

Missing the obvious

And, behold, certain of the scribes said within themselves, This man blasphemeth. And Jesus knowing their thoughts said, Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts? For whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and walk?

Matthew 9:3-5

As the scribes proceeded to scrutinize everything that Jesus did or said, it becomes more and more obvious in the gospel accounts that they lost the simple ability to apply common sense. To this point in Matthew's gospel, the only negative information about the scribes or Pharisees appeared when Jesus told the multitude during the Sermon on the Mount that their righteousness needed to exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees to enter the kingdom of heaven. But in our text, Matthew begins to record the negative reactions, first from the scribes, to Jesus' words. As far as we can tell from the narrative, they had ample opportunity to see, or hear about, Jesus' many miracles of healing and casting out of demons.

At the beginning of this chapter, Jesus pronounces forgiveness for the sins of the paralytic man who had been brought by his friends, presumably for physical healing. As this perhaps expanded the revelation of His authority beyond miraculous healing to the unseen realm of forgiving sins, this inner reaction of some of the scribes in our text resulted. (It is interesting that in the previous chapter, apparently in reaction to the miracles and/or the Sermon, a certain scribe had volunteered to follow Jesus wherever He went (8:19), so the reactions were not universal among them.) Yet, when He answered the inner questions of their minds, it seems that they did not recognize His ability to know their thoughts. Thus, the apparent process of unbelief is that it builds a case within a person's mind strong enough for them to miss the obvious. Jesus had healed multitudes, cast out demons, authoritatively taught unique and sublime truths, and now answered the thoughts of their hearts, yet they could not admit the possibility that one with such divine authority could also forgive sin.

As revealed by the accounts that follow, Jesus would proceed to do even more to demonstrate His deity, and the scribes, Pharisees, and chief priests would continue to revolt into further unbelief, until it would drive them to crucify Him. The healed man born blind had not succeeded in exposing these leaders to the obvious truth of Jesus' identity, in which case Jesus pronounced their spiritual blindness (John 9:30-33; 39-41). Even after His resurrection, coupled with the testimony of the graveyard guards, the priests would completely ignore the obvious in their attempt to cover the truth (Matthew 28:11-15). In spite of these, there were Nicodemus, Joseph, and others, whose minds were not blinded by the god of this world. Let us therefore pray and endeavor for God to shine His light into hearts, "to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (II Corinthians 4:6).