

Take Heart, Your Sins Are Forgiven (Matthew 9:1-9)

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[0 : 00] So the Bible verse is Matthew 9, verse 1 to 9. Jesus stepped into a boat, crossed over, and came to his own town.

Some men brought to him a paralyzed man, laying on a mat. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the man, Take heart, son, your sins are forgiven.

At this, some of the teachers of the law said to themselves, This fellow is blaspheming.

Knowing their thoughts, Jesus said, Why do you entertain evil thoughts in your hearts? Which is easier to say, your sins are forgiven, or to say, get up and walk.

But I want you to know that the Son of authority, 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.

[1 : 05] Then the man got up and went home. When the crowd saw this, they were filled with awe, and they praised God, who had given such authority to the man.

As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew, sitting at the tax collector's booth. Follow me, he told him.

And Matthew got up and followed him. Why don't we start by praying, and we'll get into God's word. Father, we come with many fears, and we even want to pray for a brother or sister who has so many fears on their mind.

We thank you for this brother or sister. We thank you that they are loved by you, no matter what fears they're facing. We ask that you would speak to them, even from this passage, that they would hear the words of Jesus.

Take heart, child. Your sins are forgiven. Would you speak that comfort to us as well as we listen in to your word today? In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Everyone has fears, right?

[2 : 22] It's been a pretty important topic. You have fears. I have fears. Maybe your fears or phobias are pretty basic. Some of you might have a fear of spiders.

I don't know. Anyone? Okay. All right. You guys are pretty brave. When my first two weeks in Sydney, when we were there with my family, a huntsman spider kind of welcomed us just sitting in our bathroom, and they're not easy to catch.

But yeah, big hairy spiders. Maybe some of you fear spiders. Maybe you don't like certain kinds of food, like cheese. I'm not sure if that puts you off. I don't know. Maybe you have a different combination.

Maybe you don't like spiders in your cheese. I don't know. I don't know how you'd feel if that happened to you at your next shared lunch. And maybe you have other fears. Maybe you fear talking to the opposite sex.

Maybe you fear being lonely. Maybe you fear commitment, or maybe you fear for your children's future. Maybe you fear dying. And I wonder what fears this paralyzed man had, right, before Jesus came up to him.

[3 : 33] What kind of storms going through his life? What demons were he wrestling with? What kind of shame did he feel that he had to go through before he and his friends dragged his body all the way to the house where Jesus was in Capernaum?

And where Jesus saw his friend's faith, and he said to him, take heart, child. Your sins are forgiven. I think personally, it's interesting that Matthew remembers Jesus saying, take heart.

As you know, this story is told three times, actually, in the Bible. In Matthew's gospel, in Mark's gospel, and in Luke's gospel too. Yet it is only Matthew in particular who remembered Jesus' first words to the paralyzed man as, take heart.

Take heart. It's an interesting word. It's actually, in English, it's kind of an old way of saying, have courage. Or the opposite might be, don't fear, don't be scared. Because we all have fears, don't

we?

We all have fears that keep us from going deeper into following Jesus. from trusting God fully with our lives, from going with him wholeheartedly.

[4 : 46] Maybe you have an illness or a disability that keeps you up at night. Maybe your fear is that you have a career you are scared to let go or to put aside to follow him more wholeheartedly.

Maybe you have a family member that you are really scared of disappointing. What is your fear?

Maybe you have friends who will see you differently if they knew you were here right now.

When I first started going to church, I know I was scared to tell some of my friends, oh, I've been going to church. I know they would openly mock me. Maybe they would stop being my friend if I knew I hung out with that kind of crowd.

I don't know. If you, like me, have wrestled with your own fears about following Jesus, then this passage, this episode, this scene is fantastic. Because I think here in Matthew 9, 1-9, we are told by God, take heart, don't fear.

Jesus is God. He is the divine son of man who has authority on earth to forgive even our sins. I get it. Some of us are blown away, right?

[5 : 49] How did this man switch from the Paralympics to the Olympics? But I think there's actually more to this episode than just a guy who gets miraculously healed. Okay? So that's the presenting issue, but there's more behind it.

So I want us to kind of revisit the story. We'll take a closer look. And then I want to share and suggest a few observations from this scene. Okay? So we're just going to walk through the text and then let me share a couple of observations.

So Sammy, you read it so well, but I will read it again just to remind ourselves because I have a bad memory too. So verse 1 says this. Jesus stepped into a boat, crossed over, and came to his own town.

And some men brought to him a paralytic lying on a mat. And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, Take heart, son. Your sins are forgiven. So beautiful, isn't it?

Take heart. And Mark's retelling of this episode, actually, we read that so many people were here at the house that there was no room left, not even outside the door. Mark 2, verse 2.

[6 : 52] So actually, I want you to mention, not just, Jesus isn't just sitting at home watching Netflix. He's actually in the middle of teaching a huge crowd, okay, that's kind of packed out the inside and the outside of the house, I reckon.

Okay, it's just, there's standing room only. And then the paralytic comes. And Jesus, look, he could have just healed the paralytic, right? Like he calmed the storm, as we heard last week from Pastor Albert.

Jesus could have just raised him up to his feet like he cast out the demons into the pigs last week.

Okay, but Jesus deliberately chooses to say, take heart, your sins are forgiven.

If you've read Matthew before, maybe you would have seen this coming. Do you remember, Jesus' parents, what are they asked to call their miracle baby Jesus? Right? The name is Jesus because he will save his people from their sins.

We see that in Matthew chapter 1, verse 21. And in chapter 3, actually, Jesus has a Baptist cousin, his name is John, right? John with the crazy clothes. He paved the way for Jesus' ministry, didn't he?

[7 : 56] And what did he do? He called people to repent of their sins and be baptized. And they did. And as they did that, they confessed their sins as they went through the waters of baptism.

By saying, take heart, right? Jesus is addressing our fears, right? Fear of being left out, mistreated, excluded. But by saying your sins are forgiven, Jesus is making clear to us, everyone listening into this encounter, our biggest fear in life should be sin.

No matter what we are concerned with, our biggest fear in life should be sin. And this is tricky, I get it, in our culture, in our generation. We don't really understand the term sin, right?

For many of us, when we hang out with our Kiwi friends, sin sounds old-fashioned, sounds judgmental. Who are you to tell me what sins I have? Or maybe if you have more traditional parents and grandparents, maybe sin for them is something that's still too limited, right?

I mean, as long as you have a clean police record, you're okay, you haven't sinned. But once you cross a certain line, oh, now you're a sinner. I mean, others talk about certain deadly sins, does that mean the rest are respectable sins?

[9 : 12] I don't know. We have a lot of confusion, don't we, about what sin actually is. But let me tell you what the Bible says sin is. Okay? Sin is more, it includes, but it is more than just breaking one of God's laws.

Sin, according to God's word, is rejecting or ignoring God and His rule over us. Sin is living without any reference to Him in your life.

Okay? Sin is not just doing what doesn't please God. It's also not doing what pleases Him. All right? It'd be too easy for us to go through life saying, I've never sinned.

If we just go, I've never broken a rule. I've never done that before. But when we realize that sin, okay, is also not doing what pleases God, sins of omission, then we realize that all of us fall short.

1 John 3, 4 puts it this way, sin is lawlessness. It is living as if there is no law of God in our hearts. Let me give you an analogy. When you walk alongside a cliff, let's say you go up to Music Point.

[10 : 20] There's some beautiful cliffs there, right? And there's a sign. Imagine there's a sign that says, don't jump off the cliff. Okay? If you jump off the cliff, right, you're breaking a rule.

Right? But it's not just that, right? You're actually also trying to live as if gravity doesn't exist. You see? So you're denying a bigger reality. When you jump off a cliff, you're not just breaking a rule that says, don't jump off a cliff.

You're ultimately denying that gravity exists. So when we sin, we're not just breaking a rule. Okay? Sin is so terrible because we've denied that God is God in our life.

We've denied the reality of God in our lives. Can you see? Sin is not just wrong actions. It's actually impure motives. Hearts that are worshipping something or someone other than our creator.

And the Bible says the wages of sin is death because it poisons all our relationships with each other, with God. Sin is humanity's deepest, darkest problem. So no surprise that Jesus, at this point, reminds us, right, take heart, your sins are forgiven.

[11 : 33] Verse 3 says, that this, some of the teachers of the law said to themselves, this fellow is blaspheming. I think their reaction here, right, helps us to understand the shock of this moment.

You see, the scribes, right, the Bible experts, they were going off a right intuition. Okay? They've got something right here, okay? If sin is offending God, all right, the creative universe, if it's a God-sized problem, then to forgive sin needs a God-sized solution, right?

Only God can make a way to deal with sin. And so all through history, all through God's history, that is what people have hoped in, right, for God to forgive our sin.

Psalms 86, verse 5 says this, O Lord, you are good and forgiving, abounding in steadfast love to all who call upon you, right? Or maybe you might know Isaiah 43, 25, and God's people would remember this well, right?

I am he, says God, who blots out your transgressions for my own sake. I will not remember your sins. This is the hope that the people listening in to Jesus' encounter would have hoped in, okay, for a God to forgive sins.

[12 : 48] And so now maybe you can appreciate what made the scribes so angry. Here is a backwater rabbi, okay, no Bible college degree, no special training, doesn't even know who he is, okay, and who are his wingmen?

A bunch of fishermen. No connection to the temple and the proper ways of dealing with sin through the centuries. How can this guy claim to forgive sin? Their intuition is right.

Who can forgive sin but God alone? sin? And look, if Jesus was just some run-of-the-mill faith healer, some kind of trickster, then our story would end here, right?

But it doesn't. Have a look again, verse 4. Knowing their thoughts, Jesus said, why do you entertain evil thoughts in your hearts? I mean, here, Jesus, he's clearly showing God's all-knowing power.

Not even a word is said and Jesus knows what they're thinking. And then verse 5. Which is easier, to say your sins are forgiven or to say get up and walk? There's a bit of a riddle, isn't it?

[13 : 56] What's easy to say but hard to prove? A phrase like your sins are forgiven, right?

Someone, anyone could say it, I could say it, you could say it, but how do we know that's actually true, you see?

It's easy to say, hard to prove, but if I said get up and walk and you really got up and walk, now that shows, okay, that I have authority behind my words.

You see what's going on here? So Jesus is making this claim, if he can heal this man, he can forgive sin. In verse 6, what does he say? 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, take your man, and go home. The Son of Man, that title, if you haven't heard of it before, it sounds kind of friendly, doesn't it?

But actually, the Son of Man is a very special title. It refers to an ancient prophet, Daniel, and when he had a vision once of a ruler, and it says that he was one like the Son of Man, so he actually only looked like the Son of Man.

[15:03] But Daniel 7, 13 says, he has authority over all kings and kingdoms over the earth. That's what's being alluded here. Jesus is referring to a very big view of himself.

So who is Jesus then? Who is Jesus? The crowds, I think, they get a good response, don't they? Because verse 7 says, the man got up and he went home.

And when the crowd saw this, they were filled with awe, and they praised God who had given such authority to men. Imagine being there and watching this scene unfold.

It would really get you thinking, who is this man? What kind of power does he have? And so the crowds, they're partly right. It's true. Look, as we read, they respond by glorifying God, don't they? But then what do they do? It says here, they praised God who had given such authority to men. I think here the crowds are a bit confused, aren't they?

[16:09] Essentially, here they're saying, God, thank you so much. We praise you. Thank you that one of us can now do all these kinds of amazing things. Jesus is not one of us.

He's not just one of us, because he is God. And look, the religious rulers, as we said, they're partly right too, aren't they? Sin is a big deal. And because it offends God, only God can deal with it rightly.

And so for Jesus to claim God's authority, it is blasphemy, it is an offense to God. Well, it would be if he was just any human teacher.

But he is not. Jesus is not just one of us. He is God himself. He is the divine son of man. He is the one who, and no one else, has authority on earth to forgive sins.

You see? And if this is true, and if this is true, if this story lays out accurately who Jesus really claims to be, then there are at least three things that we as PCBC need to take home today.

[17:15] And I think the first thing is this. If this is true, our greatest concern should be for our sins to be forgiven. Right? Look, I get it.

Maybe you fear being alone. Maybe you fear getting sick. Or you fear rejection. Maybe you just fear dying and being unknown. I don't know what your fears are, but God does.

And can I suggest that he wants you to put first things first? Your greatest fear in this life should be your sin. The psalmist in Psalm 32 says, before he was honest about his sin, actually, he had no strength.

His bones wasted away. That's how deeply he felt the weight of his sin before God. That is a healthy fear of sin there. I mean, think about it this way.

How much have you been scared or terrified by your own selfishness? Not just reflecting on, oh, yeah, I've sinned a little bit.

[18:19] I keep ordering too much. I don't know. But what are the sins that you don't admit in public? What are the sins you are willing to just rationalize and put aside?

Maybe you always want to try and be right in your family. Maybe you're just someone who wants to pour your hopes in your studies or your career. Maybe all you're doing all day is just dreaming about what purchase, what next thing you'll buy that will make you happy.

Does that concern you? Because it should. It should. So I don't know what your fears are. I know what my fears are, though.

All this week I was asking this question, what do I fear more than forgiveness of sin? This past week I've actually been painfully aware of how much I fear my sin.

My sin is that I love to please people more than I please God. and this actually doesn't get easier when you become someone who has to lead other people. You start to fear even more what others think of you.

[19:25] I'll give you an example. Last week a friend asked me to sign a petition. He was trying to gather some pastors to say that they don't want the government's current proposal to ban conversion therapy.

Now I have no interest in converting people from being gay to being straight. I think it's a false hope that some Christians have unfortunately given.

I think it's a false hope that sometimes comes when you read the Bibles the wrong way, when you think that this life now is the best that it'll get. And so we need to cure people, cure people in this life.

Maybe they've made marriage an idol. I think the conversion that matters the most, let me get this straight, is that we should call people to repentance and faith in Christ. That's the only conversion that really matters.

But I am concerned that if we outlaw unbiblical hurtful conversion therapy, we actually end up outlawing other things. It might become illegal to actually say to a friend who struggles with same-sex attraction to help them to keep following Christ.

[20 : 36] Christ. Maybe they don't want to work through, they have unwanted feelings, but actually it would be illegal to tell them to stay the course, to keep being faithful to Jesus.

It would actually, under this law, be illegal to be a parent and tell your gender-confused child that, to wait, don't transition yet.

Listen to what your doctor says. It could be illegal to say that. And perhaps it could even be illegal to sing to one another that Christ is enough for every part of our life. And yet I stared at this petition that my friends sent and my fears rose up.

I was really afraid that if I put my name on this, what would my family think? What would my same-sex attracted friends say? What would other pastors say?

These were all real fears of mine, but this week Jesus reminded me from this text, my greatest concern should not be my reputation. It should be ultimately for sins to be forgiven, for Jesus to be made big.

[21 : 43] After all, this is the same Jesus, right? He's going to say in Matthew chapter 10, and we'll hear it in a few weeks, don't fear those who kill the body, but can't kill the soul. Rather, fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

I don't know, what are your fears right now? Do you fear failure? failure? Are you addicted to something or someone? Do you fear disappointing someone in your life?

Whatever it is, please remember, more important than those things in eternity, according to Jesus, more important than all that is for your sins to be forgiven. And if you follow Jesus for any other reason, you've not understood him well enough.

I want our church, PCBC, to be more passionate about all kinds of things, but more passionate about sins to be forgiven in Christ than anything else.

Otherwise, we will have lost our way. Let me share another observation. If our greatest concern should be our sin, then our greatest confidence should be that Christ is over all.

[22 : 54] He has the authority that no one else has. I heard a worship song earlier this week, I put it this way, what is our hope in life and death? Christ alone, Christ alone.

What is our only confidence that our souls to him belong? We live in a world that wants us to have confidence in how many medals with one as a country, or how well with beat off COVID.

We should have confidence in our ethnicity or our political leanings or our fashion sense. Look, if Jesus can do everything he's done in Matthew 8 and 9 and more, we would be fools to put our hope and trust in anything other than Jesus.

You see? And yet we do, don't we? What is our hope in life and death? My credit card. My credit card. What is my only confidence? This girl.

she completes me. Do you think like this? Jesus invites us to examine our priorities. He calls us in this verse to let go of controlling our lives.

[24 : 04] He calls us to trust that he alone is powerful enough. If he can cure this man's wounds, if he can calm his fears, he can carry you and I to eternity. He and no one else can do it.

That's right, isn't it? That's why it is a right, it's a good and right thing as we gather as PCBC English to praise Jesus, to make him the centre of our worship. No one else.

There's no secret that most of our sermons here, they're going to point to how marvellous, how wonderful Jesus is because it's true. It's why when we pray, we do it in Jesus' name.

It's why we are called to tell each other, right, let's go. Let's go to Jesus for the power to fight sin.

Let's go to Jesus for the power to be more and more like Christ.

Let's go to Jesus for the pattern to do it. Study his life. Let's look at his strength and his kindness and compassion. Go to Jesus. So yes, friends, sin should concern us most and yet we should have confidence in the authority of Christ.

[25 : 09] And finally, I think if all of this is true, then our greatest privilege is to follow Jesus even with our fears. I find it interesting that it's straight after this episode, right, this healing that in verse 9 we hear for the first time Matthew's own story, the author of this gospel, right?

As Jesus went on from there, verse 9, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. Follow me, he told him. And Matthew got up and followed him.

Matthew writes about himself in the third person. You can do that if you're a world-famous author. But have you ever thought, why does he wait till chapter 9 to introduce himself, right?

I mean, he's not as bad as John. Some of you know, John introduces himself like at the very end of his books. But Matthew, why does he wait till chapter 9? But he hasn't been inactive though, right? He's been busy. We know what he's been doing these past eight chapters. He's been reminding and reassuring his readers. Hasn't he? Reminding them, Jesus really has fulfilled all their hopes.

[26 : 18] He has really fulfilled God's promises for you. Look, maybe some of his first readers, they were starting to doubt. They were starting to openly doubt that following Jesus was the best move.

Maybe they were getting flack from friends and family. Maybe there was pressure at work. Maybe they were about to give up. Matthew then, for eight chapters, reassures them. Look, he's the king of the Jews.

He's the promised Messiah. Maybe some were forgetting how powerful Jesus was. Some of them perhaps needed reminding. Look, Jesus is no ordinary rabbi, no ordinary teacher or prophet.

Jesus is God. He has God's authority over sickness and death, the wind and the waves, even the sin that separates us from our Father.

And so he is worth listening to and obeying. And maybe Matthew needed all this to remind himself, right? Because, think about it. He is a guy.

[27 : 14] He grew up with the name Levi. That's his name at birth. But at some stage, he ends up picking a traitor's job. Some of you might not know this, but to be a tax collector, it's, you know, not everyone likes being a tax collector today even, but to be a tax collector in those times for the Romans was to make money.

of the misery of your own flesh and blood, of your own family. Imagine if your job was to sell out your brothers and sisters and your family every day, to take money off them, to give it to a hated government.

Could Jesus even forgive his sins? Could Jesus even have the power to do so? And the answer is yes. It is yes.

And so when Jesus says, follow me, whatever Matthew's fears were, he got up and he followed him. That's a great lesson for us, isn't it?

We don't have to have all our fears sorted. You don't have to have all your fears sorted before you make that call, before you say, I'll follow you, Jesus. And look, you and I, PCBC, we have even more guarantee than Matthew did at the time.

[28 : 27] because we follow Jesus after, not just Matthew 9, but all the way up to the end of Matthew's gospel. We get to follow Jesus after knowing how Jesus not just puzzles us with parables, he ultimately walks all the way to Jerusalem and he ultimately lays down his life.

Outside Jerusalem's city walls, he offers his own life. He suffers death on the cross to pay the penalty for our biggest concern, our sins before a holy God.

You see, friends, remember, we need to remember the cross is proof that Jesus can and he has forgiven our sins before God. The cross is proof that the Father's anger at sin has now been turned away to his Son.

The cross is proof that the Holy Spirit can and does give new life to men and women who turn away from sin, who trust in Jesus, alone, who makes us new.

And so if you've ever had the question, could Jesus forgive even my sins? Every horrible thing I've done, every secret desire that is in my head right now, the answer is yes.

[29 : 42] Take heart. Be encouraged. He can forgive that sin. And he invites you, yes, you, to trust him today. And if you've never done this before, all right, maybe you are exploring a Christian, maybe this is your first time here at church.

Could I encourage you, if you've not done so before, I need you, I want you to see your deepest need is for your sins to be forgiven. And that when you look to Christ, when you see his hands and his feet, you can say, my sins are many, and yet, Jesus, you are powerful enough to save me from them.

You are powerful enough to forgive them. Help me to follow you, even with all my fears. So say that today, if you've never done so. Or come up to me, and I'd love to walk you through what it means to follow Jesus.

Or see a group leader. See someone that brought you along. But this prayer, right, that my sins are many, yet you have power to forgive my sins, this is a prayer that we all need, don't we?

As Christians who have journeyed with Jesus, whether for a year or for 20 years or more. Even if you've followed Jesus since forever, maybe like you, maybe like me, you've actually sometimes been dulled, dulled to certain areas of your life that have not pleased God.

[31 : 05] Certain sins in your life that have become okay. Everyone does it. It's not a big deal. Maybe you're having, however, doubts and fears, right, about whether following Jesus is worth it.

Can I say to you, Jesus tells you, take heart. Your sins are forgiven. And you know that's true because you can look at the cross, you can look at the empty tomb, and know that that is proof to us.

Jesus has power to forgive sins. And he calls you his child. So wherever you are this week, we all need to do what this paralyzed man did.

We all need to rise, take our baggage, and walk with the power and forgiveness of Jesus Christ.

Can I pray that we would all do that this week?

Let's pray. Father, we thank you.

[32 : 07] We thank you that once we were far from you, once we chased our own desires, our sins were many, and yet you loved us down to our soul, down to our bones.

So we praise you. Father, many of us have fears. We don't know what it would be like if we followed you. We're scared of what our friends and family might think.

Would you help us to cast those fears aside? And help us to know that since you loved us so deeply, since you've forgiven us so freely, that it's worth following you, whatever the cost.

And would you help us as a church family to be open and welcoming to those who have journeyed so far to get here? Would you help us to be keen to pray with, to encourage those who are feeling broken this week?

Would you help us to remember that all we have is in you, and we have so many reasons to thank you. Father, we thank you. Jesus, we thank you. Spirit, we thank you.

[33 : 10] In your precious name, Amen.