

Mark 7:31-37

“Can you hear me now?”

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I. **Introduction**

It’s been a few weeks since we were in Mark and so I’ll review briefly by saying that the Holy Spirit guided Mark into placing these two miracles as an illustration of what Jesus was conveying to His disciples at the time that the two miracles took place as well as there importance in what Mark wanted to demonstrate to his Roman readers. At issue to the Roman readers was the superior benefits of Jesus’ administration when compared to the traditions of the religious establishment as well as the Roman Emperor. Such demonstrations continually emphasize the radical difference of Jesus compared to all others in power and authority where He is always about others especially those that would for any other human inspire our personal prejudices. In verses 24-30 we saw this demonstrated when Jesus and His disciples moved to Tyre and Sidon and now we will look at in verses 31-37 as Jesus heals the deaf and mute man in the gentile area of Decapolis. Though this miracle is only recorded by Mark it’s appeal is far more reaching than just this one gospel as not only for the fact that it was again across racial barriers but also because of the difficulty of reaching this man as seen by Jesus’ application of a strange methodology to implement his cure. The far reaching success of this healing is fully appreciated unless we turn to Matthew 15 where we are told that Jesus actions in

this gentile region garnered praise to the God of Israel. The area of Decapolis or “ten cities” was so influenced by Roman culture that it was known as “*Rome away from Rome*”. This man not only had the barriers of racial ramifications he also presented a case that had limits do to the extreme difficulty of natural communication. He was deaf, and as such could not hear Jesus words. The evidence of the severity of his affliction is seen in the extreme methods Jesus employed through sight and touch. Even Jesus prayer is changed to communicate as we see in verse 34 that the word in the Greek for “*sigh*” is the same word connected to prayer in Roman’s 8:23 and 26. Yet though this man could not hear Jesus speak all of creation could, and at His command obeyed giving this man what he had never had the gift of communication.

II. Vs. 31-32 The most difficult person to reach

Vs. 31 The 2nd story begins by describing a journey that apart from knowing the area and continued racial prejudices would not garner any interest. Jesus was in the north in an area of modern day Lebanon and according to the text he was going to go south to the region of Decapolis which at that time was right on the Sea of Galilee and extended into what is now modern day Jordan. But the story tells us that Jesus did so by first going north before He went south. As such we see Jesus deliberately continuing His ministry to the Gentiles as He avoided Jewish territory and instead traveled only through the gentile areas until reaching the Gentile region in the south called Decapolis or ten Greek cities on the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee, this would be in modern day Syria and not the normal route taken from Tyre and Sidon. Many scholars believe that this was not a few day journey but rather that Jesus took up to 8 months in this region. In the next chapter

we will find that after these many months ministering exclusively to the gentiles that Peter will conclude in verse 29 that Jesus was the the messiah. I believe that it was Jesus example during these months that spoke a greater truth to Peter than the miracles accomplished in Israel among the Jews. When you examine the amount to recorded time Jesus spent among the gentiles during His 3 ½ years of ministry you realize that 1/3 of it was among them. Yes, Jesus went to the Jews first but He did not neglect the gentiles as He fulfilled the fact that God had uniquely placed Israel to be a light among them. The longevity in this region was a further lesson for His disciples that God is not a respecter of persons.

Vs. 32 I suppose that no handicap is a pleasant circumstance but at this time this condition had far more stigma placed upon it than blindness. Those afflicted with blindness didn't bare the same social pain as dead the deaf and mute. First they were unaware of the impatient and condescending stairs. Then there was the awareness that people who were deaf and mute were considered stupid because of their disability. The condition of this man was desperate he was deaf but apparently not from birth as he could speak but that speech was further hindered by the fact that he had speech impediment, so in truth he had two disabilities that adversely affected His life. Here was a man shut out from life, he couldn't hear or communicate. He couldn't hear the truth or ask questions, living in a silent world of isolation all the while being around people. This by all practical physical situation would be the most difficult person to reach: A gentile, unable to hear or speak!

III. Vs. 33-34 A strange cure

Vs. 33-34 Mark records for us five things that Jesus did to minister to this man that were quite unusual for those of us not afflicted with this man's handicaps.

1. "*He took him aside*": Though this seems to be a minor thing, I suggest that to this man it may have been the biggest thing he had experienced since becoming deaf. The compassion Jesus exhibited to take this gentile man aside privately, away from the gawking crowds, demonstrates to this man that Jesus well understood his handicaps. Just like today compassion and caring were not in vogue but they were always present in our Lord. We see it often before the healing that Jesus was "*moved with compassion*". One author put it well when he wrote concerning Jesus that, "*There is no place where earth's sorrows are more felt than in heaven!*" The only conclusion we can make is that with Jesus, **His compassion was a key ingredient to His healing for the hurting and suffering.** This man couldn't hear Jesus but this first method spoke more to him than anything he had encountered in years. And the crowds around this man would have known the sensitivity Jesus was using to treat his condition. They didn't hear Jesus yell at him as some might have tried, instead he took him aside privately. The next three things Jesus did was to awaken this man's faith as He needed to communicate to him what He was going to do for him.
2. "*Put His fingers in his ears*": Jesus never recoiled from laying His hands of hurting humanity. ***True compassion is not just what we FEEL, it requires us to reach out and touch!*** But why this method, what was the purpose? I believe that by so doing Jesus was indicating that He knew that he was deaf and that He

intended to enable him to hear again. It was this touch that demonstrated this to a deaf man.

3. *“He spat and touched his tongue”*: Spit in that day was thought to hold medicinal value and Jesus wetting his fingers and touched the man’s tongue would have indicated that He was going to lose his tongue so that he could speak and communicate again.
4. *“He looked up up into heaven, He sighed”*: Jesus looked into heave and sighed to indicate where this healing was going to come from and breathed out to indicate that it was from the invisible agency of the power of God.
5. *“And said to him “Ephphatha” that is “be opened”*: And when Jesus looked into his eyes He knew that the man understood spoke the Hebrew word “be opened” to indicate that the invisible power was none other than the Hebrew God!

IV. Vs. 35-37 The actions of God verse’s the God who acts

Vs. 35-37 And immediately he began to hear and speak perfectly. Jesus then told ***them*** not to speak of it but the more He commanded them the more widely they spoke about it. There is a change in pronouns as Jesus had been dealing with the deaf man until here but now he speaks to the multitudes but the more He told them the more they published it. Jesus didn’t want the moniker of miracle worker as He was and is far more than this. People are far to blind as they can only see **the actions of God** instead of **the God who acts!** Yes, He does all things well, but it is because of who He is.

Yet I think that some of this methodology may also serve a greater purpose than the healing of a deaf and mute man 3 thousand years ago. Alfred Edersheim wrote many wonderful books and one of my favorites is the “*Life and times of Jesus the Messiah*”. His perspective is that this healing serves as a great blue print on how to reach out to a pagan lost world through 4 methods Jesus employed to heal this deaf and mute gentile.

1. **Looking up to heaven**: First and fore most if we are to reach a lost world we will need to overcome our sense of “prayerlessness”. We will need a more and greater dependence upon the Father as Jesus always demonstrated. Remember that Jesus look to heaven was in the midst of a very busy hands on ministry. We are far to intent on doing good and being busy that we neglect the most important part to accomplish His purposes for His glory, prayer. If we are to be effective to return sight to the blind and hearing to the deaf we will need to be “looking up to heaven” to do so.
2. **He took him aside**: As already mentioned this a visible demonstration of compassion. Such compassion is a part of any work of reaching people, we won’t be moved until we are moved with compassion. We need what Jeremiah wrote of with regards to his own heart in 9:1, “*Oh that my head were waters, and my eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people.*”
3. **His touch**: we are told of this strange remedy but the common denominator is that Jesus touched him. With out a word spoken Jesus in full view of His church, the disciples, reached out and touched a man that they would never have thought to

have done so. It didn't matter what the person's ailment they all received a touch from Jesus. That touch said so much as it said, "*I'm with you, I feel your pain, I care about your predicament and I'm going to do something more than just express my sympathies.*" His touch is akin to Isaiah's words, "*Here I am send me*" as they demonstrate a willingness to be a part of the solution and not just a mere mention of the problem!

4. ***His word:*** I love the fact that the first thing this man heard was the words "Be opened". I also see the proper order of this response to reach a lost world. We often become frustrated in our attempts to reach people because we have been speaking to them the word and they are not "OPEN". But it could be that they are not open because we have skipped lessons 1-3 and it is our lack of openness that has caused theirs!

I pray these lessons have spoken to your heart in reaching a lost world!