

## "A Picture of Compassion" - Mark 7:31-37

*For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need. (Hebrews 4:15-16)*

Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, gets it. Jesus gets it! He understands what it is to be human, because He is human. But He is also 100% God. He is every bit God. He is just as much God as the Father and the Holy Spirit and because He is God, He is able to do something about the human condition. You can go to Jesus to *obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*

Jesus is the Word of God. He is the Agent of creation. When God spoke the words "Let there be light", it was Jesus who spoke those words, because ...

*All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. (John 1:3)*

But the world we now experience is not the world that Jesus spoke into existence. This world has been stained and cursed by sin, our cosmic rebellion and as a race, we human beings have turned our backs on our Creator. Every one of us! And so, the world that God surveyed and pronounced that "*indeed it was very good*", (Genesis 1:31) is now subjected to tribulation, travail, disease, suffering and death.

But it will not always be so. Jesus is coming back. And when He arrives, he will cause this present creation to pass away and be replaced with a new heaven and a new earth where righteousness dwells.

*And God will wipe away every tear from [our] eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things [will have] have passed away." (Revelation 21:4)*

And Jesus will say, "*Behold, I make all things new.*" (Revelation 21:5) But in the meantime, we're going to face tribulation. We're going to face traumatic events. We're going to face disease, injuries, financial setbacks, emotional distress, persecution, all kinds of sorrows, and death.

Jesus gets it and He has compassion for us.

Recall, if you will, the story of Jesus raising Lazarus from the grave. Jesus knew exactly what He was doing. Jesus knew that He had authority over death and that Lazarus would soon stumble out of that tomb. But as He observed the anguish of Lazarus' family and friends, His reaction was one of profound empathy and compassion.

*Jesus wept. (John 11:35)*

This morning, as we continue working our way through Mark's account of Jesus' life and ministry, we're going to see His compassion put on display. It is yet another miracle. Jesus performed so many miracles that John says that there is no way we could write them all down. (John 21:25) But this miracle is a picture of His compassion.

*Again, departing from the region of Tyre and Sidon, He came through the midst of the region of Decapolis to the Sea of Galilee. (Mark 7:31)*

If you recall from last week, Jesus had taken His disciples away from Galilee, away from Jewish territory up to Phoenicia somewhere in the area of Tyre. That's where He cast a demon out of the Syrophenician woman's daughter. This was to be a walking classroom for His disciples. He was preparing them to be the first generation of evangelists through whom He would establish His Church. Our best guess is that this tour took 6 months or more and the Gospels give us very little information about what went on during that period. But we know that they left Tyre and traveled North through Sidon, crossed over the Mountains of Lebanon and looped back around to the Decapolis on the Eastern side of the Sea of Galilee. They probably walked around 150 miles or so.

All this time, they were in Gentile territory. Pagan territory. These were folks who worshipped the Greek pantheon of gods or some of the earlier fertility gods.

I think part of the reason Jesus took the disciples into these regions was to teach them that the gospel wasn't just for Jews. Yes, the Gospel would go to the Jews first, but then to the entire world. It was a tough lesson for these guys to learn and they wouldn't really get it until Peter was led to Cornelius' household sometime later. The rest of the guys were actually pretty upset about that. But after Peter told them what had happened ...

*When they heard these things they became silent; and they glorified God, saying, "Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life."  
(Acts 11:18)*

I read a significant amount of astonishment on their parts. They were shocked and surprised, but they shouldn't have been. This was God's plan all along and Jesus clearly demonstrated it.

So, they pass through the middle of the Decapolis to the Eastern shore of Galilee. This is the same area in which Jesus cast a legion of demons out of a guy who was hanging out in the tombs. Remember that? Jesus granted permission for the demons to enter a herd of pigs, and they rushed down into the sea. That's where they were and folks knew that this amazing miracle-worker was among them. Mark only relates this one miracle, but we get a little different perspective from Matthew's account:

*Jesus departed from there, skirted the Sea of Galilee, and went up on the mountain and sat down there. Then great multitudes came to Him, having with them the lame, blind, mute, maimed, and many others; and they laid them down at Jesus' feet, and He healed them. So the multitude marveled when they saw the mute speaking, the maimed made whole, the lame walking, and the blind seeing; and they glorified the God of Israel.  
(Matthew 15:29-31)*

Jesus was healing a whole bunch of folks. But Mark focuses on just one guy.

*Then they brought to Him one who was deaf and had an impediment in his speech, and they begged Him to put His hand on him. (Mark 7:32)*

All week, I've been asking myself, "Why just one guy?" What is so special about this guy? Why did Mark, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, feel the need to single him out among the many healings Jesus performed? Scripture doesn't give us an explicit answer, but perhaps it has to do with the very nature of the man's handicap. In Jewish culture, a person who was deaf was considered to be cursed of God. Rabbinic tradition placed them in the same category as the insane. Rabbis certainly wouldn't touch such a person, because doing so would make them ceremonially unclean. In the Greek culture, the Roman culture, it was even worse. It was bad enough to be blind, but at least a blind man could communicate. This guy couldn't hear, and as a result, couldn't speak clearly

either. It is really, really hard for deaf folks to learn to speak, because they have no reference for what words should sound like. Today, we have techniques to help the deaf learn to speak, but in that time they just wrote them off. The culture just didn't care much about the deaf.

I think that Mark chose to relate this story because it underscores Jesus' compassion for the downtrodden. As David sings:

*But You, O Lord, are a God full of compassion, and gracious,  
Longsuffering and abundant in mercy and truth. (Psalms 86:15)*

And Isaiah writes about Messiah:

*"The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon Me, Because the LORD has anointed Me To preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives, And the opening of the prison to those who are bound; (Isaiah 61:1)*

Jesus has profound compassion for those who have been burdened by the results of the fall.

*And He took him aside from the multitude, and put His fingers in 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." Immediately his ears were opened, and the impediment of his tongue was loosed, and he spoke plainly. (Mark 7:33-35)*

What Jesus did is really quite significant. Understand, He didn't need to jump through all those hoops. All He had to do was speak a word and the guy would have been healed. Jesus wasn't performing some sort of magic act. He did these things to connect with a man who would be shunned by the rest of society, to demonstrate His compassion for him.

Jesus tenderly communicated with the deaf-mute in five ways. First, He took him aside. That demonstrated that the guy was important to Jesus. He wasn't just one of the crowd. He was worth something. Secondly, Jesus touched his ears. He put his fingers there and that communicated the fact that Jesus knew exactly what the problem was. The guy was deaf; he wasn't stupid; he was not insane. Third, He spit and touched his tongue. Jesus recognized that his severe speech impediment was also a problem. And by touching the man's tongue, Jesus let him know that he understood. Then Jesus looked to heaven. This was the fourth way Jesus communicated with the man. By this, He let Him know that what was about to happen was done by the power of Almighty God. And then Jesus sighed. In much the same way that Jesus wept at the tomb of Lazarus, Jesus communicated his empathy with the burdens of fallen humanity. Jesus demonstrated His compassion.

Only then did our Lord effect the healing. *He sighed, and said to him, "Ephphatha," that is, "Be opened."* Ephphatha is an Aramaic word. Mark translates it for his readers, who were mostly Romans. Immediately, the man was made whole.

The fact that He spoke plainly is really significant. This man had never heard speech! He didn't know how to form words and articulate ideas in a way that folks could understand. But immediately, with no delay, no time for speech therapy, he was able to speak clearly.

*Then He commanded them that they should tell no one; (Mark 7:36)*

Why in the world not? Why wouldn't Jesus want them to spread the news about the power of God He so clearly displayed. After all, after he cast legion out of the Geresene Demoniac, Jesus said:"

*Go home to your friends, and tell them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He has had compassion on you." (Mark 5:19)*

What was different about this situation that Jesus didn't want the word spread? I think it has to do with the fact that the gospel story was still incomplete at this point. Yes, Jesus was a great miracle worker. Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. But He had not yet completed the work He was sent to do. He did not want to precipitate a premature crisis, to have His hand forced.

In just a few weeks, as we continue through Mark's Gospel, we're going to encounter Peter's confession.

*He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered and said to Him, "You are the Christ." (Mark 8:29)*

Peter and the rest of the disciples had come to believe that Jesus was the promised Anointed One, the Messiah. All of His works testified to this truth. It is the reason Jesus performed so many signs, but the most important, wonderful part of the story was yet to come.

*Then He strictly warned them that they should tell no one about Him. (Mark 8:30)*

There's the same command. They had come to the correct conclusion, but Jesus wanted them to keep it to themselves because there was more to the story.

Jesus explained:

*And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. (Mark 8:31)*

That is the rest of the story. It is the most wonderful part of the story but the crowds weren't ready to handle it yet. They extolled Him as a great miracle worker. After the feeding of the 5,000, they wanted to take Him by force to make Him King. But that's not why He came. He came to lay down His life for His sheep. He came to die for you and for me and He hadn't done that part of the work yet. So, He commanded them not to tell anyone.

Well, some things just can't be contained.

*Then He commanded them that they should tell no one; but the more He commanded them, the more widely they proclaimed it. (Mark 7:36)*

I guess I can't really blame them. Think of this deaf-mute. He can hear perfectly. For the first time in his life he can speak distinctly. How could he possibly keep it to himself?

"Dude, you're speaking clearly and articulately."

"That's right, and I can hear perfectly too."

"How did that happen?"

"Er, I can't tell you."

Don't you think it would be a little tough for him to remain silent?"

*And they were astonished beyond measure, saying, "He has done all things well. He makes both the deaf to hear and the mute to speak." (Mark 7:37)*

The word translated "well" is *kalōs* (καλῶς) It means beautifully, finely, excellently well. It is a superlative term. In other words, He couldn't have possibly done better. That's our Jesus. He does all things well. He does all things perfectly. He has power over all disabilities, all illnesses, all demonic forces, everything in this universe, including death itself.

And He has compassion for you. Jesus understands your struggles, your infirmities, your needs. And your greatest need is for salvation. Jesus has compassion for you. He loves you, and even though you have rebelled horribly against Him, even though every one of us has sinned and fallen short of His glory, He went to the cross to save you from an eternity in Hell. He suffered, died, was buried, but on the third day He rose again. He conquered sin and death for you. And all you have to do is believe. Trust in His finished work. Confess, "Jesus, You are my Lord and my God." And believe that He has risen from the grave.

My dear friends, I pray you would rest in the compassion Jesus has for you. Come boldly to His throne of grace, that you may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.