

“STAND UP AND WALK!”

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Text: Matthew 9:1-8 NLT

God's Word: Matthew 21:1-11 NLT

Some time ago, Time Magazine ran an article that reported on the benefits of religion and the church, and some of the observations included:

1. Heart-surgery patients who draw comfort from their religious faith have a significantly higher survival rate than those who do not.
2. The blood pressure of people who attend church is 5 mm lower than that of those who do not.
3. People with religious faith who attend church regularly experience less depression than nonreligious people.
4. Suicide is four times higher among non-churchgoers than churchgoers.

What's the reason behind these statistics? It's simple; Jesus wants to restore the whole person - spirit, soul, and body! There are three essentials that make this possible: Faith, Forgiveness, and Courage.

Matthew 9:1-8 NLT

Jesus climbed into a boat and went back across the lake to his own town. ² Some people brought to him a paralyzed man on a mat. Seeing their faith, Jesus said to the paralyzed man, "Be encouraged, my child! Your sins are forgiven." ³ But some of the teachers of religious law said to themselves, "That's blasphemy! Does he think he's God?" ⁴ Jesus knew what they were thinking, so he asked them, "Why do you have such evil thoughts in your hearts? ⁵ Is it easier to say 'Your sins are forgiven,' or 'Stand up and walk'? ⁶ So I will prove to you that the Son of Man has the authority on earth to forgive sins." Then Jesus turned to the paralyzed man and said, "Stand up, pick up your mat, and go home!" ⁷ And the man jumped up and went home! ⁸ Fear swept through the crowd as they saw this happen. And they praised God for giving humans such authority.

The first step is...Faith.

The most important aspect of receiving healing is faith, and Matthew illustrates this fact from the very beginning. After ministering in the Gentile region of the Decapolis, Matthew tells us that "*Jesus climbed into a boat and went back across the lake to his own town.*" The phrase "his own town" — undoubtedly refers to Capernaum, the home base of his ministry in Galilee.

The people of Capernaum accepted, or at least tolerated, him while the people of Nazareth tried to kill him. Anyone who stayed in a town or village for more than a year could claim citizenship in the town and call it his own. At this time He probably took up temporary residence with Peter, in whose home He healed Peter's mother-in-law. The place is significant in that it illustrates the importance of faith in healing. It is obvious that the folks in Nazareth had no faith in him, and we are told that Jesus could do little there.

Matthew goes on to tell us, "*Some people brought to him a paralyzed man on a mat. Seeing their faith, Jesus said to the paralyzed man, 'be encouraged, my child! Your sins are forgiven.'*"

Many “beds” were mats; thus the paralytics’ friends may have carried him on the bed on which he lay all the time. Because the paralytic had to be brought to Jesus lying on a bed, his paralysis obviously was severe, and he may well have been a quadriplegic. No wheelchairs or other such equipment were available to those who could not walk, and they had to rely on others to carry them around. Jesus has already cured paralysis so the men have probably heard of Jesus’ supernatural healing ability and now bring their companion to him for healing. Jesus sees that they have faith in his ability to heal their companion, and they expect he will do so.

The paralytic was not alone in his faith; his friends who brought him believed too. Thus this account teaches us about intercession: we may pray for others, not merely for ourselves. Faith is not simply working up a feeling or suppressing doubts, but demonstrated commitment to getting to the One on whose power we stake our trust. It is even more than just believing; it is about acting on what we believe. Their faith is demonstrated by the fact that they were willing to carry him to Jesus.

Jesus then responds to their faith by saying to the paralyzed man, *“Be encouraged, my child! Your sins are forgiven.”* We need to see here that Jesus heals so much more than this man’s body. Be encouraged: to have confidence and firmness of purpose in the face of danger or testing. It represents the courage that eliminates fear. Jesus was saying, “Don’t be afraid, because you no longer have anything to be afraid of.” It was not that the man’s fears had not been real and well founded. An unrepentant sinner is separated from God and under divine judgment. But when he repents in faith he no longer has reason to fear, because he is no longer under judgment. Jesus’ encouraging words to him and his tender reference to him as his child show that Jesus authority was exercised with compassion. One of the main reasons that he performed miracles was because he cared about people.

I have every faith in my calculator’s ability to solve any math problem. However, no matter how strong my faith is, I will never get the answer until I put my faith into action and press the buttons on the calculator.

How can we expect God to heal us if we do not believe he can? We need to believe that the same Jesus who healed two thousand years ago still does so today. We need to believe that the same Jesus who healed the blind, deaf, and lame still does so today. We need to believe that the same Jesus who healed lepers then still does so today. If we don’t believe why should he heal us? We need to put our faith to work and our lives in his hands. He has provided the healing and the faith, but we have to choose to exercise it.

Healing Requires Forgiveness

There is a side issue that we must also deal with in this context. Does Jesus indicate that sickness is the result of sin? Well, sometimes, but not always. There is a close relationship between the two, and the Bible does associate healing with forgiveness.

Psalms 103:3 (NLT) *He forgives all my sins and heals all my diseases.*

Notice also that when Jesus addresses the man he does not say, “You are healed.” Rather he says, “Your sins have been forgiven.” However, elsewhere Jesus also indicates that this is not always the case. Sometimes people just get sick.

Yet without forgiveness there can be no healing. Consequently, Jesus pronouncement of the man’s forgiveness does not make everyone happy. Matthew tells us, *“But some of the teachers of religious law said to themselves, “That’s blasphemy! Does he think he’s God?”*

Blasphemy is an act in which a human insults the honor of God. This extends to misusing the name of God, which is cursed or reviled instead of being honored, the penalty for which is death by stoning in Jesus day. The teachers of the law charge Jesus with blasphemy because they believe that he is dishonoring God by taking on himself the prerogative to forgive sins, something only God can do.

Ironically, it was the teachers of the religious law who were blaspheming because later in this chapter, in v. 34, they accuse Jesus of doing miracles by the power of Satan. The forgiveness Jesus granted was not pretend, but the teachers' words slandered the Son of God.

Unlike the paralytic, those men saw no need for forgiveness, because they considered themselves already to be righteous. They resented Jesus' offering forgiveness, not only because they did not believe He was God but also because they considered it unjust for a person to be forgiven simply by asking for it—instead of by earning it, as they thought they had done.

The two great barriers to salvation have always been refusal to recognize the need for it and the belief that it can be earned or deserved. These teachers of the religious law had probably seen many miracles of Jesus and heard the testimony of others who had been healed of disease and cleansed of demons. But they refused to recognize His power as coming from God, much less that He Himself was God.

However, Jesus, since he is all knowing, knew what they were thinking, and said, *"Why do you have such evil thoughts in your hearts? Is it easier to say 'Your sins are forgiven,' or 'Stand up and walk?'"* This rhetorical question assumes, of course, that it is easier to say your sins are forgiven, because there is no way of confirming whether or not it has happened. It is obviously much more difficult to declare a person healed, because it can be immediately confirmed by the person's ability to walk. What Jesus is about to do is to prove that he has the authority to do the one because he has the authority to do the other.

Jesus, therefore, says to them, *"So I will prove to you that the Son of Man has the authority on earth to forgive sins."* Then Jesus turned to the paralyzed man and said, *"Stand up, pick up your mat, and go home!"* The command to rise suggests that when Jesus spoke the healing had already taken place. No description of this act of healing is recorded, only the command to the paralytic to take advantage of it. The man's immediate healing and departure underlines the central theme of Matthew 9-10, that Jesus works confirm his authority as the Son of God to forgive sins.

When missionaries in northern Alaska were translating the Bible into the language of the Eskimos, they discovered there was no word in that language for forgiveness. After much patient listening, however, they discovered a word that means, "Not being able to think about it anymore." That word was used throughout the translation to represent forgiveness, because God's promise to repentant sinners is, *"I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more"* (Jer. 31:34)

Forgiveness in healing is essential because sin separates us from God. There is nothing that God hates more than sin. There is nothing that can separate us from God except sin.

Forgiveness in healing is essential because God wants to heal the whole person. He doesn't want to heal our bodies and not deal with the sickness in our spirits. He doesn't want to heal our bodies if our sin is just going to make us sick again. He doesn't want to heal our bodies and not deal with the guilt and anguish that is caused by sin. It is simple - if we want to be healed physically, we must first be healed spiritually. The Good News is God wants to forgive us.

In addition to faith and forgiveness...Healing Requires Courage

There is an old saying, "The proof is in the pudding!" You can tell someone they are healed, but the real proof comes when they get out of the chair, throw away the crutches and walk. Well, that is exactly what happens in this case. After Jesus commands the man to pick up his mat and go home, Matthew tells us, *"And the man jumped up and went home!"*

It did not take weeks of therapy. He did not need special treatment to restore his muscles. He did not need to learn to walk again. He just jumped up off the mat and walked home.

What we must recognize, in my estimation, is the courage that it took this man to follow Jesus' command. Matthew gives us very few details about this man or his healing. However, we have to assume that he had been this way for some time. It is possible that this man may never have walked before in his life. At the very least, he had been in this condition for a long time.

Notice that the text says that he "jumped up!" Not only did he get up, but he did it with great enthusiasm. Don't you think that it must have crossed his mind "What if it didn't work? What if I fall flat on my face? What if I get hurt worse?" On the contrary, he did exactly what Jesus said, jumped to his feet, picked up his mat and went home. That took great courage!

The response of the crowd was interesting. Matthew says, *"Fear swept through the crowd as they saw this happen. And they praised God for sending a man with such great authority."*

When the multitudes saw this, they realized that such a miracle could only be done by God's power, and they were filled with awe. *Phobeō* (filled with awe) is the term from which we get phobia and is often translated "fear." But the most common use of it in the New Testament represents reverential awe, not cringing fright. It expresses the feeling of a person who is in the presence of someone infinitely superior. We do not know how much the crowd knew about Jesus, but they knew that what He did had to have been empowered by God. If they did not realize that He was the God's Son, they at least realized He was an extraordinarily godly man.

We need to have the courage to stand up and walk. What good does it do for God to heal us just to have us sit there and do nothing? What good does it do for God to heal us just to have us act like we're still sick? We need to have the courage to step out into our healing and walk.

We need to have the courage to stand up in the crowd. People will try and tell us that we are imagining things. People will tell us that we are out of our minds. People will tell us all that stuff in the Bible is all made up. People will tell us that God doesn't heal people anymore. But we need to have the courage to say, "I have been healed and by his power I will walk!"

We need to have the courage to thank God for his healing. If we believe that God still heals, thank him. If we believe that God still performs miracles, thank him. If we believe that faith is the assurance of things we cannot yet see, thank him. If we believe that anything we ask in his name will be done, thank him.

Do you need to be healed today? Do you have the faith to receive it? Have you asked God to forgive you so you can receive it? Are you willing to stand up and walk because you've received it?