

Jesus is a personal healer

Text: Mark 7:31-37 for 9/09/2018 by Pastor Bolwerk

31 Then Jesus left the vicinity of Tyre and went through Sidon, down to the Sea of Galilee and into the region of the Decapolis. 32 There some people brought to him a man who was deaf and could hardly talk, and they begged him to place his hand on the man. 33 After he took him aside, away from the crowd, Jesus put his fingers into the man's ears. Then he spit and touched the man's tongue. 34 He looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him, "Ephphatha!" (which means, "Be opened!"). 35 At this, the man's ears were opened, his tongue was loosened and he began to speak plainly. 36 Jesus commanded them not to tell anyone. But the more he did so, the more they kept talking about it. 37 People were overwhelmed with amazement. "He has done everything well," they said. "He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak."

How well does your health care providers know you as a person? Does your doctor know more about you than just your blood pressure and cholesterol level? What personal information does your dentist know about you besides how many fillings you have? We certainly appreciate it when people who serve us work to get to know us, so that their service meets our individual needs. Whether it is a doctor or dentist who takes the time to understand our health needs, or the contractor remodeling our home to fit our family's needs, we appreciate it when people take the time to tailor their work to fit our personal needs.

As we look at this section of Mark's Gospel we see Jesus doing that very thing. Jesus tailors his work to fit the individual needs of a person he is healing. And what Jesus does for that man, he does for each of us.

Theme: Jesus is a personal healer

- I. He gently heals our ears and tongues
- II. He frees us to hear and speak the truth

At this time in his ministry Jesus is traveling in the area called the Decapolis, which means "the Ten Cities." This area was southeast of the Sea of Galilee, and east of Jordan River. The last time Jesus was in the Decapolis he healed a man who was demon-possessed. After being healed this man wanted to go with Jesus, but the Lord said, "No." Instead, Jesus told that man to go home and tell people what Jesus had done for him. The scripture tells us, **"So the man went away and began to tell in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him. And all the people were amazed** (Mark 5:20). That man's testimony had an effect on the people that he shared it with.

As Jesus returns to the area, people now recognize him as a healer. That recognition affects their actions. Mark says, **"Some people brought to him a man who was deaf and could hardly talk, and they begged him to place his hand on the man"** (v. 32). Imagine you are that deaf man. You are brought out into a crowd of people and brought before this important person. But you can't hear, and you can barely talk. Maybe you are a little afraid or embarrassed.

Jesus recognizes this man was perhaps feeling uncomfortable. So Jesus takes into account this man's very individual needs. Mark tells us that Jesus, **"took him aside, away from the crowd"** (v. 33). To go from totally deaf to being in the middle of a noisy crowd could be quite a shock. Jesus wants to heal him, and he wants the man to understand what he is doing. So he "speaks the man's language." He gently uses signs to help the man understand what is about to

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happen. **Jesus put his fingers into the man's ears. Then he spit and touched the man's tongue. He looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him, "Ephphatha!" (which means, "Be opened!")** (vs. 33, 34). Our Lord lets the man see what he was going to heal. And then, in a very exaggerated way, he speaks that one word in such a way that the man will recognize it was Jesus' word that healed him.

"At this, the man's ears were opened, his tongue was loosened and he began to speak plainly" (v. 35). The man was immediately able to hear perfectly. When Jesus healed the man's speech the Gospel writer Mark literally says of Jesus that, "He released the chain of his tongue." Jesus set this man's tongue free, so he could speak freely and plainly. Jesus was that man's personal healer.

Christ is our personal healer also. We may not be physically deaf like that man, yet we struggle with spiritual deafness. Our sinful nature is always trying to find ways to plug our ears and keep us from hearing God. Our Old Self prefers to listen to worldly words. It loves to hear that being happy is all that matters, so do whatever it takes to be happy. It loves to hear that our thoughts, our ideas, our desires should always be what are most important. And when our sinful nature is not plugging up our ears with the garbage of the world, we are often sticking our fingers in our own ears. We plug our ears because we don't like it when Jesus says to us, **"I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin"** (John 8:34). We know very well that what Jesus says includes us. But we don't like being told we are sinful, or that sin controls us.

We may not be physically mute like that man was, yet we struggle with spiritual silence. There are many things that keep our tongues from praising God and speaking his saving grace. It might be fear. The fear of ridicule, loneliness, or even physical persecution. It might be our reputation, because we don't want to be labeled by others as different. We want people to like us. We might shut our mouths and hold our tongues when we think we can gain something by not saying anything. That's what Adam did. Adam knew God's command about eating that fruit, yet he remained silent the entire time Satan was tempting Eve. The devil and our sinful self so easily distract from God's word so we do not always properly hear the word, and we do not always want to speak it.

So Jesus comes to heal each of us. We need Christ's help because our original condition was worse than that of the deaf man. We were not just deaf, we were dead; dead in our sins and headed for eternal suffering. So Jesus comes to us personally, and he gently works to heal our hearts and souls.

For most of us he gently created faith in our hearts through just a few drops of water and his saving name spoken in our ears. For others he gently creates faith through his word. He gently breathes out the sigh of, **"Ephphatha"** (v. 34), "Be opened." With his word he tells of his life saving work: His life of perfect listening to his Father's words, a life of proclaiming God's saving truth to a deaf and dying world. Jesus speaks of the death he died to pay for our spiritual deafness: the blood he shed to wash away our sinful selective hearing. Our Savior speaks of the life he gave to free our tongues from the chains of sinful fear and pride. With his words Jesus lets us know he is with us and watches over us until the very end of the age.

Like the deaf man, Jesus leads us away from the noisy crowd of this world, and with a word he creates faith in our hearts. Through that faith Jesus creates a personal bond to each

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one of us. Our Lord says, **“If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him”** (John 14:23). How personal is your Savior? He loves you so much that he longs to live with you here in this world! He loves you so much he wants you to live with him forever in the world to come. Christ truly a personal healer.

After Jesus healed the deaf man we’re told, **“Jesus commanded them not to tell anyone”** (v. 36a). Why would Jesus say this? When Jesus healed the demon possessed man he told him to go and tell others what Jesus had done for him. Why tell this man to not say anything? Because too many people already had the wrong idea Jesus was someone who was just there to help people with worldly or physical problem. Jesus did not want that wrong idea to spread. Yet the more Jesus told this man and his friends not to talk about the miracle, **“the more they kept talking about it”** (v. 36b). That shouldn’t surprise us. Mark tells us the **“people were overwhelmed with amazement”** (v. 37a). In joy this man who was healed wanted to share what Jesus had done for him. In amazement the people wanted to praise the Savior. This is also why Jesus comes as our personal healer. Jesus frees us to hear and speak the truth.

Jesus opens our ears to hear God’s whole truth: both law and gospel. Christ’s own words give us the motivation to hear, read, and study what God says. Jesus says, **“I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned”** (John 5:24). Hearing brings believing which brings eternal life. The believing heart longs for the blessing of God’s word. Jesus said through his Apostle John, **“Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written”** (Revelation 1:3). The word of God brings spiritual blessings which create in us the desire to hear and read more.

Have you ever noticed that in your own personal Bible reading? As you start to read the scriptures have you ever felt like you just wanted to keep reading? That is because the Spirit of Christ has opened your ears and mind to want to hear him more and know him better.

Even if you have not felt that way, the more you are in God’s word the more you will find that word working on your heart and guiding your life. You will find God’s word moving you to listen to Jesus instead of listening to the rest of the world.

Along with opening our ears, Jesus frees our tongues to joyfully praise him and speak of his goodness. Jesus sets our tongues free from the control of our old, sinful nature. Through faith, Jesus gives our New Selves the power to control our tongue. So, as we speak, God’s Spirit leads us to speak things which builds others up. The Spirit helps us to speak well of the people around us, even if those people are not always the nicest to us. The Spirit help us to help others have a good reputation. With a thankful heart, the good words we speak become a precious offering to God, and a welcome gift to those who hear our words.

But what about those times when we don’t listen to God as well as we could, or when we do not use our tongues in a very Christ like way? Listen to what God says about that. He says, **“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness”** (1 John 1:9). Jesus fulfilled God’s plan of salvation. Christ has won forgiveness for the whole world. Through faith in Jesus’ saving work our tongues are set free to speak the truth. We confess our sins knowing God forgives us of those sins for the sake of

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his Son who is our personal healer.

How wonderful it is to know that we have a Savior who knows us personally. Since Jesus knows everything about us, he knows exactly how to address our needs. Jesus is your personal healer. He has healed you from every one of your sins. He has opened your ears to hear his truth. He has set your tongue free to joyfully praise him for his goodness. Now Jesus is personally preparing a place for you, so you can be with him in the everlasting glories of heaven. Amen.