

Jesus heals a deaf and mute man

Mark 7:31-37 - Sunday 22nd August 2021 - Littlebourne Chapel

We're reading about another healing, of many, in this next section of Mark's gospel. I'm conscious that we run the risk of just repeating ourselves when we have similar occurrences like this, but in preparing this, I've found that in each of these events there is always more than meets the eye.

v31

Then he returned from the region of Tyre and went through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis.

Last week we saw Jesus in the region of Tyre and Sidon, healing the daughter of the Syrophenician woman. Now he's moved back to the sea of Galilee, on its eastern side.

Let's look back to Chapter 5 - we heard back in June about the Gadarene swine.

Jesus back in the same place as in 5v1-20. He was asked to depart then (5v17), but now he's back. See 5v19-20 for why.

Jesus comes back to those that have rejected him - he is a God of second chances. They now believe that he's able to heal and so bring a man to him.

v32

And they brought to him a man who was deaf and had a speech impediment, and they begged him to lay his hand on him.

Like we've seen throughout Mark's gospel, people are bringing their sick and injured to him. This man, despite his condition, had people around him that cared about him enough to bring him to Jesus. He of course, wouldn't necessarily have understood the situation. This specific instance of healing is only recorded in Mark's gospel.

Now it says that this man could 'hardly talk' (NIV) or 'had a speech impediment' (ESV). The word Mark uses is *μογιλάλον* (*mogilalon*), a word unique in the New Testament. It's from the verb *λαλέω* (*laleo*) meaning to talk and the adverb *μόγισ* (*mogis*) meaning with difficulty, scarcely, hardly. So he speaks with difficulty, or hardly at all.

He was able to make sounds, to attempt speech, but not well. Maybe he wasn't born deaf, but acquired his deafness through injury or disease?

It says that they begged him to put his hand on the deaf and mute man. Does this mean that the people have heard about Jesus' healing power? They may have heard of Jesus' healing power, but their surprise at his healing later suggests they might have just wanted Jesus to bless the man and got more than they expected.

v33-35

33 And taking him aside from the crowd privately, he put his fingers into his ears, and after spitting touched his tongue. 34 And looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, "Ephphatha," that is, "Be opened." 35 And his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly.

In some cases, Jesus heals very publicly, but here he heals away from the crowd. This deaf man presumably did not know what was going on, so Jesus uses touch to demonstrate to him what he's doing. When we see Jesus healing in this unusual manner, the tendency is to read too much into it. We're all looking for significance in things like Jesus sighing, the specific words he uses, but it's reasonable to think that this is just how he communicated with the deaf person - by looking to heaven, by visibly sighing, by being visible rather than verbal for this man's benefit, using a sort of rough sign language.

We've seen a lot of healings in our reading of Mark so far, and various methods of healing.

The first healing we saw was in chapter one, where Jesus heals a man with an unclean spirit just by commanding the spirit to leave. In chapter 1 we also see Jesus heal by touching - first Simon Peter's mother in law and then the leper who Jesus heals with just his touch.

In chapter two we saw the paralytic healed, but this healing was tied to Jesus' forgiveness of the man's sins and used by Jesus to make a point to the Pharisees. In chapter 3, the man with the withered hand is healed after Jesus asks him to stretch it out - he doesn't touch, doesn't command anything, it just happens.

In chapter five, healing another demon possessed man takes more than just a command, there's a conversation. And then later Jesus heals the woman with the bleeding issue by her touching Jesus' garment. Then Jesus brings Jairus' daughter back to life by taking her by the hand and telling her to get up.

This healing example has maybe the weirdest method in Mark's gospel, but we'll see in chapter 8 a similar healing of a blind person. In John's gospel (chapter 9), someone is healed of blindness with mud applied and washed off in the Pool of Siloam.

Other times, healing happens at distance - the centurion's servant in Matthew 8 and Luke 7 was healed without Jesus going to him, but at a distance. Jesus commends the faith of the centurion and his servant is healed despite being far away.

Sometimes public, sometimes private. Sometimes a word at a distance, sometimes he reaches out and touches. Sometimes he touches, other times people touch him. Sometimes he teaches when he heals, sometimes he warns. Sometimes he is asked, other times he heals without anyone asking.

Jesus doesn't have a one size fits all mentality with healing - he tailors his healings to the individuals involved, he knows us all individually and treats us as the unique persons we are. And he demonstrates through his use of many methods that the healing comes from something greater than the methodology. Healing is not the product of any talisman, spell, or process. Healing comes from the power of God.

Jesus doesn't need to put his fingers in this person's ears or touched his tongue - he could have healed the man without even seeing him, as he did in other circumstances. But the method of these physical healings are used by Jesus to communicate that the healing is from him. There can be no mistake that he is the one through whom the healing is taking place.

John 20 (verse 30-31):

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

We mustn't forget that Jesus' physical healings are really the shadow of the greater healing taking place - they pale in comparison to the greater healing, the new life we are given in him today, the coming resurrection of our bodies, the removal of all sickness, death and sin from the world. The healing of this man points us to the truth that we all must be healed of the sickness we experience in our natural sinfulness.

And the result of this healing is that "He spoke plainly." He wasn't merely healed of his deafness, not merely enabled to now learn to speak properly, but supernaturally was enabled to speak and understand language. Jesus' healing power is more than just the physical - this man was not only given the ability to move his tongue in the right ways, but was enabled to know how to do so to talk. The cure was instantaneous and perfect.

v36

And Jesus charged them to tell no one. But the more he charged them, the more zealously they proclaimed it.

We've seen lots of times already that Jesus asks people to keep quiet, often to no avail. Chapter 1 verse 34, "Don't tell anyone;" chapter 1 verse 44, "Don't tell anyone;" chapter 3 verse 12, "Don't tell anyone;" chapter 5 verse 43, "Don't tell anyone." We'll see it in chapter 8 verse 26, "Don't tell anyone." And here we have it again, "Don't tell anyone." This seems such a strange command.

In chapter 5, last time he was in the same area, he told the man who had been healed of demon possession (verse 19):

..."Go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you." 20 And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him, and everyone marvelled.

He tells that man to tell everybody. He tells this man to tell nobody. Why does he sometimes heal privately and tell people to keep silent and other times he heals publicly and tells people to make it known?

Part of the explanation is that the healed demoniac was the first missionary to Decapolis. Jesus is almost completely unknown, he's rejected, in that region. He needs to be known about. But now he's very well known but it mustn't be all about the miraculous. Next week, we'll see Jesus feed four thousand men, plus women and children, a huge crowd. But he's not to be known simply as a miracle worker, simply as one who heals people's physical ailments only. I think he's trying to get a balance.

The message isn't yet complete. The whole story is not yet apparent. If we thought that Jesus came to earth, born of a virgin, did miracles, healed physical ailments, preached the kingdom of God, but it ended there, we'd be stuck. It's not the whole story. Jesus has not yet gone to the cross. He hasn't yet resurrected. His own disciples have shown that they don't really understand what's going on yet either - they are as surprised at the miracles as anyone. If they don't understand, the ordinary people won't either.

Luke 9 from verse 18:

Now it happened that as he was praying alone, the disciples were with him. And he asked them, "Who do the crowds say that I am?" 19 And they answered "John the Baptist. But others say Elijah, and others, that one of the prophets of old has risen." 20 Then he said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" And Peter answered, "The Christ of God."

21 And he strictly charged and commanded them to tell this to no one,

He tells them to keep this to themselves - to not tell anyone even the partial picture of things that they have at this stage. Why? Verse 22:

saying, "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised."

The story is not complete until the crucifixion and the resurrection. After that, he gets them all together and says, "Go into all the world and tell everybody."

v37

And they were astonished beyond measure, saying, "He has done all things well. He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak."

They can't keep quiet because they are astonished beyond measure. They understand the magnitude of what they have seen, unlike anything they have seen before.

They say "He has done all things well." He has healed perfectly - instantly by the power of his command.

Now here, the greek word for mute is different to what Mark used in verse 32. Here it's ἀλάλους (alalous). Laleo is the verb to speak, this is those who cannot speak - a-speaking people, speechless people. It's in the New Testament a few times.

But the word from earlier - μογιάλον (mogilalon) - is unique to the New Testament. It does however occur once in the Septuagint, the greek translation of the Old Testament that would have been available at the time. It's an unusual word to pick, so it's quite likely that this is a deliberate reference to what's written in the Old Testament. And it occurs in Isaiah 35 verse 6. Here's verses 5 and 6:

*5 Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,
and the ears of the deaf unstopped;
6 then shall the lame man leap like a deer,
and the tongue of the mute sing for joy.
For waters break forth in the wilderness,
and streams in the desert;*

Verse 8, 10:

*And a highway shall be there,
and it shall be called the Way of Holiness;*

...

*And the ransomed of the Lord shall return
and come to Zion with singing;
everlasting joy shall be upon their heads;
they shall obtain gladness and joy,
and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.*

Isaiah is talking about new creation - the new earth, where the ransomed shall be with God in everlasting joy, where there is no longer any suffering or sorrow, where ultimate healing has been accomplished.

We need healing to hear the gospel clearly. We need healing to enable us to be those that "come to Zion with singing". Jesus Christ completes this healing work in his death and resurrection - his resurrection enables us to be reborn with him, to have new life. He does all things well.

Conclusion

Romans 10 verse 17:

Faith comes through hearing and hearing through the word of Christ.

Romans 10 verse 9

...if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

We must hear the truth. We must confess the truth.

Our problem is our sinful nature - we need to be healed, reborn. Like this man, who in his state could not hear the gospel at all, we are spiritually unable to respond. We likewise need the Spirit to open our ears for us.

In fact, scripture tells us that we were not just spiritually deaf and mute, but dead.

Ephesians 2:1-10

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins 2 in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— 3 among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. 4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— 6 and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast. 10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

The need for healing is not limited to these people from the ancient middle east. We too need healing.

Just as at Jesus' command the deaf hear and the mute speak, the blind hear and the lame walk, so we who were spiritually dead are raised to life in him. He can open the ears of the worst of sinners to hear the truth. We look forward to that picture in Isaiah 35 - everlasting joy in his presence, having been healed completely and perfectly.