

Mark 7:31–37
JESUS RESTORES
CLEAR HEARING AND TRUE SPEECH
INI

We read in our Scripture reading from Isaiah 29, “The deaf shall hear the words of the book.” This seems like an oxymoron, where two ideas are combined yet they are mutually exclusive. How can the deaf hear the words of the book? Isaiah elaborates in chapter 35 of how the ears of the deaf will be unstopped and the tongue of the dumb will sing.

Jesus came to fulfill the prophecy of Isaiah – to deal with the curse of sin head on. He came to help us who are so desperately in need. He came to restore clear hearing and true speech. Firstly, He dealt with this man’s physical needs, but commanded Him to tell no one. Secondly He has dealt with your spiritual needs, and He commands you to tell everyone!

***1. He touched the man’s ears and tongue,
saying, “tell no one.”***

Jesus knows our every need. He is sympathetic of our every struggle with sin, and our every burden with living in this world that has been cursed with sin. So when He sees and hears the pleading of those who brought this deaf man to Jesus, He responds and He restores – He touched the deaf man’s ears and tongue.

Jesus reaches out with the hand of grace. Did this man deserve this miracle? None of us can claim to be deserving of a miracle — not this man in our text, not a single one of us. For our sins show us that not only do we not deserve a miracle, we deserve far worse than any physical ailment, we deserve eternal punishments.

It is so easy for us to get caught up in self pity, that we begin to question God’s love for us. It is easy for us to think we deserve more, we should not have to live with this or that struggle. We forget that “through much tribulation we enter the kingdom of heaven.” God doesn’t immediately cure our every ailment. He doesn’t remove the curse of sin while we still live in this world. For God to remove the curse of sin with all its effects would mean the end of the world and the eternal death of all who do not believe. Yet he allows us to live on with such struggles as deafness, disabilities, dementia, disease, and death, because it reminds people of sin, and it reminds us of a heavenly deliverance that awaits us.

Yet Jesus shares your feelings, He has walked this earth as a man and felt what this curse of sin has done. **v.34, Then, looking up to heaven, He sighed.** – Literally, “He groaned.” We find the same word used in Romans chapter 8 to describe the curse of sin (**cf. Romans 8:18ff**). “The whole creation “groans” (Ro. 8:22) under the burden of

sin. We too, “groan,” Romans says (Ro. 8:23), as we eagerly wait for the redemption of our body. But Paul reminds us, **“I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us (Ro. 8:18).”**

Yes, Jesus “groaned” when He looked up to heaven. He cares. And so we see Jesus reaching out to touch us. Firstly He touches this man’s physical disabilities. This is grace in action. Jesus shows us that He has all power to overcome sin’s curses. That He has come to restore what sin has destroyed. **v.34, He said, “Ephphatha,” that is, “Be opened.” 35 Immediately his ears were opened, and the impediment of his tongue was loosed, and he spoke plainly.**

So why is it then, that Jesus is so secretive about this miracle? Why does He take this man aside into private to do this, and why does He then command them to tell no one? He does so, because this sort of physical miracle was not the primary mission for which God has come to this earth and taken on flesh. Later in Jesus’ life, as He sees the cross getting nearer and nearer, He says, **“Now My soul is troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father, save Me from this hour’? But for this purpose I came to this hour. (John 12:27).** For the purpose of the cross, God has become flesh. There are many ways in which Jesus could have escaped the dreadful fate. One way would be to simply serve the people’s earthly needs. In the feeding of the 5000, for instance, we read that after the miracle, they sought to make Jesus king. He had to flee this temptation. And so having touched the man’s ears and tongue, He tells the man, “tell no one.”

Jesus did not want to become famous as the miracle worker, He needed to become famous as the chosen one who was sacrificed for the sins of all people. He came to fix much more than our physical burdens, He came to conquer our spiritual curse. Jesus restores clear hearing and true speech.

2. He touched your ears and tongue, saying, “tell everyone!”

He has touched your ears and tongue also, but now His command is, “tell everyone.” Now we see the ultimate goal of Jesus ministry. It was to eradicate not just the physical curses of sin, but the spiritual curses that man is under — the spiritual deafness man is born with, the spiritual bondage of man’s tongue. Jesus came to cure the complete inability to hear God’s Word or to speak the truth of it. He came to restore clear hearing and true speech.

Your conversion and your salvation was the primary goal of God’s presence on earth in the flesh. This is what Jesus saw before Him, this is what caused Him to say, as we read earlier, **“Now My soul is troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father, save Me from this hour’? But for this purpose I came to this hour. (John 12:27).**

It was prophesied by Isaiah, **Isaiah 35:4–6 (NKJV) — 4 Say to those who are fearful-hearted, “Be strong, do not fear! Behold, your God will come with vengeance,**

With the recompense of God; He will come and save you.” 5 Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, And the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. 6 Then the lame shall leap like a deer, And the tongue of the dumb sing.

Isaiah was speaking of more than just this deaf man in our text. He pictures also water busting forth in a dry desert and the ransomed of the LORD returning on the Highway of Holiness. He says, **“And the ransomed of the LORD will come to Zion with singing, with everlasting joy on their heads ... sorrow and sighing shall flee away”** (Is. 35:10).

In the midst of the sorrow, sighing, and groaning that this sinful world brings upon us, we are reminded of the everlasting joy that is ours through Christ. We are reminded that we are the ransomed of the LORD, the precious treasures of His kingdom. We are currently on a path to an everlasting home where all the world’s sorrow, sighing, and groaning will flee away. As we read earlier, **“I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us (Ro. 8:18).”**

All this because Jesus has touched your ears to hear it. Isaiah said, the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped.” He uses the same Hebrew root word we find in our text when Jesus says ephphatha. — “be opened.” One of the greatest curses that sin has brought upon man, is the inability to hear the true God speak. You need to know this as you venture out into a world where many are still under this curse. By nature they won’t hear what you are saying to them about God, about sin, and about our Savior. Many are still deaf, but guess who has the power to overcome this disability?

Let’s take your baptism for example. You were born deaf. Yet, Jesus, through baptism, worked a miracle. And just as with the deaf man in our text, Jesus does so individually. He took you aside. Conversion is not a mass miracle, it was just you and the Holy Spirit. Jesus reached out through Water and the Word to touch your ears and your tongue.

Again, just as grace was behind Jesus coming to this man’s needs, so grace is behind Jesus meeting your needs. We have not deserved a thing from God. Yet His generosity toward you knows no limit. Through your baptism, God has brought to you the forgiveness of sins and eternal life.

We confess with Martin Luther, “I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him, but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified, and kept me in the true faith.”

Think of how deaf ears affect a person’s ability to speak the right sounds out of the mouth. This could be what is behind the reference to the man having an “impediment in his speech.” A deaf man has never heard the sounds we speak, so he struggles to imitate them.

So we are reminded that we cannot expect those who are deaf to God's Word to have the right sounds coming out of their mouth. We are reminded to beware of those who will not listen to God's Word. They need their ears unstopped first.

Or maybe it is we sometimes who are not making the right sounds come out. Maybe we have plugged our ears to God's Word. Sometimes we just don't want to hear what we know to be the truth. Thank God that He continues to open our ears to the truth of His Word in our lives. Thank God that He enables us to hear the call to repentance, and even more so that He shares with us the full forgiveness for all the ear plugging we have done over the years.

Again, it is only the miracle of God's grace that restores clear hearing. Yet, unlike the miracle in our text, after this miracle in your life, God wants you to tell everyone! This is Christ's true purpose – to go to the cross, to conquer sin, and to send us out to tell everyone. We should be “astonished beyond all measure!”

Now that your hearing has been restored, you know what the right sounds are. You know how to reproduce those precious sounds that God's Word has brought to your ears: sounds like, grace alone without works, Christ crucified for sinners, eternal life, a free gift, believe. Take the word of the gospel with you, and simply let Jesus do His work. You don't have to perform any miracles, the Word will do that all on its own. The bond of your tongue has been loosed, simply “tell everyone” about it. As the hymn poet declares, “*While Thy glorious praise is sung, Touch my lips, unloose my tongue, That my joyful soul may bless, Christ the Lord, my Righteousness*” (TLH #2). So we declare verse 37, He does all things well. He makes both the deaf to hear and the mute to speak. Amen.