



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Matthew 9:1–8

Gospel of Matthew

“The Paralytic, The Pallet, and the Power of the Son of Man”

TRANSCRIPT

The subject for this morning is “The Paralytic, The Pallet, and the Power of the Son of Man,” and the Scripture reading is found in the 9th chapter of the Gospel of Matthew, and we are reading the first eight verses. This incident is recorded in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and so you will find in the 5th chapter of the Gospel of Luke, and the second chapter of the Gospel of Mark, fuller accounts of the same incident. In the course of the exposition, I will be referring to a few of the statements that are made in those sections, and so if you look at your text before you, and you don’t see that specific comment, it may be because it is in one of the other two accounts.

Someone has said—I think it was Mr. Spurgeon—the fact this account is recorded in all three of our Synoptic Gospels undoubtedly makes it trebly important. So we read it with a great deal of interest, looking for something that is important within it. Now, beginning with the first verse:

“And he entered into a boat, and passed over, and came into his own city.

And, behold, they brought to him a man sick of the palsy, lying on a bed:

and Jesus seeing their faith said unto the sick of the palsy; ‘Son, be of good

cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee.’ And, behold, certain of the scribes said

within themselves, ‘This man blasphemeth.’ And Jesus knowing their

thoughts said, ‘Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts? For whether is

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easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (then saith he to the sick of the palsy,) Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house.’ And he arose, and departed to his house (Mark tells us, carrying his bed with them). But when the multitudes saw it, they marveled, and glorified God, which had given such power unto men.”

May God’s blessing rest upon this reading of his inspired Word.

The subject for today is “The Paralytic, The Pallet, and the Power of the Son of Man.” John Chrysostom, who was one of the great preachers of the 5th century, explained the domiciles of our Lord in the following quotation. He said, “Bethlehem bear him; Nazareth nurture him; and Capernaum had him continuously as an inhabitant.” In the first verse of our section that we have read in the Scripture reading, it is said, “That he came into his own city.” That is not Bethlehem, nor is it Nazareth, but Capernaum, a very important city on the Sea of Galilee.

Mark, incidentally tells us that directly, and so we know it specifically from the Gospel of Mark. So it is at Capernaum that this remarkable miracle occurred which beautifully illustrates the power of the Son of Man. And as I mention in the reading of the Scripture, it seems evident that if this incident is recorded three times in the Gospels, the Synoptic Gospels, then it must have some importance for the ministry of Jesus Christ.

Now I know that in the reading of the Gospel of Matthew, all of you have noticed that Matthew has written us a Gospel with a definite plan and purpose. There are no loose ends in his development of the theme that Jesus is the Messiah, the King of Israel. And undoubtedly, the thing that is important about this incident is that we begin to notice official opposition to the ministry of the Lord Jesus, and we have in this account the beginning, the first indication of the legal charges that will be preferred against him that will lead to his ultimate death.

In the third verse of our section, the scribes and the Pharisees heard within themselves, after Jesus announced the forgiveness of the Paralytic, “This man blasphemeth.” And that is the clue to the charge that will ultimately be the legal grounds upon which the Lord Jesus will be crucified. Later on in this same Gospel of Matthew, when the Lord Jesus confesses his messiahship before Caiaphas the High Priest, he asks, “Are you truly the Messiah?” He replies, in this Gospel, “Thou hast said,” an affirmative answer. And with that, the high priest rends his garments and cries out, “He hath spoken blasphemy, what further need have we of witnesses for behold, have you not heard his blasphemy?” So in the charge of blasphemy we have the anticipation of the final charge that leads to the death of our Lord.

As you look over this incident, there are several lessons that appear. In the first place, it provides us with an example of the Lord Jesus giving something before we ask. Because before the Paralytic even says a word—and we have no indication that he said any word, according to this account—the Lord Jesus speaks to him and says, “Child, be of good cheer, thy sins be forgiven thee.” And it’s after this word that he is healed.

And we’re also provided with an example of acclamation turning to opposition. As one of the commentators has said, “Here dawn gives way to morning, and acclamation to opposition. The day is progressing, but the temperature is lowering. Hosanna! soon turns to crucify! The people who said of Paul and Barnabas, the gods have come down to us in the likeness of men almost immediately stoned Paul and drew him out of the city, supposing he had been dead.” That’s the way of the world, and the church is not stained.

And yet when we come to think of it, the friendship and goodwill of the world is not an honor. We cannot have Jesus and Barabbas for friends at the same time, and the Lord Jesus, who lived the absolutely perfect life is not without exception in this. The acclamation of the multitudes soon turns to opposition. But the greatest lesson of this incident is undoubtedly that that has to do with the messianic power of the Son of Man. It is here that we learn without question that the Lord Jesus has the power to forgive sins. That divine prerogative belongs to him.

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We have just been studying how the Lord Jesus calmed the sea. Now that was a great miracle; to calm a troubled sea is a mighty work that only God can do. Then we saw him cast the demons out of the two demoniacs, and to calm the troubled breasts of demon-possessed men is also a work that only God can do.

But the greatest of the works that God can do is undoubtedly the calming of the conscience that fields the condemnation, guilt and burden of sin. And that is what takes place in this incident. And it seems to me that in these accounts of the Lord Jesus as the peace-bringer, we have a growth and a climactic development of all that he does. He works in the natural sphere. He works in the spirit sphere. He works, finally in the sphere of man’s own spirit where he feels the sense, convicted by the Holy Spirit of his sin, guilt, and condemnation.

The other incident is rather simple. Luke tells us, more plainly, of some of the interesting features of it. But there were present Pharisees and scribes and others about the house in which the Lord was preaching. Mark tells us that the crowds were so large that it was impossible to enter into the house. It was like a home Bible class, held in a small home in which fifty people could come into the house, into the living room and the dining room, and 200 people were there. They were sitting on the furniture, they were sitting on the floor, they were sitting along the walls, packed around the door. It was so crowded that no one could get in. When the four men came bearing the pallet with the Paralytic upon it, they sought to make their way in, but they were unable to do so.

Now, the Lord Jesus was preaching, so the text of these accounts say, and Luke adds the power of the Lord was present for to heal them, so the people were there listening to him preach. He undoubtedly was preaching the same message that John the Baptist had preached early and that he had begun to preach, “Repent, for the kingdom of the heavens is at hand,” and then in order to accent his message, he was healing in token of the fact that he was the Messiah, and the messianic miracles were confirming the fact that he was the promised Messiah.

It’s at this time that there comes this providential eruption. These four men, evidently friends of the Paralytic, carrying him upon a little bed which was probably just about three feet wide

and perhaps five feet long, made out of some straw and probably some string or things like that; probably some pieces of leather. They bore this poor soul up to the door, attempted to get in and were unable to do so.

Now, the New Testament does not proscribe any set way in which men are to be brought to Christ. As we shall see in a moment, it provides a very set way how men come to Christ in salvation. But as far as being brought to Christ is concerned, there is no set way. There was one door in the tabernacle signifying there was only one way of salvation, but there are thousands of ways in which one might come to the door, and this was one of the most unusual.

The Lord Jesus preaching in a home. The four men arrived. They evidently were ingenious, they had the love and compassion of the lost that all good Calvinists have [laughter] and as a result of this, they were determined to get the Lord Jesus and this man together. Finding no way to get in the ordinary way, they decided to take him upstairs. So they took him upstairs—how they did this, I don't know; that's one of the questions I'll ask him, how were you able to get that Paralytic on that pallet up to the second floor of this building.

Many of those buildings had flat tops, and so the rest is very easy to understand. They managed to get him up top, finding that it was a tile roof, they began to take the tiles off. The other Gospels tell us that they untiled the roof, and probably seeing underneath straw and various other types of things which were normally under these roofs, they took that off and then they let this man down right into the presence of the Lord Jesus. As Scroggy puts it, “If conventionality does not succeed, then try originality.” It's true that there's no ingenuity quite like that of earnestness and genuineness of love for lost people.

The impotence of the paralytic, who cannot come of himself to the Lord, beautifully illustrates the truth that we are dead in our sins and are unable to come to him in our own strength. But this impotence finds its fullness in the omnipotence of the Lord Jesus.

Now I'd like to stop here for just a moment and lay a little bit of stress upon that fact. This paralytic, so far as this account is concerned, was totally helpless as far as coming to the Lord Jesus

was concerned. He beautifully illustrates the truth that Paul expounds in Romans chapter 5, “When we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.” It is impossible for us to come to God of ourselves. We’ll have more to say about that in just a moment. So, he illustrates the impotence of man and his inability to find the Lord Jesus of himself.

Now, I said that originality, instead of conventionality, characterizes these men. And the earnestness of their evangelistic fervor reminds me of Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. When Andrew came to know Jesus Christ as his Savior, the first thing that he thought about was his brother, Simon Peter. And John says that, “He first findeth Peter, for his own brother Simon, and he saith unto him, ‘We have found the Messiah,’ which is being interpreted,” John adds, “the Christ.” I can see Andrew now, having come to know Christ, thinking of the person who was closest to him, Simon Peter his brother: “I must find Peter and tell him what I have found.” So he says, I have found the Messiah, and John says, he means the Christ.

And then there follows the touching words, “and he brought him to Jesus”—the greatest thing that one man can do for another. How true it is, the greatest thing that a Father can do for his children is bring them to Christ. The greatest thing that a mother can do for a daughter, the greatest thing a father can do for a son; the greatest thing that believing sons and daughters can do for unbelieving parents; the greatest thing that children can do for other children, brother for brother, sister for sister; the greatest thing that one friend can do for another friend is bring them to the Lord Jesus, and Andrew brought him.

Now these four men evidently had the compassion of the Lord Jesus in their hearts, and so they brought this man into the presence of the Lord Jesus. Apparently the Lord was not surprised at all. We read that when he was let down in the presence of the Lord, Jesus, seeing their faith, said unto the sick of the palsy, “Child, be of good cheer, thy sins be forgiven thee.”

These words appear, to me at least, to imply that the man knew the burden and the guilt of sin, and evidently despaired of hope, to some extent, for the Lord Jesus speaks to him and says, “Son, or child, be of good cheer.” And also, it would seem to indicate that this man was truly a

penitent man, or a man who had come to realize his sin. The Lord Jesus—no one is ever forgiven his sin in a state of impenitence, and the Lord Jesus would never forgive an impenitent man. And so, evidently, this man had been brought by the convicting work of the Holy Spirit to the knowledge of himself, and in the knowledge of himself, there was expressed that yearning for deliverance not only from his physical condition, but from that which he had come to realize was at the heart of his physical difficulties, his spiritual lack of forgiveness of sins.

Now the Lord Jesus does not do as we often do: pat someone on the back and say, cheer up, brother, without reason. Every time that the Lord calls upon men to cheer up—“be of good cheer”—he gives some good, solid reasons for it. Now you can notice in the use of this term, through the New Testament, some evidence of this. Right here, he says to this man, “Child, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee.” Now that is enough to make a man cheery, to know that his sins have been forgiven. It’s not enough to cheer up because it’s a beautiful sunny day in Texas—that’s enough to drive us to desperation [laughter], a day like this. Now if you come from some other part of the country and rarely see the sun, we can only say we wished we lived where you were at the present time. But he always backs it up with some of the truths of the Word of God.

Later on in this chapter, in the 22nd verse, he uses that term again. He says to a woman, “Daughter, be of good comfort, or literally be of good cheer; thy faith hath made thee well.” And again, he calls on them to cheer up because they have received the forgiveness of sins.

Remember, too, in the 14th chapter, when the Lord Jesus is walking upon the water in the midst of the storm, he says to them, as they look off and see a ghost coming toward them, he says, “Be of good cheer, it is I; be not afraid.” And again, he encourages them with his personal presence, so that the courage that leads to cheerfulness is derived from the truth of the companionship of the Lord Jesus. The storm that came on the sea brought the truest kind of treasure to them. Be of good cheer, your sins have been forgiven; be of good cheer, for I am with you.

And then later on, in the Gospel of John, just about a day or so before he is crucified in the 16th chapter, he speaks to the disciples in the upper room and tells them that in the world they shall

have tribulation. But, “Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.” Now the world represents that system of mankind in enmity against God, because the whole of the world, John tells us in one of his epistles, lies in the wicked one. So everything we see outside of us in the world system is in rebellion against God since the fall of man in the Garden of Eden.

It would seem that the Lord Jesus, less than a day or so from the time when he will hang on the cross and cry out, “My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?” is utterly beaten at the time he says, “Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.” But he speaks proleptically about what he shall accomplish on the cross at Calvary, and it is true, the Lord Jesus has overcome the world. And what seems to be defeat on the day of the cross, seems to be victory on the day of resurrection and ever since.

Now that means that if we are here in this audience and we sense our guilt, sense our sin, sense the burden of it, or as Christians, sense a weakness, then the Scriptures call upon us to lay our weakness on his strong arm and know that in him we are more than conquerors because he has loved us.

Well now, having said that, let’s notice the basis of this forgiveness. He says in the 2nd verse, “Jesus seeing their faith.” The means of the healing of the paralytic is clearly “their faith.” There are some commentators who love take unusual views. Professor William Barkley is a man who I have cited often. Professor Barkley is a very well-recognized scholar, but Professor Barkley does not believe in the supernatural. He does not accept the miracles of the New Testament. In reading his works, you must use a great deal of perception and discernment.

I like to read them for two reasons. There is helpful material in his works. And secondly, it always challenges me to know why I do believe that the Scriptures are the Word of God and the truths that are set forth within them. Mr. Barkley says at this point, “Here is a wonderful picture of a man who was saved by the faith of his friends.” Now there is no such thing as that taught in the Word of God. The faith that saves is the faith of that individual. If it were possible for a man to be

saved by the faith of his friends, then a father might believe for a child, and a mother might believe for a daughter, and I might believe for my friends, too.

And it wouldn't be long before we practice things like the Mormons practice, when they baptize for the sins of others. And as you well know, in the Mormon church it is doctrine that one may be baptized for other individuals. And not only that, one may be baptized for individuals who have already died. And so, I could be baptized for Robert E. Lee if I wanted to be sure that he was in heaven. I could be baptized for Stonewall Jackson; that would be a waste of time, [laughter] because Jackson is already in heaven [more laughter], but I could be baptized for a series of historical characters.

But the Bible does not teach any such doctrine as men are saved by the faith of others. Now if Mr. Barkley means—and I want to do him full justice—if Professor Barkley means that it was by virtue of the faith of the four men that this man was brought into the presence of the Lord that he might meet the Lord, and if this transaction might take place between the Lord and the paralytic, well perhaps we can say that's all right. But that is not what the professor means, evidently, from the words of the text.

Why should not the “their” refer to the faith of the five as well as the four? When he saw “their faith.” Is there any reason why this is not the faith of the four who brought him and the faith of the one who was willing to be brought? I can imagine if this man did not want to be brought to the Lord Jesus, he would put up quite a fight against these two, especially when they were trying that meticulous task of getting up that first floor to the roof of that particular house.

“When he saw their faith” is a reference to the faith of the five, and it is the faith of all of these men that is referred to in the text, and specifically, it is the faith of the paralytic in our Lord that is fundamental. These five men evidently had heard of the Lord Jesus, had heard of his mighty miracles and had heard of his power as a prerogative from God, and they came in faith to him, hoping to find forgiveness of sins.

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Now this brings up a very interesting question and some very interesting doctrine. A week ago, I went to Nashville, Tennessee to see one side of my family: my son and his two daughters, my grandchildren. So I rejoiced in seeing my grandchildren, and read books that I had been wanting to read for some time. Last week, I went to see my other grandchildren in Alabama, and there, also, read books.

And one of the books that I had started but had not been able to finish was a book edited by Clark Pinnock, a well-known evangelical scholar, called *Grace Unlimited*. Now this book is very, very misnamed. It is as misnamed as that kind of party when girls get together and spend the night, calling it a “slumber party.” If there is one thing that doesn’t happen on a night like that, it is slumber. Now, this book is called *Grace Unlimited*; I recommend that you read it. Because, it will point out to you very plainly the issues in the Arminian-Calvinistic controversy, and furthermore, this is fundamental to the kind of Christianity that we see when we study the Word of God.

There are these two Christian viewpoints: the Arminian viewpoint and the Calvinistic viewpoint, and this book has bought totally into the Arminian position. It is titled, *Grace Unlimited*, but it is really conditional grace that is set forth in the book. Conditional depravity. Conditional election. And the rest of the doctrines of the Word of God are all grounded in the condition of human faith; faith that arises out of a human heart.

For example, in *Grace Unlimited*—we’ll call it, Grace Limited, or Grace, If (that’s really the way it ought to be titled)—in this particular book, the depravity of man is not taught. Man is not able to come to the Lord Jesus, but rather, man has power of himself to come to God. Men are not totally depraved. They are sick, but they are not dead in trespasses and sin. They are weak, but they are not unable. Now, the Scriptures make it plain that they are unable. The Apostle Paul states in Romans chapter 8 verses 7 and 8, “Because the carnal mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither, indeed, can be.” The mind of the flesh cannot be subject to God.

So then, they that are in the flesh cannot please God. But ye are not in the flesh but in the Spirit if you are believers, so a man outside of Jesus Christ cannot please God. He is totally unable to

come to God. But in this book, the doctrine is taught that men can come to God of themselves. The doctrine is taught that men are conditionally elected. They are elected on the basis of what God foresees what they will do, so that election is not really the election of God, it is the election of man, and God’s choice is dependent upon the previous choice of man.

The doctrine of the atonement is not that Christ died for a definite number of people and a definite group of people, but he died universally for all, even those who are already reserved for eternal judgment. The book teaches that efficacious, or effectual grace is not the teaching of the Holy Scripture, because men can come of themselves to God, and doubts are raised about the fact that we, once having come to the Lord, are sure to persevere in the faith. Eternal security is also denied. So that all of the five fundamental doctrines of the soteriology of the Bible are denied in this book.

Now there is one man in this book who has written very wisely. The rest of the men that I have read so far—and I have read halfway through the book—do not really understand the biblical position of Calvinism. But this man does. He is an Arminian. He believes that salvation begins with man, rather than God. This is what he says, “The Calvinistic mind sees election as bringing about the transition from unbelief to belief ([Johnson] that should be, better, the Calvinistic mind sees effectual grace as bringing about the transition from unbelief to belief, hence making unbelievers the object of election). The Arminian says that this transition is made by a free act of the will. Election, then, is an act of God directed toward the believer after this transition from unbelief to belief has been made.”

What kind of an election is that, if you have already believed? You have been selected out from what, since you have already accomplished the transition from unbelief to belief? Later on he says very frankly and plainly—he does not apologize—he says that the transition from unbelief to belief is “not an act of God.”

Now the Scriptures teach very plainly that the transition from unbelief to belief is an act of God. We read, for example, it is given on behalf of Christ not only to believe on his name—*given*, given mind you—but also to suffer for his sake. The Scriptures tell us that we have been blessed with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies, in Christ. What good would the blessing of all spiritual

blessings be if we weren't blessed with trust in God? Why, not the least of these great blessings with which we have been blessed is the blessing of faith. So he procures not only the end but the means in his saving work for us.

Christ did not die for any on the condition, “if they do believe,” but he died for all of God's own that they should believe, and that in believing, they might have life. That's why we preach the grace of God in human salvation. Not only is the cross of Jesus Christ the foundation of his saving work, the blood that he shed, but the power that brings us from unbelief to belief is the power of God, so that men are saved by God from beginning to end. Now that is great doctrine.

I do not have any doubt at all, I do not have any question at all, in understanding why the men of the New Testament, when they were saved, jumped up and down in joy and thanksgiving shouting out praises to God because they had been brought to the conviction that they were unable to come to God of themselves, and they had been brought to God by the power of God in Christ.

Now that is why it is important that we understand the issues that face us in soteriology. If we should believe that the decision to receive Christ comes out of our own free will, apart from divine initiative, apart from divine enablement, then there would be something in us able to respond to God, acceptable before him.

Now we do not believe that we do not have a will. We have a will. We must make a decision of the will. But the decision is a decision that comes, ultimately, from God, not from ourselves, so that the decision is something that comes from God.

Now these four men brought this man into the presence of the Lord Jesus, and he heard these wonderful words, “Your sins are forgiven you.” Isn't it a wonderful thing that these four, each of them probably grabbing a corner of that pallet, bring this man into the presence of the Lord Jesus? It's very often true that when we come to faith in Jesus Christ, it is because there have been a number of people who have been instrumental, humanly speaking, in our salvation.

In my case, well, there was my mother-in-law, whom I saw again last week. And then there was my wife, who was also a Christian when we were married. Isn't it interesting? My mother-in-law

did not want her to marry me, even though she had known me for many years, because she wanted her daughter to marry a preacher. [Laughter] And I was an unconverted insurance man, so she did not want me to marry her daughter. She tried every way possible to marry my wife to Presbyterian ministers who came for summer internships in the church [laughter] and failed. And the sovereign grace of God overcame her [more laughter], and we were married, and I became a preacher. [Extended laughter] To this day, she calls me preacher, last week. Now she had a part in my salvation.

Then there were others. Dr. Barnhouse, the preacher, and a number of other friends who were Christians, who were responsible for my coming to faith in Christ. The truth is that almost all of us in the audience who know Jesus Christ could probably tell similar stories. There would be four or five more people carrying the pallet to the presence of the Lord, because after all, there are different ways to come to Christ.

Some of us like the clarity of the Apostle Paul, the clarity with which I preach. [Laughter] But then there are a lot of people who do not like the clarity of an Apostle Paul, they like the eloquence of an Apollos, and so they come through an Apollos. And there are still others who do not like the eloquence of an Apollos or the clarity of a Paul with his doctrinal straightness [laughter], but they like Peter—rough, kind of self-made man who preaches the doctrine of sin with great fervor and understanding, and great appeal. And then there are a lot of people who do not like either one of these three; they like the loving appeal of the Apostle of Love, the Apostle John. We come to Christ in different ways, but the gospel is the same.

I love the ingenuity of these men. I don't have time to speak about it. I like the labor of the men, too, and the skill of them. It reminds me of the many times in human history in which men have begun to speak of the gospel in different ways. It was just such one of these ingenious moves that led George Whitefield to preach, and to preach in the fields, and Wesley, to give the ministry to John Wesley, and Wesley became the great field preacher, responsible for the evangelical revival. Just

such ingenious changes and methods, apparently guided by the Holy Spirit, but the same fundamental gospel preached.

The manner of the pardon is very plain. The declaration of the forgiveness comes in the form of a statement from the Son of God, “Thy sins be forgiven thee.” It’s by the word of the Son that the pardon comes. Well at this point in the story, the man now has pardon for his sin, and the Lord Jesus is on the way to providing the physical part of the healing that he needed. Did you notice the order? It is spiritual healing first, and then physical healing. For spiritual healing is more important than physical healing.

I know that we hear sneers about the Christian philanthropists who take tracts to people when they want soup. And it is true that if we are believers in Christ, we ought to have compassion for the physical needs of the lost, and sometimes that may be a means by which we reach their spirits for the gospel of salvation. But the fundamental need of men is not physical; the fundamental need of men is spiritual, and the Lord Jesus heals the spirit before he heals the body.

Now there’s always a fly in the ointment, one of the commentators says. There never was a congregation where there was not a critic, and too often, criticism comes from those who might be expected to rejoice. And the scribes and the Pharisees, the religious leaders, are there, and when the Lord Jesus pronounces forgiveness for the paralytic, they immediately begin to reason in their hearts. “If you want to get people blind as bats to the radiant beauty of some lofty character, and insensible as rocks to the waltz of a sad humanity,” McLaren says, “commend me to your religious formalists.” And these religious leaders are the ones who begin to reason in their hearts, “This man is blaspheming. He’s saying that he forgives sins, and only God forgives sins.”

Now one thing you can say about this ecclesiastical inquisition to which our Lord is put now, these men had a keen scent for heresy. And they went looking for something by which they could accuse the Lord Jesus. And so when he said, your sins are forgiven, they said, ah, but the Scriptures say only God forgives sins. And incidentally, they were absolutely right. Only God forgives

sins. Priests do not forgive sins, preachers do not forgives sins, men do not forgives sins, nuns do not forgive sins; only God forgives sins, and they were right.

Now the Lord Jesus, since he is God, knows the reasoning of their hearts, and so he puts them to a little test, and it's a masterpiece if there ever was one. He says to them, knowing what was in their hearts, “Which is easier to say, ‘Thy sins be forgiven thee,’ or ‘Rise, take up your bed and go home?’” Which is easier?

Now so far as words are concerned, why it's just as easy to say one as the other. Rise, take up your bed and go home—so far as words are concerned. Now so far as reality is concerned, both are just as difficult as the other. To say that your sins are forgiven you is a work that only God can do, but to say, ‘Rise, take up your bed and walk’ to a paralytic is also the work of God.

There is one difference, however, between these two statements. One is in the spiritual sphere, and the other is capable of testing in the visible sphere. So now, in order to show by the testable act that what he says in the spiritual sphere is a true thing and comes to pass, the Lord Jesus, after saying which is easier, now says, “That you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins, I am going to command that this man rise, take up his bed and go home so that you can see from your own eyes that I am authoritative in the physical sphere and therefore in the spiritual.

Now, someone might say, you can conceive of someone being authoritative in the spiritual sphere and not in the physical. Not if he claims to do this for God, for God would never give the power to a man who is out of relationship with him. And so if he can do this, that does validate and substantiate his claim to forgive sins. And so he speaks to the paralytic, rise, take up your pallet or bed, and go into the pulpit and give testimony to your salvation—no, that's what we do.

Some important man comes to faith in Jesus Christ. We make him a Bible teacher within a month, and he goes around the country, having meetings. The Lord Jesus said, “Rise, take up your bed, and go home.” When a man comes to faith in Jesus Christ, the thing that he needs more than anything else is spiritual growth, and so that is what he commands this man: rise, take up your bed,

and walk. And that is what happens. And it illustrates the fact that forgiveness is an exclusively divine act.

Now when this man picked up his bed and began to walk away, Bengel said, “The bed had borne the man, now the man was bearing the bed,” and he walked off. It was testimony to what had truly taken place. The forgiveness of the Lord Jesus is not ministerial and declaratory. It is forgiveness in his own name. The apostles forgave sin, but they did not forgive sin like that.

Now this man—I don’t know; I’m not exactly sure what happened—but the text says that everybody began to glorify God as a result of what happened. I can just imagine for myself that this man, lying on this pallet, when the Lord Jesus said, “Rise, take up your bed and go home,” that suddenly he sat up, and realizing what had happened, he praised the Lord. And then he got on his feet, and he said, “Hallelujah!”

And then—I said this morning at 8 o’clock, that if I had time, I would dance a little jig [laughter] because I think that’s probably what he did. The reason is because others did that, too. One man, whom the apostles healed, went out leaping and praising God. So this man began to sing, he began to shout, he began to quote texts: “Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me; bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul; forget not all his benefits. Bless the Lord, who forgiveth all mine iniquities and healeth all mine iniquities, and I can just see him shouting and praising God, and then making his way home. That forgiveness is the forgiveness of a man who has truly come to know what it is to have relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now then, may I close by just saying a word or two? It’s evident that the root of spiritual paralysis is unpardoned sin. This man was a man who did not have his sins forgiven; as a result of this, his physical disturbances happened to him. And now as a result of contact with the Lord Jesus, he has come to the understanding of all that it means to be rightly related to God in Christ.

But the greatest lesson that shines out through the incident is the power of the Son of Man to forgive sins. And may I, as I close, press upon you the dilemma. The Lord Jesus is either a blasphemer, or he is God manifest in the flesh. He is either, in his claim to forgive sins, a man who is

“The Paralytic, the Pallet, and the Power of the Son of Man,” by S. Lewis Johnson
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a liar and does not know divine truth. This man, whom down through the ages, who countless thousands of books have been written about, who we do not fully understand now because he is ultimately the incomprehensible God. He is either who he claims to be, or he is a blasphemer.

And that really is the issue that faces each of us. He claims to forgive sins, and either he does forgive sins, or he is a liar.

If you are here in this audience, and you have never come to faith in the Lord Jesus, we invite you to come to him who has provided an atonement for sinners. And if God the Holy Spirit has brought home to your heart the conviction that you are a sinner and you need this salvation, then it is for you. May God bring you to trust in him. Let's stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] We are grateful to Thee, Lord, for these great incidents which so beautifully express the saving work of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We praise Thee that our salvation is not a salvation that proceeds from man but proceeds, ultimately, from our great sovereign God. And we rejoice in gratitude for all that Thou has done.

And Father, we pray that if there is someone in this auditorium who has not yet come, give them no rest nor peace until they rest in Christ.

And now may grace, mercy and peace go with us.

For Jesus' sake. Amen.