would take a great deal of effort by itself. But then **they made an opening right above Yeshua by digging.** That meant **digging through the mortar, tar, ashes and sand that had been spread on the roof.** **Then they lowered the man on his mat into the middle of the crowd, right in front of Jesus** who had been teaching (**Matthew 9:2a; Mark 2:3-4; Luke 5:18-19**). What an entrance!

What would have happened had the friends given up? What if **they** had shrugged **their** shoulders and mumbled something about the crowd being big and dinner getting cold and turned and left? After all, **they** had done a good deed in coming that far. Who could find fault for **them** turning back? You can only do so much for somebody, even a **paralytic.** But **his** friends weren't satisfied. **They** were desperate to find a way to help **him.**

It was risky - **they** could fall or get hurt **themselves.** It was dangerous - **he** could fall. It was unorthodox - **digging** through someone else's **roof** isn't the quickest way to make new friends. It was intrusive - **Jesus** was busy. But it was **their** only chance and **they** took it. **Faith** does those things. **Faith** does the unexpected. And **faith** gets **God's** attention.⁴²²

On similar occasions **the miracle-working Rabbi** healed people by touching them, but not this time. **When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralyzed man** using the passive voice: **Take heart son, your sins are forgiven (Mattityahu 9:2b; Mark 2:5; Luke 5:20).** In Hebrew this passive voice is only used in one section of the entire TaNaKh. Being **Pharisees and Torah-teachers,** **they** had memorized it completely and would not miss the connection **the Lord** was making. **He** was claiming the authority that **ADONAI** claimed for **Himself** in **Leviticus, Chapters 4, 5 and 6,** where it speaks of blood sacrifices for atonement of **sin.** Here, **Jesus** was speaking as if **He** were **God.**

The English word **forgiven** is the translation of *aphiemi*. The common meaning is *to leave, to cancel or let go.* But this does not give an adequate picture of this Greek word. We say that we have "forgiven" someone who has wronged us. By that, we mean that any feelings of animosity we may have had, has changed to one of renewed friendliness and affection. But

that's as far as it goes. This Greek word *aphiemi*, however, means more than that. It means when people believe in **Yeshua ha-Meshiach** as their **Lord** and **Savior**, their sins are **put away** in two ways. First, our **sins** are **put away** legally on the basis by the shed blood of **Christ**. It was **His** sacrifice that paid the penalty **the Torah** demanded, and thus satisfied divine justice. Our **sins** are **put away** as far as **the east is from the west** (**Psalm 103:12**), never to be remembered again (**Isaiah 43:25**). Secondly, on that basis **God** removes the guilt of our **sin** and declares us righteous, just as if we had never sinned (see **Bw - What God Does For Us at the Moment of Faith/Trust/Belief**).

He knew very well that claiming the authority to forgive sins would raise the strongest possible objection from the Sanhedrin. **At this, some Pharisees and Torah-teachers who were sitting there began thinking to themselves** (**Mattityahu 9:3a; Mark 2:6; Luke 5:21a**), the reason **they** thought this *to themselves* and did not say anything was because **they** were still in **the first stage of observation**.

They thought to themselves: Why does this man talk like that? It is notable that the Jewish leadership from Jerusalem is quoted as calling **Yeshua this man**, because **they** didn't even want to pronounce **His** name. **They** were furious and thought to **themselves**, "**He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone**" (**Mt 9:3b; Mark 2:7; Luke 5:21b**)? Either **Jesus** really was a blasphemer, or **He** is **God** Himself. Now **He** had **their** attention!

Who can forgive sins but God alone? That's a good question, and you would think it would be pretty well cleared-up today. But the Roman Catholic Church says that *a priest can forgive sins* in the confessional. Confession was first introduced into the Catholic Church in the fifth century by the authority of Leo the Great. Although it was not until the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 under pope Innocent III, that private confession heard by a priest was made mandatory and all Roman Catholics were required to confess their **sins** and seek forgiveness from a priest at least once a year.

The Baltimore Catechism defines confession this way, "Confession is the telling of our sins to an authorized priest for the purpose of obtaining forgiveness." And a book, *Instructions for Non-Catholics*, primarily for those who are joining the Roman Catholic Church, says, "The priest does not have to ask God to forgive your sins. The priest *himself* has the power to do so in Christ's name. *Your sins are forgiven by the priest* the same as if you knelt before Jesus Christ and told them to Christ Himself" (page 93). The Roman position is that through the power given to **Peter**, and received from him by the apostolic succession (see **Fx - On This Rock I Will Build My Church**), they have the power to forgive (or refuse to forgive) **sins**. In the Roman system the priest constantly comes between the sinner and **God**.

The confession of sins is commanded all through the Bible, but it is always confession to God . . . never to man. **If we confess our sins, [God] is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness (First John 1:9).** Indeed, why should anyone confess their sins to a priest when the Scriptures declare so clearly: **For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all people (First Timothy 2:5).**⁴²³

In the Talmudic literature, there is ample debate about the definition of blasphemy and its consequences. One opinion states "the blasphemer is not culpable unless he pronounces the Name [of God] itself (Tractate Sanhedrin 7:5). Of course, this was one of the most serious religious crimes for a Jew, enforceable by death through stoning. While it is unclear if **Yeshua** pronounced "the Name" of **God** in this situation, there was no doubt that **He** was acting with the authority that belongs only to **God Himself.**⁴²⁴

Immediately Jesus knew in His spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts, and asked: **Why are you thinking these evil thoughts (Matthew 9:4; Mark 2:8; Luke 5:22)?** This was the typical method of Jewish education. **In the rabbinic academies when a student would ask a question of a rabbi, the rabbi would often answer the student's question by asking a question of his own. The rabbi would do this because he wanted the disciple to think through his own question and perhaps come up with the answer on his own without being told. The Lord used this method often.**

Using a form of rabbinic logic, "from light to heavy, from easy to difficult," Jesus asks them: Which is easier: to say to this paralyzed man, "Your sins are forgiven," or to say, "Get up, take your mat and walk?" Obviously it is easier to say: Your sins are forgiven because it requires no visual evidence, no proof. It was as if the Great Physician was saying, "I'm going to prove to you that I can say the easier by doing the harder." But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins. Then He proceeded to do the harder: So He said to the paralyzed man: I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home (Mattityahu 9:5-6; Mark 2:9-11; Luke 5:23-24).

This is the first time the term **Son of Man** is used in the New Covenant. The phrase is often used in the TaNaKh to contrast the lowliness of humanity with the transcendence of **God**. In the book of **Ezekiel**, the prophet is called **son of man** ninety-nine times. The prophet **Daniel** also used the term prophetically to describe **the Messiah coming with the clouds of heaven (Daniel 7:13-14).** **The Talmudic sages, who designated the Messiah with the secondary name, confirm this messianic title: Son of the Fallen One, or Bar Nafel, based on this Daniel passage (Tractate Sanhedrin 96b).** By using the term **Son of Man**, **Yeshua** was again alluding to **His** clear claim of being the promised **Messiah** of Isra'el.⁴²⁵

Immediately, the paralytic stood up in front of them, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all. This was a permanent cure. Jesus heals instantly with a word or touch, He healed organic diseases from birth. Praising God, the man went home (Matthew 9:7; Mark 2:12a; Luke 5:25). This, in turn, becomes evidence that He can say the easier, and is the Messiah. He is the God-Man. His title of the Son of Man emphasized His humanity, and His forgiving sins, emphasized His deity. It was the title He most commonly used of Himself. It beautifully identified Him as He fully participated in human life as the perfect Man, the last Adam (First Corinthians 15:45-47), and the sinless representative of the human race. It was also a title clearly understood by Jews as referring to the Messiah (Luke 22:69). The title is used of Yeshua by others only twice in the New Covenant, once by Rabbi Sha'ul (Acts 7:56) and once by Yochanan (Revelation 14:14).⁴²⁶

When the crowd saw this, everyone was amazed, literally filled with fear, and they praised God for sending a man with such great authority. We do not know how much the crowd knew about Jesus, but they knew that what He did had to have been empowered by ADONAI, and that God Himself had given that authority to a man. They were beside themselves and filled with awe, saying to each other: We have never seen anything like this (Matthew 9:8 NLT; Mark 2:12b; Luke 5:26)!

As the Pharisees and Torah-teachers took the three-day journey back to Jerusalem they had a long time to think. The Great Sanhedrin would discuss, debate, and then vote. Their ultimate decision was to decide if the movement of Jesus of Nazareth was a significant or insignificant messianic movement. If they found the movement significant, then they would proceed to the second stage of interrogation, during which they could ask questions.

When we look at the results of Christ's life and His mission in the world, we are overwhelmed by the central place that forgiveness takes. Like the paralytic, we come to God with many needs, but the deepest is the need for forgiveness - the ugly stains and deformities that sin leaves on a person's soul need healing most of all. How sad that people go a lifetime without having someone to show them the kind of love these friends demonstrated for their paralyzed friend. We need to experience Messiah's forgiveness and then, if necessary, carry our friends to meet Him too.⁴²⁷