

12.27.09 / Mark 7:31-37

Following their encounter with the Gentile woman near Tyre and Sidon, Jesus and His disciples move southeast toward the Decapolis, which means “ten cities.” This was a group of cities on the eastern end of the Roman Empire. It was a Gentile region, but there were still a fair number of Jews there as well because of its proximity to other Jewish settlements.

What did it mean for those who first heard it?

As the man’s friends and loved ones pursue Him with the request for healing, we should pay close attention to Jesus’ actions in response. While we can’t be certain of Jesus’ motives as He pulls the man aside from the crowd, it’s likely that He did this in part to avoid drawing attention to His capacity to heal. As His mission was to preach to the lost sheep of Israel, and He has entered Gentile territory, drawing undue attention to His healing abilities could no doubt have quickly set him up to be considered nothing more than a miracle worker who existed solely to help people get what they wanted. He did not want this. He wanted people to see and know the depths of their hearts and to turn in repentance away from their sin and toward God in response to His good news. Note the sensitivity of Jesus as He deals with the man He’s about to heal. His actions seem to suggest that Jesus was speaking to the man in a way that he could understand. The man was deaf, and so had Jesus simply spoken to him, he would not have heard. Rather, Jesus meets him where He is, as He does for us. He does so by using physical touch in this case. As He touches the man’s ears, we could imagine the man’s thoughts as He realizes that the Great Healer is touching the very part of Him that needs to be healed. And again, as He touches the man’s tongue, imagine the excitement he likely felt as it dawned on him that his tongue, the root of speech, something he was virtually incapable of, was also about to be healed. Though he would not have heard Jesus’ command, “Ephphatha,” he would have known from whom the power to heal has come as he watches Jesus look up to heaven. Meeting the man where he was, in the condition of the moment, Jesus connects with him, communicates with him, and heals him.

While it would be wonderful to know exactly what was going through Jesus’ mind when He sighs just before healing the deaf man, we simply cannot know. It’s possible that this “sigh” was not a sigh in the sense in which we commonly imagine it. Perhaps it was a groan in recognition of the sin that keeps humans separate from God. Perhaps it was sadness as the man was about to have the capacity to do more evil with his tongue than he’s ever done, since his tongue is about to let him speak clearly. While these things are purely speculation, we can be sure of one thing: that a prayer was offered to the Father. The same word used here for sigh is found in Romans 8:23 and 8:26 in reference to the inward groanings of prayer, rather made by us or by the Holy Spirit on our behalf, and Jesus prays to the Father as He prepares to heal this man.

In verse 37, the comment was made that, “He has done all things well. . . .” As we understand more of the gospel story at this point in history, our amazement of Jesus should stem not only from His capacity to make a deaf man hear, but from the fact that He is God, Emmanuel, come to be one of us so that He could save us. The unthinkable reality that God would die and come back to life to bring a broken creation back to Himself should stun us. All that Jesus does He does not only well, but perfectly, and we too should find ourselves “astonished beyond measure.”

Starter Questions

- 1) What keeps you from begging Jesus to heal those around you?
- 2) Who in your life will you beg Jesus to heal?
- 3) Where in your life do you approach Jesus as just a miracle worker?
- 4) Share a positive experience where someone met you where you were in life?
- 5) Jesus meets us where we are. Where does Jesus meet you?
- 6) What does Jesus want to heal in your life?
- 7) What do you think you can do better than Jesus?
- 8) What steps can you take to see your heart changed in this?

Sources

- The Bible Exposition Commentary
- The Bible Knowledge Commentary
- Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible