

The Miracles Of Jesus Christ: Healing A Deaf-Mute (Part One)

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Only Mark records Jesus Christ's healing of the deaf-mute man (Mark 7:31-37), though Matthew refers to it generally (Matthew 15:29-31). After His special journey to the borders of Tyre and Sidon, where He healed the Syro-Phoenician woman's daughter, Jesus made a circuit of the Decapolis, ten cities to which the Roman conquerors had granted special privileges about a century earlier. He found a tremendous need for healing in that region.

Matthew's account relates that, when Jesus returned from Tyre and Sidon, throngs of people brought their sick—the lame, blind, deaf, mute, and maimed—to be healed by Him. Of these, Mark perhaps selects the deaf-mute man's case to record because of associated incidents that had not occurred on any other occasion.

He recounts that the man was deaf and had a speech impediment. Deafness can isolate and exclude the sufferer from society. Evidently, this man was not born deaf because, if he had been, he would have been unable to speak at all. No mention is made of how he lost his hearing; possibly a disease or an accident was responsible.

His difficulty in speaking indicates that he was not completely mute, but after Christ's touch, he could speak plainly, which may indicate that his handicap cannot be directly traced to a spiritual source of evil (Matthew 9:32).

1. What do the man's two physical handicaps represent? Mark 7:32.

Comment: His deafness was absolute; he could hear nothing. This greatly limited him, especially in those days when sign language and other communication helps did not exist as prominently as they do today. The poor had no access to speech therapists, and the medical practices of the time offered no hope at all.

His deafness also put him in danger, as people use their hearing more than they realize to avoid harm. Spiritual deafness is no different: When we cannot hear or refuse to hear the Word of God, we endanger ourselves greatly, not hearing the warnings of God's ministers against the enticement and pull of sin and its curses and penalties. While physical deafness is a very limiting disability, it does not normally lead to death, but spiritual deafness is infinitely worse, leading to eternal death.

The man was almost entirely mute except for a speech impediment that kept him from communicating with others verbally. The word "impediment" in Mark 7:32 does not mean he could not make any sounds but that he had great difficulty in speaking. He could make sounds with his mouth, but they came across as gibberish. Mark's account states that Jesus "loosed" the man's tongue, which may indicate that the problem was a birth defect.

Deafness and dumbness are often associated because humans learn to speak by hearing. A person who cannot hear his own voice or the voices of others has difficulty with

pronunciation. If a person becomes deaf later in life, he will be able to speak much better than one born deaf or who loses his hearing as a child.

The relationship between the inability to speak and deafness pictures some of sin's effects. Those who are deaf to the Word of God will have great difficulty speaking properly of spiritual matters. Even the most educated sinner betrays an impediment in his speech as soon as spiritual truths are introduced, but when he opens his ears to receive the truth, his spiritual speech will improve greatly and continually. Just as Jesus physically healed the man to enable him to hear, He must spiritually heal us so that we can understand God's Word (see John 8:47; I Corinthians 2:9-14).

In one sense, a person who cannot speak could be said to have an advantage over others since, "for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment" (Matthew 12:36). However, we will be judged by our thoughts as well: "For out of the abundance of the heart [the mind] the mouth speaks" (Matthew 12:34).

2. What lessons regarding service does the presenting of the deaf-mute man to Christ teach? Mark 7:32.

Comment: The phrase "they brought to Him" describes others presenting the man to Christ. From this, we can learn several lessons of service. Those who presented the man to Christ were involved in a work everyone should emulate, that is, leading people to Christ as the solution to their needs. This work involves compassion and sacrifice. It is not proselytizing, per se, as it is done most effectively by being a true witness of God's way of life.

We must have compassion for people needing help, as those who brought the deaf-mute man to Christ had, otherwise they would not have gone out of their way to bring him. In addition, bringing others to Christ shows a willingness to pay the cost, as it is a sacrifice of time, effort, and sometimes money—and often brings criticism and ridicule from the world. It may not be an act that brings prestige in the eyes of the world, but it is wonderful in God's sight if His name is promoted and glorified.

The men in this scenario simply took a man to Christ for healing. Our work may be as simple as turning a person's attention to an article or sermon, or in this Internet age, showing him the church's website to make him aware of spiritual solutions to his problems. While these efforts can lead people to Christ, the most effective way is to be a true witness of God's way of life by living righteously (Psalm 37:30; Proverbs 10:20-21, 31-32; Revelation 20:4).