

Yeshua Is Charged with Blasphemy To Be Like Yeshua Means – To Serve Others

In my last post, we examined the story of the paralyzed man let down by His friends through a hole in the roof on His mat. We used the account from Mark as it contained a few more details than Matthews account. In this post, we will examine how He defends Himself from a charge of blasphemy.

Returning to our story from Matthew:

"On seeing this, some of the Torah-teachers said among themselves, 'This man is blaspheming!' Yeshua, knowing what they were thinking, said, 'Why are you entertaining evil thoughts in your hearts? Tell me, which is easier to say — 'Your sins are forgiven' or 'Get up and walk'? But look! I will prove to you that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.' He then said to the paralyzed man, 'Get up, pick up your mattress, and go home!' And the man got up and went home. When the crowds saw this, they were awestruck and said a b'rakhah to God the Giver of such authority to human beings." ~ Matthew 9:3-8

"On seeing this, some of the Torah-teachers said among themselves, 'This man is blaspheming!'" These scribes had come from Yerushalayim to K'far-Nachum (Luke 5:17) to conduct a special investigation for the powerful leaders of the Jewish faith. Jealous of Yeshua's popularity and power, these men hoped to find something to criticize or even condemn in Yeshua's teaching. When they heard Yeshua tell the paralyzed man that His sins were forgiven, they were shocked. The people in Yeshua's day took blasphemy very seriously. Offenders died. Even an unproven accusation of blasphemy could prove life-threatening.

In such a climate, the charge of blasphemy worked almost as well as a contract for murder. Blasphemy meant to curse, revile, or insult the name of God. Innocent persons could be accused, convicted, and killed without having a chance to defend themselves. In fact, the public cause of Yeshua's death was blasphemy. Those directly responsible for His execution wanted the charge posted: ***"This man said, I am King of the Jews"*** (John 19:21).

The religious leaders hotly debated the offense of blasphemy in the first century. Some said that a person had to use the divine name to be accused. These scribes, however, took the assumption of divine prerogatives (forgiving sins) as also constituting blasphemy. Therefore, because only God can forgive sins, Yeshua was claiming to be God.

In Jewish law, blasphemy was punishable by death (Leviticus 24:16). In labeling Yeshua's claim to forgive sins as blasphemous, the religious leaders showed they did not understand that Yeshua **was** God. Yeshua had God's power and authority to heal bodies and forgive sins. Forgiveness of sins was a sign that the messianic age had come (Isaiah 40:2; Joel 2:32; Micah 7:18-19; Zechariah 13:1). Unfortunately, it did not occur to these Jewish leaders that perhaps this man was their Messiah.

"Yeshua, knowing what they were thinking, said, 'Why are you entertaining evil thoughts in your hearts?'" God is all-knowing, and Yeshua is God. He had access to all the information; He knew every person's thoughts (12:25; 22:18). Hebrews 4:13 says, ***"Before God, nothing created is hidden, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of him to whom we must render an account."*** Yeshua's glory and divinity were veiled by His humanity and mortality. While Yeshua walked as a human on this earth, He never ceased to be God. When Yeshua was born, God became a man. Yeshua was not part man and part God; He was completely human and completely divine. Yeshua is the perfect expression of God in human form. As a man, Yeshua was subject to place, time, and other human limitations. He did not give up His eternal power when He became human, but **He did set aside His glory and His rights**. In response to the Father's will, He limited His power and knowledge. When Yeshua became human, He restrained the full use of

His powers, yet He could still see each person's thoughts, intents, and motives. Yeshua what these scribes were thinking. Yeshua may have read their minds, or He may have read the questions in the expressions on their faces. In any case, they could not hide their hostility at Yeshua's words. Their thoughts of Yeshua as a blasphemer were *evil*.

Dealing with Skeptics

When people dust off your witness for Yeshua, dismiss you as a fanatic, or quickly change the conversation from faith to furniture, you might feel offended. *"Forget them!"* you might say. *"They're Hopeless!"* Yeshua's response to skeptics was to engage them. His question showed that He was interested *in them*. Even though they were often severely accusatory, Yeshua kept talking to them. He did not write them off. Sincere questions have a way of keeping a conversation going. In your witness, don't be discouraged by skeptics. Just show compassion as Yeshua did, and keep the conversation open, honest, and friendly.

"Tell me, which is easier to say — 'Your sins are forgiven' or 'Get up and walk'?" It would take someone of great power and authority to forgive sins. Yet the statement concerning forgiveness of sins could be said without verification. Healing the paralyzed man would be open to immediate public verification. Yeshua was offering to do an easier task (healing the man) as public evidence that the more difficult, unverifiable task was also accomplished.

The scribes understood sickness to be the result of sin. Yeshua then proposed the converse - if He could heal a person, then could He not also forgive sins? Yeshua wanted to show that He had the power to forgive sins by showing that He had the power to make a paralytic ***get up and walk***. Yeshua accepted the premise that words matter.

He repeatedly made claims that were outrageous, arrogant, and deceptive unless absolutely true. But He backed up His words with His work. He rested His claim to be God on His statements and actions. Confronted with undeniable evidence, people still refused to believe. Unfortunately, people today reject Yeshua with practically no evidence. Sometimes, we are so worried about presenting ourselves as Believers that we fail to present Yeshua Himself to those around us. We should seek to gain a hearing. But when we have their attention, our subject ought to be Yeshua. When people actually find out what He did and said, they will have a clearer reason to respond to the invitation to believe. They may still reject Yeshua. But they won't be able to say to us, *"You never told me."*

Yeshua backed up His words by healing the man's legs. Yeshua's action showed that His words were true; He had the power to forgive as well as to heal. Talk is cheap; our words lack meaning if our actions do not back them up. We can say we love God or others, but if we are not taking practical steps to demonstrate that love, our words are empty and meaningless. How well do your actions back up what you say?

"But look! I will prove to you that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins. He then said to the paralyzed man, 'Get up, pick up your mattress, and go home!' And the man got up and went home." Yeshua again used the term "Son of Man." The name claimed authority, for only the highest authority - God himself - could forgive sins. The use of the title also reveals that Yeshua was anticipating His future role as Judge. Only here and in Luke 7:48 does Yeshua talk about forgiving sins. He came to do just that (Matthew 1:21), and His death would make forgiveness available to all people. But with those whom Yeshua met and touched, He also had the authority to forgive their sins when He perceived that they would understand and accept. Yeshua's authority extended from spiritual healing to physical healing. The physical healings revealed this to the world. One who could heal a paralytic could also forgive sins. Yeshua spoke to the doubtful scribes, ***so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins***. But Yeshua didn't even finish His sentence. He broke off part of the way through and allowed the miracle to speak for itself. Yeshua spoke with commanding authority, showing that He expected immediate obedience. ***He then said to the paralyzed man, "Get up, pick up your mattress, and go home!"***

Yeshua's mission was to proclaim the Good News. His great power served to reveal His authority. Thus, Yeshua sent the man back to His home with a new life because He had forgiven the man of His sins. The man did as Yeshua said. He **got up and went to home**. The healing unmistakably revealed Yeshua's power and authority. The scribes who questioned Yeshua's ability to forgive sins (9:3) saw the formerly paralyzed man get up and walk. Yeshua's question in 9:5 forced their answer: Yeshua had the power to make the paralyzed man walk; thus, He also had the authority to forgive His sins.

"When the crowds saw this, they were awestruck and said a b'rakhah (blessing) to God the Giver of such authority to human beings." Yeshua did this miracle in front of ***the crowd*** that had gathered in this home to hear Him speak (Mark 2:2). The phrase ***"they were awestruck"*** implies amazement as well as fear. Such fear was appropriate in the presence of one who displayed ***such authority*** (that is, authority to forgive sins). What was the result of this awe? The people ***blessed God***. While the scribes had previously called Yeshua a blasphemer, the people recognized God's power and realized that Yeshua had authority from God. The difference between the scribes' rejection and the crowd's awe is a major theme in Matthew (see 9:33-34; 12:13-15; 14:34-15:2; 15:29-31 compared to 16:1-4). That God had given such authority ***to human beings*** probably means that the people were recognizing that a man – Yeshua - displayed God's power.

Was the man's physical condition the result of His sin? We do not know. But we do know that Yeshua dealt with the sin problem first, for this is always the greatest need. We must not conclude from this miracle that all sickness is caused by sin, or that forgiveness automatically means physical healing. More important than the healing of this man's body was the cleansing of His heart. He went home with both a sound body and a heart at peace with God.

We are called to a life of service to others. There is no greater job description than to be classified as a talmid of Yeshua HaMashiach. We are counting the cost and learning at His feet how He would have us reach out to a lost and dying world. The hour is upon us to act.

In my next post, we will learn of Matthew's calling by Yeshua and a lesson about breaking bread with sinners.