

## **Mark 7:31-37. Sept 12 2021. One man gains hearing; we gain a lifetime of application**

*Children asked to participate in first part of sermon here...*

Miracles are also called “signs.” And signs, of course, tell us something – they point to something we are to see or point out information for us to know. The miracles of Jesus serve as signs to point to who He is. And they point out what He is like. This account, with its miracle, does that. It shows Jesus’ power as God. What else does it show about Jesus besides His power? His love.

Maybe a little less noticed aspect of this Bible account is: it also shows Jesus carrying out His work of teaching. That’s what He did with this man who couldn’t hear and who was brought to Him. He taught him first – before doing the miracle.

Well, how could He teach the man if the man couldn’t hear? Do you *see* the answer? I’m kinda giving you a hint by the way I’m emphasizing *see*.

Let’s do an example of our own to show the kind of teaching that we *see* here.

If there was a person here who couldn’t hear, is there a way you could still tell them something – teach them? [Paper & pencil. Marker board & marker. Computer, tablet or smart phone.] But what about before electronic devices were invented, and before marker boards existed, and before there was paper as we know it when the earlier materials for writing (like papyrus) were so expensive that the average person wouldn’t have them. You could still... make signs – where you communicate with your hands and with your expressions.

Let’s try an example of that together. If the person (who couldn’t hear) looked thirsty, say even dangerously thirsty and hot, what could you do to show him that you see what he needs and to offer him a place where he could get some water? [Point to him. Motion to mouth. Act like drinking. Make the motion of a person walking. Then, getting up - motion for him to follow you. Repeat: pointing to him, making walking motion, then drinking motion.]

Without using words Jesus showed the man – in Mark ch.7 – that He understood and how He was going to help. Jesus placed his fingers to the man’s ears. What was He showing him? He would fix his ears. Jesus then made a spitting motion [can you picture him doing that downward]; so He made a motion with His own mouth / tongue, and then He touched the man’s tongue. What was He showing him? He would do something with the man’s tongue: fix it; make it function.

There’s one more important sign Jesus gives. “He looked up to heaven and sighed (or groaned).” Jesus with all of these motions was teaching the man. Jesus was showing the man: this help, which He would give him, was from above. Then, Jesus – God the Son – commanded: “Be open.” And He made the man’s ears able to hear, and the man’s tongue able to speak.

What does this teach *us* about Jesus? You see Jesus’ power and His love as he heals this man. And it points us to an answer to this question: to whom should we turn in our need? To Jesus.

Jesus uses his power to heal each one of you too, and me also. What’s Jesus’ greatest act of healing? He fixes our hearts. He washes away each of your sins. Mine too. Our God has shown us: this healing comes only from above, from heaven. God the Son – Jesus – came from heaven, and He lived & He died in our place. And He rose from the dead. That’s how much Jesus loves each one of us. God, through His good news – like through the truth of the Bible we hear today –, teaches us to trust Him as our Savior.

*If children have come forward, they are asked to return to seats with their family. Hymn verse sung.*

I love this account on so many levels, for so many different lessons it brings to light for us. We might skip right over a detail that’s kinda caught right between all the big action. We see there is a lot of weighty details packed in here. We may think we have just enough time to spend on catching them. But what about the topic of time itself? How weighty is that? What a significant quality and truth, when you think about it, is captured in this historical detail:

“Jesus took the man aside.”

He gave the man His time. He gave him personal, specific – yes, specialized care. He took the time that showed concern, understanding, and compassion.

I wonder what amount of opportunities today to show care and offer help start in a similar way, where someone takes the time to step aside with someone else. “Let's get a cup of coffee,” “Could I come visit you?”, “Have a seat & tell me what's going on for you.” Then... personal, specific, individual care is shown.

“Jesus took the deaf man away from the crowd.” So think about the circumstances of this individual, the difficulties that would come along with lacking the ability to hear. I wonder how difficult it is for an individual you can't hear to be amidst a crowd with the commotion it brings. Even for those of us whose hearing is sound, we can understand how distracting, maybe even unsettling, crowds can be. What about for someone who can't hear, and because of that understands less of what is going on? Jesus took the man aside. Then He addressed the man, as we discussed a moment ago.

Just think of this from the personal view of the man. Try to Put yourself into the mind of that man. Swimming in silence. Ears stopped up. But eyes wide open. Your eyes looking into our Savior's eyes. Then watching as Jesus lifts his hands to touch your ears. Then as those 30-some-year-old hands drop away, you watch His mouth move. But you realize He's not trying to say anything, as He shifts attention away from His mouth.

He clearly understands your problem. He is even speaking your language. Then He gives that one more – culminating – sign: looking up. Then looking back at you... He speaks. And you hear! And you are able to speak – just like that! In a moment, everything changed. At His command. He has healed you! What power! What love! For you.

“HE has done everything well!”

What a succinct confession of faith for us to take up! “He has done everything well ... for us.” That's true even when we – or those we love – face ongoing disabilities with our bodies. “HE has done everything well” is not a belief that our Lord will heal every disease now. He hasn't promised that. That will come in the End.

His personal care? He has promised that. That promise drove Him all the way to the cross. He heals our greatest disease by the forgiveness of sins he has secured for us. [pause]

People in the crowd this day in Mark ch.7 might not have understood as much about Jesus' identity as you and I understand. But they understood the care He gave this day to the deaf man. They marveled at the power of his word “Ephphatha.” Yet when the same One gives them words of instruction not to speak about this, they don't listen. Wait, isn't this the same one about whom they acknowledge “He has done everything well”?

Before we get too far into analyzing the disconnect they exhibit, ask yourselves: don't we do the same? I mean: times where we fail to listen to the one about whom we know “He does everything well.”

When? Take a moment, and evaluate: When have you been tempted – when have you fallen – to turning a deaf ear to words from the One who has done everything well? [long pause]

Jesus, this day, simply says: Don't tell anyone. And on this occasion, we don't hear him give an explanation why. That fact in itself can teach us. Sometimes our God gives us words of instruction, and there is no explanation of “why.” And we are left to simply listen and trust what He, our Lord, has told us.

I say “simply listen and trust.” But I acknowledge that's not always so simple for us. Sometimes it is a battle. Are you on the same page with me? Have you felt the challenge of this too? I paused a few moments ago for each of us to think of the times we have been tempted or have failed to listen to the Lord. Did anything on your list involve times “why”s led to doubt or challenge something God has said?

Our reason wants to flex its muscles and work out “why.” And there's nothing wrong with looking for explanations, or even calling to God in prayer with our “why”s. Where we get into trouble is if we listen to our

sinful self's coaxing: "if there is no "why" explained, then why should we have to listen!" If we demand to know when we don't get an answer to "why," the sinful self can suggest all sorts of misguided directions to go from there. Like, "How can you be sure God's decision is really best," or "It's not fair to leave us guessing; if He doesn't explain Himself better, why should you listen," or "is there something He is hiding from us / holding back from us?"

You and I acknowledge about Jesus, our Savior: He has done everything well. He has given us evidence of How Perfect His understanding is. He has given us evidence of How His Love is never-failing. We enjoy His love; we trust in His power at work for us. Everything we have seen about Him, everything that has been revealed from Him, it is all good. Not once has a promise of His ever failed. So why balk, complain, doubt, challenge when there is something unseen, or that is hidden in God's infinite wisdom?

Look back with me, and join your heart to mine in offering a prayer:

Forgive us, Lord, for the times we've turned a deaf ear to your Word. No excuses. No rationalizing away the guilt with "here's why" statements. As if there is some defense of our failures to listen to You. We were wrong. We know it. Thank you for calling us back. Thank you for the full, free forgiveness that you give us. Thank you for your Word of truth.

Our prayer, walking forward from today, is: Give us ears to hear, Lord, even when we don't understand the "why" behind your Words. When our reason begins to think something else sounds, well – more reasonable... lead us to trust you, and listen to your Word. That simple. Lead us to childlike trust which you so often speak of. Give us a faith that takes you at your Word, for your Word is truth. And it brings us peace. Continue to give us that peace. Help us guard our hearts against apathy, so that we don't ever take our hearing of your Word for granted!

Then we will live in eagerness of the day we'll hear your final command, dear Jesus... when with a mighty word of "Ephphatha" you'll open every grave, and the ears of those stopped up by death will hear again – they will open to hear your voice. We, your people through the faith you've gifted us, will rise to life. And... we will each see you face-to-face.

Until that day, keep our ears ever open to hear your Word! Direct our tongues to speak of you, and the peace that comes from you! Transform our hearts to be ever more aligned with your heart, so that as we see the kind of care you gave to this man – and all of us – individually, we are moved to take the moments "to step aside" with others and show them compassion and love which mirror your love shown to us. Amen.