“Faith versus Fear”
February 14, 2010
Matthew 9:1-17

I. Introduction

2000 years ago religious Jews were looking for their Messiah. As prophesied in Daniel 9:25, He was due any time. But there was a problem; the Messiah most of them expected was supposed to be a warrior king—a man mighty in battle. He would be the one to “lead captivity captive.” He would get Israel out from under the thumb of the hated Romans and take them back to the glory days of David and Solomon. They definitely were not looking for the suffering Messiah of Isaiah 53.

Matthew has been trying to demonstrate to his readers that Jesus is the promised Messiah. He has shown that Jesus has the right bloodline and beginnings—e.g. He was born in Bethlehem. He has shown that Jesus’ words and goals were those expected of the Messiah as prophesied in the Old Testament. Finally, Mathew has been showing that, as prophesied by Scripture, Jesus has power to heal disease, control the elements, and even command the supernatural. But as God’s anointed One, as God Himself, Jesus’ power goes even beyond that—He is able to forgive sin.

This morning let’s look at the conclusion of Matthew’s 2nd set of healings; the healing of the paralytic and Matthew’s call to be a disciple as we see Jesus’ ability to forgive sin.

II. Healing the Paralytic (also, Mark 2:1-12; Luke 5:17-26)

A. He has faith in Jesus.

As we have seen before, Matthew’s account is often a bare minimum. Turn to Mark 2:1-12 for a more complete account. As we saw last week, Jesus had left Capernaum earlier to escape all the crowds, so it is no surprise that when He returned that He was soon inundated with requests for healings again—among those requests was the paralytic.

I wonder if the paralytic and his 4 friends had planned to go through the roof or if that was one of those “spur-of-the-moment” things. We often talk about the faith of these men, but there was also love for one another, too. And, I suspect, more than a little fear and trepidation. What if Jesus says, “No.”? Or what if we can’t get to Him? Or what if He isn’t able? Or what if He gets mad about the hole in His roof? Or what if . . . they/we could go on and on, but their love for their friend and their faith in Jesus overcame all their fears and “what-if’s”.

Jesus knew the concerns and fears in the paralytic’s heart as he was let down through the roof; so He said, “Take heart, My son.” Jesus wanted the man to know that everything was going to be all right.
There was nothing to fear. But when Jesus said, “Your sins are forgiven,” He set many wheels and tongues turning.

You see, in Palestine it was a universal belief that all sickness was the result of sin and no sickness could be cured until sin was forgiven. One rabbinic statement was: “The sick arises not from his sickness until his sins are forgiven.” Even the disciples when they saw a blind man asked Jesus in John 9:2, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”

Was this man’s physical condition the result of his sin? We don’t know. But we do know that Jesus dealt with the sin problem first, for this was the man’s greatest need—his eternal need. I wonder if Jesus thought of the cost of forgiving this man his sin—Jesus’ own death. The man’s faith in Jesus was going to be rewarded.

B. Then we see The scribes and Pharisees have doubts and misgivings.

The scribes and Pharisees were right, only God can forgive sins; Isaiah 43:25 says, “I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more.” Turn to Colossians 2:13. But since, even with all the miracles they had seen, the scribes and Pharisees refused to recognize that Jesus was from God, they could only conclude that He was blasphemy—He was usurping the power of God. They resented Jesus’ offering of forgiveness, not only because they didn’t think He was God but also because they considered it unjust for a person to be forgiven simply by asking for it in faith—instead of earning it.

Jesus didn’t need to hear the conversation since in John 2:25 it says, “He did not need man's testimony about man, for he knew what was in a man.” He knew they were thinking evil of Him. His rhetorical question, “Which is easier to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up and walk?’” has no answer. Both things, forgiving sins and healing disease, are equally impossible for man and both are equally possible for God. In the theology of the scribes and Pharisees, sickness and disease were consequences of sin; the removing of disease would be connected to removing sin. They were trapped but they refused to budge.

In reality, it is easier to say that a person’s sins are forgiven—there is no visible proof of the results. So Jesus said that to make it clear that He could forgive sin as well as heal, He would heal the man. Just as the 2000 pigs running into the sea demonstrated Jesus’ power over demons, His healing of the paralytic would prove His power over sin.

C. The man is healed spiritually and physically.
Turning to the man, Jesus said, “Get up, take up your mat and go home.” As soon as Jesus finished speaking the man did just that. He was healed—instantly and completely. Jesus’ claim of being able to forgive sins and to heal was verified before everyone; they all could see this “new” man.

D. The crowd’s response.

The crowd was awestruck to the point of almost being afraid. They had seen the power of God at work. Matthew wrote, “They praised God, who had given such authority to men.” In their eyes, Jesus was just a man who was empowered by God. Most of them didn’t know yet that Jesus was God.

III. Matthew (also Mark 2:13-17; Luke 5:27-32)

After showing how faith in Jesus led to physical healing, Matthew now shows how faith in Jesus leads to spiritual healing and how that can really be seen. He does this through his encounter with Jesus. First, we see Matthew’s call.

A. Matthew’s Call

Matthew, who Mark tells us was also called Levi, Mark 2:14, was a tax collector. Since he served the Roman government against his own people and since he was suspected as being just as crooked as all other tax collectors, he was one of the most despised and vile and corrupt men in all of Capernaum.

Because Jesus’ teachings and many miracles were done in and around Capernaum, Matthew would have known about Jesus already. But in none of the accounts of his calling to follow Jesus do we see that he knew Jesus personally. Regardless of whether or not he did, Matthew’s heart was ready for forgiveness, so when Jesus called him, Matthew immediately rose and followed Him.

Because of his modesty, Matthew does not mention a significant fact, it’s left to Luke to tell us that the moment Jesus called him, Matthew “left everything behind, and rose and began to follow Him” (Luke 5:28). That simple call by Jesus was more than enough reason for Matthew to turn his back on everything he was and possessed. Because of his position as an agent of Rome, he knew that once he left his post he would never be able to return to it again. He knew the cost and willingly paid it. Of all the disciples, Matthew undoubtedly made the greatest sacrifice of material possessions; yet he himself makes no mention of it. There must have been fear in his heart, but just like the paralytic, Matthew’s faith in Jesus won. He lost his career but gained his life.

B. Matthew’s response
Matthew’s response was typical of many new Christians, he didn’t respond by just leaving everything and following Jesus; his next thought was to tell his friends about the Savior. He gave a banquet in his own house so that the social and religious outcasts could meet Jesus. They needed the opportunity to be changed inside and out, just like Matthew. We aren’t told about any tremendous revival, but we do see that Jesus was willing to associate with them. And once again the Pharisees get “bent out of shape.”

C. The Pharisees’ Response

The response of the Pharisees was quite different from Matthew’s. They weren’t just upset; they were outraged that this Teacher, who claimed to uphold standards of righteousness even higher than their own, would willingly sit down and eat with such an obviously sinful group. How could He! There was another reason, too. Not doubt they were resentful and humiliated that Jesus had never shown them such favor. If He were really a man of God, they reasoned, why had He not given a banquet for them—the righteous leaders and teachers of Israel?

When they asked Jesus’ disciples, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners,” they weren’t trying to learn the truth. This was another rhetorical question. In their eyes there was no satisfactory answer. They were trying to trap and convict Jesus and His disciples who were beginning to turn everything upside down.

The Pharisees didn’t think they needed God’s forgiveness and were certain that tax collectors and sinners did not deserve it. Their “ministry” was not to help but to judge, not to restore but to condemn. They wanted no part of a Man who condemned their self-righteousness and offered forgiveness to obvious sinners.

Perhaps they approached His disciples because they were already afraid of Jesus, but Jesus heard them and responded. He took their question at face value and explained exactly what He had done. He came to bring spiritual health to those who were sick sinners. The Pharisees were so caught up in their religious self-righteousness that they could not see any need for healing. They were fine just they way they were.

In Revelation 3:20 Jesus said, “Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.” He waits for sinners to open the door and accept His invitation. Until the Pharisees saw their need, Jesus wasn’t going to be able to do anything for them. It was only those who know how much they need Him that can accept His invitation.
When Jesus said, “Go and learn,” He was challenging them to look at their hearts the way God did. Jesus quoted from Hosea 6:6 to tell them that they need to be more concerned about God’s Word and to show mercy and forgiveness than to be judgmental and condemning.

D. John’s Disciples’ Response (also, Mark 2:18-22; Luke 5:33-39)

Jesus’ banquet with the tax collectors and sinners was also offensive to John the Baptist’s disciples. They felt that fasting was necessary for repentance and spiritual discipline—just the opposite of Jesus and His disciples going to a banquet. John’s disciples had gotten caught up in traditions which they carried out to the point of being legalistic. Jesus is saying that He came to bring spiritual joy not oppression. The Christian life is to be a feast not a funeral. That’s why Paul wrote in Philippines 4:4, “Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!”

E. Jesus’ Response

Jesus went on to say that He didn’t come to build on the traditional practices of the Jews. Rather, He came to offer a whole new way to God. Jesus did not come to patch up old religious traditions, He brought something new. He didn’t come to patch up the traditional acts of righteousness—like fasting and sacrifices—within Judaism; He offered a new and true righteousness through faith in Him and discipleship in the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus uses an example of wineskins. Wineskins were often made from tanned and sometimes skinned animal hides. Over time they stretched to their limit and eventually became brittle. Because new wine is still fermenting it expands and will cause old skins to burst if new wine is poured into them. The new wine and the old skins will both be lost. New wine requires new wineskins. In other words, Jesus was saying that He didn’t come to fill the old Jewish system of traditions with new life. They are inadequate to the new life of the kingdom. Rather, new forms are needed for His kingdom, and new practices must accommodate the new life of discipleship in Christ. Jesus didn’t come to supersede or abolish the Old Testament, as He said in Matthew 5:17 “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.” Jesus was teaching a new way of believing and thinking and living. His way had nothing to do with the old way and the old way had no part in the new.

IV. Conclusion

Have you ever known something that you were sure that God wanted you to do, but you held back because you were afraid of what might happen? What others might think? If so, you are missing a blessing. Proverbs 3:5-6 says, “Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own
understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.” If the paralytic or his friends had held back, he never would have been healed. If Matthew had been afraid to give up everything for Jesus, he would never have become an Apostle; he never would have written the Gospel according to Matthew; he would never have called Jesus his Lord and Savior. Do you remember when you made Jesus your Lord and Savior? If you had been too afraid to take that step, you would never have eternal life. If God is calling you to do something for Him, but you are afraid, then you need to pray as the disciples did in Luke 17:5, “Increase our faith, Lord!” As David wrote in Psalm 118:8, “It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in man.” In Lamentations 3:57 Jeremiah wrote, “You came near when I called You and You said, ‘Do not fear.” All you need to do is call and God will be there.

Secondly, it is so easy for a good thing, a religious thing to lose its purpose and to become a thing of ritual, maybe even become a legalistic standard. We must guard our lives and the life of Tabernacle Baptist Church so that things don’t become ritualistic without meaning or that we do things just because “We’ve always done it that way.” As Hebrews 12:2 says “Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.” Then you will be able to do things with the right mindset. Then you can walk in faith and not fear. Then you will be able to leave everything and follow Him. Let me close with this verse from Isaiah—Isaiah 26:3— “You that is God will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in God you.” Have faith in God and watch you fear disappear.