

Mark 7:24-37

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[0 : 0 0] We're in the passage tonight, Mark 7, and Paul read for us from verse 24. We're going all the way down to verse 37. I'm focusing on verses 31 to 37, but a moment just to look back at what's happened before. It's interesting, this passage, both passages that we've read tonight, really shows us two quite strange examples about Jesus interacting with people. In the one, he calls a lady a dog, and in the next one, he spits on his hands and touches someone else's tongue. It's quite bizarre. It's quite absurd if you begin to think about it. And perhaps one of the main things that I hope you take away from tonight's meeting, whether you're a Christian or not, is that in order to understand the Bible, you need to have a rich biblical literacy. You have to have a rich biblical imagination in order to understand all that takes place in the Bible. And so it's worthwhile, if you're not a Christian, to delve deep into the Bible and to just read, to just let the world be shaped by what you read in the scriptures. Otherwise, you won't make sense of the things that

Jesus does. In many ways, as we come to this passage, we struggle to make sense of what Jesus does when he spits on his hand and touches someone else's tongue. So, I've got three points to make tonight.

The first one is the clarity of Jesus and the requirement for personal faith. The clarity of Jesus and the requirement for personal faith. And I'll give you the other points as I get to them.

But the first one is the clarity of Jesus. So, let's just return back to chapter 7, verse 31, and let's see what it says there. Then he returned from the region of Tyre and went through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee in the region of the Decapolis. 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. And taking him aside from the crowd privately, he put his fingers into his ears, and after spitting, touched his tongue. And looking up to heaven, he sighed, and he said, Ephatha, that is, be opened. And his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. It's really a strange scene that unfolds right here. But Jesus has come back from Tyre, the region of Tyre, which was a pagan, Gentile country, and that's where he met the Syrophenician women. And now he's again at the Sea of Galilee. This isn't quite in the Promised Land, but it is a Jewish settlement of people that settled there in the Decapolis. And this crowd brings to Jesus a man who cannot speak, nor can he hear. Now, he can speak just with some serious impediment. So, communication must be really onerous and difficult for him. And it's worthwhile for us, for a moment, to put ourselves into the shoes of this man. He is brought by a crowd, a thronging crowd, to see a man who, by all accounts, looks quite obviously like a tradesman. Jesus, as we know, was a carpenter. He must have had hands that would mark him out as a man that's a carpenter.

He certainly didn't wear the Pharisees' garb. He wasn't part of the Sanhedrin. He wasn't a religious figure. Around him, he had his friends. These guys were fishermen, and some of them were tax collectors. They certainly weren't part of the religious crowd. And so, this thronging crowd brought this man who's deaf, unable to hear, unable to ask questions to clarify what's going on, and they bring him to Jesus. And it's important what we hear is they beg Jesus. It's not the man begging Jesus. They beg Jesus to heal the man. They beg Jesus to heal the man.

[3 : 2 9] And then, it really becomes quite bizarre. Jesus takes this man aside, privately, the passage tells us. So, we can imagine he takes him around a corner. His disciples are most likely with him. We've often seen that when Mark refers to Jesus in private, he's in a home, but his disciples are there with him. And there, he stands in front of this man, this man who has been brought by the thronging crowd to see this carpenter, this Jewish carpenter, and now he's privately meeting with this Jesus, and Jesus looks at him, takes him by the ears, pokes his fingers into his ears, and then the next moment you might feel the release of pressure as he takes his fingers out. And then he touches the spit on his tongue, and he walks over and he touches the man's tongue,

his mouth. Now, for a moment, if you want to imagine yourself, please then do it, it looks bizarre, but if you put your hands on your ears, and you can just imagine the hummed sounds that you hear, and the strange scene that's unfolding, this man must have been truly baffled by all that he sees. And then the next moment, he can quite visibly see that Jesus sighs. He breathes. He breathes out. That's what the passage is. He just breathes out. And then as he looks intent at Jesus, all he can see is, how bizarre, how strange.

But yet the moment that it made sense to him what Jesus was saying, be opened, we hear the man's ears were opened, and he was able to speak. And so what we see happening here is Jesus. Jesus is absolutely, unmistakably clear in who he is and what he came to do to this man, personally and intimately. He addresses this man in his very own situation, and everything that he does is personal. It's meant to be intelligible. It's meant to this man, for this man, in order to be understood what Jesus is coming to do. Now I'll explain a bit more about the ears and the spitting in a moment, but let's just stop there for an application.

Jesus is interested in you as an individual. Jesus is interested and takes great interest in who you are as a person. You are not just a face in the crowd, even if I can just see the top part of your face tonight. Jesus is interested in your whole being. He's not just interested in this evening of your life. He's interested in the whole story of your life. He is a God that takes interest in us from our birth until our very end. He knows our story, and he is, as we can see in this passage, intent on making himself as clear as possible to you, no matter what your circumstances. If you're an unbeliever, the God of the Bible is intent on being as clear as possible to explain to you who he is and what he came to do. He's not a God that speaks in riddles that try to withhold himself from you. He is presenting himself clearly to you, and tonight is perhaps an opportunity for that. If you're a believer, you need to know that perhaps you've grown numb and accustomed to the gospel, but the God of the Bible is a God that knows you, knows your story, and wants to clearly communicate to you who he is and what he came to do.

But both of these groups, both of you require, both of these circumstances require a response in personal faith. Take the information that you hear, that you receive from this Jesus that he's so clear about he is, and act by putting your faith and your trust in him, perhaps renewing your faith and your trust in him even tonight. Now Jesus puts his fingers into the ears, and after spitting touch this man's tongue, why does he do that? Why does he do that? Jesus is making it as clear as possible to this man that he's intent on healing him. He's intent on opening his ears and loosening his tongue. And when Jesus addresses the man with the word, he addresses the man in a way that he understands that Jesus is about to heal him. He is cutting through the layers of unbelief that this man might face. And we've seen earlier in the gospel of Mark how God, through Jesus, speaks to his people, and he's speaking produces the faith that responds. So Jesus speaks to the man, and it produces the faith that responds. Jesus has to do this. We've seen earlier in this whole gospel of Mark that his own disciples are called on numerous occasions hard-hearted. Hard-hearted. They're unable to understand. They go through incredible experiences with Jesus, and yet they don't understand. And Jesus is fully intent on making it as clear as possible what he came to do and who he is. There's one occurrence that happens in John 9 where the disciples bring a man who was born blind to Jesus, and they ask him, who was it? Why is he blind? Who sinned? What's the reason for his blindness? And then Jesus says plainly, he says, it was not that this man sinned or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him. You see, my central premise here is that Jesus performs these miracles as a wordless sermon, as a parable, to address often the crowds, often the poor person suffering because of his illness, but most often his disciples. He's performing the miracle so that his disciples can see what Jesus is doing, so that their hard hearts would be softened and they would believe.

And he's constantly speaking to us, knowing that we too have hard hearts, that is, slow to believe and slow to trust in the promises of God. He's constantly speaking to us. Now, it's this quote from C.S. Lewis, I'm sure you're familiar with it. He says, pain insists upon being attended to, but shouts, well, God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks to our consciousness, but shouts to us in our pains. It is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world. God whispers to us in our pleasures. The whole creation around us, Romans 1 would remind us, is he's preaching to us, he's speaking to us about who God is, his invisible attributes, his eternal power, his divine nature. Ever since the creation of the world, these things are clear, so no one is without excuse. God is whispering to us who he is and what he's intent on doing. But then God goes further and he speaks to us through our

consciences.

[10:19] And we read this in Romans 2 verse 14, for when Gentiles who do not have the law by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts while their conscience also bears witness.

Now, God whispers to us in the pleasures that we enjoy of creation. He speaks to us through our conscience. As I'm sure many of us have found out in our short lives so far, that he shouts to us in our suffering and our pain. It is, as C.S. Lewis says, his megaphone to rouse a deaf world. And that is the prayer that should accompany this passage. As we look at the pain that our city and our country is going through because not just of COVID, but the ensuing economic downturn that is sure to follow.

There are many medical treatments that have been halted because of this. There's pain to follow. There's opportunities for God to speak to a people, to make clear who he is and what he came to do.

That's what he did with this man who was a deaf and a mute. And he's coming to us as a country and as a city, as a community, as a church, to remind us once again of who he is and what he came to do.

It requires a response, personal faith in this Jesus. Point two. This passage tells us that there was an expectation of a Jewish Messiah that is reliant on a biblical culture. And I don't know how to put that point more succinctly than that, but just call it biblical culture. Let me try and talk a little bit about that and you'll see why I mean that. When Jesus appears to this man and he touches his ears and he touches his tongue and he heals him, it is clearly understood by the crowd that is there around Jesus. In fact, they break out in something of a doxology in verse 37 and they were astonished beyond measure saying, he has done all things well. He even makes a deaf hear and the mute speak. So they break out in song when they see what Jesus has done to this man. So what's going on in their minds? Why do they interpret what Jesus does with this man as something that's worthy of a doxology, of a song of praise? Why do they interpret it like this? Well, they do this because, well, they've got a rich biblical imagination and steeped in biblical literacy. They understand the culture of the Bible. What do I mean with that? Well, in Isaiah 35, there is a clear prophecy about a time when someone will come, the Messiah, that will do exactly this.

[13:08] Verse 5 of Isaiah 35 says this, Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap like a deer and the tongue of the mute sing for joy.

So those that knew about this prophecy saw Jesus and they realized something, something happened just now in Jesus that changes everything that requires a different response. There were two responses open to them. The one was to worship him as the Messiah, as prophesied by Isaiah 35. The other one was to make him a military leader like they did 160 years before, raising up the Maccabean revolt that was intent on opposing the oppressors. But this crowd seemingly chose to sing a song of praise to this Jesus. They could only do this because they understood what Jesus was all about. They had the biblical background.

The furniture was there for them to put it in together to see what it was all about. And perhaps that's what will help us as we look at this passage to further understand, well, a biblical culture, biblical literacy is necessary and it's something worth pursuing as we plant churches, as we seek to do gospel ministry. It is one thing, it's a good thing to preach the gospel and to expound the scriptures. But it is also a good thing to teach your children just basic biblical literacy. It is also a good thing to teach your city, your community just basic biblical literacy. As we give up ground on these things, well, we're removing some of the pieces that we'll need in order to bring the gospel to bear on someone's heart. I was reminded over Christmas of a boy who certainly did not have biblical literacy, who asked his teacher after Christmas, why is it, after the minister came to tell them about Christmas and the nativity play, why is it that they called a festive season like this a word that his dad often exclaims when his football team loses on the screen or when something hurts him or is angry or upset?

And the teacher had to explain to him, no, it's the name of Jesus Christ. It is a name of a person. That's who it is. The biblical literacy simply isn't there. And that's what's necessary. And I want to push all of us, whether you're a child or an adult, to use opportunities to build a biblical culture in your sphere of influence so that we can draw on that in future. Well, this is necessary if we were to

understand exactly why Jesus does what he does here with this man. So let me try and explain the saliva and the ear for a minute. Let me just, it's long shots. I'll admit that. Both of the comments I'm about to make is tenuous links, but it's the kind of thing that you can do if you've got a rich biblical understanding and you can sort of see the Bible in its fullness. You're not just looking at little verses and little words to just fixate on that, but you look at the old tapestry of scripture.

So why the saliva? Now, earlier we've been preaching through Mark's gospel in Canada Water Church. And in chapter 14, Jesus says to them, he says, and he called the people to him again and said to him, hear me all of you understand. There is nothing outside a person that by going into him can defile him, but the things that come out of him is what defiles a person. And yes, Jesus, and he takes the saliva that comes out of his mouth and he touches someone else's tongue with it.

[16:31] It's as if he's putting words, actions to words. And he says, out of me, there is nothing that defiles. And it fits because with the lady at the well in John, is it John four? He says, if you were to ask me, I will give you the living water, the living water that comes out of Jesus. Jesus is the source of this living water. So I know it's a, it's a long, long shot to go from, from water to saliva coming out of Jesus, but, but it's helpful, isn't it? It's, it's something worthwhile to say, but Jesus is the source of this healing and it comes from him. Well, the most tenuous one is probably the one I'm about to tell you. It's from Exodus 21. Uh, and it's about the poking of the ears. Now, these are the rules that you shall set before them, says God in Exodus 21. When you buy a Hebrew slave, he shall serve six years. And the seventh, he shall go out free for nothing. And then he explains, if he comes back and he says, well, master, I love you. Uh, and I want to stay. Then the master shall bring him to

God and he shall bring him to the door or the doorpost. And his master shall bore his ear through with an awl. And then he shall be his slave forever. Reach biblical understanding, the poking of the ears. Is this a way of Jesus saying, this is an invitation, an invitation for you to be a follower, a bond servant of me, Jesus Christ. It certainly has its benefits. Galatians four, uh, Paul goes on to tell us that, so you're no longer a slave, but a son. And if a son, then an heir through God, to be a slave of Jesus Christ means to be an heir of Christ and all that is his. And so as Jesus preaches to this man, this wordless sermon of poking his ears, his fingers into his ears and touching his tongue with saliva, he's inviting him to become a bond servant of Jesus, following Jesus, as he is the giver of life that overflows from within him.

Now, this is necessary for us because every explanation that I'm sure you've heard from this pulpit and other gospel ministries, when we preach, we are not simply trying to teach you some biblical facts. It's helpful for Bible quizzes and pub quizzes and that sort of thing, and I agree, but, but that's not the point of preaching. In fact, what the people do when they go out after Jesus has healed the man, it's clear that they go out proclaiming. That's the verb that's used for what they do. They zealously proclaimed. They were preaching. I often have to rely on a rich biblical understanding of what the Bible says about the gospel in order to take one passage and relate it to the cross, but that is what preaching is all about. It is bringing the cross into relief so that you in 2020 can see the majesty of Jesus and the worth of Jesus and the finished work of the cross and that you will fall down and worship Jesus for all that he has done for you.

So that is then my third point. The only way Jesus can heal sinners is through taking their place. And so let's rely on some of this biblical furniture that we've put in place in order to make sense of it. When Jesus comes to a man who is deaf and mute and he heals him, particularly in the gospels, in some way we've got to view the gospels as Old Testament books. You know what happens when Jesus is resurrected and he pours out his spirit on his church. It's then that the dividing wall between Gentile and Jew is overcome. It is then that the Holy Spirit brings intimacy between God and his people and new hearts. But here at this point, every miracle that is taking place is almost a miracle on loan. It is because Jesus will himself become deaf on the cross that he can now take this man's deafness away. And it is because Jesus will himself become mute on the cross that he can take the muteness away of this man. It's because Jesus will bear the punishment for our sin on the cross that he can perform these miracles. And these miracles aren't in the first instance about physical healing. They are about what Jesus will accomplish on the cross. And it is not just the opening of ears or the opening of mouths, but it is about the salvation of the whole self that Jesus will accomplish. So as Jesus is crucified, we can say that he went deaf to the voice of his father. My God, my God, why have you forsaken me is what he cries out on the cross. The words that has accompanied his ministry at every point throughout his life, that voice turns to God's punishment for the sin that we deserved. Judgment as he becomes and bears the curse on our behalf.

[21 : 22] Then as Jesus breathes his last, his last words are, it is finished. From that moment on, he does not speak again. His tongue sticks to his roof of his mouth as he passes away. Jesus stops speaking so that we can continue speaking. Jesus stops hearing so that we can continue hearing. And Jesus' last breath is almost a sign of the breath that he breathes on the man as he sits in front of him, touched his ears, touched his tongue, and he sighed. Jesus' last breath on the cross is the very first breath that he pours out on his church. And we read about this in John 20, when Jesus appears to his disciples, he says to them, peace be to you after his resurrection. And again, he said, peace be with you. As the father has sent me, even so I am sending you. And when he has said that, he breathed on them and said to them, receive the Holy Spirit. Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them. If you withhold forgiveness for any, it is withheld. So Jesus equips them with his last breath. And as this man was given hearing and speech, it was a little microcosm of all that

Jesus would accomplish on the cross, where he himself would take our place. And with his last breath, he will give us the first breath of the Holy Spirit so that we too can say, Ephatha, be opened. So we too can proclaim with Jesus Christ that took your place. And so those lips, those words should go onto our lips as we become the people that now sing for joy. What do we sing? We sing the gospel for joy. For in Jesus, he has brought reconciliation between us and God. So with that, I conclude. And I would like to pray for us, to pray that the Holy Spirit would indeed equip us with his spirit to go out and also speak the gospel boldly to the world. Let's pray.