

A Deaf and Dumb Man Healed

Mark 7:31-37

Mark 7:31-37 - *“Again, departing from the region of Tyre and Sidon, He came through the midst of the region of Decapolis to the Sea of Galilee. ³²Then they brought to Him one who was deaf and had an impediment in his speech, and they begged Him to put His hand on him. ³³And He took him aside from the multitude, and put His fingers in his ears, and He spat and touched his tongue. ³⁴Then, looking up to heaven, He sighed, and said to him, “Ephphatha,” that is, “Be opened.”*

³⁵Immediately his ears were opened, and the impediment of his tongue was loosed, and he spoke plainly. ³⁶Then He commanded them that they should tell no one; but the more He commanded them, the more widely they proclaimed it. ³⁷And they were astonished beyond measure, saying, “He has done all things well. He makes both the deaf to hear and the mute to speak.”

Background Notes

The region of Tyre and Sidon is about 40-50 miles northwest of the Sea of Galilee, in what is now the country of Lebanon. This was where the Lord healed the Syro-Phoenician woman's daughter. Then instead of returning directly to Capernaum, He skirted around the entire Galilee area and came to the region of the Decapolis, on the southeast side of the Sea of Galilee. Perhaps He bypassed Capernaum and the west side of the Sea of Galilee in order to avoid further conflict with the Pharisees at this time.

The region of the Decapolis was so named because of the ten Greek cities that were in that region (*decapolis* means *ten cities*). This is the area where the demon-possessed man lived, the man from whom the Lord cast out a legion of demons, and then permitted the demons to enter a herd of pigs that drowned in the Sea of Galilee (Mark 5).

In verses 32-33, the cause of the man's speech impediment was likely his deafness, because he never learned to reproduce the sounds clearly. Most likely the Lord put His fingers into the man's ears and put saliva on his tongue to indicate to him that the Lord was going to heal him. After all, if the Lord had said, “I'm going to heal you,” the man would not have been able to hear Him. So the Lord was using “sign language” to indicate to the man that He was going to heal him. There was now a responsibility on the man's part to believe and respond in faith that the Lord would heal him. These physical signs, then, would encourage this man's faith.

Incidentally, a rabbi or teacher placing his saliva on a person's tongue in that day would not be considered as “gross” as it would be today. In Mark 8 the Lord placed His saliva on a man's eyes. And in John 9, the Lord mixed saliva with clay, placed it on the blind man's eyes, and then told him to go wash in the pool of Siloam.

In verse 34, *epphatha* is the Aramaic expression for “be open.” In the previous miracle, where the Syro-Phoenician woman’s daughter was healed, the Lord probably spoke Greek to her. Now He is speaking Aramaic. Most likely, the Lord Jesus was trilingual - He could speak Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic.

As He did so often, once again the Lord told the people not to spread the news about the miracle (v36). Why did the Lord do this? He did not want the people crowding to Him just because He did miracles. But once again the people spread the word. I wonder - would we do the same?

Doctrinal Points

1. Spiritual deafness and dumbness go together.

Physically, defective hearing and defective speaking often go together, because when you can’t hear, you never learn to speak properly. This is also true spiritually speaking, and certainly this is the meaning of this miracle. No, we’re not just making up a lesson here and trying to force it into the miracle! All the miracles of Jesus had spiritual meaning associated with them. Teaching is built right into the miracles. And the meaning of this miracle is that spiritual deafness and dumbness go together.

This was true of the nation of Israel. The Lord Jesus came to them, preaching the word of God, announcing that the kingdom of heaven was at hand, but Israel could not hear. Spiritually, they could not “speak” plainly because they had twisted and misinterpreted the Scripture. They were spiritually deaf and dumb.

This is true of every unbeliever, then and today. If you’re not a Christian, you’re spiritually deaf and dumb. You may speak a lot of religious talk or “God-talk,” but you don’t speak plainly if you don’t know the Lord because you’re spiritually deaf and dumb. Have you ever read the writings of a liberal theologian who doesn’t know the Lord? The writing is spiritually unintelligible, because they refuse to believe. Their spiritual ears are closed and they cannot speak plainly.

There’s a lesson for Christians here as well. If we don’t read God’s Word and open our ears to hear what God is telling us, we will not speak plainly. We will not “rightly divide the Word of Truth.” We will not communicate the Word of God properly. Spiritual deafness and dumbness go together.

The good news is that the man was healed. His ears were opened, and his speech impediment was healed. There’s coming a day when a sizeable portion of the nation of Israel will have their spiritual ears opened and their spiritual tongues unloosed. Read Romans 11. In that coming day, the nation of Israel will hear and speak the word of the Lord plainly and clearly.

The good news also is that any unbeliever today can be healed of spiritual deafness and dumbness, by turning to Christ in faith. Is it possible that you are spiritually deaf and dumb? You've been religious, you've always gone to church, you've gone through all the rituals and spoken the God-talk - but you've never really turned to the Lord Jesus Christ and accepted Him as your personal Savior? Your spiritual ears can be opened and your spiritual tongue unloosed if you turn in faith to the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior.

2. The Lord is tender in the way He deals with people.

Did you know that the Bible teaches that God is tender in the way He deals with people? The Bible teaches that God is very gracious in the way He deals with people, and He is merciful in the way He deals with people. And the Bible teaches that God is loving and caring in the way He deals with people. God's tender love and care for people is illustrated in this miracle.

Look once again at verse 33: "*He took him aside from the multitude.*" Why? Probably to shield the man, and to avoid embarrassment, the Lord took him away from the gawkers. And the Lord gave the man signs that He intended to heal him – just as a good doctor or dentist would explain every step to you. It's a tender and caring approach.

Two prophecies are fulfilled, at least partially, in this miracle. In Isaiah 35:5-6, we read this about the coming Messiah:

*Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,
And the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped.
Then the lame shall leap like a deer,
And the tongue of the dumb sing.*

Another prophecy that is fulfilled here is the tenderness of the Lord. In Isaiah 42:3, a prophecy about the perfect Servant, His tenderness is predicted:

*A bruised reed He will not break,
And smoking flax He will not quench;*

Have you ever noticed the tiny smoldering ember on the wick of a candle after the flame has been extinguished? It would take a lot of tender care to coax that smoldering wick back into flame! I think that's the idea here in the phrase, *smoking flax He will not quench.*

The Lord is tender. In the past, when I sometimes struggled in my faith, the Lord was not harsh and angry with me. He gently brought the right people alongside me at just the right time to help strengthen my faith. You can probably remember those times in your own life as well. The Lord is tender in the way He deals with people.

Practical Applications

1. Can you say, “He has done all things well?”

In verse 37 the people said, *“He has done all things well.”* All of us should be able to say that - but maybe, right now, you’re unable to say that. You know you’re a Christian and you’re thankful for that, but you don’t like the way the Lord has allowed your life to come at you. You’re angry, even bitter, because the Lord allowed something or someone to be taken from you. You’re disappointed because your job, or location, or even your marriage didn’t work out exactly the way you thought it would.

Are you blaming the Lord for something? Or can you say with all your heart right now, “He has done all things well”? Even the very little problems of life can throw you off stride, like the coffee wasn’t ready because the automatic timer failed, or you spilled something on your suit that just came from the cleaners. Can you say, even through the little annoyances of life, “He has done all things well?” We’ll say it in Heaven - even in reference to the tests and discipline that the Lord brought in to our lives. Why not say it now? **He has done all things well!**

2. Your lone testimony can change a whole community!

Where do we see that lesson? Go back to chapter 5, where the Lord healed the demon-possessed man. Mark 5:17-20: *“Then they began to plead with Him to depart from their region. And when He got into the boat, he who had been demon-possessed begged Him that he might be with Him. However, Jesus did not permit him, but said to him, “Go home to your friends, and tell them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He has had compassion on you.” And he departed and began to proclaim in Decapolis all that Jesus had done for him; and all marveled.”*

The man obeyed the Lord’s command - and he had been successful in his testimony! The attitude of the people had changed. Before, they wanted the Lord to leave. Now, when He arrived in the same area, they brought a man who was deaf and dumb to the Lord for healing. And in verse 37 the people said, “He has done all things well.”

What a change! How did this happen? It was through the lone testimony of that one man. This was a Gentile area, and yet his lone testimony changed the attitude of an entire community.

Your lone testimony can change the attitude of a whole community - the community of a campus if you’re a student, the community of your department at work, the community the neighborhood where you live.

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