

Jesus Heals the Deaf Man
Mark 7:31-37
May 26, 2013

Introduction

Mark is the gospel for the Deaf! The hope of salvation rests in Jesus Christ, and Mark show God's mercy and grace through the healing of a Gentile deaf man. I have been looking forward to preaching this passage since I've started preaching through Mark!

As Deaf people, we often are overlooked by the world and shunned by society. This stems from the fact that those that hear and speak have a hard time communicating with us. During Jesus' time, the Jews would declare the deaf as insane because the Jews could not know how much the deaf could understand. In the Middle East, it was common for the deaf to be killed or thrown out and left alone because of their inability to communicate. Even the blind were better off because they are at least able to communicate.

I want to take the time to introduce here what the Bible has to say about deaf and Deaf people. I want us to be able to share with others God's compassion and mercy.

Exodus 4:11 *The LORD said to him, "Who gave man his mouth? Who makes him deaf or mute? Who gives him sight or makes him blind? Is it not I, the LORD?"*

We learn, at the beginning of Scripture, that God has made the deaf, blind, and the other handicaps for His good pleasure. Why would God do that? We need to understand that God does not do things in a mean way, but so that His glory would be revealed.

John 9:3b *but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life.*

Jesus answers this when the disciples ask Jesus as to why the man was born blind. They were taught that it was sin of the parents that caused the blindness of this man, but Jesus answers that what his parents did had no bearing on his condition. He was blind because God has planned it so that God's work would be displayed. Of course, Jesus healed the man. But what about us? We haven't been healed. Why are we deaf? Why did God have us with lost hearing? Again, it is so that God's glory will be displayed.

God uses the Deaf to shame those who are "wise" (**1 Cor 1:27**). The world sees the deaf people as useless, but God has used the Deaf for His glory so that His name would be proclaimed.

Because being deaf is a social and cultural problem (by means of the majority's inability to converse or interact with the deaf), people often relegate the deaf as 4th class citizens or lower. Many people find it sporting to make fun of such people. After all, the deaf cannot hear what is being said, and they are easy targets. This cruelty has its beginnings at the Fall and continues on today all over the world. However, God has something to say about those taking advantage of the deaf.

Leviticus 19:14 *Do not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block in front of the blind, but fear your God. I am the LORD.*

God established rules in how people should treat others, and one such rule is how we are to treat the deaf—namely we are not suppose to take advantage of their deafness. It is quite easy (and sporting) for such person to walk up to the deaf person and sprout curses at him. The deaf would not know the difference if such insults were delivered with a smile on their face. God expresses His outrage when such group are mistreated because He has made them and they are worthy of honor and dignity.

Here in Mark's gospel, we see the heart of God when He heals the deaf man. Remember the theme of Mark is that Jesus is the Son of God and believe in Him as the Savior. He is the Savior of the whole world, of every people, tribes, languages, and even handicap.

Background

- This is some months before His crucifixion

- The Galilean ministry has come to an end and He spends time with His disciples
- Dangers are cropping up
 - Pharisees and religious leaders are seeking to kill Him
 - Herod Antipas is seeking Jesus
 - Crowds of people want Jesus as king (this is a danger to the disciples)
- He leaves on a Gentile tour—traveling from Capernaum to Tyre then to Sidon and going north, then down along the eastern part of Galilee to Decapolis
- This started because the disciples have recognized Jesus as the Son of God
- It is time to train them and get them ready for the ministry after His resurrection

Mark 7:31-37

³¹Then Jesus left the vicinity of Tyre and went through Sidon, down to the Sea of Galilee and into the region of the Decapolis.

- There is no record of Him doing anything in Tyre or Sidon
- It is possible He has done some things...we just do not have a record of it

John 21:25 *Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.*

- Months have passed
 - When Jesus fed the 5000 in **Mark 6**—they sat on green grass

Mark 6:39 *Then Jesus directed them to have all the people sit down in groups on the green grass.*

- What this means is that this is in the early to mid spring when rains came
- When Jesus fed the 4000 in **Mark 8**—they sat on ground

Mark 8:6a *He told the crowd to sit down on the ground.*

- Mid to late summer, grass withered because of heat
- Decapolis
 - Ten towns southeast of Sea of Galilee
 - Totally pagan and non-Jewish

³²There some people brought to Him a man who was deaf and could hardly talk, and they begged Him to place His hand on the man.

- This incident is only found in the gospel of Mark
- However Matthew alludes to this incident

Matthew 15:29-31 *Jesus left there and went along the Sea of Galilee. Then He went up on a mountainside and sat down. ³⁰Great crowds came to Him, bringing the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute and many others, and laid them at His feet; and He healed them. ³¹The people were amazed when they saw the mute speaking, the crippled made well, the lame walking and the blind seeing. And they praised the God of Israel.*

- How did the crowd in Decapolis know about Jesus?
 - Two sources
 - Jesus' earlier ministry

Matthew 4:25 *Large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and the region across the Jordan followed Him.*

- Demon-possessed man

Mark 5:18-20 *As Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon possessed begged to go with Him. ¹⁹Jesus did not let him, but said, "Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how He has had mercy on you." ²⁰So the*

man went away and began to tell in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him. And all the people were amazed.

- This man was an effective missionary!
- Jesus healed all kind of diseases that day
 - Interesting contrast to the worthless idols that populated Decapolis
- Matthew lets us know that they are indeed Gentiles because they praised the God of Israel
- The deaf man
 - He could not talk well (a speech impediment)—most likely congenital deafness (born that way or at least at a very young age)
 - All of his life
 - No communication, no education, no relationship
- His friends and family begged Jesus to lay hands on Him

³³*After He took him aside, away from the crowd, Jesus put His fingers into the man's ears. Then He spit and touched the man's tongue. ³⁴He looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him, "Ephphatha!" (which means, "Be opened!").*

- He took him aside, away from the crowd
 - Jesus' compassion
 - Crowd is crushing, all around Him
 - Jesus takes the time to give His full attention to the deaf man
 - One-on-one
- Jesus uses sign language!
 - There are no barriers in communication with Jesus

Note: Some Deaf are afraid that God cannot understand sign language or understand what they are saying because they are not saying it right. God does not require perfect grammar or polished sayings! He understands all communication, thoughts and intent!

- He knows what to sign and how to sign
 - We need to understand that this is not Signed Language, but probably home signs that this man has developed and tried to communicate with others
 - Jesus knows the man's heart and understands how to communicate with him
- Jesus signs 4 things

Note: All these signs are very visual—His hands, His face, and His actions.

- Jesus put His fingers in the man's ears
 - Ears—both sides
 - He is telling the man "I know you are deaf and I will be able to heal you."
- He spit (on His finger) and touched the man's tongue
 - Why spit?
 - Middle East believe that spit has healing properties—I am sure that the man has seen spit used in healing
 - He is telling the man, "I know you cannot speak well, and I will be able to heal you."
- He looked up to heaven
 - He is indicating that His healing is from heaven
- He sighed deeply
 - He is expressing His compassion and understanding
- *Ephphatha*
 - Aramaic—language spoken by the Jews in the area
 - Mark translates this so the Gentiles will know what that word means

³⁵*At this, the man's ears were opened, his tongue was loosened and he began to speak plainly.*

- Staggering miracle!
- A deaf person would not have any knowledge of language or phonetics

- For him to be successful, he would have had to have years of training
- **Example:** Speech Therapy—almost all Deaf people have experienced this
- Yet when he is healed, he has normal grasp of the language and speaks well!

³⁶Jesus commanded them not to tell anyone. But the more He did so, the more they kept talking about it.

- Jesus tells the deaf man who is now hearing and able to speak not to mention about this healing!
- That is an awesome restraint for this man—I know that I would have done the same as what this man has done
- He tells not just the man but to the crowd
- Do NOT tell anyone what has happened
 - Mark has mentioned this several times in the gospel
 - Why?
 - What about the demon possessed man in Mark 5? Jesus told him to tell everyone what the Lord has done for him?
 - Why the difference?
 - Difference 1: at the time when He healed the demon possessed man, He was just starting His ministry, and He wasn't as well known then

Luke 9:18-22 Once when Jesus was praying in private and His disciples were with Him, He asked them, "Who do the crowds say I am?" ¹⁹They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, that one of the prophets of long ago has come back to life." ²⁰"But what about you?" He asked. "Who do you say I am?" Peter answered, "The Christ of God." ²¹Jesus strictly warned them not to tell this to anyone. ²²And He said, "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and He must be killed and on the third day be raised to life."

- Difference 2: When He heals the deaf man, He does not want them to think of Jesus only as a miracle worker or a healer because the story has not been complete
- The gospel is based on the cross and resurrection and this has not happened yet
- This is why He asks them to be silent

³⁷People were overwhelmed with amazement. "He has done everything well," they said. "He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak."

- They were overwhelmed
- He does all things well
 - He did everything perfectly
 - All His healings—people healed perfectly
 - How? With a word
 - Mark is referring back to the time of Creation when God created everything with the word
- He makes the deaf hear and mute speak
 - mute—different word from verse 32
 - could hardly talk—*mogilalos*—rare Greek word, found only in **Isaiah 35** (in LXX)

Isaiah 35:5-6 Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. ⁶Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy. Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert.

Note: God has given out curses to different nations, including Judea in **Isaiah 34**; however, by **Isaiah 35**, God is now saying that these lands will heal and be fruitful. People will be healed. I believe this verse has two-fold purposes: 1) Through Jesus all people will be healed when they come to Him in faith—Jews, Gentiles, handicapped, etc and 2) this also refers to the Millennium when the lands and people will be healed from their physical ailments.

What is the application? Jesus is indeed the Savior of the world, of all kinds of people. We are to place our trust in Him alone. The Deaf and the deaf all over the world can place their faith in Jesus Christ. This is the gospel we present to them: that Jesus died for their sins, and for three days was placed in the tomb. On the third day He rose again. They need to believe and repent of their sins.