

Reflection Guide: Mark 7:31-37

Big Idea: In this passage, Jesus heals a man who is deaf and had a speech impediment. But the way in which Jesus heals this man is different from how he has healed others previously. He places his fingers into the man's ears and then Jesus spits on his hands and places his fingers on the man's tongue. Why? What is Jesus trying to teach his followers about Himself and about His compassion?

31 Then he returned from the region of Tyre and went through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis. 32 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. 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. 36 And Jesus charged them to tell no one. But the more he charged them, the more zealously they proclaimed it. 37 And they were astonished beyond measure, saying, "He has done all things well. He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak."

Jesus again comes to the region of the Decapolis, a place he had been previously rejected (Mark 5), and the people brought to Jesus a man who was deaf and had a speech impediment. Their reaction to Jesus is different to the first one they had when Jesus healed the demoniac (Mark 5:1-20). Why? Jesus' last words to the demoniac were "Go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you." This man obeyed, and as a result, the people received Jesus instead of begging Him to leave.

Take a moment to identify some people that you can share your experience of God's grace and mercy with. Has there been someone who came to an understanding of God's grace through hearing your experience?

This man that the people brought to Jesus was deaf, meaning that he lived in a world of silence, but he also had a speech impediment, which hindered his verbal communication. Jesus takes the man aside privately in order to keep him from being a spectacle and He begins to show him compassion by connecting with him and communicating to him through "sign language" that He is going to heal him. He doesn't have to do this. He could have healed this man without speaking a word, but Jesus wants to connect with this man. He is compassionate towards him. He doesn't see this man as a problem to fix, but a person to love. He identifies with Him emotionally.

**Who has been to you recently a problem to fix rather than someone to love?
What have you forgotten about God, the gospel, yourself, etc that has allowed you to think this way?
How can you show them the compassion of Jesus? How can you connect with them?**

Jesus proceeds to put his fingers into the man's ears and after spitting, He touches his tongue and then He says the Aramaic words for "Be opened". Why does Mark include this detail? The people were accustomed to watching wonder workers and magicians do similar things to people in an effort to display their magical powers. But Jesus doesn't use any magic words. He speaks in the common language of the day. He isn't drawing attention to Himself as a "wonder worker" or a magician. He is exposing and exploding these people's superstitious ideas about who He really is. He, not His spit, is the True and living water. Jesus heals this man in a way that could have been done by any one of them. Everything He did, they could do, except heal this man. Jesus touches this man and his ears are opened and his tongue was loosed and he spoke plainly.

**What are some ways that you have been drawn to Jesus as a wonder worker who can fix things for you, instead of being drawn to Jesus Himself?
Where have you chosen God's gifts over Him as Giver?**

How does the gospel explode your ideas about who Jesus is?

Jesus immediately told the people to tell no one about what He had done in healing this man. But the people proclaimed it zealously the more He told them not to. The reason they proclaimed it makes sense given what we know they were attracted to and why they came in the first place. The people began proclaiming or preaching a two point message: Jesus does all things well and He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak.

These people's proclamation pointed to a passage in Isaiah (Isa. 35:1-6) about the fulfillment of God's promise to His people.

[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.

When God himself appears and brings salvation to His people and judgment to His enemies, then the deaf will hear and the mute will sing. These Gentiles went away preaching that God has come and has brought salvation to His people. The word for "mute" that Mark uses in this passage is the same word Isaiah uses in Isa 35:6. Jesus is the fulfillment of God's promise.

When we see Jesus for who He is, His actions begin to make sense for us, even something as insignificant as His "sigh" in verse 34. Jesus "sighed" in verse 34 because He knew the cost of what it would take to heal this man. Although Isaiah mentions that God will come with vengeance and retribution, we don't see any retribution in Mark's recording this event. Why? Jesus doesn't execute the vengeance and retribution of God, He takes it. He bears God's recompense for sin on the cross.

Jesus touched this man and sighed not because he was frustrated or unable to heal. He sighed because this was an inward groaning (Romans 8:23) over the brokenness that sin has caused and over the cost Jesus will pay to bring eternal healing to God's people.

**How has sin or its effects burdened you recently?
How can the gospel give you hope in this particular circumstance?
Who are some people around you who are deaf to the message of Jesus?
How can you display compassion and God's grace to them?
Let's pray for some of these folks right now.**

Jesus takes spit from his own mouth and applies it to the one who is so severely afflicted by the venom of sin's curse. This would not be the last time that fluid from within Jesus would become symbolic for healing of those afflicted by the curse. In due time this same powerfully compassionate Jesus would punctuate his ministry at the end of his death march to Golgotha. There he would suffer the wrath of men as he anticipates the wrath of God. He would soon be slain like a lamb on the altar of the cross. He would stain that wood with crimson as he dies for sinners.

Surely you see the connection now. Jesus would take his own blood and shed it for us. He would apply his blood to us. He would cleanse us, heal us, restore us, make us new. This blood of Christ is sin atoning, enemy reconciling, sight giving, blood. Christ would shed and apply this blood for us that we might, like this deaf man may hear. He means for us to hear. And thanks be to God we hear. All who have been graciously, sovereignly, compassionately touched by the Savior and received the healing blood of his cross, we can hear. Yes we all, like this guy, are deaf. But, don't look away discouraged. See the Savior touch again. See him dip his finger in the great ocean of his blood and reapply. We are hearing better. We are loving more. This is due to the Savior's powerful and gracious compassion.

- Octavious Winslow