

JESUS HEALS A DEAF AND MUTE MAN

Mark 7:31-37

Key Verse: 7:34

He looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him, "Ephphatha!" (which means, "Be opened!").

In today's passage, Jesus heals a man who was deaf and mute. This man could not hear or speak. Jesus had compassion on him and healed him. Today's passage is also a story about the people of the Decapolis. They brought the deaf and mute man to Jesus begging his mercy on him. From them we learn what it means to be a good neighbor. Above all, we learn how we can overcome our spiritual deafness and hear the word of God.

Look at verse 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."* Jesus had been in the region of the Decapolis before. The story appears in Mark 5:1-20. There Jesus healed a demon-possessed man at the cost of 2,000 pigs.

First, one man's good influence. Let us go back to Mark's Gospel chapter 5 for a little background. There was a man who had been possessed by a legion of demons. He had terrified the people around him. They had him arrested but he broke out of the jail. He roamed around the cemetery at night, screaming his lungs out. He also tormented himself by cutting his flesh with stones. As soon as he saw Jesus coming to the region, he cried out at the top of his voice, "What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? Swear to God that you won't torture me!" (Mk 5:7) The man had a split personality. He really wanted to be with Jesus, whom he called "Son of the Most High God." So he came to Jesus. But the demons inside him made him say, "Swear to God that you won't torture me." Jesus commanded the demons to come out of him. But the evil spirits did not want to give up their hostage easily. They demanded 2,000 pigs as ransom. Jesus permitted them. Then the demons went into the pigs. They in turn became crazy and committed a mass suicide.

Those tending the pigs reported this to the townspeople. The people went out to see what had happened. They saw the formerly crazy man sitting there with Jesus, dressed in a suit and he was in his right mind. The young man became a new person in Jesus (2Co 5:17). However, the people noticed something else that made them very upset. Their pig business was ruined. Instead of celebrating what happened to the young man, they were sorry that Jesus had come to their town. So they asked Jesus to get out of their town. To them, their pig business was more important than the life of a young man. They didn't care about the young man. Their only concern was their business.

Look at verse 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."* This time, however, the people of the Decapolis were quite different. When they heard Jesus was in town, they brought a deaf and mute man to Jesus and begged his mercy for him. In the

past, they couldn't care less about a person like the demon possessed man. Now, they brought to Jesus a man who was deaf and mute in the hope of helping him. They begged for the Messiah's mercy for the man. These people had been changed from within.

So what caused this change in the people of the Decapolis? It was probably one man's good influence on them that helped them to open their spiritual eyes. When Jesus healed the former demoniac, the man was so happy that he wanted to go with Jesus. But Jesus told him, "Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you" (5:19). 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 (5:20). The man accepted the mission of evangelizing the Decapolis. Obviously he worked hard for the mission. He would testify, "You know, I used to be a crazy punk. But Jesus saved me. He set me free from the demons! Now I have the peace of God in my heart. Not only that, Jesus gave me a mission to share the good news of salvation with you. He can also set you free from your bondage of sin and death. Come and taste the joy of knowing Jesus personally and serving him!" He shared with the people again and again what God had done for him. The people began to open their spiritual eyes. They began to see God's work in the man. They were influenced by the grace of God. They wanted to know the secret of his joy. Today's passage shows that the people of the Decapolis were changed from material-oriented people to people who cared for one person deeply. It is amazing to see that one person's change is so influential.

Second, the caring people of the Decapolis.

Look at verse 32 again. *"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."* In the past, the people of the Decapolis did not care about their neighbors. To them, their pig business was more important than some needy people. They made a lot of sausages and sold them for large profits. From early morning to late night they said, "pig, pig, pig." They probably bragged about how many pigs they had instead of talking about how many friends they had. They had no time to deal with some crazy punk. They just wanted to lock him up in chains.

This time, however, they brought to Jesus a man who was deaf and mute. They begged Jesus to place his hand on the man. They deeply cared about one person's agony. They began to understand the compassionate heart of Jesus. In the Bible, Jesus commands us to love our neighbor as ourselves. But what does this mean? Who is our neighbor? Spiritually speaking, a neighbor is not just a person who lives next door. A neighbor is the one who understands and shows God's mercy. In Luke 10:25-37, Jesus teaches us who a good neighbor is. In this well-known parable, a man was traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. Then three people appeared in the scene. The first



was a priest who looked very dignified. When he saw the wounded man, he pretended that he had not seen anything and passed by him on the other side. Next a Levite came and did exactly the same. He also passed by the wounded man, covering his eyes. Finally, a Samaritan man came where the man was lying. He saw him. He took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring oil and wine on him. He put the man on his own donkey and took him to an inn and took care of him. The next day, he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. "Look after him," he said, "and when I return I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have." In the course of helping the wounded man, maybe the Samaritan missed an important meeting and lost a chance to get a lucrative contract with the city of Jericho. After telling the story, Jesus asked, "Who is his neighbor?" The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise" (Lk 10:37).

Leviticus 19:18 says, "... love your neighbor as yourself." James 2:8 says, "Love your neighbor as yourself." Romans 13:9 says, "Love your neighbor as yourself." John 13:34 says, "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another." It is God's command for us to love our neighbor. But what does it mean to love our neighbor as ourselves? It means to help the needy people as the Good Samaritan did. But it is more than doing some human favor for someone. It is to love others spiritually in obedience to God. Once the people of the Decapolis were materially-oriented and self-centered; they valued pigs more than people. They only cared about themselves. But through the personal testimony of the former demoniac about what God had done for him, some of them were changed from within. They now valued a seemingly useless person. They brought the deaf and mute man to Jesus and pleaded with him for his mercy. They knew the meaning of being a good neighbor. This is what God wants us to do. He wants us to bring spiritual deaf and mute young people of our time to Christ.

Third, Jesus can open our ears and loosen our tongue. Jesus was greatly moved by their caring hearts. He accepted their shepherd's heart and was eager to take care of the helpless man. How did he help the man? Look at verses 33-34. *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. He looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him, "Ephphatha!" (which means, "Be opened!").* First, Jesus took the deaf and mute man aside, away from the crowd (33). Jesus paid personal attention to the man. He wanted to have a personal relationship with the man. Next, Jesus put his fingers into the man's ears. The man couldn't hear, but he could feel the compassionate touch of the Messiah. Then Jesus spit and touched the man's tongue. I don't know why Jesus spit. And spitting and touching the man's tongue doesn't sound a healthy thing to do. The man could have felt humiliated. But one thing is certain. Jesus showed his affection towards the man. Jesus showed his eager desire to help the man.

What did Jesus do next? Look at verse 34. *He looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him, "Ephphatha!" (which means, "Be opened!").* He looked up to heaven and had a deep sigh. I don't think this was a sigh of frustration. Jesus had a deep compassion towards this helpless man. Then he said to him, "Be opened!" *At this, the man's ears were opened, his tongue was loosened and he began to speak plainly* (35).

The compassionate touch of the good shepherd and the absolute word of the Son of God brought a wonderful miracle to the life of one man. In no time, the man was able to hear and talk. He could hear the beautiful Sermon on the Mount and understand the word of Jesus. He was able to pray and praise God. He began to give a life testimony entitled, "From a fatalistic, deaf and mute man to a servant of God's word."

This man's life was turned around because Jesus opened his ears and loosened his tongue. This is what happens to anyone who comes to Jesus. Some people may say, "But I can hear fine and speak very well, thank you." We should know that there are two kinds of deafness--physical and spiritual. There are many people who have excellent hearing but are spiritually deaf. That's why Jesus often said, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." Consider the Pharisees in Jesus' time. Once Jesus had compassion on a man with a shriveled hand and healed him. But the religious leaders severely criticized Jesus for healing the man on Sabbath. So Jesus asked them, "Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?" But they remained silent (Mk 3:1-4). They heard what Jesus said, but they were not willing to accept his words of truth. They did not have the ears to hear. They went out to plot to kill Jesus. How about the family of Lot, the nephew of Abraham in Genesis? God heard Abraham's earnest prayer for his nephew and decided to save his family from the impending destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. God's angels came to Lot's house to tell them that they had to leave the city right away to escape the judgment of God. But Lot hesitated because he didn't want to leave the sinful city. His two sons-in-law thought that it was a joke. His wife became a pillar of salt because she didn't listen to the word of God. Lot's family members had good sets of ears but they were spiritually deaf.

How can we be healed of our spiritual deafness? We must come to Jesus and have him put his fingers into our ears. We need to establish a personal relationship with the Messiah. We must hear him when he says, "Be opened!" We must listen to him when he says, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." In order to get out of the spiritual deaf and mute condition, we should study the word of God with a reverent fear and respect. Psalm 1:1-3 say, "Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers." How can we be like a tree planted by streams of water? It is possible when we live according to the word of God. In the word of God, we can find the way and the truth and the life (Jn 14:6). Psalm 119:1 says, "Blessed are they whose ways are blameless, who walk according to the law of the Lord." Psalm 119:9-10 says, "How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word. I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands." All things of the world change, but the word of God remains forever. The word of God can open the eyes of all spiritually blind men and the ears of all spiritually deaf people. The people of the Decapolis had turned their deaf ears on Jesus when he healed a crazy man. But now they could hear him loud and clear.

Look at verses 36-37. *Jesus commanded them not to tell anyone. But the more he did so, the more they kept talking about it. People were overwhelmed with amazement.*

"He has done everything well," they said. "He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak." Why did Jesus command them not to tell anyone about the miracle? He wanted them to focus on the kingdom of God, not the miracle *per se*. However, they couldn't help but talking about Jesus and his grace. In the past, when Jesus healed the demoniac, the people of Decapolis told Jesus, "You ruined our sausage business. Get out of our town!" But this time, they praised Jesus for the work of God in the deaf and mute man. They said, "He has done everything well. He even makes the deaf hear and mute speak." They praised the Lord!

Today we learned how one man's changed life can have a great impact on other people. We also learned what it means to be a good neighbor. A good neighbor takes care of God's lost sheep and brings them to Jesus. Finally we learned that our spiritual deafness can be cured by coming to Jesus and hearing his words, "Be opened!" May God help us to hear and obey the word of God as we study the Bible! May God bless us to be good neighbors to SU students! May we bring them to Jesus so that their ears may be opened and hear the wonderful truth of God!