



# Christ Reformed Community Church

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## “Heavenly Sign Language” Mark 7:31–37

Well, I want you to take your Bibles this morning and be turning to Mark chapter 7, as we continue our exposition in the Gospel of Mark; and when you find your place there, please stand to your feet in honor of the reading of God’s Word, Mark chapter 7. This morning’s message will come from verses 31–37. The title of the message: “Heavenly Sign Language.” Picking up in verse 31:

*Then he [that is, Jesus] 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 said to him, “Ephphatha,” that is, “Be opened.” And his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. And Jesus charged them to tell no one. But the more he charged them, the more zealously they proclaimed it. And they were astonished beyond measure, saying, “He has done all things well. He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak.”*

This is God’s authoritative Word. Please be seated, and let us beseech the Lord for His help this morning as we look at this text.

Our Lord and our God, we come this morning to this text, understanding that the last several months we’ve been studying the Gospel of Mark, and we know that it is only by the power of Your Holy Spirit that we can understand this text. So, Lord, we pray, Lord, that He would be operative in our hearts, in our midst, Lord, that we might understand the deep things of Your Word in this glorious, glorious story of this deaf and mute man having his hearing and his speech restored, which is a picture of what happens to sinners when You open our ears so that we can hear Your truth, hear Your gospel, and then speak the glories of that gospel to the world. Bring this passage to bear upon our hearts, we pray, in the blessed name of Jesus Christ, our Savior. Amen.

Well, as Jesus ministered in Galilee really for well over a year after His baptism, we began to see last week that He is now shifting His attention from a primarily Jewish territory to more of a gentile territory. We saw last week that He began to move into this area, and He met the

Syrophoenician woman, and He healed her daughter from a distance. We noted last week that the reasons for Christ’s departure are important, and we really need to state those again. First of all, King Herod was seeking Jesus, and really viewed Jesus as a political threat to His power. The religious leaders of Judaism saw Jesus as a religious threat to their power as well, and so Jesus senses that the opposition against Him is mounting, and He wants to avoid a premature death. John 6:38 says the words of Jesus: *“I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me.”* Jesus knew that He was predestined to die. That is why He came into the world, but not at this moment. Such is a reminder to us, I think just on an aside, that though God has ordained every situation and every circumstance in your life, He still intends for you to live responsibly and wisely and purposely. We are not to be hyper-Calvinists. It is true that God has ordained all things, but He wants us to walk on the path that He sets before us in a wise way, and here we see Jesus doing that. Jesus, to be sure, was not trying to escape death. We noted that last week. Rather, He was going to this gentile territory to isolate Himself with His disciples in order to prepare them for their mission when the time of His death would come.

In fact, in chapter 8 in verse 31 we read that as He was in this region, *“He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again.”* There were many things the disciples didn’t understand, which they needed to understand, and the first lesson that Jesus taught these disciples came really by way of illustration, by the way that He treated this Syrophoenician woman; this woman, who would have been viewed by Jews and gentiles as a dog. Jesus welcomed this gentile woman in His household, as we saw last week, allowing her to share in table fellowship by eating the crumbs of bread from the table of the children of Israel. We noted that in Matthew’s parallel account of this in Matthew 15:23 that the disciples were annoyed by this woman and even asked Jesus to tell her to leave, implying that they needed a lesson on how to treat others, specifically gentiles because Jesus, the Bread of Life, came into the world not just for Jews but also gentiles. He said in John 6:35, *“I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.”* He said in the Sermon on the Mount, *“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.”* He had every intention to satisfy this hungry, humble woman that wanted to receive crumbs from the table in which Jesus was fellowshiping with the disciples. The Jewish disciples grew up despising gentiles as dogs, and they needed a compassionate example set before them on how to treat the many gentiles who would respond to the gospel that they would preach once Jesus was gone.

Now, of course, both sovereignly and graciously, Jesus allowed this woman entrance into His household, but the instrument of entrance was her faith. She had great faith, and the disciples needed to be prepared for the mass rejection of the gospel because of their lack of faith among the Jews and the mass inclusion of gentiles because of their great faith like this woman becoming part of the household of God. We even observed last week, if we had eyes to see, that this new covenant inclusion of gentiles being incorporated into the household of Jesus with Him as the head included the households of those who had faith. Remember, God’s promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:3 that *“in you shall all the families of the earth be blessed.”* We saw that this

woman’s faith resulted in Jesus cleansing her daughter. He didn’t even meet her daughter. The little girl never met Jesus, but she was included by proxy into this new household of faith to which she had been joined; her daughter coming with her. She would have been in the privileged position of now hearing the gospel and being taught the law of God. Her context would have changed at once from that of thoroughly pagan to hopeful by virtue of her mother’s faith. We cross-referenced last week another gentile that Jesus encountered; namely, the Roman centurion, and you remember that Jesus healed that Roman centurion’s servant from a distance, he too being a gentile. On that occasion, what did Jesus say in Matthew 8:10? Jesus said that He had never seen such great faith in all of Israel. And we saw in Matthew 15:28 in the parallel account of Jesus’ encounter with the Syrophenician woman that He told her, “*O woman, your faith is great.*” Now, Jesus had predicted to that Roman centurion, also a gentile, “*I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,*” and such is exactly what happened with this woman, allowed to join with Jesus and the apostles in table fellowship in the household of Jesus.

Well, as we move into verses 31–37, it’s very critical that you have that theology in your mind. Jesus is still in gentile territory, but now He encounters a deaf and dumb man who was also a gentile. We see at the end of this account that the news and power of Jesus spread rapidly as this man and his friends began telling everyone in this territory about Jesus, but interestingly, this is only one of the many stories that took place in this region. If you go back with me to Matthew chapter 15, Matthew does not give this account, and by the way, none of the other gospel writers give this account. Mark is the only one, but what Matthew does provide for us is a little summary in Matthew 15:29:

*Jesus went on from there and walked beside the Sea of Galilee. And he went up on the mountain and sat down there. And great crowds came to him, bringing with them the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute, and many others, and they put them at his feet, and he healed them, so that the crowd wondered, when they saw the mute speaking, the crippled healthy, the lame walking, and the blind seeing. And they glorified the God of Israel.*

This took place in this gentile region. Mark is just picking one story of many of the healings of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the imagery and detail in this story is maybe bizarre on the surface but detailed enough that it could only come with an eyewitness testimony. And as you know, Peter was the eyewitness of this account, being Mark’s primary source. As we’ll see in this account in verses 31–37, Mark is continuing to advance his argument regarding the blessings of the Messianic age that not only will a mass of gentiles through their faith be incorporated into the covenants of God made with ancient Israel to compose one household, but also this Messiah along the way will miraculously heal to prove that He was the Messiah predicted in the Old Testament. This story teaches us that the prophecies of Scripture are always fulfilled; namely Isaiah 35, which we will look at, also that Jesus is the Messiah, and third, that He has to be the Messiah because He is God come in human flesh, evidenced by His miracle-working power to take our illnesses and to bear our diseases. So, with that in mind, Jesus’ healing of the deaf and dumb man here in verses 31–37 unfolds to us in seven dramatic details, and I want you to notice

with me there in verse 31 simply what we’ll call “the scene.” Verse 31: “*Then he returned from the region of Tyre and went through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis.*”

Mark is giving to us Jesus’ itinerary, which he says took Him from the region of Tyre; that was twenty miles north, to Sidon, then southeast moving in sort of a hairpin-like circuit toward the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee, as verse 31 says there, into the region of the Decapolis. Now, this would sort of be like you traveling from Saint Augustine and looping all the way around north, going through Orange Park and Baldwin and Yulee, all the way up to Fernandina, and then dropping back down all the way south into Daytona Beach. Sort of a strange way to get to Daytona Beach to go north and curl that way, but that’s what Jesus was doing. Jesus is wandering through this gentile territory, not because He didn’t know where He was going but because He wanted to spend as much time alone with the disciples as possible; and so, He covers some 120 miles. The location of this is very significant because you may remember that it was in this region, the region of the Decapolis that Jesus was met with much resistance after He exorcised demons from that crazy demoniac that came out of the caves to the shore as Jesus was mooring His boat earlier in chapter 5. That word *Decapolis* comes from really two Greek words; the word *deca*, which means “ten” and *polis*, which means “city.” The Decapolis was a confederation of ten cities. It was a large region. It was a pagan region with the worship of all sorts of false gods: Zeus and Aphrodite and Artemis. Going back to Mark chapter 5, when Jesus was there, He did something strange.

If you turn back in chapter 5, after the man was exorcised from his demons, he was so zealous in wanting to go with Jesus, he tried to get into the boat, and we read in verse 19 of Mark 5: “[Jesus] did not permit him but said to him, ‘Go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you.’ And,” verse 20: “he went away and began to proclaim,” what does it say? “*in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him, and everyone marveled.*” Now we see that Jesus wasn’t being cruel in not allowing him to go. He sent him as a gentile missionary to tell others what great things God had done for him. This man obeyed, and it says, everyone was amazed. Going back to Matthew’s summary of what happened in this Decapolis, in Matthew 15 it says that the mute spoke, the crippled were restored, the lame walked, the blind saw, “*And they glorified the God of Israel*” because these gentiles believed in this Messiah. What would compel them to go and hear a Jewish preacher who had come through their towns and cities? Well, it was the testimony of this demoniac now put in his right mind who was a missionary to his own people.

Such a reminder to us that we are to take the gospel wherever we go and as we go, telling others what great things Jesus has done for us. Sometimes this will be met with hostility, but many times with reception; and I think Mark is not writing pessimistically. He’s writing optimistically to tell us that even the gospel spread among pagan gentiles, and it was warmly received because the Spirit of God was active. The Spirit of God was active. The Messianic kingdom had come. Something was shifting in redemptive history, and Mark is writing to gentile believers. He wants them to know that this gospel is advancing in paganistic and hostile territories with great success. Their salvation was real. It was a thing of God, and such should encourage us in our own

context, as we are surrounded by hostilities and pagans. When the Spirit of God is active on His truly elect people, revival and reformation is possible when we faithfully preach the gospel, and we learn that from this text.

But let’s move from number one, the scene, verse 31, to number two, the subject, verse 32. Who was this guy that Jesus encountered? Well, he’s described in verse 32 as being brought, notice your Bibles, presumably by his friends and family to Jesus, and it says that the subject was “*a man who was deaf and had a speech impediment,*” This subject had a double dilemma. He couldn’t hear, so that he was deaf, and because he was deaf, he couldn’t hear his own voice, so he spoke with difficulty. He had a speech impediment. Apparently, he wasn’t completely mute, but this may as well have made the situation worse since the mumbling groans to try and make words made him appear as if he had a mental defect. If given the option, I assume that many of us would choose to be deaf rather than blind, but the testimony of deaf people will tell us differently. One of my best friends in college and then later my roommate in seminary, both of his parents were born blind, and yet by all accounts, as my friend John grew up in this home of blind people, they were joyful people who functioned quite normal considering their condition. The reality is, as awful as blindness is, blind people do not usually experience the social stigma of the deaf because the deaf can see the stares and the laughs from others. The deaf understand that they are unsuccessful in trying to make sounds from their mouths, which make themselves look as if they’re mentally deficient when, in reality, they sometimes and many times are highly intelligent. Additionally, the Jews viewed disabilities or deafness or blindness as God’s judgment for sin. You remember in John chapter 9, the disciples passed by a blind man and said, “Was it this man or his parents that sinned that caused this malady?”

This man likely had been deaf and mute from birth. He had lived his whole life ostracized from normal social interaction and acceptance, but apparently, he had a few friends who had mercy on him; and those friends, verse 32 tells us, notice your Bibles, “*begged [Jesus] to lay his hand on him,*” in order to heal him. This is great faith, isn’t it? They had heard maybe from the demoniac that Jesus had healing powers. Maybe they had heard from those who had traveled to Galilee. We know that some from this region traveled to Galilee, Mark 3:8. They came back and told the friends of this man that Jesus had power to heal. Their faith and that of this man was willing to go to Jesus. It was so strong, they believed that just a touch of His hand would immediately restore his health. Once again, people understood the tenderness of our Lord. No matter how big the crowd, He took special interest in individuals, compassionately taking them aside, touching them even when there wasn’t much faith present. Back in chapter 6 and verse 5 says that in Nazareth, “*He could do no mighty work there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and healed them.*” There wasn’t much faith in Nazareth, and yet Jesus still compassionately laid His hand on a few and healed them, but in this account, certainly there was faith present. Christ demonstrates to us that He didn’t just generically care for the multitudes, but He specifically cared for specific men and women and even children, taking them up into His arms. This is our ever-loving and tender Lord.

Additionally, such a touch that Jesus would often demonstrate communicated that He wasn't afraid of ceremonially being defiled by gentiles. You remember that the religious leaders were obsessed with cleanliness, but every time Jesus touched a gentile, rather than making Himself ceremonially unclean, He was miraculously—listen to this—cleansing this person from their physical defilement or handicap as the result of living in a fallen world. It was that transfer of healing power through the hand of Jesus in many cases that not only removed the physical malady but also supernaturally removed the sin because faith was present. As we'll see, Jesus doesn't simply just touch this man; He does far more. He does far more, but I want to remind you that in the Old Testament was Aaron the priest. Jesus fulfills the office of priest in His healing ministry. Leviticus 16:21 tells us that Aaron the priest would “*lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, and confess over it all the iniquities of the people of Israel, and all their transgressions, all their sins. And he shall put them on the head of the goat and send it away into the wilderness.*” Just as Aaron's actions were symbolic and looked forward to the Lamb of God, who would be slain for the sins of His people, so too did Jesus Christ in His healing ministry as our Great High Priest often lay His hands on people in healing them and simultaneously and symbolically removing their sins far away from them, cleansing them due to their faith in Him, as they looked forward to His sacrifice upon the cross.

Jesus was never defiled. He was cleansing these gentiles by touching them, just as Aaron the high priest would touch the goat, but there's something else about this subject that Mark does not want us to miss. Notice again in verse 32 that Mark uses an interesting word. It's translated “speech impediment” there in verse 32, but it is the Greek word *mogilalon or magilalos*. It occurs only one other time in all of the Bible, and since Mark is writing to gentiles, they would have been familiarizing themselves with the Greek Old Testament, the Septuagint where this word is found. The only other place in all of the Bible it's found, Isaiah chapter 35. Turn back with me, if you will, to Isaiah chapter 35. This is critical, and we'll spend probably more time on point two this morning than the rest of the passage because this is important to see. Isaiah chapter 35, notice in verse 5, it says:

*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.  
For waters break forth in the wilderness,  
and streams in the desert;*

The same Greek word that's used in Mark 7:32 is used in verse 5 of Isaiah 35, that the ears of the deaf would be unstopped and the lame shall leap like a deer. Here it is verse 6, “*the tongue of the mute [will] sing for joy.*” The same exact Greek word. Mark clearly wants these gentile believers, who are just now becoming familiar with the Greek Old Testament to understand what was happening in the ministry of Jesus. The larger passage of Isaiah 35 describes the glory of the Lord revealed to the nations. Remember Matthew 15:31 in his summary of what occurred in the Decapolis? He says that many “*glorified the God of Israel.*” And so, Mark is pointing to Isaiah

35; Isaiah 35 really being the climax chapter of the first part of Isaiah. The chapters before it declared in no uncertain terms God’s judgment on pagan nations, nations like Egypt and Edom and Tyre where Jesus was located but also His judgment on Israel and Jerusalem. But here in Isaiah 35, it shifts from a message of judgment to that of hope because what God tells God’s people in the Old Testament through the prophet Isaiah is that He is going to save a remnant of Jews, and from this remnant of Jews, God would also bless the rest of His creation; that the coming of the Messiah would have with it the nations singing the praises of God. In fact, as I said, there in verse 6 in Isaiah 35, it speaks about the restoration of the speech of the mute, *magilalos*, which signifies the coming day of the Lord when, though it involves judgment, it will include the mute speaking, the healing ministry of Jesus. Back in verse 1, notice it says:

*The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad;  
the desert shall rejoice and blossom like the crocus;  
it shall blossom abundantly  
and rejoice with joy and singing.  
The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it,  
the majesty of Carmel and Sharon.  
They shall see the glory of the Lord.*

Modern-day Lebanon is exactly where Jesus is located here with the healing of this deaf and dumb man. We read, therefore, at the end of Isaiah 35:10 that:

*The ransomed of the Lord shall return  
and come to Zion with singing;  
everlasting joy shall be upon their heads.*

I think Mark is trying to tell his readers that the healing of this mute man and other mute people is the beginning of the fulfillment of Isaiah 35, which tells us that the gentiles, including those in Lebanon are the ransomed of the Lord. God is going to loosen the tongues of sinners so that they praise and glorify Him. He’s telling us that the Messianic age will come with the inclusion of gentile believers incorporated into the covenants of God made with ancient Israel. Together, this one household of God—remember the Syrophoenician woman entering the household of God and eating the crumbs—this one household of God composed of Jews and gentiles who believe in the Messiah will sing the praises of God together. This is the exact imagery that the apostle Paul uses in the book of Ephesians. You’re familiar with it. Chapter 2 and verse 19, he tells these gentile believers, they are “no longer strangers and aliens, but [they] are fellow citizens with the saints, [they are] members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone.” He tells them that together with Jewish believers, they have one Lord and one faith and one baptism.

Mark is writing with a theological purpose. He wants these gentiles to understand they are just as Jewish as ethnic Jews because they have the faith of father Abraham. Jesus said to the Samaritan woman at the well, “Salvation comes from the Jews.” Jesus, the obedient Israelite, enters gentile

territory. He heals and He forgives those with faith. He reaches out to the wastelands of the gentiles so that blossoming can occur, salvation can occur. He’s preserving a remnant among the Jews. The gentiles won’t be left out on the day of the Lord, Isaiah 35. So, Mark’s use of *magilalos* describes this man’s condition, a mute man to point back to Isaiah 35 to teach us that God will fulfill His ancient promises. There would come destruction and desolation. There would be judgment on Israel for rejecting the Messiah, but God would save a remnant, and then this gospel would be preached by this Jewish remnant. It would reach the nations because when Jesus came, the kingdom of God was breaking into history. Jesus would prove this by giving sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, speech to the mute. This should encourage us because God is saving His elect people. No one can prevent God from saving His elect children, bringing them into the house of God. Remember Jesus told the Roman centurion that *“many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.”* God allowed the Syrophoenician woman in. Now this deaf and dumb man would enter the kingdom of God. God is preparing a feast for His elect children, and just as He saved a remnant of believing Jews, who trusted in His promises that through Abraham He would bless the families of the earth, so too must we today as Christian parents believe this promise ourselves and remember that God told Abraham, *“In you shall the families of the earth be blessed.”*

Paul said in Galatians 3:7, *“Know then that it is those of faith who are sons of Abraham.”* In the Old Testament, the prophecies about the coming Messiah, the new covenant’s inclusion of gentiles, even from the desert land of Lebanon was not merely a promise to individual gentiles. The expectation was that just as God saved Abraham and his household and the Jewish families coming after him, so too would He save gentiles who had faith like Abraham, and these gentiles are to teach the gospel to their children, trusting in the generational blessings of God. If the glory of the new covenant is superior to the glory of the old covenant—which it is because the author of Hebrews is quite clear about that—then are we to expect that this canopy of God’s covenant will not also include the children who receive the overflow of hearing the gospel and the law of God? We are to raise our children in the new covenant just as the Jews raised their children in the old covenant. Remember, they were commanded by God back in Deuteronomy chapter 6, a very, very important passage:

*These words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.*

God said to Abraham, *“In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”* If you share the faith of father Abraham, those blessings to the families of the earth are yours. God said, *“Know therefore that the LORD your God is God, the faithful God,”* who loves you and is faithful to His covenant promises *“to those who love Him and keep His commandments to a thousand generations.”* That promise has not been abrogated. Do we have the faith this morning to see that even in this simple story of the healing of the deaf and dumb man, this allusion to Isaiah 35 and



speaking about the mute being able to speak, that this is now beginning to fulfill that the kingdom of God is broken into history; that God’s gospel promises will not fail? God will be faithful to a thousand generations for those who have faith, those who have faith like the gentile woman whose daughter never met Jesus, for those who had faith like the Roman centurion, this gentile whose servant never met Jesus, healed from a distance, both brought to the household of covenant promises. All of this theology is here if we have eyes to see, and that’s a little bit of the theology of the overall application of this passage, but let’s return to the account itself.

We move, number one, from the scene, verse 31; number two, the subject, verse 32; to number three, the spittle, verse 33. We’re going to talk about spit this morning, verse 33. Let me get back in Mark. Mark 7:33 says, that Jesus *“taking him aside from the crowd privately, he put his fingers into his ears, and after spitting touched his tongue.”* The text says that Jesus took him aside from the crowd privately. This no doubt was a move of compassion to give this man His undevoted attention because all his life, he had been ostracized and unaccepted in society. Now, he would be face to face, one on one with his Creator, the very one who ordained his deafness and muteness. Jesus was protecting this man from the crowds who would naturally gawk, as if he was a freak at a circus. And so, once private from the crowds, verse 33 tells us what Jesus did. *“He put his fingers into his ears, and after spitting touched his tongue.”* Remember, this man was incapable of verbal communication. This man couldn’t hear. He couldn’t speak, so Jesus condescends to his condition. He speaks to him in a language he can understand; namely, a form of sign language. That’s the point to see. By placing His fingers in the man’s ears, He was signing to him that He possessed the power, Jesus did, to restore his hearing by removing the physical blockage. Then after spitting, the text says He touched the man’s tongue. Why’d He do that? Well, in order to communicate through sign language that He would loosen his tongue so that he would speak. This latter action probably included Jesus spitting on the tips of His fingers before placing them on the man’s mouth to indicate that within Himself, He held the power alone to enable this man to speak. So, with fingers in the ears and fingers on the mouth, Jesus was showcasing the power to heal that came from within.

Interestingly, ancient people, both Jews and gentiles, believed that spit had healing properties. The reality was, however, that Jesus was not orchestrating any sort of hocus pocus. He was simply communicating to this man in language he could readily understand that He intended to heal this man. There was nothing to worry about. This man’s day of freedom had come. He could relax. He could trust Jesus. He was in the presence of the Great Physician that other people through sign language was trying to tell him and point him too could restore his health. One the one hand, spittle was considered to be a bodily excretion akin to menstrual blood, semen, urine that polluted one, made one unclean if coming in contact with that of another, at least according to Jewish literature. On the other hand, even Jews saw spittle as an appropriate medium to apply to the sick if it was accompanied by prayer. So, here’s what you need to understand; Jesus the Savior anoints this man with His own spittle as a sign of His healing power. And I can assure you that it was much better than the Hellenistic healers who were noted for attempting to cure the sick by applying various balms made from the blood of white roosters mixed with honey. This man would gladly come in contact with Jesus’ spittle because he understood what Jesus was

trying to say in all the sign language, and that was that through this spittle, through this lowercase *s* sacrament, through that agent of spittle, this man would be physically restored, but Jesus does more.

We move from the spittle, verse 33; verse 34, to the sigh, the sigh. Verse 34 says, “*And looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, ‘Ephphatha,’ that is, ‘Be opened.’*” Be opened. It says He looked up to heaven and sighed. This was a way to communicate to the man, once again, non-verbally that as the Son of God, He only did the works of the Father. Really, there are three actions of Jesus here in verse 34. First, He stared upwardly. Secondly, He sighed outwardly; and third, He stated verbally “*Ephphatha.*” Actually, the second *ph* is silent. It’s ef-fath-ah’. Ef-fath-ah’ is how you pronounce it. First, He started upwardly, verse 34 says, by looking up to heaven. Someone has well said, “There is no place where earth’s sorrows are more felt than in heaven.” And this healing was a work of God from heaven. It wasn’t something that a mere man on earth could do. So, Jesus as the God-man is demonstrating to this man that the healing would come from God. Incidentally, looking up to heaven was an appropriate posture of prayer. Jesus looked up to heaven and prayed silently before He healed Lazarus. Jesus looked up to heaven in the High Priestly Prayer. We read in the Psalms over and over again, “I lift my eyes to the hill, from whence my help comes, from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth,” Psalm 121. Jesus stared upwardly by looking into heaven. Secondly, He sighed outwardly. Notice verse 34 says that. “*And looking up to heaven, he sighed.*” He sighed indicating, I think, His grief over the man’s condition. He felt deeply the man’s sorrows. Though the man could not audibly hear this sigh, He could read the sorrow in Jesus’ face when He sighed. He could tell that Jesus was struck with the ravages of his own condition, the result of a fallen creation. Jesus always had compassion on those that He interacted with, the crowds. He was moved with compassion, wasn’t He? They were sheep without a shepherd.

Matthew tells us in Matthew 8:17 that these healings of Jesus “*was spoken by the prophet Isaiah: ‘He took our illnesses and bore our diseases.’*” We must never disconnect the New Testament from the Old Testament. We must never disconnect the ministry of Jesus from the Old Testament. There is much continuity between the old covenant and the new covenant. In fact, if you don’t see that continuity, then you’ll have a skewed understanding of who the Messiah was. He came to fulfill the prophecies. He came like He did with this man, to come in intimate contact with another man, look him in the eye as if to say, “I feel your pain. I want to carry your diseases and bear your sorrow.” He is our Great High Priest, isn’t He, who passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God. “*For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.*” So, with confidence, we boldly approach His throne. This is that same Jesus.

I don’t know where you’re at right now in life. I don’t know what trial you’re facing. I don’t know what worries and vexations and anxieties are on your heart, but this same Jesus as it were, looks you in the eye this morning to say, “It will be okay. I have come from heaven to earth to meet you where you are, and I have met your greatest need by dying on the cross for your sins.” By sighing, Jesus was beginning to fulfill and even Himself was longing for the day—listen to

this—to quote Isaiah 35 again, the end of it says, “*And sorrow and sighing shall flee away.*” Did Jesus have Isaiah 35 on His mind when He sighed as if to say prophetically, “I long for the day when the sorrow of this world is gone”?

So, Jesus stared upwardly. He sighed outwardly, and then He stated verbally, notice verse 34, “*Ephphatha.*” Try to say that ten times really fast. “‘*Ephphatha,*’ that is, ‘*Be opened.*’” Once again, Mark is translating for his gentile readers. They don’t know Hebrew, and they also don’t know Aramaic, which was the main language that Jesus spoke in, *Ephphatha*. So, he translates it. It means “be opened.” Both this man’s ears and mouth would be opened, the blockages removed physically so he could hear and speak. By the way, this was a command by Jesus—listen to this—not to the man but to his impersonal ears and mouth. You remember in Matthew 3:9, Jesus said He could make children of Abraham out of what? Stones. Here, He is saying that He can create hearing from deaf ears, sound from a mute mouth. Sign language by our Lord was like a parable pointing to His own incarnation, the intimacy by which Jesus non-verbally communicated to this man, showed that He was one with this man, bearing his sorrows, acquainted with his grief. He came from heaven to earth and brought heaven’s power with Him. He entered into the silence of this man’s miserable world, and spoke to him in a language that this man could understand, that He had power from on high to make all things right. Just with that word *Ephphatha*, his ears and his mouth were opened. Perhaps that was the first word the man heard.

“*Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world...and [through whom] he upholds the universe by the word of his power,*” the Bible says. The one who created the world, the one who upholds all things by the word of His power was able to restore this man’s ears and tongue by the voice of our Savior. It’s a picture of the gospel, isn’t it? It’s a picture of the gospel. When the gospel is heard by God’s elect children, they are spiritually restored. They hear the truth. They understand the truth. They then speak the truth. They praise God for it. This man is a picture of that, a living illustration for us. So, now we move to the next dramatic detail where we see that it actually worked. We move, number five, to the speech, verse 35. “*And his ears were opened,*” Mark says, “*his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly.*” The man’s ears were opened so that he could hear, and therefore, his tongue was released so that he spoke plainly, Mark says in his characteristically summarized fashion. By the way, the Greek word there for *released* is *desmos*. It comes from the root word *desmón*, which—listen to this—refer to chains that bind a prisoner. At once, this man was released from his fetters, released from the shackles of his silent imprisonment, his dark, silent world. He could hear in order that he could speak, and the story unfolds that this man couldn’t keep his mouth shut. Notice verse 36, we’ll just skip ahead for a minute, “*Jesus charged them to tell no one. But the more he charged them,*” that is, the man and his friends, “*the more zealously they proclaimed it.*” Verse 35, “*His ears were opened,*” opened.

Turn with me for one brief moment to Colossians chapter 4. It’s important to be familiar with word studies because word studies can often reveal little glimpses into theology. Colossians chapter 4. This same Greek word translated *opened* in Mark 7:35 is used in Colossians 4:3. Paul

says, “*At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open,*” same Greek word, “*to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison.*” Paul is saying, “I am essentially imprisoned, but I don’t want the Word of God to be imprisoned, so pray that God may open a door for the word of the gospel to go forth.” This man’s tongue in Mark 7 was loosened. He was free from the prison cell of darkness and silence and shame, and he powerfully preached the Word of God among everyone he came in contact with. Let me just say this; this is what should happen with every born-again Christian. The Holy Spirit opens to His children the deep things of God so that we hear, so that we understand our sin, so that we recognize the glory of God, and we can’t keep our mouths shut. We praise Him for it in worship. We tell others about it. We tell our children about it. Through regeneration, we are set free from the misery of sin, and we want to tell others about it, but for some reason, Jesus told this man to do the exact opposite of what He had told the demoniac. Remember, He told the demoniac, “Go and tell everyone what great things the Lord has done for you,” but Jesus doesn’t want this man to go.

So, now we move, number one, from the scene, verse 31; the subject, verse 32; the spittle, verse 33; the sigh, verse 34; the speech, verse 35; number six, to the silencing, verse 36. We already mentioned it briefly. “*Jesus charged them to tell no one. But the more he charged them, the more zealously they proclaimed it.*” I mean, this is the exact opposite of what Jesus commanded the demoniac back in chapter 5. I read it earlier. Chapter 5 of Mark, when the demoniac went away, verse 19, he tried to go with Jesus, but Jesus said, “*‘Go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you.’ And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him.*” Why is it that Jesus attempts to silence this man, to tell no one, whereas He commanded the demoniac to report all the great things the Lord had done for him? Well, circumstances have changed. You remember when Jesus originally went to that gentile territory briefly, really just there on the shore before being kicked out back to Galilee, He was largely rejected. His message was resisted, but now this demoniac has spread the word far and wide so much so that Jesus the Jewish preacher is not only popular in Galilee, but He’s popular in gentile territory. We’re going to see in chapter 8 that four thousand of them come to hear Him and to have Him heal them.

Jesus did not want to be known—listen to this—as a miracle worker. He wanted to be known as a preacher because without the proclamation of the good news, there is no salvation. We’ve talked about this back in Mark 1:25 when the demons that were possessing the man were speaking, Jesus rebuked them and said, “*Be silent, and come out of him!*” And just after that, His disciples were seeking Him, and Jesus said to them, “*Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out.*” I came to preach. Mark 1:39 says, “*He went throughout all Galilee, preaching in their synagogues.*” That’s why Jesus came. So, in chapter 3 and verse 12, after doing many healings, “*He strictly ordered them not to make him known.*” Over and over and over again, chapter 5 verse 44 and throughout Mark’s gospel. A key verse perhaps is Mark 8:30, “*[Jesus] strictly charged them to tell no one about him.*” Okay, why? Well, verse 31 gives an explanation: “*He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and*

*after three days rise again.*” He didn’t need a premature death. There were many things He had to suffer, like the rejection of Judas, the betrayal of Judas being arrested, being put on trial. His popularity was growing. Circumstances have changed. So, Jesus says, “*Tell no one,*” but this man and his friends were persistent. Verse 36 says, “*But the more he charged them, the more zealously they proclaimed it,*” what had been done.

Now, notice the language there. It’s repeated commands, almost like an ongoing conversation and interaction over a period of time as Jesus ran into them. The more He charged them, the more zealously they proclaimed it. I don’t know for sure, but apparently, these people became followers of Christ and had great zeal. Unfortunately, they were disobedient, even boldly so. The problem wasn’t their zeal to proclaim the deeds of Jesus. It was the fact that Jesus told them not to. In fact, in verse 36, the word *proclaimed* is *ek kēryssō, ek kēryssō*. It’s where we get the word *kēryssō*, “to herald, to preach.” They were preaching the gospel. They were preaching the deeds of Jesus, just like the demoniac, but here was the difference. They did not give due recognition to the fact that they went about it the wrong way. Jesus had told them not to do it because He was trying to operate according to His Father’s timetable. So, in this sense, they were disobedient. They were working against Jesus’ purpose and mission, even though their motives were right in wanting to work with Him.

How can we apply this to our lives? Let me ask you a question; how do you evangelize? There’s a right way to do it and a wrong way. How do we make disciples of the nations? I suppose we could evangelize by thumping people over their heads with our Bibles, never considering that there is wisdom involved in how we deal with people, how we speak to people, even how we proclaim the truth. Maybe we should consider the tender compassion and example of Jesus and the way that He treated this man, meeting him where he was; the Syrophenician woman, because sometimes in our zeal in proclaiming truth, if it is accompanied with harshness, it’s misdirected. It goes against God’s purpose, against Christ’s mission. We can say the right thing, and we can say it the wrong way. Jesus has set before the disciples an example of how to deal with people, how to be tender, how to be compassionate, how to be gentle. We can learn from this. This man and his friends proclaimed the truth, but they disobeyed Jesus in the process. We have no right to go against King Jesus’ directives, and when we do, we are in sin, and we need to repent. It’s not enough to know the truth and proclaim the truth, but we must do it in a way that Scripture directs us. Paul pleads with sinners. He makes an appeal with them to come to know Christ. Jesus wept over Jerusalem. Jeremiah the prophet was the weeping prophet. Jesus, our ever-compassionate Lord.

But now we come to the conclusion. We’ve seen the scene, verse 31; the subject, verse 32; the spittle, verse 33; the sigh, verse 34; the speech, verse 35; the silencing, verse 36; finally, number seven, the shock, verse 37. The Bible says, “*And they were astonished beyond measure, saying, ‘He has done all things well. He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak.’*” They were astonished. That word literally means they were struck with amazement. They were blown out of their minds. They were knocked out of their senses, shocked. Why? Because everywhere Jesus went, every word He said, every deed He performed, notice, “*He has done all things well.*” He

batted 1,000. He was 100 percent in His free-throws. He never missed. He never missed. Every healing, 100 percent accuracy so that He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak? He commands a deaf man who cannot hear to hear? Yes. That’s the power of Jesus. Perhaps harkening back to Genesis 1:31 when God created the world, He declared, “Behold, all things are very good.” So too Christ’s action of restoring this man’s hearing and speech, it was a restoring of God’s good creation. They openly declare, *“He has done all things well.”* Jesus never did anything halfheartedly. He was all in.

I want to tell you, you may be part of God’s bigger kingdom, but wherever you’re at, you need to be all in. Whatever marriage you’re in, you need to be all in. That’s kingdom work, as you raise children, as you wash your wife with the water of the Word, as you submit to your husband. Whatever church you’re in, you need to be all in. You need to be all in, in your community, being a witness to the lost around us. Jesus said we are to pray this way: *“Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”* We are to pray for the restoration of God’s fallen creation, as the nations enter His kingdom through faith. That’s the point of all of these stories because what is consistent with these healings is faith. I don’t know how many people had faith that Jesus healed. Mark picks one story out of all the time Jesus was in the Decapolis to say, “This man had faith.” He picks out one gentile woman, the Syrophoenician woman, who had great faith. We are to proclaim the gospel because we believe, going back to Isaiah 35, we believe that that has been fulfilled; that Jesus has made the deaf hear. Jesus had made the mute speak. It’s already happened. Jesus has come. Jesus has done that. He has inaugurated His kingdom. Now all these gentiles have faith and are included in the household of God. Such was fulfilled in this man physically, and such is being fulfilled spiritually every time someone comes to a saving knowledge of Christ. Their stubborn ears are open. The voice of Jesus is heard. They follow Him, and no longer with stammering tongue but a loosed one, the gospel is proclaimed. The mute speak.

Oh, for a thousand tongues to sing  
My great Redeemer’s praise,  
The glories of my God and King,  
The triumphs of His grace!

My gracious Master and my God,  
Assist me to proclaim,  
To spread through all the earth abroad,  
The honors of Thy name.

Jesus! the name that charms our fears,  
That bids our sorrows cease—  
'Tis music in the sinner’s ears,  
'Tis life, and health, and peace.

He breaks the power of canceled sin,  
He sets the prisoner free;  
His blood can make the foulest clean,  
His blood availed for me.

Hear him, ye deaf; his praise, ye dumb,  
Your loosened tongues employ;  
Ye blind, behold your Savior come,  
And leap, ye lame, for joy.

Such took place with this man as a picture of what happens to us when the gospel has penetrated our hearts. As we close, I want you to go back to verse 14. That may surprise you, but I cannot stress enough that Mark writes with a purpose. He is not just giving a sort of random list of things that occurred in the life of Jesus. He has a purpose, verse 14, “[Jesus] called the people to him again and said to them,” what does that say? “Hear me, all of you, and understand.” Hear Me. Much of Israel did not hear Jesus. Oh, they heard Him with physical ears, but not with spiritual ears. That’s why Jesus said, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.” But Isaiah 35 told us this was prophesied. This was prophesied. The Jews would reject their Messiah in order that gentiles could be grafted in, to borrow the language of Paul in Romans. God would save a Jewish remnant. He would then incorporate gentile believers into God’s household making it one household so that Jews and gentiles together, part of the new covenant, would hear and understand God’s salvation. That’s exactly what happened on a mass level when Jesus came.

Our spiritual ears have been opened. Together, we have heard and understood that in Christ, the son of Abraham by the way, all the families of the earth would be blessed. The question this morning is simple; have you heard His voice? Do you understand, and are you faithful in declaring what great things Jesus has done and that He does all things well? This begins with your own household, and then reaches into the world so that those from the east and the west can recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. This Word, this gospel is for you. Don’t plug your ears. Open them, receive the Word, and praise Jesus Christ, the only Savior of sinners. Let us pray.

Father, we thank You for these words of eternal truth. Lord, they are rich with theology. They remind us, Lord, that these stories given in the gospels are not merely stories, but they are living illustrations of the work and the power of the gospel, even in our own hearts if we would but have hearts that were willing to believe, eyes that are willing to see, ears that are willing to hear what great things Jesus has done. Father, we pray that as we turn now to the Lord’s Supper that, Lord, our hearts might be refreshed, Lord, as we consider these emblems—the bread and the cup, pictures of the gospel—this holy sacrament is an example of You condescending to us, stooping to our level, giving to us visible emblems to remind us of the gospel, just as You stooped to this deaf and dumb man, communicating to him in a way that he could understand so that he could receive salvation and physical restoration. So, bless our time, we pray, as we observe the Lord’s Table. We ask this in Jesus’ name. Amen.