

## God's Intentions When He Afflicts Us With Illness.

Text: Mark 7:31-37

Suggested Hymns:

243, 54, 161, 452, 408

1) Are To Call Our Attention To The

True Original Cause Of Illness

2) Are To Direct Us To The True Physician And To The True Remedy For Our Spiritual Disease

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, <sup>31</sup> *Again, departing from the region of Tyre and Sidon, He came through the midst of the region of Decapolis to the Sea of Galilee.*

<sup>32</sup> *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.* <sup>33</sup> *And He took him aside from the multitude, and put His fingers in his ears, and He spat and touched his tongue.* <sup>34</sup> *Then, looking up to heaven, He sighed, and said to him, "Ephphatha," that is, "Be opened."*

<sup>35</sup> *Immediately his ears were opened, and the impediment of his tongue was loosed, and he spoke plainly.* <sup>36</sup> *Then He commanded them that they should tell no one; but the more He commanded them, the more widely they proclaimed it.* <sup>37</sup> *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,

Our Gospel presents to us a piece of human misery. A man is brought to Jesus who is both deaf and has an impediment in his speech. He is both deaf and mute, and who can conceive the misery of a poor deaf-mute?

The world of sound is closed to him. He cannot hear the warbling of the birds, the voice of friends, and the harmony of sweet sounds. In company he sees the lips of others moving in joyous conversation, he sees how much they are interested in the matter under discussion; but he is barred from taking part, he does not have the slightest idea of what they are speaking of, and in his soul there is a great blank.

And if a thought comes to him, he cannot give utterance to it. He is mute. The mechanism of his tongue is like a piece of machinery which is irreparably out of order and refuses to work. He must resort to movements of the limbs and to gestures to make himself understood.

And, oh, how miserable he must feel when, as is often the case, he cannot make himself understood! But worst of all, he cannot hear the preaching of the Word of God, which can save his immortal soul. He cannot take part in the Divine Service, and his tongue must remain silent when others sing hymns of praise.

In our age a great deal has been done to improve the miserable condition of the deaf and mute. Although they cannot be made to hear, many of them have at least been taught to speak. And those who cannot speak with their lips, have been taught to speak with their fingers and hands.

Missionary work is done among the deaf-mutes. Congregations are formed, and the Gospel is proclaimed to them in sign language. We must, however, admit that this is a very tedious way of communication, and, in spite of all improvements, their condition is bad enough as it is.

There are many other ailments in the world. There is a host of diseases. The world is one great hospital of diseases. When man is born, he is born with the germ of death. Very few people are so fortunate as never to experience the taste of illness.

To some, illness attaches itself at the cradle and scarcely leaves them until they sink into the grave. But we must know that all things in this world are done under the ruling of divine Providence, and that it cannot be by chance when God allows us to endure illness.

Let us consider, with the help of God's Holy Spirit, *God's Intentions When He Afflicts Us With Illness*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

### **1. God's Intentions Are To Call Our Attention To The True Original Cause Of Illness**

We cannot deny that the science of medicine has made great strides in modern times. Doctors have been tireless in their efforts to find the causes of

certain diseases and the remedies that lead to their cure. Their efforts have been crowned with success to a great extent.

Microbes, bacteria, and bacilli have been discovered to be the germs of certain diseases, and medicines have been found that kill these germs and thus remove the cause of the disease.

As a rule, doctors are more skilful at present than they were in olden times, and many diseases are cured now that formerly were fatal in almost every case.

Yet there are hundreds of ailments and diseases which baffle medical skill, for which no remedy has been found, and presumably, never will be found, and even the most skilful physician may err in his diagnosis, apply the wrong treatment, and fail to save the life of his patient.

God rules and governs the universe. There is nothing done in this world by chance. All things come from above. Not a sparrow falls on the ground without our Father, and the very hairs of our head are all numbered.<sup>1</sup>

Not a disease can come to our door, no illness can touch us without the will and permission of our heavenly Father. When we are afflicted with illness, we may find some natural cause, and blame ourselves for not taking the proper care of our mortal body; but we must know that everything is done under the ruling of divine Providence, and that there must be some reason why God did not avert from us the evil, that there must be certain intentions on the part of God, intentions connected with the affliction which He has sent upon us.

And what are His intentions? Let us examine our Gospel and see. We read,<sup>31</sup> *Again, departing from the region of Tyre and Sidon, He came through the midst of the region of Decapolis to the Sea of Galilee.*

<sup>32</sup> *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.* <sup>33</sup> *And He took him aside from the multitude*

Was it by chance that Jesus came all the way from the coast of the Mediterranean Sea, where Tyre and Sidon were situated, to the Sea of Galilee to meet that deaf-mute?

Was it by chance that this unfortunate man's friends were waiting for Jesus, and took the man to Jesus, asking Him to put His hand upon him? Was it by

chance that Jesus did not accede to their wishes, but that He went His own way about curing the man, and that He took him aside from the multitude to deal with him alone?

Was it by chance that this individual was afflicted with the ailment which no one but Jesus could heal? No, my friends, there was a divine plan and purpose to everything that is recorded in our Gospel, and the final purpose was that the glory of Jesus, the eternal Son of God, should be revealed.

And so there are certain intentions on the part of God when He sends us sickness, intentions aiming at His glory in attending to our immortal souls. When God afflicts you with illness, He takes you aside from the multitude, He deals with you privately, and points out to you the true original cause of your illness in His divine Word.

Why is it that we are all subject to disease? Why is it that we cannot enjoy this life in perfect health and happiness; and that this beautiful world has been turned for us into a vale of tears? Why is it that we must suffer pains and sorrows and, finally, sink into the grave?

God says in the Bible, *“just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned.”*<sup>2</sup> The true original cause of all our misery upon this earth, of our diseases and sicknesses also, which finally terminate in death, is sin.

If we were without sin, if we were perfectly holy and righteous, as were our first parents in paradise before the fall, we would never feel a pain and never die.

We must look upon sin as the cause of all our trouble when we are afflicted with illness. We should realise that we are sinners. We should be aroused from the apathy of sin. We should sincerely repent of our transgressions.

Lying on the sickbed, we should meditate on our life, and realise that sin is at the bottom of all our misery, and direct our thoughts to eternity, and say with the psalmist, *“If You, LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?”*<sup>3</sup>

## **2. God’s Intentions Are To Direct Us To The True Physician And To The True Remedy For Our Spiritual Disease.**

God's intentions, however, in sending us illness, are not that we should sink into utter despair on account of our sins, but that we should call upon the right Physician and apply the true remedy for our spiritual disease.

The manner in which Jesus healed the deaf-mute is thus described, "*He put His fingers in his ears, and He spat and touched his tongue.* <sup>34</sup> *Then, looking up to heaven, He sighed, and said to him, "Ephphatha," that is, "Be opened."*

<sup>35</sup> *Immediately his ears were opened, and the impediment of his tongue was loosed, and he spoke plainly."*

Here we have both, a physical treatment for the body, and a spiritual treatment for the soul. The Lord could certainly have healed this man by His simple word and will, as He did upon other occasions.

But why does He touch the man's tongue with the moisture from His own mouth and put His fingers into his ears? This was done, doubtless, to make him understand that a cure was to be attempted. At the same time, however, it suggests that we may and should use proper means for the treatment of physical diseases.

The theory of curing diseases by denying their existence is wrong. They may effect some cures by will power, and by the help of the evil spirit. But the grossest failures are on record, and it has been stated by coroners' juries that patients of theirs who died, could have been saved if physicians and medicines had been used.

In any illness we can use and apply the earthly means God has placed at our disposal for curing diseases. But what did the Lord mean when He looked up to heaven and sighed? Was this also a part of the physical treatment?

No; the deaf-mute's thoughts were thereby directed to heaven. He was made to understand that the only effective help, not only for the mortal body, but also for the immortal soul, the only effective help against evil and sin, on account of which Jesus sighed, is to be expected from above, from the Father of light.

It was the spiritual treatment of the man's soul which Jesus undertook when He looked up to heaven and sighed.

It is principally our spiritual treatment which God has in view when He afflicts us with illness. His intention is that we should learn to trust in Him alone and expect of Him alone our help.

In sickness we may have all the confidence in our attending doctor and in the medicine he prescribes. But He who stands above physicians and medicine is God in heaven, and without His divine help we can never recover from any disease that has fastened upon us.

In sickness we should not do, therefore, as King Asa did, of whom we are told that *“in his disease he did not seek the LORD, but the physicians.”*<sup>4</sup> In prayer we should call upon the true Physician for the mortal body and then apply the true remedy for the immortal soul.

God Himself says in Exodus 15:26, *For I am the LORD who heals you.*” He has prepared, for the disease of our souls, for our sinfulness and incapacity to enter into eternal life, a universal remedy which never fails.

Did He not send His beloved Son Jesus Christ into the world and have Him die for our sins? Did not our dear Saviour Jesus fulfil for us, in our stead, all the commandments of the divine Law, and pay the penalty for our transgressions by His painful suffering and bitter death on the cross?

Is not Christ, then, the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world?<sup>5</sup>

See, therefore, the remedy for the soul, and the only true remedy: Christ’s merits, Christ’s perfect and spotless righteousness, which you must appropriate to yourself and make your own by faith.

Although your body may be diseased, your soul will be healthy and sound, and you will join the people in our Gospel in saying, *“He has done all things well.”*

May the Lord be with us always, in health and in sickness, in the days of joy and in the days of sorrow; and we shall always say with the psalmist, as written in Psalm 103:1–4, *<sup>1</sup> Bless the LORD, O my soul; And all that is within me, bless His holy name! <sup>2</sup> Bless the LORD, O my soul, And forget not all His benefits: <sup>3</sup> Who forgives all your iniquities, Who heals all your diseases, <sup>4</sup> Who redeems*

*your life from destruction, Who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies.” Amen.*

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

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<sup>1</sup> Matt 10:29-30

<sup>2</sup> Romans 5:12

<sup>3</sup> Psalm 130:3

<sup>4</sup> 2 Chronicles 16:12

<sup>5</sup> 1 John 2:2