

Ephphatha! Be Opened Mark 7:31

We continue our look at the gospel of Mark this morning. We are also going to celebrate Communion at the close of our service today. Turn with me to **Mark 7:31** as we look at God's word and prepare our hearts to come to the table of the Lord.

V31 - Jesus healed the daughter of the Syrophenician woman in Tyre and then for some reason went north, through Sidon, a city about 25 miles north of Tyre, and then turned south and came back down into the region known as the Decapolis or "ten cities." This was a gentile area made up of ten cities around the Sea of Galilee.

V32 - Some people brought a man to him who was deaf and could hardly talk. Once again we see un-named, unheralded people who are part of the miracle. What an essential ministry and what a great joy to bring people to Jesus! When was the last time you invited someone to church or to meet Jesus? Discover the blessing that comes with bringing someone to Jesus. Notice too it was the friends who "begged" Jesus to place his hand on the man and heal him. These were true friends who interceded on behalf of this man.

V33 - Jesus took the man aside, away from the crowd. So unlike us preachers today. You have to appreciate the fact that Jesus was not doing this to entertain or impress anyone, to win fans or followers. He didn't take photos for his newsletter. He didn't even post this on youtube or facebook. This was simply the compassionate act of our loving Savior. This was Jesus through his actions, announcing that the kingdom of God had come, breaking into this one man's world.

Since the man was deaf and could not hear Jesus, Jesus essentially showed the man he understood his situation and through a rather primitive sign language indicated to him what he was going to do. "I am going to heal you and create what is necessary for you to hear and I am going to loosen your tongue so you can speak." I think there was something creative going on in this miracle.

He put his fingers into his ears, spit and touched the man's tongue with the spittle, and then notice, "**He looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh, said to him, 'Ephphatha!' (which means, 'Be opened!')**" Mark once again is explaining to his readers. Jesus spoke the Aramaic word for "be opened." In the superstition of the ancient world "healers" often spoke incantations or some kind of gibberish over the sick as some kind of magic to heal them. Mark

wanted to make sure his readers understood that Jesus wasn't speaking gibberish nor was this a magical incantation but Jesus spoke a command of healing to the man and the bible says his tongue was loosened and his ears were opened and he began to speak plainly.

Jesus told them not to tell anyone, but it's pretty hard to hide the fact that a man who was deaf and mute is now hearing and speaking. The word spread as the man and his friends testified to the miracle. **“People everywhere were overwhelmed with amazement. ‘He has done everything well,’ they said. ‘He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak.’”**

Mark pays particular attention to the comments being made by people about Jesus. Especially perhaps the comments of the Jewish folks, since they would have been aware of the Messianic prophecy of the prophet Isaiah. He declared that the day of the Lord was coming, a day they associated with the Messiah and the coming of God's kingdom and **“Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame leap like a deer and the mute tongue shout for joy.” Isaiah 35:5-6**

They witnessed this happening at the hands of Jesus. It is interesting that Mark uses the Greek word *mogilalos* which the NIV translates as “could hardly talk.” That word is used only here in the New Testament and it is used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Septuagint, only in this passage in Isaiah 35:6. Mark considered this miracle a fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy. The kingdom of God is here and the mute shout for joy!

It's a wonderful story and thank God for the healing of this man. The physical miracle of restoring this man's hearing and speech is extraordinary, but he wasn't the only man who had a hearing problem in that crowd. The disciples were hearing impaired, not in a physical sense, but in a spiritual sense.

In Mark 8 they get into another incomprehensible discussion about bread and their lack of it. Jesus says, “watch out for the leaven of the Pharisees and that of Herod.” Leaven was always viewed as something wicked, sinful, evil when referred to like this. They talked about his comment and then said, “he said that because we forgot to bring bread!” Exasperated I think, Jesus said, **“Why are you talking about bread? Do you still not see or understand? Are your hearts hardened? Do you have eyes but fail to see and ears but fail to hear?” Mark 8:17-18**

The disciples were hearing impaired – not in a physical sense, but in a spiritual sense.

They had ears but failed to hear. They couldn't or wouldn't understand. They focused on their lack of resources - no bread, no money, and Jesus had just fed four thousand with seven loaves and a few small fish. In spite of the evidence of Jesus' power and provision, they couldn't hear and understand who he was. They could see what he did, but they couldn't comprehend it. They could remember the numbers - how many were fed and how many baskets of food were collected afterwards, but they couldn't recognize they had the bread-maker with them. They had ears but they couldn't hear.

And today, I have to wonder about our spiritual hearing. Have we become spiritually hearing impaired? Have we gone deaf to the voice of God? Perhaps we've lost our spiritual hearing due to the constant barrage of noise and information and media from the world's perspective. We are bombarded by sound and opinion, by audio and video stimulus until our heart and spirit and mind are never truly quieted before God. We never quiet our souls and allow his voice to be heard. The continual noise of the world drowns out the voice of God's Spirit that wants to call us aside and to speak words of hope and love and grace to us. **"Be still and know that I am God" Psalm 46:10** declares. But remember the context. That chapter begins, **"God is our refuge and strength, an ever present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea..."** Be still and know that I am God, in the midst of trouble and crisis that invoke fear in the hearts of men and women.

Do you hear what the Lord is saying to you this morning? You have ears but can you hear what the Spirit says? Perhaps it's not just the noise of the world that has left you spiritually deaf, perhaps it is the embrace of the world that has hardened your heart and left you both unwilling and unable to hear the voice of God. You've just written him off. "God has nothing to say to me any longer and I've nothing to say to him" so we simply ignore him, his word, his instruction, his calling for us. Eventually the callouses upon our heart cause deafness to our spiritual ears. We no longer hear or understand.

We've become spiritually deaf. Like the disciples, we have ears but we fail to hear. We still don't understand. And when we've lost our ability to hear, we lose our ability to speak. When the church became spiritually deaf, when we stopped listening to God and his word for the church and for the world, we also lost our voice. We lost our ability and our desire to hear the truth and to speak the truth to a world that is being deceived. We've been frightened into silence.

The church can't speak what the church can't or won't hear.

We've stopped hearing. We've lost our voice. So what shall we do? We do what this man did. We come to Jesus. We repent and we come in faith to the one who makes even the deaf hear and the mute speak. We come to Jesus and he says "**Ephphatha! Be opened!**" Come to Jesus and let him open your spiritual ears and your heart to hear again and to open your mouth and loosen your tongue to speak again. It's what we are about to do as we come to the Lord's table. He said "This bread is my body which is broken for you. Take it and eat it. And this cup is my blood which is poured out for you. Drink it. For as often as you eat the bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death." It is here in his presence as we marvel at his grace that our ears are opened and our tongue is loosened so we can proclaim again what Jesus has done for us.

Come back to this place, to the cross of the Lord and to the Lord's table. Let your ears be opened to this incredible truth: While you were still a sinner and in rebellion against God, Christ died for you so you could be forgiven and live a new way and have eternal life. So hear it again. Hear it with opened ears.

Let me ask you, "Do you have spiritual ears that can hear?" If so, why are you living in bondage to sin when he died to make you new, to set you free, to give you power to overcome? And once your ears are opened and you hear the truth of the gospel of Christ and are changed by it, then you find a voice again to speak, to proclaim this glorious truth every day, until he comes. He who has ears to hear, let him hear and let him proclaim. Jesus died to save sinners – all of us – and if we will believe upon him, that he died for us and rose again and if we will confess our sins and receive him as Savior, he will change us and give us a new heart and a new life with new spiritual ears to hear him and with a new voice to praise him and to make his glory known. He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

Holy Lamb of God, the one true sacrifice who atoned for our sins, forgive us for allowing the noise of this world to overwhelm your voice. I'm sorry that I've grown spiritually deaf, my hearing impaired by the volume of every other voice but yours, my comprehension affected by the hardness of my heart. I've refused to listen, refused to respond, ignored your calling to me. I'm sorry. I ask Jesus that you would speak that word over my heart and my spiritual ears once again today. Ephphatha. Open my ears Lord to hear and release my tongue to speak and I will proclaim your death and your resurrection and your victory and your holiness and faithfulness and

your purposes for the rest of my days on this earth. Lord let us hear and understand as we come to you in faith. In Jesus name. Amen.

Come to Jesus today. Ask him and he will open your ears to hear again. He will breathe life into your spirit again. He will give you hope and joy once again. O God, open our ears to hear and to be changed by what we hear - your voice calling us to new life, to a walk of holiness, to a journey of grace, to a lifetime of your presence and peace. (Servers coming)

The words of the book of Common Prayer reads, "We do not presume to come to this thy table, O merciful Lord, trusting in our own righteousness, but in thy manifold and great mercies. We are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under thy table, but thou art the same Lord, whose nature and disposition is always to have mercy. Grant us therefore, gracious Lord, so to eat the flesh of thy dear Son Jesus Christ and to drink his blood, that our sinful bodies may be made clean by his body, and our souls washed through his most precious blood and that we may evermore dwell in him and he in us. Amen."

The apostle Paul declared, "For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you, the Lord Jesus on the night he was betrayed took bread and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." "Take and eat this in remembrance that Christ died for you and feed on him in your heart by faith, with thanksgiving."

In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me. For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. Drink this cup in remembrance that Christ's blood was shed for you and be thankful."

Let me declare to you the good news. Upon the authority of the word of God himself I tell you, because you have repented of your sins and come to God through Christ in faith, then by his mercy and grace you have been redeemed, ransomed, born again into eternal life. Your sins are forgiven, your guilt is gone, the shame of your past has been covered by his blood and there is therefore now no condemnation to you because you are walking according to the Spirit and the

new life you have is the life of Christ who lives within you. Thank God!

And now, may the peace of God, which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God and of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord. And the blessings of God, Father, Son and Holy Ghost be among you and remain with you now and forevermore. Amen.