

Our Glorious Redeemer, Heals the Spiritual Deaf-Mutes.

Text: Mark 7:31-37

Suggested Hymns:

452, 408, 217, 282, 224

1) The background to our text

2) Who Are The Spiritual Deaf-Mutes?

3) How Does Jesus Heal Them?

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Mark 7:31–37, *³¹ Again, departing from the region of Tyre and Sidon, He came through the midst of the region of Decapolis to the Sea of Galilee.*

³² Then they brought to Him one who was deaf and had an impediment in his speech, and they begged Him to put His hand on him. ³³ And He took him aside from the multitude, and put His fingers in his ears, and He spat and touched his tongue. ³⁴ Then, looking up to heaven, He sighed, and said to him, “Ephphatha,” that is, “Be opened.”

³⁵ Immediately his ears were opened, and the impediment of his tongue was loosed, and he spoke plainly. ³⁶ Then He commanded them that they should tell no one; but the more He commanded them, the more widely they proclaimed it. ³⁷ And they were astonished beyond measure, saying, “He has done all things well. He makes both the deaf to hear and the mute to speak.” (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Among the many miraculous healings of our Saviour, Holy Scripture reports a number of miracles performed on people who were deaf-mutes. These were people who could not hear or speak.

In Matthew 9:32-33 we read, *behold, they brought to Him a man, mute and demon-possessed. ³³ And when the demon was cast out, the mute spoke. And the multitudes marveled, saying, “It was never seen like this in Israel!”*

And in our Gospel today we hear of a deaf man who had an impediment in his speech, for those who lose their hearing early in life usually have trouble also with their speaking.

It is a distressing affliction to be deaf and unable to speak. We who have normal hearing and speaking ability do not realise it.

The great Bible scholar John Kitto had this misfortune, and he exclaims: *“To me the whole world is dumb, since I am deaf to it. No more the music of the human voice shall charm. All around, below, and above me is solitary silence; ever-enduring silence, stillness unbroken.”*

But the Lord gives those who come to Him in their afflictions the strength to bear it, or He gives them complete deliverance. The latter we see in the Gospel before us.

The purpose of this miracle, as of all miracles, is the proving of Jesus’ divine authority. We read in John 10:37–38, ***37 If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me; 38 but if I do, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, that you may know and believe that the Father is in Me, and I in Him.***

As of the first miracle at Cana, we can say of this healing of the deaf-mute that Jesus *manifested His glory; and His disciples believed in Him.*

But while the condition of physical deafness is grievous, it is only a faint illustration of the spiritual deafness of all people in their natural state. *“There is none so deaf as those who will not hear.”*¹

The deaf-mutes who appear in the New Testament are therefore often used as pictures of the unconverted world.

The hymnist writes,²

O make the deaf to hear Thy Word,
And teach the dumb to speak, dear Lord,
Who dare not yet the faith avow,
Though secretly they hold it now.

Let us therefore consider *Our Glorious Redeemer Heals the Spiritual Deaf-Mutes*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. The Background To Our Text

From Tyre, Jesus and His disciples journeyed north to Sidon, then east and south toward the Sea of Galilee, and then to the Decapolis (the Ten Cities). This is the area east of the Jordan River and Southeast of the Sea of Galilee.

The Decapolis was a region of Hellenistic, that is, Greek culture, and therefore was predominantly gentile. Our Lord performed many miracles in the Decapolis and also preached the Word there. He again showed that Gentiles were not excluded from the kingdom of God.

During His journey from Tyre to the Decapolis Jesus avoided the public eye. He devoted His time to instructing His disciples privately — a very important task, since they were to take the Gospel out into all the world.

Jesus had been in the Decapolis once before.³ That time the people had asked Him to leave when they suffered the loss of a herd of pigs. But the demon-possessed man whom Jesus healed had gone throughout the area proclaiming Jesus' power and mercy.

This witness, by just one man, brought a remarkable change. When Jesus returned, crowds gathered⁴ and brought their sick to Jesus. Mark related just one of the healings Jesus performed, undoubtedly the most striking one.

The case was pathetic, beyond the ability of any doctor to heal or even to improve — a man who was deaf and mute. Friends of the man brought him to Jesus. Since the man who was deaf and mute could neither understand easily nor express himself readily, Jesus took him aside privately.

Then using some exceptional sign language, the Lord made the man understand what He was about to do for him. Jesus placed His fingers in his ears meaning that Jesus would give him hearing. Jesus spit and touched his tongue. Jesus gave him the ability to speak clearly.

By looking up to heaven and sighing deeply, Jesus showed the man that the cure He was bringing him was more than an ordinary man could perform. It came from God. Then Jesus spoke one word, and the man was immediately and completely cured.

As we read the Aramaic word *Ephphatha*, we again hear the very syllables Jesus spoke. In that way Mark brings our Lord very close to us, even as he does

in Mark 5:41, where he quotes the Aramaic words Jesus spoke when raising Jairus' daughter from death.

The reaction of the crowd is our reaction too, as we through these words of Mark stand in the presence of Jesus who can be nothing less than the Son of God. For only God can do what He did.

Jesus commanded the people not to tell anyone because the Jewish people of His day had a totally false, political conception of the coming Messiah. Christ made it clear that He had not come into this predominantly gentile territory to organise a political insurrection. He had come on earth to lay down His life as payment for the sins of the world. He was determined to let nothing compromise the purpose for which He had come.

2. Who Are The Spiritual Deaf-Mutes?

In many cases at Jesus' time deafness was caused by demon possession. This does not mean to say that this is still the case today, except that, as the devil has brought all sin into the world, so he is the cause of all human afflictions and diseases.

All people are spiritual deaf-mutes, because in their natural, unconverted condition they are under the power of the devil. We read in 1 John 3:8, ***8 He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning.***

Those who are born in sin and live in sin, then, are the spiritual deaf-mutes. We are all born in sin, for glorious Redeemer says in John 3:6, ***6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh.*** And those who have not accepted this Redeemer continue to live in sin, they walk in the counsel of the ungodly, they stand in the path of sinners, and sit in the seat of the scornful.⁵

And all these servants of sin and Satan are deaf to the words of their Lord and God. As Luther says,⁶ *In spiritual and divine things, however, which concern the salvation of his soul, man is like a pillar of salt, like Lot's wife, yes, like a log or a stone, like a lifeless statue which uses neither mouth nor eyes nor senses nor heart, ... All pleas, all appeals, all admonitions are in vain. It is useless to threaten, to scold, or even to teach and preach until the Holy Spirit enlightens, converts, and regenerates man,*²² *a destiny for which only man, no stone or log, was created.*

We often speak of the heathen in foreign lands as blind. The hymnist wrote, *“The heathen in his blindness bows down to wood and stone.”*⁷ Similarly, we can speak of the unbelievers in so-called Christian lands as deaf and dumb.

Have you not often spoken to an acquaintance, a neighbour, a friend, a relative, even a husband or wife or child, of their soul’s salvation, and you found that they seemed absolutely deaf to your words? They hear them, but make excuses or promises they do not keep. *“There is none so deaf as those who will not hear.”*

And yet, there is healing for these spiritual deaf-mutes, for our glorious Redeemer, who healed the deaf man brought to Him, wants to heal all who live in the condition of spiritual deafness.

3. How Does Jesus Heal Them?

We read in our Gospel: *“He took him aside from the multitude.”* Yes, Jesus often singles out the spiritual deaf-mutes and takes them under His special care. He may do this by a special dispensation of His providence: letting them sink into trouble, misery, sickness, or sorrow; or by showering them with His goodness, with prosperity, or with a miraculous escape from danger.

Or He may single them out during a church service, during a sermon, that the one who has until then been deaf and dumb to the Lord’s Word, will feel its arrow piercing his heart.

As Nathan said to David: *“You are the man,”*⁸ so one’s conscience might be pricked, one’s spiritual deafness, blindness, and hopelessness, becoming suddenly apparent.

Then we read in our text that Jesus *put His fingers in his ears, and He spat and touched his tongue.* ³⁴ *Then, looking up to heaven, He sighed, and said to him, “Ephphatha,” that is, “Be opened.”*

What are His fingers now? Where is His call, “Eph-phatha?” The Gospel of Jesus Christ is for *“it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes.”*⁹ The Holy Spirit comes with this Gospel and in it He testifies of Jesus and His work.

He also comes through the Sacraments. We often forget that. There is Holy Baptism. When Emperor Frederick Barbarossa was drowning in a river during

one of the Crusades his dying words were: "*I comfort myself in the waters of my baptism.*"

And in the Sacrament of the Altar He touches our spiritual ears to remove more and more of our spiritual deafness.

All this is certainly as much of a miracle as the one Jesus did on the deaf-mute at the Sea of Galilee. Do miracles still occur? Look around you and see people converted, the deaf beginning to hear, the dumb beginning to speak and testifying of their faith in their glorious Redeemer.

In conclusion all this has been done to you. Or has it not been done to you? Are you still deaf to spiritual things? Are your lips still closed to a confession of your Saviour?

He is coming to you now. He wants to touch you with the divine hands of His blessed Gospel. Will you not let Him? He calls to you through the prophet, as we read in Isaiah 42:18, ¹⁸ "***Hear, you deaf; And look, you blind, that you may see.***"

And Jesus Himself cries out in Luke 14:35, ***He who has ears to hear, let him hear!***" Yield yourself completely to Christ as the Psalmist writes: ¹⁵ ***O Lord, open my lips*** (yes, my whole life), ***and my mouth shall show forth Your praise,***¹⁰ the praise of my glorious Redeemer.

Then you will not be deaf to the cries of your fellow-men who are still spiritually deaf, blind, dead and dying. Everywhere they are lying in the bondage of sin and Satan. Will you be silent and not confess Him who has released you? Do the millions of heathen in other lands, and the millions of indifferent and ungodly in our own country, not touch your heart?

Will you not be an agent of your glorious Redeemer to unstop the ears of others?

Our text says, ***Then they brought to Him one who was deaf and had an impediment in his speech.*** Are you bringing one, any one? Are we publishing the good news, the Gospel of our glorious Redeemer, who ***has done all things well. He makes both the deaf to hear and the mute to speak?***

O let us help that the time will come of which the prophet Isaiah speaks in Isaiah 35:5-6, ⁵ ***Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, And the ears of the***

deaf shall be unstopped. ⁶ Then the lame shall leap like a deer, And the tongue of the dumb sing.

May our ears and hearts and minds be opened that we gladly hear and receive God's Word and bring forth much fruit. May the strings of our tongues also be loosed that we may be able to speak plainly and courageously to others about the message of life and the way to heaven. May our lives be a reflection of Jesus, who is our only Saviour.

Let us close with the words of the hymnist,¹¹

O gently call those gone astray,
That they may find the saving way:
Let every conscience sore oppressed
In Thee find peace and heav'nly rest. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Matthew Henry, Psalm 58:1.5

² Hymn 217 v 4

³ Mark 5:20

⁴ See Matthew 15:30 and Mark 7:33

⁵ See Psalm 1

⁶ Formula of Concord, Sol. Decl., Article II, Free will, para 20

⁷ Hymn 224

⁸ 2 Samuel 12:7

⁹ Romans 1:16

¹⁰ Psalm 51:15

¹¹ Hymn 217 v3