

Sermon for September 8, 2024 – 16th Sunday after Pentecost

Mark 7:31-37 (EHV)

Theme: **Jesus takes us aside...**

- 1) To heal us physically.
- 2) To heal us spiritually.

³¹Jesus left the region of Tyre again and went through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, within the region of the Decapolis. ³²They brought a man to him who was deaf and had a speech impediment. They pleaded with Jesus to place his hand on him. ³³Jesus took him aside in private, away from the crowd. He put his fingers into the man's ears. Then he spit and touched the man's tongue. ³⁴After he looked up to heaven, he sighed and said, "Ephphatha!" (which means "Be opened!") ³⁶Jesus gave the people strict orders to tell no one, but the more he did so, the more they kept proclaiming it. ³⁷They were amazed beyond measure and said, "He has done everything well. He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak!"

Did you know that around 2.4 billion people worldwide call themselves Christian? Many of them are going through tough times, facing monumental challenges, and even being persecuted. With all the prayers being sent up to God's throne at any given moment, do we think it's okay to bother the Lord with our small problems, like a mild cold or a general feeling of sadness: expecting Him to give our requests His full attention and answer for His Mercy's sake?

The answer is a resounding yes! Not because we're so important or our problems are so dire. The answer is yes, because that's the kind of undeserved love the Lord has for us. You are not just another molecule of water in the vast ocean of humanity. You're a precious soul that Jesus purchased with His precious blood. You're the Lord's adopted child, cleansed from all sin and sealed with the Holy Spirit at your baptism. God the Father is your Father, Jesus is your brother, and the Holy Spirit is your dear friend. As such, the Triune God gives you his full attention - even when He's busy managing all the other affairs of this world.

Let us consider Jesus' personal care for his beloved followers, under the theme: **Jesus takes us aside:** 1) To heal us physically. 2) To heal us spiritually.

Part One: To heal us physically.

Our text begins: *³¹Jesus left the region of Tyre again and went through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, within the region of the Decapolis. ³²They brought a man to him who was deaf and had a speech impediment. They pleaded with Jesus to place his hand on him.*

I find it curious that this deaf man was *brought* to Jesus. Deaf people could easily get around on their own, so why did his friends and family bring him instead of sending him? Maybe he asked his friends because he was afraid his speech impediment would stop Jesus from understanding his request. Or maybe his friends brought the deaf man because he felt unworthy of asking Jesus for

healing. Many people in the ancient world believed that disabilities were God's punishment for sin - even though that belief clearly wasn't biblical! I can imagine the deaf man wondering why the Messiah would help someone like him who lived under sin's curse.

Now, let me be clear: we can't say for sure that "feelings of unworthiness" were what stopped the deaf man from going to Jesus on his own. I just mention it as a possibility because I've met many people in my ministry who have felt that way. Not only is that the case, but I've felt that way myself. Who am I that God should care for me? And yet, he does! The friends of this deaf man believed it so much that they didn't just "tell" the deaf man about Jesus; they brought him to Jesus.

Brothers and sisters in Christ: be like the friends of the deaf man in our sermon text and bring your sick and burdened loved ones to Jesus. How can we do that? First, let's pray for them. Sometimes people are too weak or scared to pray for themselves because the devil plagues them with all kinds of feelings of doubt, shame, and guilt. It is especially at times like these that you need to be like the friends of the deaf man and plead to Jesus on their behalf. And, when opportunities arise, tell them about Jesus and his love. Ask them if your pastor may visit them at home or in the hospital - not to take your place in sharing Jesus with them, but in addition to it.

Our text continues: ³³*Jesus took him aside in private, away from the crowd. He put his fingers into the man's ears. Then he spit and touched the man's tongue.* ³⁴*After he looked up to heaven, he sighed and said, "Ephphatha!" (which means "Be opened!")*

Let's take a closer look at what Jesus did, step by step. First, notice that Jesus was nothing like Benny Hinn. Who's Benny Hinn, you might ask? Well, he's a false teacher who claims to have the special power to heal people on God's behalf. He puts on big shows in front of enormous crowds, taking money from people in Christ's name. And guess what? He dishonours Jesus by doing all that. Is that how Jesus operated: only healing people in front of enormous crowds to make himself famous and rich? No way! The first thing Jesus did was take the man aside *in private, away from the crowd*. Can you imagine how much that meant to the deaf man? Jesus cared about him so much that he stopped teaching the crowds to care for him one-on-one. That act reminds me of Jesus' parable of the shepherd, who left his 99 sheep in an open field to search and care for one lost sheep.¹ That's exactly what Jesus does here with the deaf man.

Dear Christian, take heart in this: the personal love Jesus showed to the deaf man is the same love He has for you. You're not just another face in the crowd of 8 to 9 billion people on Earth. No, Jesus knows and loves you personally. You can go to Him anytime with any problem, and He'll give you his full attention. He listens to your prayers better than you can express them!

Does that mean He'll instantly fix your problem? No. Like a wise counsellor, Jesus might help you slowly so you can learn and grow through what you experience. But don't let that make you doubt whether He heard your prayers. The Almighty King of heaven and earth promises in the Bible to give you nothing less than his full attention as you come to Him in faith. Isn't that amazing?

After taking the deaf man away from the crowd, Jesus communicated to him what he was going to do. He put his fingers in the man's ears, thereby signalling that he was about to unplug them. Then Jesus spit on His finger and touched the man's tongue - maybe to show that the words that

would heal the man's speech problem and deafness would come from Jesus' mouth. Finally, Jesus looked up to heaven – showing the man from where his help was coming – and said with a deep sigh: "*Ephphatha!*" (which means, "*Be opened!*")

³⁵*Immediately the man's ears were opened, his tongue was set free, and he began to speak plainly.* There's real power in Jesus' words. When He speaks, things happen. He used His actions to explain how He would heal the man, and then He spoke the word that accomplished it: proving that He's the Messiah.

If Jesus has the power to make the deaf hear, then he certainly has the power to help us when we are sick or in need. Now, the healing He provides us may not be as dramatic as what He did for the deaf man, but He still does it. I know this personally. When I was 4 years old, I had meningitis so bad that I temporarily went blind. The doctors at the hospital worried whether I would survive the night, so my parents prayed for me. The next morning the doctor said I was alive, but warned my parents that I might have brain damage. My parents prayed for me and here I stand today.

I'm sure many of you have your own stories of how God healed you or a loved one in some unexpected way. Maybe the healing wasn't extraordinary to the casual observer, but you know it was a miracle. Some people might say you were just lucky, or that the doctors did their job. But we Christians know that our healing and health are never a matter of luck. Jesus is always behind the scenes, working through the medical community or other natural means, to give us healing. Yes, every physical healing, from a cold that runs its course to cancer that disappears inexplicably - is from our gracious Lord who deeply cares for us. Not only does He address our physical needs, but He addresses our greatest spiritual need: healing from sin.

Part Two: He heals us spiritually

Our text continues: ³⁶*Jesus gave the people strict orders to tell no one, but the more he did so, the more they kept proclaiming it.*

Have you ever wondered why Jesus asked his followers not to tell anyone about the miracle? Didn't he want everyone to know that he was the promised Christ who came to take away the sins of the world? Yes, he did, and that's why he gave them the order not to tell others about the miracles. You see, people were so caught up in what Jesus was doing that they often missed what he was saying. Most people viewed Jesus as a powerful prophet and miracle worker who made them feel good, but nothing more. Only Peter and Jesus' other disciples believed and confessed the truth: he was the Christ, the Son of God, sent to the world to give us real spiritual healing. That's what Jesus wanted people to understand about his mission, and that's what we should understand too. Let us, therefore, consider how the deaf man's healing serves as a good illustration of how Jesus spiritually heals us from sin and unbelief.

Like the deaf man, we were born with a problem: we were born spiritually deaf to God. Sin and unbelief blocked our ears, preventing us from accepting God's Word. Thus, we began our lives: reluctant to go to Jesus.

But then someone brought us to Jesus. Maybe it was your parents who brought you to the baptismal font as an infant, or a dear friend who told you the good news about Jesus. Regardless of how it happened, someone brought you to Jesus and he pitied you. He took you away from the crowd of this world and opened your ears with His powerful Word. He showed you how He paid for all your sins on the cross, how He loves you, and how, through faith in this good news, you have everlasting life.

Jesus spoke his great “Ephphatha” to us when He said: “Believe in me.” At that moment we could hear Jesus speak, understand him, and follow him. And Jesus not only opened our ears to the good news of his salvation, but He also opened our hearts to receive and believe it. Not only that, but also opened our mouths and loosed our tongues so that we can tell others everything that Jesus has done for us.

And Jesus doesn’t want us to be quiet about what He has done. No, now He commands Christians to boldly share the good news of His salvation with others. While it is certainly fine to rejoice in the physical blessings and miracles God has done in your life, don’t just talk about them. Instead, be more excited about your spiritual healing, and how God offers it to everyone through faith in His Son. Tell people how Jesus forgives all sin and grants everyone everlasting peace with God through faith in Him.

Yes, be like the friends of the deaf man and bring others to Jesus, just as you were brought to him. Amen.

¹ Cf. Luke 15:4-6