

Mark 7:31-37

“Jesus is the only one that can unplug our obstinate ears and loose our tangled tongues.”

Intro:

The earliest known work of famous painter Diego Velazquez is a work titled *Kitchen Maid with the Supper at Emmaus*. The masterful painting, painted in the early 1600's but set in Biblical times, captures the clean-up effort after a meal. The main character in the painting is a maid, hard at work over a table. There's a rag sitting prominently on the table, several dishes strewn about and a vase in the maid's hand. One of the first things that stands out about the painting is that the maid has a look of curious astonishment on her face as she stares off to her right with raised eyebrows- perhaps listening in on a glorious conversation. As you survey the scene, your eyes are drawn over her right shoulder where, in another room, there is a depiction of the risen Christ at the table, halo overhead, deep in conversation with his disciples leaning in. As the full picture comes together you find the main character, the astonished maid, caught in between two worlds as it were. In the foreground the rag she's been cleaning with clearly stands out- a bright white cloth on a dark table; in the background the resurrected Jesus sits with his disciples at the table. The painting is a marvelous depiction of two worlds colliding, the old and the new. **The maid seems almost to be being called away from her toil with the old rag by the glorious words of the new life being spoken by the resurrected Lord.** It's a truly beautiful painting.

However, if you would have seen this painting at some point after it was sold and subsequently altered in the mid 1600's and before it's restoration in 1933, it would have left a much different impression on you with much less meaning. You see, at some point, after the purchase the new owner decided to paint over the scene of Jesus in the background. Apparently, the Jesus scene

in the painting was not deemed necessary or maybe it was downright bothersome or offensive to the new owner of the painting; as if Jesus was robbing the rest of the work of its beauty. In order to beautify the painting in the eyes of the new owner, Jesus was painted over. It was not until 1933 during a cleaning that the cover up was discovered and the painting was restored as much as it could be to the original. Upon restoration, the true beauty of the painting was restored and the deep meaning was brought back out. You see, with Jesus painted over the painting looks incomplete and gives more questions than answers: why the astonished look and far away glance of the maid? Why the attention given to the bright rag on the table? Why the dead space over the maid's shoulder in an otherwise lively and active painting? What meaning does the painting hold- what did Mr. Velazquez hope that I would walk away feeling? **By painting over Jesus, someone was making an attempt to beautify the painting to their liking, and they may have accomplished this, but in so doing they stripped it of its intended beauty and meaning.**

In the healing of the deaf and speech impaired man in Mark 7:31-37 we will be reminded this morning of a much deeper problem- that of spiritual deafness. Spiritual deafness is much more than simply the inability to hear- it is hearing but refusing to listen. Like the obstinate toddler who plugs their ears at an unsavory command from mom or dad, spiritual deafness is the obstinate plugging of the ears from the voice of God Almighty. You could say, spiritual deafness is like looking at your life like a painting and deciding that it would be more beautiful if Jesus were painted over- if he were not there at all. Like the physically deaf, with spiritual deafness comes a speech impairment of sorts. When we do not hear from God as we ought, we will not

Speak so as to honor him or love others as we ought. Like what happened with the painting, *Kitchen Maid with the Supper at Emmaus*, spiritual deafness causes us to see Jesus but decide to paint over him; we hear the words of God, but we decide that life would be more appealing if he would just quiet down. The problem is, in so doing, we are left with more questions than answers, with half beauty rather than the full intended beauty of the divine Artist, with shallow meaning- if any at all, and with an empty space where there should be beautiful completeness. Mark is going to help us see just how badly we need help hearing this morning as Jesus compassionately heals a man deaf and tongue tied. From this miracle, we find that: ***Jesus is the only one that can unplug our obstinate ears and loose our tangled tongues.***

Let's read Mark 7:31-37 and then unpack and apply it:

31 Then he returned from the region of Tyre and went through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis. 32 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. 33 And taking him aside from the crowd privately, he put his fingers into his ears, and after spitting touched his tongue. 34 And looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, "Ephphatha," that is, "Be opened." 35 And his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. 36 And Jesus charged them to tell no one. But the more he charged them, the more zealously they proclaimed it. 37 And they were astonished beyond measure, saying, "He has done all things well. He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak."

PRAY!!!

Jesus has just traveled from the region of Tyre and Sidon where we saw him encounter a Syrophenician woman and cast a demon out of her daughter. After a brief exchange, the woman, who may expect to get treated like a dog, expresses desperate faith and is instead treated like family by Jesus. Jesus is now in the region of the Decapolis where, as it is another heavily Gentile, or non-Jewish, population, he is perhaps looking for a break from the masses looking for a dog-and-pony show from him. His reputation as healer still proceeds him here so a man is brought to him in desperate need of a miracle. The man, we're told, is deaf and has a speech impediment. His friends are desperate for a healing touch from Jesus- they beg him to lay hands on the man. Jesus heals the man, and his renown is spread all the more through the land. There are some unique elements of this healing that we need to take notice of as we understand what God is trying to communicate to us in this passage by the pen of Mark. No word in the Scriptures is wasted and no placement is arbitrary. This is not just another run of the mill healing by Jesus, as if there were such a thing. **We need to get into the details to not just hear the story, but truly listen to its message.**

1. Larger Spiritual Point:

The first detail to notice is that, as I mentioned in the intro, a larger spiritual point is being made. While the healing of the deaf, speech impaired man is significant and amazing in its own right, Mark wants us to see that this miracle is pointing to another, even greater miracle: **Jesus has come not just to heal those physically unable to hear, he has come to unplug the ears of those who are obstinate in their spiritual deafness; Jesus has come not just to fix the broken speech of the mute, he has come to loose the tongue of those who are spiritually tongue tied.**

We get our first clue of this deeper meaning from the word Mark uses for “speech impediment” as he penned his gospel in the original Greek language that it was written in. The word that Mark uses that we have translated as “speech impediment” is only used one other place in the entire Greek translation of the Bible: Isaiah 35:6. His usage of this extremely rare word here is meant to call his readers back to that passage. Isaiah 35, written long before Jesus was born, looks forward to a time when the people of God will see his glory and majesty. God himself will come to strengthen and to save his people. Isaiah is looking forward with Messianic longings. Beginning in verse 4 of Isaiah 35 it reads:

4 Say to those who have an anxious heart,

“Be strong; fear not!

Behold, your God

will come with vengeance,

with the recompense of God.

He will come and save you.”

5 Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,

and the ears of the deaf unstopped;

6 then shall the lame man leap like a deer,

and the tongue of the mute sing for joy.

(or the tongue of the one with a speech impediment will sing for joy)

In this prophecy, Isaiah is looking forward with jubilant optimism for the day of the Messiah, God’s anointed savior, Jesus Christ. Part of the complete restoration that this Savior brings is

the healing of one of the most damning maladies of God's people: spiritual deafness and spiritual speech impairment. **If you trace the history of God's people, you'll find over and over again that they have plugged their ears to God's voice and speak evil against God and man.**

It's deafness and speech impediments in their worst form. If you go back and read Genesis 2 and 3 you'll find that when Eve commits the first sin she does so with fingers lodged in her ears as it were and speaking lies. She heard God's command not to eat of the tree but apparently did not listen as she recounts the commandment wrong, adding her own extra command to not touch it. Clearly, she heard the warning that she will surely die but did not listen as she goes ahead expecting to find life and even become like God as she consumes the fruit. With plugged ears and twisted tongue Eve ignores the words of God and speaks and does evil. Also known as sin, this is to become the pattern of God's people and of all of mankind: we plug our ears to the voice of God and speak and do evil. Over and over again God will groan through his prophets and kings phrases like we find in Psalm 81: **11 "But my people did not listen to my voice; Israel would not submit to me."**

Over and over we see the pattern of Jeremiah 7:23-24:

23 But this command I gave them: 'Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be my people. And walk in all the way that I command you, that it may be well with you.' 24 But they did not obey or *incline their ear*, but walked in their own counsels and the stubbornness of their evil hearts, and went backward and not forward.

And Zechariah 7:11 **But they refused to pay attention and turned a stubborn shoulder and *stopped their ears that they might not hear.***

This intentional inattentiveness to God words of humanity in general and God's people specifically is not unique to the OT. As we might expect Jesus himself, God in the flesh, has been experiencing this same stubborn unwillingness to listen from the people he interacts with, including his own disciples. Seven chapters in to Mark and the answer to our seemingly elusive question, "Who is Jesus", still evades the people. Not because they haven't been shown or told but because they have not listened. Jesus has shown and told them more than enough to know exactly who he is and yet they still do not listen.

Over and over Jesus commands the people that experience his healing touch to go quietly so that he doesn't become a spectacle and over and over again they ignore Jesus and tell every listening ear they can find. We have found in his interactions with the Pharisees that they are a group of people that like to question Jesus without any real desire to hear from him. They only have a desire to use his words against him as they plot evil. Jesus implores the crowds in Mark 4 as he teaches the parable of the sower to listen! **"He who has ears to hear, let him hear!"** Even Jesus own disciples are hearing his words but are limited in how they listen as they still do not fully understand Jesus and his kingdom. Mark places this miracle here in the story for just that reason. If you look up two paragraphs to 7:18 Jesus asks his disciples: **"Then are you also without understanding?"** (the implied answer being that they are indeed still without understanding). And 18 verses into the next chapter he will ask them: **8:18 Having eyes do you not see, and having ears do you not hear?**

God's people, and certainly all of humanity, have a grave listening problem. We hear the voice of God in many internal and external ways, but we plug our ears and do not listen. In our

stubborn suppression of the truth of God's word we speak evil and run after all manner of evil. Mark is calling this greater spiritual need to the minds of his readers in our passage this morning, and certainly you and I need to see this and grapple with our own spiritual condition. We too hear the voice of God and are prone to plug our ears to it or maybe just act like we didn't hear. Perhaps, in our sophistication, this looks like explaining things away or making excuses or raising questions, like the Pharisees, that may not even be intellectually honest or that we don't truly want to hear the answer to. Just questions that we throw out there to make sure that there's questions as if that gives us some sort of an excuse to not listen. We too, in our own ways, try to paint Jesus out of the picture of our lives with our obstinate deafness. We too can have tied tongues when it comes to proclaiming the glory of our Creator- worshipping instead our own ideas, proclaiming our own excellence. When the Jesus asks the rhetorical question, "Then are you also without understanding?" of his disciples, he's also asking it of you and I. We too hear, but certainly don't listen as we ought. When we plug our ears to the voice of God, we speak and do **the** evil of one who has lost themselves in themselves. Even our best work is an altered painting stripped of the intended beauty and meaning that's been covered up under ignorance and stubbornness. When we plug our ears and claim to be wise, we will ultimately speak and do folly.

2. Compassion of Jesus:

As we grapple with our deeper spiritual brokenness in this healing of the man's broken ears and tongue, there is also a great comfort in this passage that we do not want to miss- the compassion that Jesus displays. Jesus heals a great many people throughout the gospels, but

this is one of the more detailed accounts of a healing that you'll find. Again, no word is wasted in God's word. This unique detail should grab our attention and cause us to look deeper and ask, "What is being communicated by all of this extra detail?" In word, what's being communicated is "compassion". Let's look again at the details:

33 And taking him aside from the crowd privately, he put his fingers into his ears, and after spitting touched his tongue. 34 And looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, "Ephphatha," that is, "Be opened." 35 And his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly.

Jesus begins by taking the man aside to a private location. He likely does this, in part, to avoid the crowd getting hyped up by the healing and treating him like a side show. But, think about what else Jesus is doing here in pulling this man aside for an intimate, one on one, interaction. This man cannot speak or hear. How many years has it been since he experienced the intimate connection with another human being? How long has he been left alone and ignored with his own thoughts and internal cries? Jesus does not ignore this need for connection to just do the work of healing in some pragmatic way. His compassion compels him to go above and beyond even what the man may have been hoping for and pulls him aside, one on one. The compassion of our Lord...

Jesus could have easily spoken a word to heal the man, we've seen him do that with everything from healings, to casting out demons, to even calming a storm. However, we see the compassionate Savior here making pains to put his fingers in the man's ears and to spit on his hand and touch the man's tongue. Jesus is going out of his way to communicate his compassion to the man by interacting with him in a most meaningful way. The man cannot hear but he can

certainly feel, so Jesus meets him where he's at in a way that is deeply meaningful. The compassion of our Lord...

We even have Jesus entering in to the deep emotion of the moment with a sign- a groan of sorts because of the brokenness of his creation. Certainly, he groans for the deeper spiritual deafness that is present all around him. The compassion of our Lord to empathize on such a deep level with this man in his brokenness.

The temptation can be to read accounts like this and breeze on through as if it's just another healing like the catalogue of others we find in the gospels. But, as Jesus takes his time to step into the emotion and gravity of the moment here and as Mark takes the time to record it all for us, so should we slow down and take in the compassion of the moment. When we do so, we find that Jesus' compassion is abundant. His compassion is overflowing. Jesus certainly would have been amazingly compassionate to simply heal the man with a word, but in the details we see that Jesus' compassion is more than amazing, it's abundant! He pours compassion on this man to meet all his needs: body, mind, and spirit. Feel the compassion of the moment:

33 And taking him aside from the crowd privately, he put his fingers into his ears, and after spitting touched his tongue. 34 And looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, "Ephphatha," that is, "Be opened." 35 And his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly.

And we know that as abundantly compassionate as this is, this doesn't begin to scratch the surface of Jesus' compassion. Remember, Jesus is God in the flesh- the eternal God taking on human form- driven from heaven by indescribable compassion for lost souls such as you and I. He lived a perfect life, never stopping his ears to the voice of God the Father, never speaking a

word of evil against God or man. Always listening and obeying even though obedience to the plan of the Father meant that Jesus would ultimately be hung on a cross and face the punishment for your sins and mine- bearing the wrath for all of our obstinate refusals to listen to God and for every wicked thought and word spoken with tied tongues. We see the abundant compassion of Jesus in the healing of the deaf and mute man, oh see the abundant compassion of Jesus as his blood is poured out for our sins! And remember also that he did not stay dead, but rose and stands now with compassion in his hands for all who come to him. What a savior!

Apply:

When we put these details together: the deeper spiritual point being made and the abundant compassion of Jesus we find that truly ***Jesus is the only one that can unplug our obstinate ears and loose our tangled tongues.*** The cure to our deep spiritual brokenness is the compassionate, personal touch of Jesus himself.

He came to do just that. "Who is the Jesus?" we ask in the book of Mark. Jesus is the Son of God, the Savior who has come to open the ears of the spiritually deaf to hear the words of Life. Jesus is the Savior who has come to turn our tangled wicked tongues into tongues that freely sing his praises. He has come so that all who encounter him and experience his touch of abundant compassion would say in astonishment beyond measure along with the crowds in verse 37: **"He has done all things well. He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak."**

Jesus is the one that comes to compassionately restore the ruined paintings that are our lives. Where we've marred our own given beauty as image bearers of God by plugging our ears to his voice and turning our voices against him and each other, Jesus wipes away our failed attempts

at beauty and glory. Where we've left ourselves without meaning and full of emptiness, Jesus comes to restore deepest meaning and fill us with himself. Truly, he has done all things well.

Seeing this clearly, hopefully not just hearing this but listening to it, how should we respond?

1. As we think about application, we have a few things to draw out, but I want to first address our non-Christian friends in the room. If you do not know Jesus this morning as your Lord and Savior, I hope that you can hear what he's communicating to you this morning. Of all of the real issues and problems you may have in life, you have an even deeper and more serious problem. Spiritually speaking, you have plugged your ears to voice of your Creator. You have gone your own way in an attempt at beauty and meaning but what you will find in the end is not lasting beauty or meaning because you are limited and fallible. You do have a Creator, God in the heavens, who is eternal and he offers lasting and true beauty and meaning and joy for all who come to him, but he also holds lasting punishment and wrath for all who spurn his righteous voice. If you do not know Jesus this morning, you have a great need to have your ears open to the glorious voice of God and your tongue loosed to proclaim his glory. Christians are not different, we have merely had our ears opened and tongues freed by God. But, the way that you get that is not by your own efforts. Look to the compassion of Jesus, the God-man. Though there is never-ending punishment awaiting all who remain obstinate to the voice of God, we stand in a day when the compassionate hand of Jesus is still outstretched to any and all who would trust in him. Jesus has abundant compassion enough to meet all of your deepest needs and longings. Jesus has abundant compassion enough to forgive all of your sins. If you doubt that, if you think no one has

enough compassion for your failures, look again to the rest of the story of this Jesus who healed the deaf man in Luke 7 this morning while on his way to die for your sins and rise again.

2. Christians, there are a couple of important application points that we need to take away this morning. The first concerns our hearing. We need to see ourselves as once deaf men and women who can now hear the most glorious symphony ever composed in the voice of God. We should proclaim with Peter in John 6: ***Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.*** If this is the case, we should receive the Word of God at every opportunity with eagerness and gratefulness. From daily Bible reading to Sunday sermons to rich worship lyrics to fellowship opportunities to small group meeting to Bible studies, we should be eager to hear the Word of God; we were once deaf but now we hear! Oh that sense of gratefulness should compel us to what Paul calls us to in Colossians 3: **16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.** And we need to remember that this deep problem of spiritual deafness does not just affect how we hear but whether or not we actually listen. Maybe you're hearing God when he calls you to be generous in service to him with your time and money but are you actually listening? Have you acted. Maybe you're hearing God when he calls you to purity in your relationship with your boyfriend or girlfriend, but are you listening? Are you following him. Maybe you're hearing God's condemnation on the evils of pornography use, but are you listening? Do you turn away from it?

James 1: 19 Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; 20 for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. 21 Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.

22 But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. 23 For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. 24 For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. 25 But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.

3. Our second application point for the Christian concerns how we speak. Part of the total restoration that you are experiencing with life in Christ in healing of your speech impediment. This spiritual speech impediment is one in which our manner of speech and even vocabulary may be impressive, but the content is self-promoting at the expense of the glory of God and love of others. However, Jesus has set you free from that and, by the power of the Holy Spirit, is working in you to heal this speech impediment. The question that we need to ask ourselves is if we are working towards this same goal with our words? If you are one that is comfortable talking, are you watching your words so as to speak for the good of others and the glory of God? If you are one who is less comfortable talking, are you stepping out in faith to actually use your words and use them for the good of others and the glory of God?

Having been healed of this spiritual speech impediment, we need to fight self-promotion and gossip and lies and harsh words and the like. We need to cultivate God honoring speech that is a blessing to others, knowing the immense power of the tongue:

James 3:2 For we all stumble in many ways. And if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body. 3 If we put bits into the mouths of horses so that they obey us, we guide their whole bodies as well. 4 Look at the ships also: though they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs. 5 So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things.

Jesus is the only one that can unplug our obstinate ears and loose our tangled tongues, and for those who know the abundant compassion of Jesus, he has done just that. May we eagerly and gratefully we use those freed faculties for his glorious kingdom. After all, our lives are his to paint and we find true beauty and meaning in his intended masterpiece. When the paintbrush is in his hands you can be sure you'll be left like the crowd in verse 37: **And they were astonished beyond measure, saying, "He has done all things well. He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak."**

Let's pray