

PEOPLE WERE AMAZED

The Gospel Lesson: Mark 7:24-37 Text: vs. 37

Today, we're going to explore a powerful verse from the Gospel of Mark found in chapter 7, verse 37. It describes the reaction people had when Jesus healed a man who couldn't hear and couldn't speak. It says, "*People were overwhelmed with amazement. 'He has done everything well,' they said. 'He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak.'*" To fully appreciate this verse, you need to understand the context in which the miracle was performed.

Jesus had been traveling through the region of Decapolis, a largely populated Gentile area in ancient Israel that contained ten cities inhabited mostly by Greeks. On the east side of the Jordan River, southeast of the Sea of Galilee, Decapolis is mentioned three times in the New Testament. And that's where Jesus met the man who was deaf and could not speak. Some people had taken this man to Jesus hoping for a miracle. And *Jesus, in His compassion, took the man aside, touched his ears and tongue, and commanded, "Ephphatha," meaning "Be opened!"* Immediately, the man was healed. He was able to hear. And He could speak, clearly.

Now, there was a tradition in the ancient world about those who had healing powers. They would often use their own spittle as a medium to transfer their power to the people to whom they ministered. Some, however, saw a far deeper symbolic meaning to Jesus' using His own spit to bring redemption to a suffering man. Some say it suggests another liquid from His body. His blood, when on the cross, poured out of His body for His people. In any case, this is a vivid description of when Jesus touched the man on the tongue with His own spittle and looked up to heaven. Scripture says, "*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.*" (v. 33) When "*Jesus sighed,*" or "groaned inwardly," it showed Jesus' passionately asking for His Father to "do it." He touched the man's tongue. A tongue that was in chains. And when Jesus sighed and spoke the word "*Ephphatha*" those ears that had heard no sound, and that tongue that had been in chains making it impossible to speak clearly, were set free! The man's tongue could now be used, not for meaningless mumbling, but for clearly speaking the Glory of God.

In a sense, that's what happens to every Christian when the Holy Spirit opens you up to the things of God. You've been deaf to the Word of God, just as that poor man was deaf, until the Holy Spirit cleansed your heart and renewed your soul. What you had in your mouth was blasphemy and was poisonous. And Mark tells us his ears were opened, *immediately*. His tongue was set free. And notice, the Bible doesn't simply say "*and He spoke.*" That would be remarkable enough. But Mark says, immediately after Jesus touched the man's tongue and made the commandment, "*Be opened!*" not only could he speak, but He could speak – clearly! He was understandable in what he said. Then Jesus, as He normally did, said no one should be told about this. But the more He commanded that, the more widely they proclaimed it. They were astonished beyond measure. Notice in their shock, their astonishment, what they said about Jesus: "*He has done all things well. He makes both the deaf to hear and the mute to speak.*"

What a description of Jesus! He never did anything poorly in His life. When He set His face toward Jerusalem, He determined be obedient to the will of His Father, God. And He did it well. There was no failure. There was no blemish to His work. As a child when He was working in the carpenter shop with Joseph his earthly father who looked over his shoulder and watched Jesus working, beaming with pleasure at how well his son did what He was doing. His Father in Heaven made the same evaluation of Jesus when He said from heaven at Jesus' baptism by John in the Jordan River, "*This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.*" It's the same God who called light into darkness at creation through the power of His voice. The same God at work beside the Sea of Galilee restoring a man's hearing and His ability to speak. It's the same God who redeems you.

And in the work of redemption for your soul, Jesus does it well! That's why you can sing in the midst of pain, "*It is well with my soul*"—not because your soul is made well in the midst of a storm. But because when the Spirit of God comes into a person's soul, He brings peace and joy. And He does it well. That's what those pagan Greeks noticed about Jesus. Look at Him. Everything He does, He does well. It was because He was God made flesh. The One who creates. The One who redeems. The One who loosens tongues and opens deaf ears. He does all things well. When you look at your life in the midst of pain, in the midst of sorrow, you're not always sure about anything.

On a television program there was an interview with the Hollywood actor Robert De Niro. At the end of the interview, the host asked Robert De Niro, "*At the end of your days, if you come before God, what will you say to Him when you meet Him?*" And De Niro, in his kind of cocky manner said, "*What I'm going to say to God is, 'You have some explaining to do.'*" No, Mr. De Niro. You've got it all wrong! *You're* the one who's going to be doing the explaining. God doesn't have to explain anything He brings to pass in this world.

Many people believe God's actions and plans are beyond human understanding. And that faith involves trusting in His wisdom and purpose, even when we don't fully understand it. The people's reaction to the man's healing was tremendous amazement. They were astounded by Jesus' power and compassion. They shouted, "*He has done everything well.*" They recognized Jesus' divine authority and goodness. Their statement echoed the creation narrative in Genesis where God

saw all He had made and declared it is *“very good.”* (Genesis 1:31) These are the people Jesus touched. And they are the people Jesus wants us to touch, as well. He wants us to minister to those who are not a part of our group. To those who don’t measure up to our standards. You see, the church doesn’t exist just for itself. It’s for those who are outside the church and in desperate need of Jesus.

When Aaron Barg was three months old, a hernia left him in almost constant pain. His parents said finding a surgeon who could repair the hernia was easy, but finding an anesthesiologist was almost impossible. With a rare genetic disorder, Aaron was born with a weakened heart and lungs and an undeveloped brain. On top of all that, he was deaf and legally blind. Doctors told the Barg’s that Aaron would die within a year. If he survived beyond that, his life would have little quality—he’d never speak, walk, or feed himself. For most anesthesiologists, the risk was too high. Any operation could kill Aaron. After several attempts, Susan Barg finally asked an anesthesiologist if he would like to hold Aaron. He did. For a full hour! Only then did he agree to assist in the operation. Since then, the same anesthesiologist has helped in several more operations for Aaron. “He holds Aaron, and he becomes a human being,” Barg said. “Not a statistic, not a piece of medical research on a piece of paper—but a human being with a name who responds to touch and cuddling and love.” Against all odds, Aaron grew into his teens and became a handsome boy with blond hair and a face that lit up when anyone he knew came by. If you bent down by his wheelchair, he would pull your face close to his, stare deeply into your eyes and stroke your face. Though he couldn’t speak, his eyes and hands told you he knew you were there. And he far exceeded all expectations! He could move his wheelchair, feed himself, and even communicate using five hand signals. (Bob Smietana, “When Does Personhood Begin?” *Christianity Today*, July 2004, p. 24)

We often reject those who have little quality of life. Most often, we ignore them. Such people, we look away from, hoping they won’t bother us. But Jesus calls us to an unusual way of life. Like Him, He wants us to hold on to such people, so they become real to us. So, they become people with a name. People who respond to touch and cuddling and love. It’s when we touch people as representatives of Jesus, others may say, “you have done everything well.” And since Jesus is the divine perfection and goodness in all His works, what does that mean for us today?

Well, it reminds us of Jesus’ compassion and power. No matter your situation, the reasons for your suffering, the timing of your healing, you are part of a larger, divine plan that may be beyond your understanding. Sometimes the reasons for God’s actions, or inactions, are not clear. Faith often involves trusting in God’s wisdom and timing, even when you don’t understand it. Enduring hardships and suffering can lead to personal growth. Increased strength. And a deeper faith. And seeking support from your faith community, your friends, or your family can provide you comfort and strength. Sharing your struggles with others can help you feel less isolated. And it’s important to seek medical advice and professional support because healing can come through the help of doctors, therapists, and other professionals, with God’s help.

And while Jesus is able and willing to heal you, it challenges you to recognize and tell of the goodness of Jesus in your life. Be filled with awe. Have gratitude for Jesus’ miraculous works. Open your heart to His healing touch. Tell of His goodness to the world. Be like the people in Decapolis. Be overwhelmed with amazement. And declare, *“He has done everything well.”*

LET US PRAY: O Lord, such grace and excellence is indeed amazing. And even if we had ten thousand tongues to sing your praise, we would still seem to be unclear about it. Take the chains from our mouths, that we may praise You in a manner fitting for Your glory. For we ask it in Jesus’ name. Amen.