

Healing a Deaf-Mute -- Mark 7:31-37

by Travis Dean
February 26, 2011

Please bow your heads with me for prayer:

Open our eyes, Lord, we want to see Jesus. Open our ears, Lord, and help us to listen. Amen.

Sign language has been used throughout the world for thousands of years. Wherever there has been a community of deaf people, a sign language has emerged. I am certainly not an expert in American Sign Language. But, if you will humor me, I would like to test your interpretation skills, if not of American Sign Language, at least of my rendition of it. I will sign three songs to you. As soon as you recognize the song, please raise your hand.

(Sign words to (1) "Jesus Loves Me": *Jesus loves me. This I know, for the Bible tells me so. Little ones to Him belong. They are weak, but He is strong. Yes, Jesus loves me. Yes, Jesus loves me. Yes, Jesus loves me. The Bible tells me so.* (2) "The More We Get Together": *The more we get together, together, together. The more we get together, the happier we'll be. 'Cause your friends are my friends and my friends are your friends. The more we get together the happier we'll be.* (3) "My God Loves Me": *My God loves me, and oh, the wonders I see. The rainbow shines through my window. My God loves me.*)

In our story today Jesus connected with a man who was deaf and mute. In doing so He used a type of sign language.

Let's begin with a summary of our story:

Leaving the region of Tyre and Sidon, Jesus came through the region of Decapolis. As a crowd began to gather around Him, a man who was deaf and mute was brought to Him. Jesus led the man away from the crowd. // After touching the man's ears and tongue, He commanded for them to be opened. Immediately, the man could both hear and speak clearly. The people were so amazed by this miracle, that, in spite of Jesus prohibiting it, they kept proclaiming the news more and more.

Let's now consider what Jesus experienced in our story. First of all, He experienced traveling through foreign territory. Mark 7:31 says that Jesus left the region of Tyre and Sidon. The wording of the Greek in many of the early manuscripts implies that Jesus continued north from the southern border of Phoenicia up through Tyre and then northward to Sidon, before coming back towards the Sea of Galilee. On His way from Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, He went through the middle of the region of Decapolis. This whole time, which would have involved around 100 miles round trip, was spent outside of Israel in foreign territory.

Second, Jesus experienced a request for healing. As Jesus went through Decapolis, a crowd began to gather around Him. Mark 7:32 says they brought to Him one who was deaf and had an impediment in his speech. And they begged Him to place His hand on this man. It seems that there was a common connection drawn between Jesus' touch and healing. Jesus was known for healing people with a touch of His hand. So, these people concluded that all Jesus needed to do is touch this man, and he would be healed.

Third, Jesus experienced releasing a captive privately. Mark 7:33 says Jesus took this man aside, away from the crowd. And as Jesus and this man are separated from the people, they experience a connection. Jesus used a type of sign language to communicate with this man, who had not come on his own, but has been led to Jesus by his friends. Through this sign language Jesus sought to awaken faith in this man's heart, to realize that the healing came from His Father in heaven, not a magical touch. Jesus' first sign to this man was putting (or more literally, "thrusting") His fingers in his ears. He touched the man where he was in need of healing. Jesus' second sign was spitting. Saliva was believed in this culture to have medicinal properties, so this act would not have had the disgusting meaning to this man that it would today in our culture. As this man watched Jesus spit, he understood that Jesus was going to provide the medicine and healing that he needed. Jesus' third sign was touching his tongue. Again, this was where the man was in need of healing. After these three signs the man understood what Jesus was doing, and yet no healing had come about from Jesus' touch.

Jesus' fourth sign was looking up to heaven. As the man watched Jesus' fourth sign, he came to realize that the healing he needed came from heaven, not from a magical touch by Jesus' hand.

Mark 7:34 then mentions that Jesus sighed. A better translation of this word might be "groaned". It's a response to suffering. The Bible mentions that when the Lord heard the groaning of the Israelites in Egypt, He sent Moses to deliver them. The apostle Paul mentions that the whole creation groans, awaiting their redemption. As Jesus looked upon this deaf and mute man, it must have recalled in His mind the ears that were unable to hear the truth in His teaching. He agonized over the Jew's inability to acknowledge the truth He shared. This man before Him was a specimen of the spiritual destitution of the Jewish people. And this produced in Jesus a groaning. Mark then records that Jesus said to the man, "Be opened." And the word Mark uses expresses the idea of being opened completely. Jesus not only was commanding this man's ears to be opened and his tongue to be set free. He was also calling for this man's spiritual perceptions to be opened. He was calling upon him both physical and spiritual healing. Mark 7:35 then says of this man, "Immediately his ears were opened, and the impediment of his speech was loosed, (or another way, "the bond of his tongue was set free") and he spoke plainly. This man was immediately healed upon Jesus' command.

Last of all, Jesus experienced His concealment being undone. Mark 7:36 says that Jesus commanded (or "ordered") them to tell no one what had happened. He knew that to do so would only further infuriate the Jewish leaders, who were trying to bring an end to His ministry. But Mark says that His effort to keep this healing concealed was undone. The people kept proclaiming the news more and more. Certainly such a reaction would have been natural, for they were "astonished beyond measure" (Mark 7:37).

Now that we have considered what Jesus experienced in our story today, let's consider how this story reveals Jesus as our example. How do we know from this story how a healthy and dangerous Christian lives in Lancaster, Ohio in 2011? First of all, Jesus is revealed as our example in this story in that He concealed the physical healing. Jesus took the deaf and mute man away from the crowd. He performed the miracle in private. Then He tried to keep it a secret. If Jesus' primary ministry was about healing people's diseases, His actions would make no sense. But Jesus did not come simply to bring physical healing. He came so that people might experience complete healing. He came to heal their spirits as well as their bodies.

And so He reveals that a healthy and dangerous Christian is someone whose ultimate goal is for people to experience spiritual healing. As a pastor, his goal is not just to have large numbers of people in church to hear his sermons. But his greatest desire is for this congregation to experience a spiritual revival. He longs to see people getting serious about God and having their lives changed by the power of the Holy Spirit. As a parent, her goal is not just for her children to grow taller and gain weight. She wants more for them than to have good grades and intelligence. She wants her children to experience the new birth in their hearts and a relationship with God. As a teacher, he wants his students to not just rattle off the right answers in class. He wants their hearts to open up to the Spirit's influence. As a friend, she wants her friends to not just experience entertainment and fun. She wants them to experience the moving power of the Holy Spirit. She seeks to have a connection with her friends in their spirits, not just in the social realm.

Second of all, Jesus is revealed as our example in this story in that His focus was on freedom. The way that this man's condition is described in the original Greek language, this man was not primarily a handicap. He was a captive. And Jesus' words to him were not, "Be healed", but "Be opened". His desire for this man was not only to be able to hear and speak clearly, but for him to be set free from the power of sin and the devil. And so He reveals that a healthy and dangerous Christian is someone who sees Christianity as liberating. This is easier for those not raised in the church to understand. They have lived life in the world and know how enslaving it is. They've experienced the addictions and the oppression of unrealistic expectations from the world. But those who have been raised in the church have more difficulty realizing that Christianity is liberating. Young people often grow up in the church with the idea that being a Christian is restricting and boring. It deprives you of the fun and excitement that the world offers. But this is a lie straight from hell. Christianity is not about a list of do's and don'ts. Yes, there are rules, but these rules are meant to protect us and lead us to Christ. Unfortunately if all I experience in the church is rules, then I become as enslaved by them as I would be by the world.

I invite you to turn with me to Galatians 2:19. This is a letter written by the apostle Paul to the church in the region of Galatia. (Read) Paul was raised in the church, if you will. He knew all about the laws and rules. And he became such an expert in them, that he eventually came to be enslaved by them. So Paul says that there came a time in his life when he had to die to the law so that he could live to the God who gave him the law. There is no freedom in the law. There is only freedom through Jesus Christ. John 8:36 says, "If the SON (emphasis supplied) makes you free, you shall be free indeed."

There is a telling statement by the people from Decapolis in this story. Mark 7:37 records them saying, "He has done all things well". They certainly didn't know all the implications of this statement. They hadn't had years of experience with Jesus to understand how everything He does is done well. They couldn't convince a skeptic with their reasoning. They were more speaking out of their amazement at Jesus' healing. It was largely an emotional response. But the more I learn about God, and the more I experience of Him, the more I see how true this statement is. He is the expert no matter what my problem is. Whatever He chooses to do with me and my circumstances, He always makes the right choice.

Fanny Crosby is the author of our closing hymn. She was similarly handicapped like the man in our story. She was not deaf or mute. She was blind. When only six weeks old, she developed a common cold, which created some inflammation in her eyes. The physician was out of town, so a quack (self-proclaimed doctor) prescribed a paste of mustard seeds. When this was applied, it caused Fanny to lose her eyesight. Not only was she blind from malpractice, but her father died when she was only one year old. And yet in spite of this, she wrote over 8,000 hymns. When she was only eight years old, she wrote:

*Oh what a happy soul I am,
Although I cannot see;
I am resolved that in this world
Contented I will be.
How many blessings I enjoy,
That other people don't;
To weep and sigh because I'm blind,
I cannot, and I won't.*

Later in life she would pen the song, "All the Way". In it she wrote the words, "*All the way my Savior leads me, what have I to ask beside? Can I doubt his tender mercy, who through life has been my guide? Heavenly peace, divinest comfort, here by faith in Him to dwell. For I know whate'er befall me, Jesus doeth all things well.*"

I invite you to join the chorus of the people from Decapolis and that of Fanny Crosby, as we sing the song, "All the Way", hymn number 516. Truly, Jesus does all things well.