

INTRODUCTION

After a break for the holidays and the Treasure Truth series, we're back in the Gospel According to Mark. I'm calling this series, "The reMARKable Power of Jesus."

What you don't know can hurt you—or embarrass you. It's important to understand what things mean. I found an actual text message a mother sent to her son. It read:

Mom: Your great-aunt just passed away. LOL.

Son: Why is that funny?

Mom: It's not funny, David. Wht do you mean?

Son: Mom, LOL means Laughing Out Loud!

Mom: oh my goodness!! I sent that to everyone I thought it meant Lots Of Love. I have to call everyone back oh god.

In our text today, it's important to understand what Jesus was saying and what He was really doing. In our passage today, we're going to study a miracle in which Jesus heals a deaf man who also has speech impediment. I've read about this miracle dozens of times before, but as I studied it in the past few weeks, there is one detail that has always escaped me. Just before Jesus healed the deaf man, He did something that surprised me. He looked up to heaven and expressed a deep sigh. He really did use SIGH language for a deaf man.

Mark 7:31-37. "Then Jesus left the vicinity of Tyre and went through Sidon, down to the Sea of Galilee and into the region of the Decapolis. There some people brought to him a man who was deaf and could hardly talk, and they begged him to place his hand on the man. After he took him aside, away from the crowd, Jesus put his fingers into the man's ears. Then he spit and touched the man's tongue. He looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him, "Ephphatha!" (which means, "Be opened!"). At this, the man's ears were opened, his tongue was loosened and he began to speak plainly. Jesus commanded them not to tell anyone. But the more he did so, the more they kept talking about it. People were overwhelmed with amazement. "He has done everything well," they said. "He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak."

If you ever visit Venice, Italy, chances are you'll take an expensive gondola ride through the crowded canals. You'll probably go under a famous bridge called "The Bridge of Sighs." It has another Italian name, but Lord Byron gave it the English name. It's a bridge that leads from a courtroom to a prison. Convicted prisoners would be led through this bridge on the way to prison. For some of them, it would be their last glimpse of Venice, thus it was named the Bridge of Sighs. Our lives are one long bridge of sighs.

That's just one of five lessons I want us to learn from this amazing miracle.

1. The best thing you can do for a hurting friend is to bring him/her to Jesus

"Some people brought to him a man who was deaf and could hardly talk..." Jesus had been on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea, and He relocated to the area of ten Gentile cities call the

Decapolis. Nine of these cities were on the Eastern side of the Jordan River, in modern day Jordan or Syria. They were not Jewish cities.

When Jesus came into the region, His fame as a miracle-worker had already spread. There is an unnamed man who was deaf and could hardly speak. The Greek language is very descriptive of his speech problem. It says his tongue was "tied up with a string." Today, we talk about someone being "tongue tied." This speech impediment could have been stuttering, or perhaps, it was difficult for him to pronounce words since he was deaf.

It's interesting this man didn't seek out Jesus himself. The Bible says some people brought him to Jesus. These might have been family members or friends. But their compassion for their friend and their belief that Jesus could make a difference caused them to escort their friend to Jesus.

Does this remind you of another healing miracle? In Mark 2 we read about the four friends who brought the paralyzed man to Jesus and tore up the roof to lower him in front of Jesus. My favorite part of that miracle is where it says that when Jesus saw THEIR faith, He spoke to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven." Jesus honored the faith of those four men.

This man couldn't call on the Lord, or hear the Word of the Lord. He needed help. People without Jesus need help as well. Do you have a friend or family member who needs Jesus? They need your help because they are spiritually disabled. 2 Corinthians 4:4 says that "The god of this age [the devil] has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they CANNOT see the light of the gospel."

You may be thinking, "Jesus has ascended into heaven, and is at the right hand of God, how can I bring my friends and family members to Him?" I'm glad you asked. When you bring them to church, you're bringing them to the Body of Christ, where the Word of God is proclaimed.

We have a television ministry, and we do some advertising in the community, but every study we've ever done reveals that 80% of the new people who come to Green Acres come because a friend or family member invites them and brings them. That's the greatest thing you can do for anyone—bring them to Jesus.

2. Jesus came to save the world, but He relates to each of us individually

When they brought the deaf man to Jesus the Bible says, "He took him aside, away from the crowd." There were many miracles Jesus performed publicly. Next Sunday we're going to read about the feeding of the multitude. But I love the fact Jesus took this man aside and dealt with him privately and personally.

Jesus had such tenderness with this deaf man. He acted out what He was about to do. He placed His Divine fingers in the man's ears to indicate He was going to fix that problem. Then Jesus placed some of His Divine saliva on the man's tongue to indicate that He was going to fix that problem as well.

Then Jesus spoke a word in Aramaic. He said, "Ephphatha." It meant, "Be opened. Be loosed." Suddenly, this man could hear Jesus. He could hear the wind. He could hear the birds singing for the first time. The string binding his tongue was opened and he began to speak plainly for the first time—and he could hear his own voice.

Can you imagine his reaction? Today, there are roughly 360 million people on the planet who suffer from hearing loss: That's about 5% of the world's population. Only 10% of those have access to hearing aids and medical science. Today, there is a surgical procedure called a cochlear implant in which many people with profound hearing loss can hear again, or hear for the first time. If you want to be blessed, go to YouTube and watch the reaction of little children and adults when they hear for the first time (don't do it now). When little kids hear their parents' voices for the first time, they have two reactions: wide-eyed amazement, and then smiles and laughter. When adults hear for the first time, there is wide-eyed amazement, and then they collapse into grateful tears as they can hear. I can imagine this poor man expressed amazement and then tears of gratitude to Jesus.

For God so loved the world [that's all seven billion of us] that if anyone believes on Him [that's each of us] they will not perish but have eternal life. Jesus loves you individually, as if you were the only person on earth to love. He came to die for sinners, and if you had been the only sinner, He would have died for you. Jesus doesn't save groups of people together: He saves each person individually. He wants to take you aside from the crowd today and touch you and open your ears so you can hear Him, and open your mouth so you can make His name famous.

3. As a man, Jesus understands our pain

Just before He healed the deaf man, Jesus used sigh language. The Bible says, "He looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him..." As I said earlier, this is the part of the story that grabbed my attention for the first time. Jesus sighed.

There are all different kinds of sighs. There's a sigh of relief when the doctor tells us that the tumor is benign. There's a sigh of fatigue after we've finished a long, hard job. And there is the sigh of anguish and grief when someone we care about is longer with us. This past week, we had to put our 12-year-old Boxer, Boomer, down because she had gotten too sick to function. A day afterwards, I was driving in my car, and found myself just going, "Sigh...poor old Boomer. I'm going to miss her greeting me every afternoon." Life is one long bridge of sighs. Job said, "For my sighing comes like my bread; and my groanings are poured out like water." (Job 3:24 NRSV)

Sighing is part of the human condition. Jesus was 100% God, but He was also 100% man. He feels what we feel. He is moved to compassion when we suffer. The Bible says, "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin." (Hebrews 4:15)

Jesus was a man of sorrows acquainted with grief. I did a word search for the Greek word *stenazo*, and it appears eight times in the New Testament. It can be translated "sighed" or "groaned." When Jesus showed up at the tomb of Lazarus and saw the tears of Mary, He groaned because He shared in Mary's grief. Jesus isn't the only one who groans and sighs. The Bible says

in 2 Corinthians 5:4 that this body we live in is like a tent that gets battered and old. And inside this tent, we groan, we sigh. Have you groaned lately when you've tried to get out of bed in the morning? That's the same word that was used of the times that Jesus sighed. It was a cross between a groan and a sigh.

In Romans 8, we read that the entire creation sighs, we sigh, and even the Holy Spirit groans and sighs. "We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies... In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express." (Romans 8:22-23, 26)

Sometimes we are so burdened we can't even express words in our prayers. That's when our compassionate, loving God sighs and groans in us with words that cannot even be expressed. When you're praying if you don't know the words to say, don't worry. God understands sigh language.

We sigh because we're part of a fallen world. That's why Jesus sighed that day. A respected Anglican Bible scholar, Dr. Frederic Farrar expressed it better than I can: "He was about to heal the deaf man. Why then should He have sighed? In that poor afflicted man Jesus saw but one more sign of that vast crack and flaw which sin has caused in everything good God created. When God finished His work, He saw that it was very good. But since that time the devil has sown evil tares amid God's wheat; an alien element of suffering intruded into God's world; a jangling discord clashed into God's soothing music. Earth is no longer Eden."

Some people blame God for the suffering in this world. But God is a good God who created a good world. Sin and Satan have created the havoc and suffering. And that's why Jesus sighed and it's why we will sigh until we see Jesus.

4. When Jesus has touched us, we can't resist telling others

The Bible says, "Jesus commanded them not to tell anyone. But the more he did so, the more they kept talking about it." This is the great irony of the Gospel. This wasn't the only occasion where Jesus told the recipient of a miracle to keep quiet about it. And in every case, they didn't stay quiet; they told everyone about Jesus. And yet Jesus has commanded us to tell everyone the great things He has done for us and yet most of us remain silent. That's the irony.

So, WHY did Jesus tell this man to keep it under wraps? There's a simple reason. Jesus was already being overwhelmed by crowds demanding a miracle. Jesus' primary mission to Planet Earth wasn't to heal the sick. His primary mission was to die on a cross for the sins of humanity. Jesus knew that the more people talked about His healing miracles, the more people would crowd around Him just for a miracle.

But in other cases, Jesus told those set free from demonic influence to spread the word. Remember the man who was tormented by a legion of demons that Jesus cast into the pigs. Then they died of swine flu as they flew into the water and drowned. We read in Luke 8, "The man

from whom the demons had gone out begged to go with him, but Jesus sent him away, saying, 'Return home and tell how much God has done for you.' So the man went away and told all over town how much Jesus had done for him." (Luke 8:38-39)

Jesus has called us to do the same thing. Notice Jesus told the man to tell people what GOD had done for him—and the man talked about what Jesus had done—one more proof that Jesus is God. Have you been telling people what Jesus has done for you?

One of the choruses we used to sing as teenagers was, "While I was praying, somebody touched me. While I was praying, somebody touched me. While I was praying, somebody touched me. It must have been the hand of the Lord." If you've been touched by the Master, tell people about it!

5. Jesus' miracles provide proof that He is the Messiah

You might not have recognized the importance of this final verse. "People were overwhelmed with amazement. 'He has done everything well,' they said. 'He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak.'"

The Jews as well as the Gentiles around Israel had been looking for a Messiah since Isaiah and the other prophets predicted His arrival. One of the ways people knew to recognize the Messiah was by the miracles He would perform.

Over the preceding four hundred years, many Jewish leaders had arrived on the scene and claimed to be the Messiah. But none of them had performed miracles. But Jesus fulfilled all the Old Testament prophecies.

Seven hundred years earlier Isaiah prophesied: "Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy." (Isaiah 35:5-6) Jesus opened the eyes of the blind, healed the deaf, raised paralytics who jumped like a deer, and opened the mouths of the mute to shout for joy.

Jesus touched this man at the point of his pain. What is your point of pain today? Are you struggling with a physical problem? Jesus wants to touch you and say, "Be healed." Are you struggling with the guilt and shame from your past? Jesus wants to touch you there and say, "Be forgiven." Are you struggling with terrible grief over the death of a loved one? Jesus wants to touch your broken heart and say, "Be comforted." Will you let Jesus touch you today?

CONCLUSION

The bottom line of this miracle is that the people said Jesus has done all things well. Can you say that?

We all sigh because we live in a world full of pain and adversity. None of us are immune from suffering. We don't have a choice about pain. But what we do have a choice about is how we react and respond to our pain.

Through the years, I've been fascinated by studying the lives of American Presidents. One of our most obscure presidents was Franklin Pierce, our 14th President, who served from 1853 to 1857. Historians agree he was one of the five worst presidents, along with our city's namesake, John Tyler.

When the Democratic National Convention was held in 1852, nobody expected Pierce to be nominated. The frontrunners were Sam Houston from Texas and James Buchanan from Pennsylvania. But the party was split and no candidate got a majority. Finally, on the 49th ballot, Pierce was nominated. In the general election he easily defeated the Whig candidate, General Winfield Scott, who had been nominated on the 53rd ballot—and we think our politics are divided today!

Five weeks before Pierce's inauguration, tragedy struck his family. He and his wife, Jane, and son Benny, were riding on a train. There was an accident and the train derailed. Benny was killed, while Franklin and Jane were uninjured. Franklin and his wife were devastated by this accident, and they became angry with God. Jane Pierce didn't attend the inauguration, and Franklin Pierce chose to "affirm" the oath of office rather than swear it on a Bible. Jane Pierce was not seen in public for two years, she hid in the White House writing letters to her dead son. When she finally appeared she wore the clothes of a mourner. She was so seldom seen she was called "the Shadow of the White House."

After four uneventful years, Franklin Pierce wasn't nominated for a second term. Here is the sad example of a couple that faced adversity and it made them angry and bitter toward God. Their lives spiraled down into depression and despair. Jane remained a recluse until her death. Franklin Pierce fought alcoholism and died of cirrhosis of the liver at age 64.

But let me tell you about another person who lived when Franklin Pierce was president. This person suffered from adversity as well, but she refused to blame God. Fanny Crosby was born as a healthy child with sight. At six months, she developed a bad cold and a quack doctor applied a mustard poultice to her eyes. This mis-treatment blinded her for life. But she refused to be angry and bitter about her blindness. At age 8 she wrote this poem: "Oh what a happy soul I am; Although I cannot see; I am resolved that in this world; Contented I will be! How many blessings I enjoy; That other people don't, To weep and sigh because I'm blind; I cannot, and I won't!" Fanny Crosby was a faithful member of a Baptist Church in Brooklyn and would write over 9,000 hymns including "Blessed Assurance" and "To God Be the Glory."

On the day Franklin Pierce was inaugurated as President, he was angry and bitter toward God. Fanny Crosby was 33 years old, the same age as her Savior when He died. She wrote these powerful words: "All the way my Savior leads me; What have I to ask beside? Can I doubt His tender mercy, Who through life has been my Guide? Heav'nly peace, divinest comfort, Here by faith in Him to dwell! For I know whate'er befall me, Jesus doeth all things well."

What is your attitude today toward you pain and adversity? Like President Pierce, has it caused you to be bitter? Or like Fanny Crosby, has it made you better?

Have you come to a place in your life where you can say, “For I know whatever befalls me, Jesus does all things well?” Our lives will be full of sighs—but cheer up, Jesus understands sigh language. And at the end of your sighs, remember, Jesus does everything well!

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes



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