

MORE THAN JUST MIRACLES: Healing the Deaf/Mute Man

In the Gospels, we are told again and again of the wonderful miracles that Jesus performed. He made the blind to see, the deaf to hear, the lame to walk, the spiritually distressed were calmed—to mention but a few of His miracles. There were many, many more reported in the Scriptures, but even they do not describe all of the marvelous things that Jesus did. John attests to this in the very last verse of his Gospel when he says, “Jesus also did many other things. If they were all written down, I suppose the whole world could not contain the books that would be written.” John 21:25 (NLT)

For the next few Sundays, I want you to think about some of Jesus’ miracles. I would like for us to consider what they tell us about Jesus’ great power and His great compassion for all of mankind. But there is something more that we need to look for in these miracles. In each one, Jesus tells us something beyond the physical healing that He provided to each of the recipients of His grace—Because in each miracle, Jesus is looking at us. When we read these miracles, Jesus wants us to dig deeper and look for the spiritual healing and restoration that they offer to you and me.

This morning, let’s start by taking a look at one of those miracles—the one involving a man who could not hear, nor could he speak. We will see how Jesus attended to his needs—and more importantly for our purposes: We need to think about how this miracle relates to our own needs. And we don’t want to miss what this miracle calls us to do.

This particular miracle is found only in Mark’s Gospel, where he tells us: ³¹ “Jesus left Tyre and went up to Sidon before going back to the Sea of Galilee and the region of the Ten Towns. [So bear in mind, that Jesus has left Jewish territory and is now in the land of the Gentiles.] ³² A deaf man with a speech impediment was brought to him, and the people begged Jesus to lay his hands on the man to heal him. ³³ Jesus led him away from the crowd so they could be alone. He put his fingers into the man’s ears. Then, spitting on his own fingers, he touched the man’s tongue. ³⁴ Looking up to heaven, he sighed and said, ‘Ephphatha,’ which means, ‘Be opened!’ ³⁵ Instantly the man could hear perfectly, and his tongue was freed so he could speak plainly! ³⁶ Jesus told the crowd not to tell anyone, but the more he told them not to, the more they spread the news. ³⁷ 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 7:31-36 (NLT), 37 (NKJV)

It may sound odd—the way that Jesus goes about the healing here. He sticks His fingers in the man’s ears. He spits on his finger and touches the man’s tongue. Then, Jesus speaks, “Be opened!”—

and immediately, the man's hearing is restored, and he can now speak clearly to boot. But note—not even Jesus' detractor could have accused Him of "putting on a show." After all, Jesus deliberately took the man aside to a bit more private place where He administered this rather unusual healing technique. As one commentator put it: "Healing in the ancient world was a 'hands-on' activity. The crowd had asked Jesus to lay His hand on the deaf and mute man, and He fulfilled their expectations."¹

But aren't we like that as well? If you go to a doctor for a check-up or for some ailment, you expect that the doctor will be wearing a stethoscope. He or she will have a tongue depressor and ask you to open your mouth and say, "Ahhh." If that didn't happen, you might wonder if the doctor really knew what he or she was doing. Human nature hasn't changed that much, because people in the ancient world also had their own expectations as to what a healer was supposed to do—and laying your hands on the person you were restoring to health was one of those expectations. And so, it is reasonable to assume that Jesus, by His method of healing, gave the man a chance to have faith in Him—Jesus attended to this man in a manner that the man may well have expected. And, as it turned out, the man's faith in Jesus was not misplaced because he was instantly healed.²

Jesus is like that. Remember the Beatle's song of years past—"Give Peace a Chance"? Well, Jesus always gives peace a chance—it is the peace He offers everyone by giving faith a chance. He offers His peace and healing in one way or another to everyone in a manner that gives faith a chance. Whether or not that person responds, is totally on him or her.

So what was the purpose of the miracle? From the man's perspective, it was basically physical in nature. He was deaf and mute before, but afterwards, he could both hear and speak clearly. But much more is intended by Jesus in doing this miracle. While others might try to plug a person's ears with fingers or apply saliva to a mute person's tongue, none of them could actually bring about real, lasting healing. The Bible seems pretty clear here—only God could do something like that. When Moses claimed that he would not be able to appear before Pharaoh and deliver God's demands, the Lord responded: "Who gave man his mouth? Who makes him deaf or mute? Who gives him sight or makes him blind? Is it not I, the LORD?" Exodus 4:11 (NIV) And the answer, of course, is: "Yes Lord, only you could do those things." And with that being the case, the logic is not hard to apply—If only God can heal the deaf, mute and blind, and Jesus healed the deaf, mute and blind, then Jesus must be . . . God! Yet, it seems that both Jesus' disciples and the people who witnessed these miracles were having a hard time in coming to grips with this reality. Funny how they failed to remember the Prophet Isaiah's proclamation that when the Messiah came, ⁵ "The eyes of the blind [would] be opened and the ears of

the deaf unstopped. ⁶ Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy.” Isaiah 35:5-6 (NIV) ³

And there is something else that springs from this miracle. It provides a picture of those in the world today who God is speaking to, yet they make no response, as if they were deaf. ⁴ And they are deaf in the spiritual sense, or at least they chose to be. And that’s a shame because while they may be spiritually deaf to the things of God, they hear quite clearly the things of the world. And that is a very dangerous situation to be in. For those who tune their ears to the voice of Jesus Christ, they will hear Him say: “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” John 14:6 (ESV) But those who listen to the world are given anything but the truth. Their ears become filled with the noise of disinformation and lies. When that happens long enough, you begin to become a member of a world family of liars—a family with a very specific father. Jesus tells us about people like that—those with eager ears for the world, but not for God. Jesus identifies them this way: “You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.” John 8:44 (ESV)

The father of lies—Satan—is so very active in the world today. He uses so many different means to try to influence you in ways that will separate you from the truth of Jesus Christ. Maybe it’s that talk show host who encourages you to engage in something that you know is contrary to God’s Word. Maybe it’s that violent movie filled with its sex scenes that offers the ways of the world to you. Maybe it’s that magazine or website that teaches you the ways of the world. If you don’t believe Satan is active in spreading his lies throughout this country, if you don’t believe that he is skilled in inspiring some of the most technologically advanced means of deceiving you, then take a pause—look around. You can see his disinformation and lies everywhere.

Just this past week, an article in the New York Times appeared that was entitled, *“After Florida School Shooting, Russian ‘Bot’ Army Pounced.”* What pounced?—a Russian bot? What’s a “Russian bot”? It’s an automated fake account set up on Twitter or Facebook to appear as if it’s the account of an ordinary American citizen. But, in reality these accounts are created by Russian-backed operatives who regularly post and disseminate false information on matters of public interest. They are called *“automated”* bots because they can very quickly send this disinformation repeatedly—hundreds, even thousands of times, just seconds apart. That reaches quite a few people, who in turn, may unwittingly pass these lies on to others.

And in this New York Times article, it described how Russian-backed social media accounts pounce on virtually every major news story in this country in an effort to spread this “fake news.” And what is the purpose of all of this?—simply to send out lies to as many people as possible with the aim of creating discord and fear among anyone who is willing to lend them an ear. This New York Times article stated: “One hour after news broke about the school shooting in Florida last week, Twitter accounts suspected of having links to Russia released hundreds of posts taking up the gun control debate.”

As you can imagine, the information these Russian backed accounts spread were not intended to give anyone updated news on the situation. Rather, their sole aim was to stir up anger and discord among the people of this country—all at the expense of those pitiful people whose children and loved ones had just been slaughtered. The article goes on to say: “Any news event — no matter how tragic — has become fodder to spread inflammatory messages in what is believed to be a far-reaching Russian disinformation campaign. The disinformation comes in various forms: conspiracy videos on YouTube, fake interest groups on Facebook, and **armies of bot accounts** that can hijack a topic or discussion on Twitter.”

“Armies of bots”! . . . Did you know that Satan has an army of bots? It’s true—he has used them for a very, very long time. And they are infinitely more powerful, much more sinister than the most evil Russian Twitter who ever lived. Paul tells us about “Satan’s army of bots” and who we are really fighting against (and it’s not the Russians). This is what he says: “For we are not fighting against people made of flesh and blood, but against persons without bodies—the evil rulers of the unseen world, those mighty satanic beings and great evil princes of darkness who rule this world; and against huge numbers of wicked spirits in the spirit world.” Ephesians 6:12 (TLB)

Satan and his evil spiritual bots want to flood you with disinformation and lies. Lies that take away your hope. Fake news that causes you to think that the ways of the world are more beneficial than the plan that God has for your life. Satan wants to fill your life with deafening noise that keeps you from hearing God’s call. This miracle of the healing of the deaf man, as great as that miracle was, is about far more than physical healing. The miracle isn’t so much about the ears, as it is about the heart. While it is certainly true that Jesus healed this man’s ears, the miracle has less to do with what the ears can hear, as it does about what our hearts *need to hear*. If we will let Jesus touch our hearts, the noise of the world starts to recede into the background, and confusion melts away.

Now one final thing to consider regarding Jesus’ miracle. Notice that after Jesus restored the man’s hearing he told the man, and anyone standing around who witnessed all of this, not to tell anyone. Had we observed one of Jesus’ miracles, we too might have thought that it would have been a

good idea to tell everyone what wonderful acts of healing Jesus performed. So why did Jesus tell them to keep these things private for the time being? Well, the answer is this. Jesus came to save the world by the truth of His words, not to dazzle people with miracles. Jesus wanted people to follow Him as the Savior of their souls, not as their mobile “Doc-in-a-Box.” Now the thing is—all that changed after He hung on that Cross and arose from that tomb.⁵ That was the Greatest Miracle of all time, and is the one that has the most significance for you and for me. That was the greatest healing miracle in all of history. It is the reason that Prophet Isaiah proclaimed that: “He was pierced for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon Him, and by His wounds we are healed. . . For He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.” Isaiah 53:5, 12 (NIV) That is the miracle that Jesus bids us to tell everyone, everywhere all about. Just before Jesus ascended to Heaven, He said: “You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” Acts 1:8 (NRSV)

If we are truly followers of Jesus, we cannot ignore the fact that He has loosened our tongues no less than that of the deaf and mute man that He healed. Before Jesus comes into your life, you are just as spiritually mute and deaf as that man who was physically deaf and physically mute. But when Jesus touches you, all that changes. Then you can truly listen for His voice, and use your own voice to tell others about Him. When we step back and take a closer look at the deaf and mute man in this miracle, someone else begins to come into focus—someone who looks a lot like you and me. William MacDonald states in his commentary that this man “pictures the sinner, deaf to the voice of God and, therefore, unable to speak to others about Him.”⁶ And that’s true for all of us—we cannot repeat the Good News of Jesus’ message if we have failed to thoroughly listen to His voice. But, if Jesus is truly part of your life—how can you possibly resist the great urge to burst out with joy, spreading the Gospel of Christ wherever you go?

Jesus wants us to be His army of “bots”. But, not mindless, robotic bots that automatically spit out things in some artificial, mechanical way. Jesus wants us to be His *“Bots of Joy”*—not merely automated beings, but ***animated*** ones!—Animated by the love of Christ, spreading His Truth in a world so accustomed to lies. Let Him open your ears today to hear His voice. Ask for Him to empower you, to embolden you, so that your tongue may be loosened to spread His Word of truth and peace in a world plagued by disinformation and chaos. And so when we repeat the words of those who witnessed Jesus’ healing of this man, we too can say with a deeper meaning than they had: “He has done all things well. He makes both the deaf to hear and the mute to speak.” Mark 7:37 (NKJV)

Let us pray.

Forest Hill Baptist Church
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Darvin Satterwhite, Pastor ©2018

¹David Garland, *NIV Application Commentary, The – Mark: From biblical text...to contemporary life*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 300.

² Ibid at 300.

³ Ibid at 299-300.

⁴ William MacDonald, *Believer's Bible Commentary*, Thomas Nelson/Nashville (1995), 1339.

⁵ Id. David Garland, *NIV Application Commentary*, 299.

⁶ Id. William MacDonald, 1339.