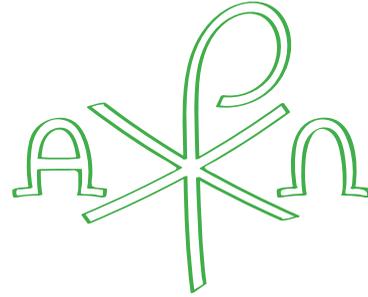


THE NINETEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Study Notes for the Christian Layperson

by: Rev. Marcus Baikie



MATTHEW 9:1–8 ESV

Author and Date:

The Holy Spirit caused St. Matthew Levi the Apostle and Evangelist to write this gospel around AD 50. This account takes place during Jesus' ministry in Galilee, which is summarized in Matthew 4:23, "And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people."

¹ **And getting into a boat he crossed over and came to his own city.**

- After concluding the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7), Jesus traveled to Capernaum, where he healed (8:5-17). After this, he decided to go to the other side of the Sea of Galilee (8:18) and arrived on the other side in the country of the Gadarenes (8:28). There he healed two men afflicted by demons (8:28-33), but when the residents of that city heard what he had done, "they begged him to leave their region." (8:29) Thus Jesus got into a boat in the Gadarenes, crossed over the Sea of Galilee, and returned to his own city of Capernaum.

² **And behold, some people brought to him a paralytic, lying on a bed. And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven."**

- Perhaps these people had heard or possibly even witnessed Jesus' healings when He was last in Capernaum. Therefore they believed that Jesus would be able to heal the paralytic man and brought him to Jesus.
- Jesus saw their faith in their deeds. Their faith was not silent, hidden away in their hearts. It was evident in bringing the paralytic to Jesus. "Our churches teach that this faith is bound to bring forth good fruit."

(Augsburg Confession VI:1) Our faith in Christ, through which alone we are justified, will necessarily show itself in works of love for the neighbor, just as the faith of these people was shown in their love for the paralytic.

- Their faith in Jesus and love for the paralytic is even more apparent in the parallel accounts in Mark and Luke. There we learn that the men had to lower the paralytic's bed through an opening in the roof because there was no way for them to pass through the great crowd that surrounded Jesus (Mark 2:4; Luke 5:18).
- In his *Annotations on Matthew* from 1538, Martin Luther points out the apparent contradiction in Jesus' words: "The one whom He defines as a sinner—saying 'your sins,' etc.—He calls 'son.' How is he who is a sinner a son? Who will make these [two] things agree?" (*Luther's Works* 67:61-62) By grace alone are sinners forgiven and declared to be sons of God and heirs of the kingdom of heaven.

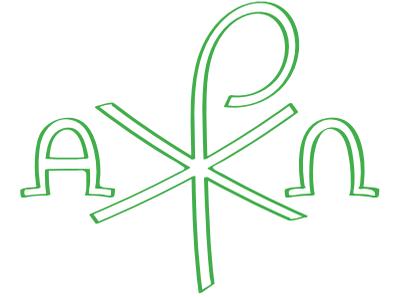
³ **And behold, some of the scribes said to themselves, "This man is blaspheming."**

- The scribes were experts in the Old Testament. They knew well the laws of Moses that prescribed sacrifices to atone for sins (see, for example, Leviticus 4-5). The law demanded burnt offerings from the guilty. Jesus, however, forgave the sins of the paralytic apart from an offering on his part, for He offered Himself as the once-and-for-all sacrifice for sin on the cross.
- This is the first time in Matthew's Gospel that the religious leaders of the Jews charge Jesus with blasphemy. Blasphemy would be the final charge by which they were able to sentence Jesus to death (see Matthew 26:65-66).

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- In the parallel accounts in Mark and Luke the reason for their charge of blasphemy is clearer: “Who can forgive sins but God alone?” (Mark 2:7; see also Luke 5:21) Clearly they do not believe that Jesus Christ is true God with the authority to forgive sins.

⁴ **But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, “Why do you think evil in your hearts?”**

- The scribes accused Jesus in their hearts, rather than publicly. However, Jesus, being true God, knows their hidden thoughts. This testifies to Jesus’ omniscience as the Second Person of the Holy Trinity and answers the question found in the accounts of Mark and Luke: “Who can forgive sins but God alone?”

⁵ **For which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Rise and walk?’**

- On the one hand, it is easier to say “Your sins are forgiven,” than to say, “Rise and walk,” for the former statement cannot be verified by sight. It can only be received by faith.
- On the other hand, it is easier for God to say “Rise and walk.” He does this daily through various earthly means, such as medicine, surgery, physical therapy, and the like. However, it required His own death for Christ to declare to the rich man, and to all men, “Your sins are forgiven.” For “without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.” (Hebrews 9:22) It was easier for God to say, “Rise and walk,” and yet because of His boundless love toward us sinners, “He did not choose the easy part But gave His dearest treasure.” (LSB 556:4)

⁶ **But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins” – he then said to the paralytic – “Rise, pick up your bed and go home.”**

- “Son of Man” – Jesus alone uses this title for Himself, and He uses it more than any other. It comes from Daniel 7:13, “I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven, there came one like a Son of Man, and He came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before Him.” Thus it serves as a testimony to the exaltation and glory of the Son of God, Jesus Christ, while acknowledging His true humanity. Here Jesus uses this title to remind us that His “glory...is always to have mercy.” (Collect for the Third Sunday in Lent)

- Jesus does what is lesser in order to prove what is greater. He heals the paralytic with a word in order to prove that He has authority to forgive sins with a word.

- The Son of Man still has authority on earth to forgive sins, but He now exercises that authority through pastors, who are commanded by Christ to forgive the sins of the repentant: “If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.” (John 20:23)

⁷ **And he rose and went home. ⁸ When the crowds saw it, they were afraid, and they glorified God, who had given such authority to men.**

- As in the previous account of the healing of the two demon-possessed men, the crowds react with fear. This is a common response to Jesus’ demonstration of divine power and authority (see also Luke 5:8). A god who has the power to do anything is no comfort to the sinner who deserves nothing but death and judgment. Rather, the sinner is comforted by faith in the almighty God who has compassion on sinners and uses His divine authority to forgive sins. Having seen this, the crowds here, unlike the crowds in the Gadarenes, respond by glorifying God.

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