

"31 Again He went out from the region of Tyre, and came through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, within the region of Decapolis. 32 They *brought to Him one who was deaf and spoke with difficulty, and they *implored Him to lay His hand on him. 33 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; 34 and looking up to heaven with a deep sigh, He *said to him, "Ephphatha!" that is, "Be opened!" 35 And his ears were opened, and the impediment of his tongue was removed, and he began speaking plainly. 36 And He gave them orders not to tell anyone; but the more He ordered them, the more widely they continued to proclaim it. 37 They were utterly astonished, saying, "He has done all things well; He makes even the deaf to hear and the mute to speak.""
Mark 7:31-37, NAS95.

This miracle is described by the evangelist Mark alone. It is only recorded in this seventh chapter of his gospel.

The great event of history is that God became man. The Creator of the universe, the Almighty, the Ancient of Days, born as a little baby. An act of love. There was nothing about becoming a man that was particularly desirable except that, by doing so, God could redeem a people for Himself. We are the reason for the incarnation.

One of the most beautiful aspects about the incarnation is that it was PERSONAL. The Lord did not send us a form letter when He moved to communicate His love to us. We did not receive a computer-recorded telephone call or an E-Mail from Him. He came in the flesh.

That tells me something about how He deals with us. He deals with us as INDIVIDUALS.

When He spoke to men, He began with who they were. He talked to a Samaritan woman about water from wells. He talked to Galilean fishermen about becoming fishers of men.

He was equally comfortable attending the party of a retired tax-collector or sitting in the company of the educated.

This nature of Jesus' dealings with men is manifested in His healing of the deaf man recorded in this chapter. The story begins as He and His disciples return from their travels abroad.

A ROUNDABOUT RETURN

And again He went out from the region of Tyre, and came through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, within the region of Decapolis. (Mark 7:31).

We know that the Lord has just been near Tyre where he granted the Greek woman's request to deliver her daughter. Then we are told, "Jesus left the vicinity of Tyre and went through Sidon, down to the Sea of Galilee and into the region of the Decapolis" (v.31). Why is that strange? Tyre, you might remember, is on the coast of the Mediterranean in what today is Lebanon. Sidon is also on the coast twenty miles further north, while the sea of Galilee is fifty miles south and the region of the Decapolis another twenty to thirty miles or so away to the southeast. So what you have here is a horseshoe-shaped itinerary about 120 miles long. It is a very perplexing route to take Jesus had left the region of Galilee earlier in this chapter. Departing from those regions governed by Herod Antipas, He traveled north to the ancient land of the Phoenicians, coming at last to the city of Tyre. It was here that He healed the daughter of the Syrophenecian woman.

Leaving Tyre, He and His disciples continued north through Sidon and then turned south and east, past the snow-capped peak of Mount Hermon to come at last to the Decapolis, the region to the east of the Sea of Galilee.

This was a long and strenuous journey. It is 60 miles as the crow flies and they were not flying - they were going up and down hills and valleys.

What we have here is another slow itinerary of maybe eight or nine months' duration in which the Lord Jesus was constantly interacting with the twelve, answering their questions and teaching them, but also preaching throughout that period to increasingly Gentile crowds and healing the sick. Many of the well-known incidents that are recorded in the other gospels took place during this period. By the conclusion of this period the Lord had become the topic of conversation throughout the Decapolis area so that 4,000 men came to hear him. He feeds them with loaves and fishes (as you see at the beginning of the next chapter), just as he'd done with the 5,000 men of Galilee (who'd been stirred by the nine months of the preaching of his twelve disciples). So this is the

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middle portion of the three years of the public ministry of Christ. After this period is over there are only a few months left before the cross. So Mark tells us that the Lord arrived at this location called the 'Ten Cities', Decapolis, the area which includes the Golan Heights, all the area being east of the Sea of Galilee and the river Jordan. It would be approximately the size of our own county of Cardiganshire. So the Lord was somewhere in that locality and there took place this incident which we are now going to consider. We are told, "some people brought to him a man who was deaf and could hardly talk" (v.32).

It was a retreat. A time to get away from all of the crowds and the teaching and the ministry and the miracles. A time for Jesus to be alone with His disciples.

Do you have any disciples?

It is a fundamental principle of discipleship that you can only affect those with whom you spend time. Jesus understood that principle and He deliberately set time apart from His very busy schedule to spend some times with these men.

As Jesus and His disciples came back southward, they find themselves once again within the region of Decapolis (Mark 7:31). The word "Decapolis" is a compound made from the joining of two Greek words.

(1) Deca is the word for "ten."

(2) Polis is Greek for "city."

This was the land of the ten cities. There were ten Gentile cities in this region (Damascus, Raphana, Hippos, Dion, Kanatha, Gadara, Scythopolis, Pella, Gerasa and Philadelphia). Because of the high percentage of Greek immigrants to these cities, they had formed a political league among themselves and had developed a tradition of self-government.

It was a land of heathen temples, or marble amphitheaters and of Greek culture and art. Jesus had come to this area already. We saw in Mark 5 that Jesus had come here and had been confronted with a man who was possessed with a number of demons. He had

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cast the demons out of the man and had allowed them to enter a herd of pigs. The pigs had stampeded down the hillside and into the waters of the Sea of Galilee to drown.

The man, now healed, had wanted to follow Jesus. Instead, Jesus instructed him to go home and to tell everyone about what had happened to him.

Some time has now passed. Jesus has returned to the Decapolis. And it seems as though the man who had been healed had done his job. Everyone in the area has heard about Jesus. It is not long before a crowd gathers.

A REQUEST FOR A MAN WHO CANNOT ASK

And they brought to Him one who was deaf and spoke with difficulty, and they entreated Him to lay His hand upon him. (Mark 7:32).

The crowd had heard of the miracles of Jesus. And so, they bring to him a man who has a need. This man had not heard of the miracles. He hadn't heard of anything. He couldn't hear. Because he could not hear, his speech was also affected. The Greek text says literally that he was "thick-voiced."

The Septuagint uses this word (mogilalos) to refer to someone who is mute. This man had vocal chords and could make sounds, but they were not understandable.

The fact that this man could not ask for himself meant that he was totally helpless. He was not only deaf and mute, but he couldn't even ask Jesus to heal him. And so, certain people among the crowd asked on his behalf. The man had no faith, so the crowd believed for him. It was because of their faith in Jesus that they brought this man to be healed. This man had no faith of his own. But that was about to change.

HEALING FOR A MAN WHO CANNOT HEAR

And He took him aside from the multitude by himself, and put His fingers into his ears, and after spitting, He touched his tongue with the saliva; 34 and looking up to heaven with a deep sigh, He said to him, "Ephphatha!" that is, "Be opened!" 35 And his ears

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were opened, and the impediment of his tongue was removed, and he began speaking plainly. (Mark 7:33-35).

Can you put yourself into the sandals of this deaf mute? He has been in this condition for a very long time. It has been a lonely life. He has no one with whom to talk. He cannot participate in the worship in the synagogue because he cannot hear the Scriptures or listen to the prayers. He is a social outcast. He has no friends and his family considers him to be a liability rather than an asset. He cannot even express the frustration that he feels.

Then one day, a group of people come to him. They are excited and they are talking about something, but he cannot understand them. They pull at him and perhaps he is afraid. What are they trying to do to him? Is he being accused of something? Does some new persecution await him? They lead him to where a large crowd has gathered. But since he cannot hear what is being said, he can make no sense of what they are doing or why they are here.

And then, there is another hand upon his shoulder. It firmly guides him away from the crowd and the confusion. He looks at his new guide and sees a man with Jewish features. This man seems genuinely interested in him.

How different are men from Christ. Have you noticed how they always want to manipulate an audience and give them moral dilemmas by asking people to stand up and come to the front. It seems an absolute obsession with them, getting them to move from point A to point B. "Stand up in front of everyone, walk down the aisle and have hands laid on you while everybody looks on." That is supposed to be the religion of the New Testament, the religion of the Holy Spirit. How different was Christ; he took the man aside and virtually no one saw what he did. He treated him privately with dignity and seriousness. He brought him tenderly and considerately into his presence and dealt with him as an individual with deep needs. He took him away from the rude gaze of the madding throng. The crowd wasn't interested in the deaf mute as a man. They weren't concerned for his recovery. They wanted him as a show, some

excitement, a healing, a seven day wonder with all the accompanying emotions. A sinful and adulterous generation is always wanting signs. But Christ wouldn't put on a performance for them. This man wasn't a problem; he was a person.

Now that they are alone and free from the distractions of the multitude, the Jewish stranger begins a series of pantomimes.

1. He... put His fingers into his ears (7:33).

Jesus takes the deaf man and touches his ears, pointing out that He is aware of the hearing problem the man has and that He is going to do something about it.

2. After spitting, He touched his tongue with the saliva (7:33).

Notice that the words "with the saliva" are italicized in the English translation. This indicates that they are not a part of the Greek text. They were added by the translators. I do not think they should have been.

By spitting and then touching the man's tongue, Jesus was letting him know that he intended to deal with his speech problem.

Why is Jesus doing this? Because He wants to create a measure of faith within the man before He heals him. Up to this point, the only people who have demonstrated any faith are those who brought the deaf-mute to Jesus. He has no faith of his own. And so, Jesus makes His intentions known to the man so that he can have his faith aroused.

3. Looking up to heaven with a deep sigh (7:34).

The sigh and the looking up to heaven were also for the deaf man's benefit. As he saw Jesus looking up to heaven, he would realize where the power for this miracle was coming from. As he saw Jesus breath a deep sigh, he would perhaps understand that Jesus is praying on his behalf.

The Greek word translated "sigh" is the aorist active indicative of *stenazo*. It is the same word that is translated "groan" in Romans 8:23; 1 Corinthians 5:2-3 and Hebrews 13:17.

Why did Jesus groan? I think that it was because He was touched by this man's infirmity. The real importance of the incarnation is that God became flesh so that He could touch us and so that He could be touched by us. We do not pray to a God who is unable to identify with our problems. He has been touched by the same things that touch us. The Son of God looked at this man, at his deafness, and his inability to speak, and the helplessness of anyone to change him. The man was just one of thousands all over the land who were in pain. Our Lord knew of the broken homes, the abandoned children, the mental illness, demon possession, the poverty, every kind of degradation and every form of evil. He had observed at close hand so much of it, more than anyone else. People were coming to him day and night in great weakness and pain, and it must have been overwhelming for him to see the constant arrival of the seriously ill and the dying, young and old, and hear the sobs of their loved ones as they pleaded for their lives. We are not surprised that Jesus sighed.

4. He said to him, "Ephatha!" that is, "Be opened!" (7:34).

This man had not been able to hear for a very long time. Suddenly as he looks into the eyes of Jesus, he hears His voice. This single Aramaic word is the first thing that he hears.

Moreover, his healing is immediate. He can hear what Jesus is saying to him and he can speak so that others can understand him. The use of the imperfect tense means that the man started speaking plainly and that he kept on speaking plainly. In fact, people couldn't shut him up.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR A PEOPLE WHO WON'T LISTEN

And He gave them orders not to tell anyone; but the more He ordered them, the more widely they continued to proclaim it. 37 And they were utterly astonished, saying, "He has done all things well; He makes even the deaf to hear, and the dumb to speak." (Mark 7:36-37).

This is not the first time that Jesus had told people not to spread the news of his miracles.

You understand that when Jesus commanded the man and his friends and his own disciples not to tell anyone he is aware that the transformation of this man would be impossible to hide. The Saviour is asking just this, that the actual details of how he personally dealt with the man be held back. You see, Jesus is not simply a healer. He has to go to the cross and die and be raised on the third day. You do not understand who this Jesus is until you've grasped that he is the suffering Messiah, and the resurrection and the life. Crowds demanding signs are going to dog his footsteps from now on. The more Jesus commanded them to not to tell anyone, "the more they kept talking about it" (v.36).

Whereas the deaf man had not been able to hear, the rest of the people refused to listen. Which experienced the greater deafness? The people who could hear and who did not were no better off than the man who could not hear in the first place.

Their great theme was this, "He has done everything well" (v.37). A woman called Alice Brade was taken to hear William Gadsby preach in Preston. She had been raised amongst the Methodists and a group of them went to hear the Baptist minister. She was deeply affected by what she heard and she went to her class-leader to ask him what he had thought of Gadsby. "Well," he said, "he certainly gave Jesus Christ a good name."

People don't give Jesus Christ a good name today, do they? The leading South American novelist, Isabel Allende, was in London in October giving interviews to mark the appearance of her new book, and she was telling journalists her own muddled life-story. She said, "I hate Christianity - all that guilt." I don't know what her understanding of Christianity is, but I do know that those who have had their guilt taken away and receive forgiveness of sins in Jesus' name say about him, "He has done everything well."

There is a lesson here. It is summed up in the oft repeated words of Jesus: He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

