

Mark 7:24-37^{vii} ^{viii}

Jesus set out and went away to the region of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know he was there. Yet he could not escape notice, but a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately heard about him, and she came and bowed down at his feet. Now the woman was a Gentile, of Syrophenician origin. She begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. He said to her, "Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." But she answered him, "Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." Then he said to her, "For saying that, you may go— the demon has left your daughter." So she went home, found the child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.

Then he returned from the region of Tyre, and went by way of Sidon towards the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis. They brought to him a deaf man who had an impediment in his speech; and they begged him to lay his hand on him. He took him aside in private, away from the crowd, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spat and touched his tongue. Then looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, "Ephphatha," that is, "Be opened." And immediately his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. Then Jesus ordered them to tell no one; but the more he ordered them, the more zealously they proclaimed it. They were astounded beyond measure, saying, "He has done everything well; he even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak."

^{vii} **About Mark 7:24-37**

The miracle story in this passage is told only by Mark, not the other gospel writers, as is the story of the blind man of Bethsaida (8:22-26), with which it has many features in common. Spittle was believed to have curative qualities.

The choice of the word translated he “had an impediment in his speech” creates a direct reference to Isaiah 35:6, the only other place in the Bible where this word occurs. Thus, the messianic promises of that passage would come to the minds of those who had already heard of the healing of the paralytic (2:3-12) and would hear of the healing of the blind (8:22-26; 10:46-52).

Mark may also intend the story as a comment on the disciples, who so far have been “deaf” to Jesus' word. However, at Caesarea Philippi they will have their tongues loosened as Peter confesses his faith (8:27-30). Yet the time for open proclamation of Jesus' messiahship has not yet come. That will come only in Jesus' suffering and death (8:31).

^{viii} **Reflection and Response**

If you have ever been ill, you know the relief that sweeps over you when you suddenly realize you are in competent hands. Although you may not verbalize it, there is an almost palpable sense that everything will be okay.

That experience, though incomplete, offers a slight parallel to how people must have felt in the presence of Jesus. Hearing that voice cry, “Ephphatha!” and feeling that touch on the ears must have brought an overwhelming joy. The restoration of sound must sing like a great gift.

Just as the message echoed from Isaiah through Jesus, so it comes from Jesus into our time. Our challenge is to recognize the deaf and voiceless among us—noting that difficulties in hearing and speech are not restricted to the physical sphere—then intervene with the healing presence of Christ acting through us.