

Trinity 19, 2021

Matthew 9:1-8

Part I

What is the **one thing** the devil could take from you, if he could? It is the key to heaven. The key to heaven is the forgiveness of sins won by Jesus. The devil wants to **pluck** that out of your hand of faith. He **grasps** for it by attempting to deceive you with his **bogus bag of lies**. These lies make sense to our old Adam.

If our old Adam would get the upper hand; if, at the devil's urging, we would grab his bag of lies, then the devil would win. He would be able to pluck the key of heaven out of the hand of faith. Without the key to heaven we would be **locked out** of heaven destined for hell.

... but you have been baptized into Jesus. You have been baptized into him who is **the truth**; into him who holds the key to heaven. We see **that truth** in today's gospel.

Part II

In our text a crowd has gathered. In the center of that crowd is a paralyzed man. He is lying on his mat before Jesus. The crowd looks on. It, no doubt, expects Jesus to deal with **what it sees** - the man's infirmity.

...but Jesus sees what the crowd does not see. He sees **beneath** the skin. He sees the **faith** of the paralyzed man and his friends. Seeing their faith, Jesus **knew what the crowd did not know**. He knew what the paralyzed man's **greatest need** was. It was to have **the key to heaven**, the forgiveness of sins.

We are not told just what sins troubled the paralyzed man. Though we aren't, we can imagine him lying on his cot day after day. As he lay there, he had plenty of time to ponder his

sinfulness. In his day, it was common to think that people who had bad things happen, had done something especially bad. Because they had, God was punishing them. Such thoughts could easily have led the paralyzed man to have feelings of despair; to despair that he was God's child. Whatever it was that the paralyzed man felt, he **did** feel his sin and his need for forgiveness.

... as so Jesus **dealt** with the paralyzed man's greatest need. He spoke to his distressed heart, "Cheer up; take heart." Then, he called him, "Son," giving him a place in God's family. Finally, he **backed up** those words **by giving him** the key to heaven, "Your sins are forgiven you!"

Let's pause and reflect on this. We can have the same kind of **inner turmoil** the paralyzed man had. When bad things happen to us, the devil urges your and my old Adam to get the upper hand –

- to take our eyes **off** Jesus who was punished **for us**
- to believe God is **punishing us instead** for some bad we did
- to believe that this would not be happening, **if** we were God's children.

When we feel that in our hearts, the devil is ready to pluck the key to heaven from us.

To be sure, the devil wants us to grab his bag of lies, but it is not the truth. The truth is that

“[Jesus] was wounded **for our** transgressions;
he was bruised **for our** iniquities.”

The words, “**for our**” tell us that Jesus **took our place**. The Father punished Jesus, his Son, **instead** of punishing you and me. He did so that the Son can now say to you, “Cheer up; my Father's baptized child.” I deliver you from the devil's lies. “Your sins are forgiven you!” You have the key to heaven!

With the key of heaven in hand, the Father gives you a promise. The Father promises that “[He] works together in all things for

the good of those who love him.” That is to say, the Father promises to bring good out of whatever bad comes our way. The ultimate good is that, whether in good **or** bad, God put the key of heaven in our hand of faith.

Part III

Let’s get back to that crowd for a bit. Among the crowd were scribes. The scribes were Bible scholars. They heard Jesus’ words. They did and they thought the worst. They thought

- that Jesus was blaspheming;
- that he was lying with his words;
- that he showed disrespect to God by forgiving sins.

They thought that because Jesus was doing something that **only God** can do.

No one could see their thoughts - no one, but Jesus that is. Just like he saw beneath the skin of the paralyzed man, Jesus saw beneath the scribes’ skin. He saw what they were thinking. So,

Jesus brought their thoughts to light. He did by asking, “Why do you think **evil** in your hearts?”

After Jesus asked the question, he gave proof of his power to give the key to heaven. He began with a leading question

“Which is easier to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven you,’ or to say, ‘Arise and walk?’”

Actually, both phrases are **easy** to say. **However**, you **cannot see** whether a word of forgiveness works or not, but you **can see** whether a word of healing works or not.

So, Jesus told the paralyzed man, “Arise, take up your bed and go to your house.” At Jesus’ word, the man who was paralyzed, could move his legs. Then, he stood up, grabbed his mat and went home. By simply speaking a word to heal the paralyzed man, Jesus gave **a sign** that he does what only God can do; and as God he **does** have the power to forgive sins.

Let's pause and ask, "Can I see myself in the scribes at times?" To be sure, it might be a little harder to see ourselves in the scribes. The thing about them is that they **doubted** that Jesus had the power to forgive sins. In other words, they were **skeptics**.

That is our connection. At times, there is that **little old Adam skeptic in us** who can get the upper hand. We are skeptics when we doubt that God can forgive us. It can happen when sins from the past haunt us; sins that we struggle with in the present afflict us; sins weigh heavy on our conscience. The devil uses them to grab from us the key to heaven, "My sin is too big. My sin is too great. God cannot forgive me."

This, too, is the devil's bogus bag of lies. Jesus proved it is a bag of lies. He proved it by the **greatest sign of all** - his resurrection. Jesus' triumph over death is the **proof** that **all** sin has been paid for in full. The apostle put it this way,

“[Jesus] was delivered up **for our** trespasses and was raised **for our** justification.”

It is easy to pass over the little word, “**our.**” It is, but it is an important word. The word, “our” excludes **no one**. It includes **all** people. That means your sin - no matter how big - no matter how much you struggle against it – no matter how heavy it weighs on your conscience - **is** taken away. Jesus’ resurrection is proof of it. He has won for you the key to heaven.

So when that skeptical old Adam tries to rear his ugly head, you can pray with the man who came to Jesus for help one time. Jesus asked him, “Do you believe?” The man replied, “Lord, I believe, help my unbelief!” And Jesus does. He does by means of his powerful word.

Part IV

That brings us to the crowd one last time. We are told that when the crowd saw the paralyzed man get up, take his mat

and go home, they marveled. They heard with their ears; they saw with their eyes, the power Jesus has as God. They did and they praised God for what they saw.

Then Matthew adds his comments. “They praised God **for giving such power to *men***. Matthew does not say, “They praised God for giving such power to [a man],” meaning Jesus. Rather Matthew says, “They praised God for giving such power **to men,**” meaning many.

Matthew is connecting some dots for us. The miracle has **proven** that Jesus has the power to forgive; he has the power to forgive, **because he is God**. Because Jesus is God, he is **able** to give that power to men.

Jesus put it this way to Peter.

“I give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth **will have been bound** in heaven and

whatever you loose on earth **will have been loosed** in heaven.”

That is to say, Jesus gives the church the power to declare what **already has been** declared **by God** heaven.

A good example is that of that is King David and his pastor, Nathan. David had committed some grievous public sins. **As long as** David did not repent, David’s sins **were bound to him**. However, **when** Nathan led David to confess his sins, **then** Nathan declared to David what God had **already** declared in heaven. “God has put away your sin!” David was loosed from his sin.

This is our public practice in our liturgy; and, when there is no rest for the conscience, in private confession and absolution. Confession, the catechism says,

“consists of two parts: one, that we confess our sins, the other that we receive absolution, [that is the word of] forgiveness.”

By means of confession and absolution, God puts off the old Adam, duped by the devil's lies; puts him off with all the dirt, grime and filth of indulging in the devil's lies. He washes you clean by the blood of Jesus and wraps you in the clean pure robe he spun for you by his perfect life.

Clothed and washed clean, God puts on you the new self. The new self is created in Christ Jesus. It is created to live the baptismal life - to **not live the lie** of the devil, **but to speak the truth** - “for we are members of the same body.” We have been baptized into the body of Jesus, that is, the church.

That means as members of Jesus' body, he gives you the power to speak his word of truth to a troubled sinner. So...

- You can tell a sinner afraid that God is punishing him for some bad done in his life; that God, instead **punished Jesus in his place**
- You can tell a sinner skeptical that God can forgive him; that Jesus' resurrection is the **proof** that God **has** taken away his sin

That is the key the devil wants to snatch away from us. He will do all in his power to do so. He wants to keep you out of heaven. And that is precisely why we need to keep hearing it.

By hearing Jesus' word of forgiveness

- in the word of absolution,
- in the preaching of the gospel,
- in our conversations with one another,

Jesus keeps putting the key of heaven into your hand of faith. It is the key that he purchased for you; the key that gives you heaven. Hold it tightly in your hand! Amen!