

**Mark:
Hear Him Ye Deaf, His Praise Ye Dumb**

Mark 7:31-37

By Dr. Derek Thomas

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Now, turn with me if you would to the Gospel of Mark. It's been a couple of weeks since we were in Mark's gospel, and we're in chapter seven. And we come to the final story in chapter seven, the healing of a deaf man who is sometimes also described as being mute—has a speech impediment as a consequence of his deafness. It's Mark, chapter seven, beginning at verse 31 and reading through to the end of the chapter.

Let's look to God in prayer.

Gracious God and loving Heavenly Father, again we bow in Your presence. We acknowledge that we are a needy people. We need Your word, we need Your instruction; and we pray, Lord, by Your Spirit that You would open up the Scriptures to us now. Write Your word upon our hearts. Come, and comfort and encourage, and instruct, and rebuke, and drive us to

Christ. For Jesus' sake we ask it. Amen.

This is God's holy and inerrant word:

Again He went out from the region of Tyre, and came through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, within the region of Decapolis. And they brought to Him one who was deaf and spoke with difficulty, and they implored him to lay His hand on him. Jesus took him aside from the crowd by himself, and put his fingers into his ears, and after spitting, He touched his tongue with the saliva; and looking up to heaven with a deep sigh, He said to him, "Ephphatha!" that is, "Be opened!" And his ears were opened, and the impediment of this tongue was removed, and he began speaking plainly. And He gave them orders not to tell anyone; but the more He ordered them, the more widely they continued to proclaim it. And they were utterly astonished, saying, "He has done all things well; He makes even the deaf to hear, and the dumb to speak."

Amen. May God bless the reading of His holy and inerrant word.

I was thinking of a title for this sermon. It came to me this afternoon: “Do You Hear Me Now?” Think about it...Verizon Wireless....”Can you hear me now?”...and that's what we have here. It's a curious beginning to this story. The geography isn't quite right. Jesus has just been in Tyre—Tyre is on the northwest coast in what today would be Lebanon—and then He goes to Sidon, which is another twenty miles north, in order, as the text reads, to go to Galilee, which is south; and then to Decapolis, which is about twenty miles to the southeast of the Sea of Galilee. It would be like going to Hattiesburg from Jackson, via Yazoo City.

And Mark isn't telling you the whole story, you understand, and probably what's taking place here is perhaps six, seven, eight months of ministry in the northern regions of Tyre and Sidon, in the lower regions of what we would today call Lebanon. And Mark is simply now focusing on a story that probably occurred towards the end of that extended ministry. It is perhaps an incident that Peter, whom you'll remember, is probably telling much of the story of the gospel to Mark from his own experience of the ministry of Jesus. It was probably a story that Peter especially remembered.

Jesus' miracles are always more than just miracles. It's very important for us to understand that when we are reading the Gospels. John, in particular, tells us that the miracles were signs: signs of who Jesus was; signs of what Jesus had come to accomplish in terms of His redemptive mission in this world. And as we watch Jesus in performing yet another miracle here in restoring sound and hearing to a man who has never been able to hear, and, as a consequence, whose speech has been impaired, there are some peculiarities about what Jesus does here that are full of instruction for us.

This is another of those “Gentile stories”. We've just had one. It was a couple of weeks ago, so let me just remind you. In the section from verse 24 to verse 30, we have Jesus healing this Syrophoenician woman who comes on behalf, you remember, of her little daughter. The incident is important because she's a Gentile, and Mark is telling us something about the extended ministry of Jesus: that He'd come for the lost sheep of the tribes of Israel, but He'd also come for a wider purpose than that, a purpose that we will see unfolding as we traverse through the Gospels and into the Acts of the Apostles, and God raises up a Saul of Tarsus, the Apostle Paul, as the apostle to the Gentiles. And this incident here in the Decapolis region—it's the area, you remember, where the Gadarene (or the Garasene) demoniac and the incident, you remember, with the swine (or the pigs)—that's this location. And again, it's Gentile territory, telling us of this extended ministry of Jesus.

Well, let's look at what Jesus does here, and then draw some points of application for our help and benefit at the end of our study.

First of all, Jesus took this man aside. He took this man aside. There's a crowd of people, a great throng of people, and they bring this man to Jesus, and they are imploring Him—they're beseeching Him, they're begging Him to just lay His hand upon him, to heal him. Here's a man who has never heard a word, never heard the birds sing; never heard his mother's voice; never heard the sound of an instrument of music; never heard his own voice. And as a consequence, as you know, folk with hearing difficulties often speak with difficulty, unable to know quite where to pitch the voice at certain levels.

And here's this man. And what does Jesus do? He takes him aside by himself, perhaps into a house, closing the door. Whatever He's going to do with this man, He does it in private. What a lost opportunity! Imagine if this were today!

Imagine if this were one of those TV channels...imagine your favorite televangelist...has the gift of healing... and the big wide-screen, high-definition screen behind him... perhaps two—one on either side of a huge stage...with fixed cameras and mobile cameras...walking about the stage... close-ups of this man...doctors coming with testimonies as to the things they've tried to do to heal this man, all to no avail.

Some story from this man's mother, in tears, of all the years of strife and agony and difficulty, and the appeal to the crowd—and little logos on the bottom of the screen accepting Visa and Diner and American Express for a \$50 or \$100 donation to this ministry.

I'm not exaggerating! This is the world in which we live! This is modern evangelicalism. This is what it does. Thousands, tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands of people buy into this, send their Visa and Diner's cards....and Jesus takes him aside. Isn't that interesting? He does it in private.

Whatever He's doing here, the focus of His ministry is actually not this miracle. He will perform this miracle, it will be a sign; but He hasn't come just to do this. Jesus' miracles were very selective, and here and there He performs these miracles; but on occasions, you remember, He will walk away and He'll go elsewhere. He will get into a boat and cross to the other side of the sea, because that wasn't the main focus of His coming. He'd come to be our Savior. He'd come to die for our sins.

And such things as we see today, my friends, they cheapen our faith. And they cheapen the gospel, and they cheapen the Scriptures. And there are charlatans and hucksters, and we need to identify them as such.

Jesus took this man aside. It's very instructive.

Secondly, He did a peculiar thing. He put his finger in the man's ears, and then... you know, if the Bible didn't say it, I couldn't ...I couldn't pronounce these words. But, He spat. It's uncouth. It's not a Southern thing to spit. And then to dip His finger in the saliva and then touch the man's tongue...some of you have hives, even thinking about it! What's this all about? It's a curious thing. Jesus could just have said the word; He could have snapped His fingers; He could have done it at a thousand paces, and the man would have been restored of his hearing. So why is He doing this?

Well, the simplest explanation is probably the best one. He's speaking to this man in the only language this man could understand. There was no point in Him talking. He probably couldn't lip-read. He didn't know sign language, and as you can see, neither do I! So, He communicates to him in the only language this man can understand. He puts his fingers in his ears, as though He were saying to him, "I am going to do something with your hearing. I'm going to do something with your tongue, with your speech." Jesus is entering this man's world. The great King of Heaven, the Creator of the heavens and the earth, the sinless Lamb of God is coming down, He's identifying with this man's condition in all of its wretchedness, in all of its agony, in all of its angst. Jesus is coming right down to where this man is.

He looks up to heaven, the text says. Isn't that interesting? He looks up to heaven. It's code language, of course, for saying that Jesus is looking to His Heavenly Father. Now, you might think that Jesus could have healed this person, because He is Himself God, from the resources of His own deity, but Jesus isn't there in the capacity of His own deity. He's there as the servant of the Lord, and He looks to His Father to do this. He prays to His Heavenly Father. It's a wonderful example of the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. He isn't relying even on His own native strength for this. He's looking to His heavenly Father.

Well, my friends, there's surely a lesson there, that we ought to see right now. If the Lord Jesus needed to ask His Heavenly Father in order to accomplish this miracle, how much more do you and I need to beseech our Heavenly Father for strength to perform the daily tasks that God requires of us? Jesus has placed Himself in the role of one who is utterly dependent upon His Father in heaven. When the disciples came to Jesus and said, "Teach us to pray," He said, "Pray like this: 'Our Father, who art in heaven...'"

And then, you notice, He sighs. Verse 34 — looking up to heaven, He sighed. Isn't that a curious thing, that Jesus should sigh? It's an expression of human emotion, isn't it? That great out-breathing, that emptying of your lungs, where your muscles seem to go limp. It's an expression of almost sheer helplessness. Isn't it remarkable that Mark is recording here...and perhaps Peter is whispering in Mark's ear, "You know, before Jesus healed this man, this great sigh came out of His wounded heart." He's moved by this man's condition. He's moved by it. It offends Him, the fallen-ness of this world: what sin has done, the ravages of sin

in the lives of men and women. This ought not to be! This was not how Creation was meant to be, in all of its beauty and glory. Man was made to reflect something of the image of God, and the glory of God, and this poor wretch of a man who cannot hear and cannot speak properly...and Jesus is moved by it.

He's moved by it with a heart of infinite compassion. It ought not to be. Sin has ravaged the garden, and everything is out of shape. And you see what this says to us? I'm reminded of some words of the late Archbishop Ramsey: "In God there is no un-Christ-likeness at all." And you see what this is saying to us? That there's something about this response of Jesus that tells us this is something that's at the very heart, the very being of God Himself. God is like this. God is moved by our human condition.

There's a dear friend of ours tonight, he was always here. On a Sunday evening, he was always here with his Bible, a well-worn Bible, highlighted in so many colors it was like a rainbow. He was always asking me about Revelation, chapter three; always wanting to check whether I agreed with his interpretation of Revelation 3:20. And he lies in hospital, with all the ravages of human pain and extremity, all of the consequences of the fall. And we're moved by it, but we're not as moved as the heart of Jesus is moved by it.

My friends, I wonder tonight if you've come bowed down with a load of care, a burden too heavy for you to carry. And let me say this evening, if you get nothing else, get this...get this: that the heart of Jesus is moved by that. He sighs. He sighs.

You know, I was looking at *Trinity Hymnal*, and there are 74 hymns in the *Trinity Hymnal* that begin with the letter "O". It's a sigh: *O for a Closer Walk with God; O For a Heart to Praise My God; O For a Thousand Tongues to Sing; O Happy Day That Fixed My Choice; O Jesus, King Most Wonderful; O the Deep, Deep Love of Jesus; O Worship the King, All Glorious Above.*

I can remember as a young, very young Christian, 1972 or so, this very tall lass from Northern Ireland, an Ulster lass with a big smile...and I remember her coming up to me one day in class with a sticker, and she put it on my jacket. And it said "Smile, God Loves You." And that's true, in a sense.

But there's another aspect to Christianity, too, and you know, this church tonight is not a "No Sigh Zone." It's not a No Sigh Zone, because it's appropriate at times, it's the Christian thing to do, it's the Jesus thing to do to sigh at the consequences of sin and the ravages of the fall.

And then, He spoke. And He spoke using this word that's transliterated into Roman letters for us in our English Bibles, but it's actually an Aramaic word. It's not even a Hebrew word, it's an Aramaic word reflecting, probably, the language that was customarily spoken in this region of the Decapolis. It means "be

opened.” He puts His fingers in this man's ear, and spits and puts his saliva on this man's tongue, and then He utters these words: “Be opened!” I wonder if the man heard those words. Don't you think he heard them? Because there is an immediacy to what Jesus does. No sooner had Jesus uttered those words than recovery, restoration change—a miracle takes place within the brain, within the head of this man. It's an astonishing thing. And he begins to speak, and he begins to speak plainly.

Now, it's beyond my ability to describe it to you. Ask the medics here, but a man who has never heard is incapable, probably, of understanding the sounds that he now begins to hear, and he has to be trained to understand what sounds actually are. But not in this case. It's immediate. There is a restoration that has the spark of divinity about it; something God-like has taken place in this man. The One who could speak to winds and waves and say, “Peace; be still,” is here; the One who could stand outside the tomb of Lazarus, who had been dead for three days, and in those marvelous words of the King James, “Behold, he stinketh!” ... “Lazarus, come forth!” This man is standing before Him now. He speaks the word. That's all. That's all He does. He speaks the word, and this man is able to hear and he's able to speak.

And then, Jesus commands them to say nothing. Isn't that the most curious thing of all? He's just done this spectacular miracle, one worthy of being syndicated to all the channels on television, and Jesus says don't say a word about this. And the more He tries to do it, the more they begin to speak about it.

It's not a new thing, of course, in the Gospels; twice in the opening chapter and once again in chapter three, the demons are told to keep silent. And after four of the miracles that Jesus performs He says the same. This one here, the leper in chapter one, the raising of the dead girl in chapter five, and once more in the next chapter with a blind man, He bids them keep silent.

There was a theory that began just over a hundred years ago, in 1901. A New Testament scholar by the name of Reid suggested that what you have here is the difference between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith; that as the years went by, the decades went by, the centuries went by, the church made more of Christ than had been done in the past. And some way of explaining that needs to be fabricated in the Gospels, and what you have in the Gospel of Mark is the fabrication of the church, and Jesus now saying, “You're to keep quiet about these miracles.” Well, we don't accept any of that nonsense. We believe this to be the infallible word of our God. And what Jesus is doing here is trying to prevent the disciples, and especially others, from an hysterical response that would make Him into some kind of political figure. He'd come not primarily as a miracle worker; He'd come as the Savior of sinners.

Now there are three things that I want us to see by way of application.

The first is in verse 37, and it's the reaction of the crowd. And the crowd are amazed. They are amazed, because there is no category in which we can put Jesus. Of all the categories of the things that we experience in this world, Jesus defies them all. There's something astonishing about Him. There's something wonderful about Him. He is the God of heaven who has become incarnate, and what they are glimpsing, do you see, is something of His innate glory, His transcendent quality. Let's fall down tonight again at the feet of Jesus, and let's be, in the words of the hymn, "lost in wonder, love, and praise."

Secondly, there's an allusion in this passage to something that we find in Isaiah 35. In verse 32 a somewhat rare word is used to describe this man's inability to speak properly. It could be rendered "stammerer." And it's such a rare word that when you find it in the Old Testament, alarm bells start to go off. And it's found in Isaiah 35. Isaiah 35 is a beautiful description of what will occur when the Servant of the Lord will come into this world, and one of the things that will occur, Isaiah says, is that the deaf will hear and the mute will be able to speak, and a highway will be erected, will be made in the desert for our God. And what you have here is just a little foretaste, just a little glimpse that Jesus comes into the world in order to re-create that which has fallen, in order to restore the consequences of the fall in Eden. He's come to make a new creation, and ultimately a new heavens and a new earth. And there'll be no deafness, and there'll be no muteness, and there'll be no pain, and there'll be no suffering. There'll be no cancer. There'll be no heart disease. There'll be no crying. And here is just a little glimpse, a little foretaste of the work that Jesus has ultimately come to this world to do. He's come to restore us in Himself, so that if any man be in Christ, we are a new creation. And that new creation has already begun within us, but "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man what God hath prepared for those that love Him."

"Lord, I was deaf; I could not hear the thrilling music of Thy voice.
But now I hear Thee and rejoice, And all Thine uttered words are dear."

God has opened your ears, my friends, in the gospel, so that I can even sense from the way your facial muscles are responding to some of these words that there is an echo in the chambers of your hearts to the truth of what is being spoken here in the gospel, in these words. God has done that. He's opened your ears to hear the words of Jesus.

Ah, but my friends, this is just the beginning. This is just the beginning. It's as though Jesus is already saying to you, "Can you hear Me now? Can you hear Me now?" Can you hear the voice of Jesus in the gospel calling you, reassuring you of the forgiveness of sins by faith in Jesus Christ; promising and reassuring that having begun a good work, He will complete it unto the day of Jesus Christ?

Do you see what Mark says right at the very end of this passage? It's something that they say. They were astonished beyond measure, saying, "He has done all

things well.” Do you know where else those words occur in the Bible? In the Greek translation of Genesis, chapter one and verse thirty-one. When God had made the heavens and the earth, “...and behold it was very good.” It was beautiful. It was a thing of beauty and glory. And you know, that's what these people are saying. They're echoing. They can see the hand of the Creator fashioning and re-fashioning this fallen creation.

We're growing old, you and I. You know that. We're heading, unless Jesus comes again, for a tomb. We're heading for decay. But you know, my friends, that's not the gospel, is it? Because the gospel reassures us that one day these bodies will rise again from the dead and be reunited with our souls, and forever be with the Lord.

“Finish, then, Thy new creation; pure and spotless let us be.
Let us see Thy great salvation, perfectly restored in Thee.
Changed from glory into glory, till in heaven we take our place;
Till we cast our crowns before Him,
Lost in wonder, love, and praise.”

Let's pray.

Father, we thank You for Your word and for this beautiful, beautiful story and a glimpse of what You ultimately will do in the new heavens and in the new earth. Keep us persevering; keep us persevering, even to the end, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Please stand, receive the Lord's benediction.

Grace, mercy and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

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