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Sermon Notes

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Jesus Heals a Deaf and Mute Man

Mark 7:31-37

In Psalm 139, David celebrates the marvels of the human body:

Psalm 139:14 I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.

Among the marvels of the human body is its ability to gather information from the universe around us by our five senses... our sight, our hearing, our smell, our touch and our taste

In fact, this is among what David celebrates in this verse... not just that God's works in our amazing bodies are wonderful, but also that God's works in the universe around us are wonderful – and by our five senses, we take in information that we can process and that serves as the basis for our worship of God.

Among the wonderful capacities of our bodies is the sense of hearing... the way our ears are designed by God to receive pressure waves that move through the air, how our eardrums vibrate with those pressure waves, the

The ear can be divided into three parts leading up to the brain – **the outer ear, middle ear and the inner ear.**

The ***outer ear*** consists of the ear canal and eardrum. Sound travels down the ear canal, striking the eardrum which causes it to move or vibrate.

The *middle ear* is a space behind the eardrum that contains three small bones called ossicles. This chain of tiny bones is connected to the eardrum at one end and to an opening to the inner ear at the other end. Vibrations from the eardrum cause the ossicles to vibrate which, in turn, creates movement of the fluid in the inner ear.

Movement of the fluid in the *inner ear*, or cochlea, causes changes in tiny structures called hair cells. This movement of the hair cells sends electric signals from the inner ear up the auditory nerve (also known as the hearing nerve) to the brain.

The brain then interprets these electrical signals as sound.

By that amazing mechanism, we hear the beautiful sounds of the world around us... within the womb, the sound of our mother's heartbeat and voice; then, as we grow, the sounds of nature... the chirping of birds, the fluttering of leaves in a breeze, the roar of the ocean, the sound of music...

Music! What a gift! The beauty of chord progressions in an aria by Handel... the sound of a skillful pianist striking the keys chosen by Mozart. I remember the first time I heard Mozart's piano concerto #8... I was at work as an engineer in Beverly, MA... working on a design. The radio was set to a classical station, and Mozart's music came from the speakers into my world; I was utterly transfixed by the second movement – the notes floated through the air into my ears until I could not continue to work.

So it has been for all of you music lovers... the same unspeakable power of tones and rhythm and frequencies... logic, order, beauty, power... emotion... all encoded in SOUND.

But by far the most significant sounds we ever hear are the sounds of LANGUAGE... of our mother's words... spoken gently into our ears from infancy, incomprehensible at first but repeated; the infant begins to associate sounds with experiences in life; and little by little, language forms inside their developing

minds. With that gift we are able to communicate with other human beings... to listen to their ideas and to speak our own.

But imagine being born deaf... or losing the sense of hearing in infancy. All those marvelous sounds of nature – a bubbling brook, a bird's sweet songs, the steady soothing drone of a downpour, the mighty thunder of a waterfall... never heard. But far worse, never developing the gift of LANGUAGE!!

The inability to communicate the deepest thoughts of the heart or to understand the hearts of others.

This is the tragedy of approximately 72 million people in the world... deaf-mutes. It is certainly tragic to lose hearing at any point. I remember reading about the anguish of the great composer Beethoven at his gradual hearing loss that became total toward the end of his life. He became a social recluse and only allowed close friends into his study; he communicated with them using a conversation book, by which they wrote their statements to him and he replied in kind. But Beethoven was well into his twenties when he lost his hearing... so the tones of all the instruments in the symphony were already burned into his mind, not to mention the tones of human language.

But a baby who is born deaf or who becomes deaf in infancy before language can form can become an ISLAND unto himself or herself. Cut off. Isolated. Lonely. Unsocialized.

I was reading the work of an Irish social worker in the 18th century who was doing pioneering work with the deaf in Ireland. He came upon an elderly mother who had two deaf daughters. They had not been allowed out of the house for twenty years, could only communicate with each other and their mother, and had no education or skills other than rudimentary housework. Since their mother was elderly, the social worker lamented what would become of these girls when the mother will have died.

That is the tragedy of deaf-mutes. This leads to a terrible form of isolation. It was into this isolation that Jesus, the compassionate savior moved in the account we will study today.

I. The Context: Jesus in the Decapolis

Mark 7:31 Then Jesus left the vicinity of Tyre and went through Sidon, down to the Sea of Galilee and into the region of the Decapolis.

A. Jesus was Taking “The Long Way Around”

1. He was moving from Tyre and Sidon down to Galilee by the long route around the eastern part of the Sea of Galilee
2. A much faster route would have been directly from Tyre to Capernaum
3. Some scholars believe Jesus was training and preparing his apostles for their future ministry among the Gentiles... just as when he purposely went through Samaria and had the time with the woman at the well, for, as we will mention in a moment, the Decapolis was a Gentile region
4. It also seems Jesus wasn't ready to return to the mayhem and huge throngs and hostile enemies in Capernaum and the other Jewish cities throughout Galilee... he wants to let the heat under the pot cool down so the pot won't boil over; it is still a ways from the time ordained for his death

B. The Decapolis

1. It means “ten cities”; a loose confederation of ten essentially independent Hellenistic cities
2. Located South and East of the Sea of Galilee
3. That was Gentile territory; they were Greeks who had settled there in the 3rd century BC after Alexander the Great had established his empire

4. There was a history of warfare between the nationalistic Jews living in Palestine and these Greeks
5. When Rome conquered that part of the world in 63BC, all Jewish independence came to a decisive end

C. The Ministry of the Former Demoniac of the Gadarenes

1. Remember that this man had had Legion of demons in him... the most wretched man in the entire history of the Bible
2. Jesus had instantly and effortlessly driven the demons out, and they went into the pigs and the whole herd had drowned in the sea
3. The man was healed, and in his right mind deeply desired to follow Jesus as one of his disciples
4. Jesus refused, but instead sent the man back to his family to tell them everything God had done for him, and how he had had mercy on him

Mark 5:20 So the man went away and began to tell in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him. And all the people were amazed.

D. The Fruit of His Ministry

1. This huge crowd waiting for Jesus' healings was probably the fruit of that man's ministry
2. People knew of his horrible plight... especially his family; now everyone in that region had heard of Jesus
3. As Mark 5:20 told us, everyone in that area was amazed at his deliverance and wanted to know more about Jesus

II. A Deaf Man's Terrible Plight

A. They Bring a Suffering Man to Jesus

Mark 7:32 There some people brought to him a man who was deaf and could hardly talk, and they begged him to place his hand on the man.

B. The Terrible Isolation of the Deaf

The International Mission Board divides up its worldwide mission work into nine affinities... eight of them are roughly geographical, like the European affinity, and the North African/Middle East affinity, or the Sub-Saharan African affinity

But one of the affinities is not tied to geography at all... it is the DEAF affinity.

Missionaries who have worked to reach deaf people say they are a culture unto themselves all over the world, and struggle with the same issues all over the world.

Deaf people understand each other and can be trained to speak in sign language – thus they are a PEOPLE GROUP unto themselves with their own language, culture, and issues

C. The Problem of Speech Development

1. Human language is based on the assigning of arbitrary sounds to physical realities
2. There is usually no connection whatsoever between the sound of the word and the reality it represents
3. There is nothing “house-like” about the word “house”... when you look at a “house” its walls and roof and windows and doors do not scream the sound “HOUSE” to you... that’s why the French assign the word “maison” to it, and the Japanese call it “uchi”
4. When an infant grows up deaf, none of these arbitrary sounds can enter his mind; so he cannot speak—he is mute
5. This deafness and muteness leads to a complete inability to participate in language-based communication
6. It also lead people in Jesus’ day to see deaf-mutes as INSANE and complete outcasts—isolated in every respect

D. Deepest Problem: Learning the Word of God

1. Without language, special revelation is impossible

2. Deaf-mutes can experience much of the world around them with their healthy five senses
3. But special revelation—the Word of God—is obviously language based; it involves abstract truths about invisible realities
4. “Faith comes by hearing”... without hearing the Word of God, how can they be saved??

Into this quiet world of sad isolation and loneliness, Jesus stepped with great compassion and power.

III. Jesus’ Gentle Power

Mark 7:33-34 After he took him aside, away from the crowd, Jesus put his fingers into the man's ears. Then he spit and touched the man's tongue. ³⁴ He looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him, "Ephphatha!" (which means, "Be opened!").

A. Jesus Shows Amazing Tenderness Toward this Tragic Man

1. The most common emotion ascribed to Jesus is compassion
2. Again and again it is clear that Jesus deeply feels the sorrows and miseries of sinful humanity
3. It was compassion that led him from heaven to earth to begin with

Isaiah 53:3 a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering.

Isaiah 53:4 Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows

B. Four Gentle Actions

1. He took him aside, away from the crowd
2. He put his fingers into the man’s ears... identifying the part of the body he wanted to heal
3. He spit and touched the man’s tongue... as with the healing of the man born blind in John 9, Jesus used his saliva... again, touching the second part of the body he was healing

4. He looked up to heaven... to show him that he was speaking to God on his behalf

C. The Supernatural Power of Christ's Word

1. Then comes the moment of power... Jesus speaks, and it IS!!

Mark 7:34 He looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him, "Ephphatha!" (which means, "Be opened!").

- a. I think Mark gives us the Aramiac word because of how BREATHY it is
 - b. The Greek letter "phi"... called an "aspirated consonant" in phonetics because of the breathing you do when pronouncing it; and the "pfff" sound is DOUBLED in the spelling... a doubled aspirant!
 - c. It is soon followed by another aspirated consonant... the theta—THHHH
 - d. Triple aspirated consonants... pphh-pphh—tthhh...
2. It reminds me of the "breath of life" God breathed into Adam so he became a living being; or the sound of a rushing wind that came in Ezekiel's valley of bones vision, that cause life to come into the previously dead bodies.
 3. Powerful impact... the IRON GATES of deafness were OPENED... and the CHAINS of speech were LOOSED

Mark 7:35 At this, the man's ears were opened, his tongue was loosened

- a. There is a sense of liberation here... of freedom
- b. God did not create ears to be deaf, or tongues to be bound
- c. This is a work of full restoration to God's original purpose for this man's physical body

D. Even More Amazing: The Gift of Language Given Instantly!!!

1. We know very little about this man's history

2. We don't know if he was deaf from infancy and had never heard a sound
3. Or if there were just some physical damage to the ears and a blockage with his tongue... like a paralysis of sorts
4. BUT it is amazing that in an instant, this formerly deaf-mute can speak perfectly clearly!! IN AN INSTANT!!

Mark 7:35 At this, the man's ears were opened, his tongue was loosened and he began to speak plainly.

The Greek word for "plainly" or "clearly" is also "correctly" ... "orthos" ... like "orthodonture" or "orthodoxy" ... his words were formed accurately, rightly, normally, clearly

Everyone could understand him immediately and plainly

E. Reminds Me of the Day of Pentecost

1. The breath of Jesus here prefigures the rushing wind of the Spirit
2. The sound of that rushing wind attracted the crowd... a crowd that had come from all over the Roman world
3. Then Peter spoke the words of the gospel to the crowd and the miracle of language was instantly given to them

Acts 2:7-11 Utterly amazed, they asked: "Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans? ⁸ Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language? ⁹ Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰ Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome ¹¹ (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs-- we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!"

IV. The Crowd's Overwhelmed Reaction: Jesus Does Everything Well

Mark 7:36-37 Jesus commanded them not to tell anyone. But the more he did so, the more they kept talking about it. ³⁷ People were overwhelmed with amazement. "He has done everything well," they said. "He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak."

A. As Usual... the Command Not to Tell

1. This is so common by now
2. As with Mark 1 and the leper and many other healings... like Jairus's daughter... Jesus wants the news kept to a minimum
3. Obviously, this is just temporary!
4. By the Holy Spirit moving Mark to record this miracle in the pages of his gospel, and ensuring that this gospel record be taken to the ends of the earth and to the end of time, God wants the details of this miracle spread everywhere
5. But Jesus restrains the spread right at that moment... for CROWD CONTROL! The crowds were already overwhelming and getting unruly
6. They already want to take him by force and make him King
7. And even Jesus' commands do not stop this story from spreading like wildfire... the more he sought to restrain them, the more they kept talking about it!
8. Their words are words of stunned amazement!!

B. Look At Their Reaction

1. They are overwhelmed with wonder
2. The Greek words Mark uses are "beyond all measure" and "overwhelmed with amazement"
3. They cannot contain themselves
4. Though they are disobeying Jesus, I love what they said in their wonder

C. Jesus Has Done All Things Well

1. Everything Jesus put his hands to turned out well
2. There was literally nothing he could not do

3. Dear friends, ponder these words: “Jesus does everything well!”

4. That is pure worship!

Jeremiah 32:27 "I am the LORD, the God of all mankind. Is anything too hard for me?"

V. The Central Lesson: Spiritual Hearing

A. All of Jesus' Miracles Pictures of Spiritual Healing

1. Real miracles, actually occurred, physical, in space and time

2. YET also living parables of the real healing we all need

John 9:39 Jesus said, "For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind."

3. So also this one... the real deafness is spiritual deafness; unable to hear God speaking

B. Spiritual Deafness

Psalm 135:15-18 The idols of the nations are silver and gold, made by the hands of men. ¹⁶ They have mouths, but cannot speak, eyes, but they cannot see; ¹⁷ they have ears, but cannot hear, nor is there breath in their mouths. ¹⁸ Those who make them will be like them, and so will all who trust in them.

1. “Those who make them will be like them”... unable to hear God speak

2. So also this:

Ezekiel 12:1-2 The word of the LORD came to me: ² "Son of man, you are living among a rebellious people. They have eyes to see but do not see and ears to hear but do not hear, for they are a rebellious people.

3. And this:

Isaiah 42:17-20 those who trust in idols, who say to images, 'You are our gods,' will be turned back in utter shame. ¹⁸ "Hear, you deaf; look, you blind, and see! ¹⁹ Who is blind but my servant, and deaf like the

messenger I send? Who is blind like the one committed to me, blind like the servant of the LORD? ²⁰ You have seen many things, but have paid no attention; your ears are open, but you hear nothing."

4. And this from Stephen:

Acts 7:51 "You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit!"

People in sin are spiritually deaf; they cannot hear God speaking to them through the Word of God

C. Jesus' Repeated Call

After the parable of the seed and the soils...

Mark 4:9 Then Jesus said, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

D. Spiritual Hearing Given by Jesus through the Spirit

Matthew 13:14-17 In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah: "'You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving. ¹⁵ For this people's heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.'

¹⁶ But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear. ¹⁷ For I tell you the truth, many prophets and righteous men longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it.

"Blessed ears" are those transformed miraculously to hear God speaking through his word

1 Thessalonians 2:13 And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe.

You listen to the Bible being preached and you don't hear MY voice;
ultimately you are hearing God speaking to you through the
Bible

That's spiritual hearing!

As Francis Schaeffer said of God, "He is there and he is not silent!"

Isaiah 1:2 Hear, O heavens! Listen, O earth! For the LORD has spoken

E. Faith Comes by Hearing

***Romans 10:17 faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is
heard through the word of Christ.***

As you hear the words of the Gospel of Mark, do you feel faith
growing inside your soul... faith in Jesus as the Son of God?
Faith comes from hearing, not seeing.

F. Growth Comes by Hearing

***Galatians 3:2-6 Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by
works of the law or by hearing with faith? ³ Are you so foolish?
Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the
flesh?.... ⁵ Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works
miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with
faith-- ⁶ just as Abraham "believed God, and it was counted to him
as righteousness"?***

Paul's point is, the exact way you were justified, that is, forgiven of
your sins – hearing the gospel truth with faith – that is how you
also grow as a Christian through the Spirit – by HEARING
WITH FAITH!

G. The Spirit's Timeless Call

***Hebrews 3:7-8 So, as the Holy Spirit says: "Today, if you hear his voice, ⁸
do not harden your hearts***

Those who came in here this morning as unbelievers, do you hear
Jesus calling you to follow him?

Matthew 11:28 "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

John 7:37 Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink.

This is the call of salvation... to come to Jesus who does all things well, and trust in his blood shed on the cross for your sins

And you Christians... the same call is on you. **"Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your heart!"**

Everyday, as you begin your day, you should open the Bible and pray for spiritual hearing... listen to the still small voice of God speaking to you in the words of Scripture; What is God saying to you today through his Word? Do you hear him speaking? Do you hear him rebuking you for sin? Calling you to repent? Pointing you to Christ and the cross?

Is he telling you to obey him in some matter? Some sin habit? Is he giving you some work to do? Some co-worker or neighbor or lost relative to share the gospel with? Is there some money he wants you to give to the Lord's work? Is there some ministry he wants you to serve in to alleviate suffering in the world?

DO YOU HEAR HIM through his Word and his Spirit? Do you have spiritual ears to hear?