**Jesus Opens Our Spiritual Ears**

**(Are you spiritually deaf?)**

June 21, 2020

Mark 7:24-37

Key Verse 7:34 “He looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him, ‘Ephphatha!’ (which means ‘Be opened!’).”

In modern times we communicate with each other in many different ways: cell phones, e-mails, instant messaging. Yet many people have difficulty in communication. They suffer greatly from misunderstanding. I said one time, “In UBF we should get all A’s to glorify God.” Then one student misunderstood it, thinking that if she does not get all A’s in her classes, she will be condemned. The reason we misunderstand each other is because we interpret the other person’s words based our own experience and prejudice. Obviously she was a very fearful person and she understood my words based on her fear. When we receive outside information, our brain takes that information and compares it to what it already knows. Then the brain alters the information and stores the altered information. It is as if our brains are playing the children’s game “Broken Telephone”--where one child receives a whispered word and passes it to another child. Then that child passes it to another and so on until the last child informs the group of what they heard. Each individual’s experience of the word alters the word. For example, at one picnic, we played the game. M. Esther whispered, “Hope is a thing with feathers that perches in the soul.” Guess what came out: “Hope is purchasing Bibles in Seoul, Korea.” In today’s passage, Jesus heals the daughter of a Gentile woman. Even though Jesus says harsh words, her spiritual ears were open to understand Jesus correctly, and asked for his mercy. Also Jesus opened the ears of the deaf-mute man. May Jesus open our spiritual ears.

After dealing decisively with wicked religious leaders, Jesus left Galilee and went to the vicinity of Tyre. Tyre was in northwest of Israel, and it was a Gentile territory. Jesus wanted to avoid the hostility of the Pharisees and the demands of the crowds, and wanted to spend some quality time with his disciples to plant gospel faith in their hearts. So Jesus entered a house and did not want anyone to know about it. Yet he could not keep his presence a secret. Look at verse 25. “In fact, as soon as she heard about him, a woman whose little daughter was possessed by an impure spirit came and fell at his feet.” This woman had a very difficult problem. Her little daughter was possessed by an impure spirit. “Little daughter” implies that she was quite young, maybe a preteen. The impure spirit filled her with bitterness and malice and drove her to do terrible things. Perhaps she skipped class, drank and took drugs. Can you imagine her mother’s agony?

Most likely this Gentile woman did everything to help her daughter. She took her to a doctor. Probably she took her to a psychiatrist. But nothing worked. Her heart felt dead. However, when she heard about Jesus, something happened in her heart. The name Jesus stirred her soul. She heard how Jesus had driven many demons out of people in Israel. In chapter 3:8, we see that many people from Tyre and Sidon came to Galilee and witnessed Jesus’ healing power. Next door neighbors told her about Jesus. She believed that Jesus could heal her daughter as well. New hope sprang up and her heart came alive. She made a decision of faith to bring her daughter’s problem to Jesus. She did not remain in her hopeless human condition. She made a giant leap of faith by coming to Jesus. Mark comments in verse 26 that the woman was Greek, born in Syrian Phoenicia. Greeks were proud of their cultural and intellectual heritage. Greek was the language of scholars. Greeks conquered Israel in the past and tried to remove Jewish culture. She was a proud Greek woman. But she curbed her human pride to save her suffering daughter. Furthermore, no mother wants to reveal her daughter’s demon possession. They want to hide their children’s problem. But by faith she came to Jesus with her daughter’s problem. She begged him to drive the impure spirit out of her daughter. Her coming to Jesus was her great faith.

After seeing the utter sincerity and humility of the woman, we might think that Jesus would quickly answer. Yet Jesus said something hard to accept. Look at verse 27. “‘First let the children eat all they want,’ he told her, ‘for it is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to the dogs.’” When we carefully examine Jesus’ words, he is not saying, “No,” but he is saying, “Not yet.” I do believe that Jesus’ heart was greatly moved by the woman. Yet Jesus did not simply grant her request. Jesus reveals his deep respect for the sovereignty of God in world salvation work. In verse 27, “the children” refer to the people of Israel. God had chosen Israel out of all the nations to be adopted as his firstborn son. God had made a covenant with Israel based on his promises to Abraham. In terms of this covenant, Israel enjoyed special favor among all nations. God had said, “...out of all nations, you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” (Ex 19:5,6) God made Israel his chosen people to cowork with him for world salvation. God had been faithful to this covenant, even if Israel had not. On the other hand, Jesus referred to the Gentile people, including the woman, as “dogs.” It is interesting that the word used here does not refer to wild street dogs, but to cute pet dogs, like many dogs M. Langue Chung groom. But still, the word used is “dog.” This reveals that God really did make a distinction between the Jews and the Gentiles in the past. The Gentiles were aliens and strangers from God’s covenant, without Christ, without hope, and without God (Eph 2:12). They did not deserve to share the children’s food or the children’s blessings yet. The time would come, but it was not then. It was only after Jesus was raised from the dead and the Holy Spirit came that the distinction between the Jews and the Gentiles disappeared. Now the Gentiles can enjoy the same privilege as the Jews.

How did the woman respond? Look at verse 28. “‘Yes, Lord,’ she replied, ‘but even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.’” The woman said, “Yes, Lord.” She recognized Jesus as the Lord. Even though Jesus implied that she was a Gentile dog, she acknowledged Jesus as Lord. This is real humility. She accepted from her heart that she was an undeserving Gentile dog. Her humility was not pretense; it was real. The Gentile woman had faith. By faith she learned how to become wise. By faith she learned how to humble herself. As we know well, women are very emotional due to their sensitivity. Most women like admiration, even if it is nothing but lip service. They never expect any insult from men. There is a saying, “Hell has no fury if a woman is scorned. There will be a frost in the summer if a woman is angry.” Don’t try to answer like Jesus when a woman coworker asks you for something. You invite many troubles if you do. If a woman is insulted, even by her husband, the husband who insulted his wife must expect an unhappy future; he will get no respect or love from his wife. Once one missionary implied that his wife became overweight, and then he had to endure her cold stare for many days.

Look at verse 28 again. “‘Yes, Lord,’ she replied, ‘but even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.’” She did not react emotionally. She did not burst into anger. She did not storm out of the room. She did not talk back to Jesus emotionally. She did not say any bad words to Jesus. She did not say, “Okay, you insulted me. What kind of a man are you? I will never see you again.” But she was calm and thought about who she was and who Jesus was. Then she accepted Jesus as her Lord and Master. She said, “Yes, Lord.” Wow! What a faith she had! She understood Jesus’ word exactly and was not upset by what he said. She was not bitter about what Jesus said. She thought about the true meaning of his word. Suddenly an infinite wisdom of faith came to her heart. She was not spiritually deaf. Her ears were open to hear Jesus’ words. In verse 27, Jesus said, “First let the children eat all they want, for it is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to their dogs.” I think she understood it as follows: Let me rephrase what Jesus said according to her understanding. “I prepared an abundant feast for my children Israel. They need to eat first all they want. Then their dogs can eat the leftovers.” But as we saw in chapter 7, Jesus was so sorry that his chosen people Israel refuse to eat the abundant feast. The Pharisees only criticized Jesus. But the woman understood Jesus. She said, “Yes, Lord, but even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.” Let me rephrase what she said. “Yes, Lord. I, as a dog, have to wait until the children finish eating. But my situation is very urgent. I cannot wait. I noticed that when children eat, many crumbs fall under the table. Let me have just one crumb. That’s all I ask for--some crumbs left over from your ministry to the Jews!” She had a “crumb eating faith.” Just one crumb was enough to solve her problem.

Look at verse 29. “Then he told her, ‘For such a reply, you may go; the demon has left your daughter.’” Jesus answered her humble prayer. This woman obtained Jesus’ blessing through her prayer and humble faith. This woman is not named, but she became a pioneer of faith for all Gentile people. She showed us that even though Jesus has a clear order and direction for his gospel ministry–based on the will of God–he blessed faith nonetheless. Gentiles can come to Jesus by faith. To Jesus’ eyes, she was a woman of faith, for she seized on the bread of heaven which the Jews had ignorantly rejected and thrown away. To Jesus’ eyes, because of her, the door of salvation was widely opened to the Gentile world. Because of her humble faith, Jesus saved her daughter from her demon-possession.

Jesus left Tyre, went through Sidon, down to the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee and into the region of the Decapolis. Look at verse 32. “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.” A deaf person cannot speak well, for he cannot hear himself speaking. I can only imagine what it would be like to be deaf and mute. Obviously, hearing and speaking are essential in communication with others. Missionaries who don’t speak the native language can relate better to the deaf and mute man. In a foreign country, one feels like the deaf and mute man. A deaf man today cannot use the telephone or listen to the radio. Even television or movies without captions would be worthless. This man could not hear others talking, birds chirping, dogs barking, music playing, children singing or his mother calling him. Most people could not understand what he wanted to say, except a few people who understood sign language. Even if he could write everything he wanted to say, it would greatly slow and limit his communication. He lived in a silent, lonely, isolated world.

Whoever has been blessed with the gift of hearing and speech must not take it for granted. We must thank God for the ability to hear and speak. Even more importantly, we must use our gift of hearing and speech for the glory of God. If a man doesn’t use his ears or mouth for the glory of God, then he is spiritually deaf or mute. If we cannot hear what God is saying to us through his word, then we are spiritually deaf. Jesus often said, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.” (4:9,23) If a man does not want to hear the word of God, then he is spiritually deaf. Sometimes a person thinks he has heard it all before. Many students say, “I have studied the Bible before. I know all about it.” His pride makes him spiritually deaf. King Saul was spiritually deaf. God ordered him to fight the Amalekites and totally destroy them, both men and animals. Saul thought he had a better idea: to spare their king and the best of their sheep and cattle. When Saul listened to his own idea, rather than God’s command, he disobeyed God, and God rejected him as king. One who does not listen to God’s word is spiritually deaf.

Look at verses 33-34. “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!’).” Jesus sighed deeply because of spiritual deafness of his people, even among his disciples. Then Jesus put his fingers into the man’s ears. Then Jesus spit and touched the man’s tongue. Perhaps Jesus did these things since they were very visible and the man could not hear. Jesus wanted the man to know what he was doing and to plant faith in him. Jesus looked up to heaven, showing his reliance on God, and said with a deep sigh, “Ephphatha!” (which in Aramaic means, “Be opened!”). Though the man could not hear, he could surely read Jesus’ lips, especially the word, “Ephphatha!”

What happened? At Jesus’ words, “Be opened!” the man’s ears were opened, his tongue was loosened and he began to speak plainly. When Jesus said to Jairus’ 12-year old daughter, who was lying dead on her bed, “Talitha koum! Little girl, I say to you, get up!” immediately the girl stood up and walked around (5:41). When Jesus said to the stormy sea, “Quiet! Be still!”, the wind died down and it was completely calm (4:39). There is almighty power in the word of Jesus. Jesus’ word is living and active. Jesus’ word can heal and save us. Through Jesus’ loving touch and powerful word, the man could hear and speak plainly. Then a whole new world opened up to this man; he had a rich new life full of sounds and the ability to communicate his thoughts. Now he could speak and sing praises to God. He could testify to the wonderful grace of Jesus. This is how we must use our mouths for the glory of God.

We are spiritually deaf and mute. We do not listen to God’s word clearly because of our pride, prejudice, and habitual attitude. Jesus sighs deeply because of our spiritual deafness. But Jesus can open our spiritual ears. We must come to Jesus and receive his healing touch. Jesus can loosen our tongues to speak praises to God.

Big Idea: Am I spiritually deaf?