

THE PATHWAY OF GOD'S GRACE (Mk. 7:31-37)

Mk. 7:31 And again, departing from the coasts of Tyre and Sidon, he came unto the sea of Galilee, through the midst of the coasts of Decapolis. ³² And they bring unto him one that was deaf, and had an impediment in his speech; and they beseech him to put his hand upon him. ³³ And he took him aside from the multitude, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spit, and touched his tongue; ³⁴ And looking up to heaven, he sighed, and saith unto him, Ephphatha, that is, Be opened. ³⁵ And straightway his ears were opened, and the string of his tongue was loosed, and he spake plain. ³⁶ And he charged them that they should tell no man: but the more he charged them, so much the more a great deal they published it; ³⁷ And were beyond measure astonished, saying, He hath done all things well: he maketh both the deaf to hear, and the dumb to speak.

For over a year, the Lord Jesus has been ministering throughout the region of Galilee. He began under difficult circumstances, **Mk. 1:14** Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God ... Those difficult circumstances continued 'under a shadow' because **Jn. 1:11** He came unto his own, and his own received him not. As Isaiah had prophesied, **Is. 9:2** The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined. ... Yes, the crowds were attracted by 'the Light', - often in great numbers, - but they did not believe and trust in Jesus as the Messiah and Saviour of Israel ... Instead, they followed Him for their own selfish purposes.

Previously, we saw how Jesus and His disciples had travelled on foot from Capernaum to Tyre, which was fifty miles to the north-west, - where He healed the young daughter of the Syro-Phoenician woman (Mk. 7:24-30) - ... and then He walked another twenty miles north to Sidon (in modern-day Lebanon). Next, He and His disciples headed south-easterly back over the hills and down to the northern end of the Sea of Galilee. And then His journey continued southwards along the eastern shoreline to the region known as the Decapolis ... and all the while, Jesus was teaching His disciples.

Why did He put so much effort into teaching them? Why didn't He keep on doing what He was doing ... going to as many regions as He possibly could and continuing to preach and heal? Actually, the answer is very important in that He made time to teach His disciples for, after all, He knew that after He would be taken up into Glory they would be the first generation of Gospel preachers. He knew the Holy Spirit was going to come upon them and use them in the proclamation of the Gospel throughout many parts of the ancient world. So, they needed to be prepared. They daren't have been sent out unsure of the Gospel for they had to be convinced of its power and that is why Jesus had *made* the time to take His disciples somewhere outside of the rigorous demands of His ministry in the region of Galilee.

It makes sense, doesn't it?! You can't go out and witness if you are not completely sure what you are witnessing about, - 'a little knowledge is a dangerous thing' ... And it is such an important issue that you cannot afford to start off wrong, for if you start off even slightly wrong on the fundamentals you end up confused and confusing others!

Ah, but it is only something as simple as sharing the Gospel! ... Is sharing the Gospel *simple*? I don't believe it is. Sharing the Gospel requires commitment to the truth of the Gospel, and to be committed to the sharing of the truth of the Gospel you need to be convinced of its power. There is no point speaking to someone about Jesus if you are not sure within yourself that you are confident in what you are saying. ... And what you are saying must be soundly riveted in God's Word, and for its truth to be applied God must make the application by the power of the Holy Spirit ... otherwise nothing substantial will be achieved. And for the power of the Holy Spirit to be applied, God's people must pray and be prepared.

So, they have arrived in the area known as Decapolis. This was a region outside of Israel, on the eastern side of the River Jordan in modern Jordan and Syria. It was known as Decapolis (Δεκάπολις) because it consisted of 'ten cities' which were established by the Gentile-Greek invaders who had brought with them their paganism and idol-worship. To facilitate this policy known as 'Hellenization' they intermarried with the local girls and the children were brought up as non-Jews. Then when the Romans conquered the Greeks, the Romans brought their influence, and introduced their gods. ... *Some* Jesus lived in the region, but very few because it would have been extremely difficult between Jew and Gentile. It was disparagingly known as a 'foreign country'.

... It was into this countryside Jesus had previously crossed the Sea of Galilee to meet Legion, the demon-possessed man (Mk. 5:20) who was then sent back among his people with the Gospel. We also find mention of these ten cities in Mt. 4:25, *And there followed him [Jesus] great multitudes of people from Galilee, and from Decapolis, and from Jerusalem, and from Judaea, and from beyond Jordan.* ... Obviously, He was well-known throughout the region.

Now, all this was taking many months, and here is how we know ... When He fed the five thousand-plus, **Mk. 6:39** he [*Jesus*] commanded them [*His disciples*] to make all sit down by companies upon the green grass, - so, since the grass was still green, it was the springtime. Then, in chapter eight, when He and His disciples had returned and gone into this Gentile region of Decapolis we notice how He miraculously fed another multitude but *this* time Mark details for us, **8:6** And he commanded the people to sit down on the ground ... which means it was much later in the year for the grass had been burned by the sunshine, so the people had to sit on the ground.

Let's turn to Matthew to see what he adds concerning this same incident in Christ's ministry. Matthew tells us about the woman of Canaan, up near Tyre and Sidon (Mt. 15:21-28), and then about the Lord's journey back down to the Sea of Galilee, and how He **29** ... went up into a mountain, and sat down there. ... Such a very human statement, and sat down there ... He was obviously tired and needed a rest.

However, Matthew tells us the crowds came and found Him, and they had **30** ... with them those that were lame, blind, dumb, maimed, and many others, and cast them down at Jesus' feet; and he healed them. ... They weren't prepared to 'give Jesus a break'! It was all about 'them, them, them'!

... Consider how much the healings would have taken out of Jesus ... Remember how He said back in Mk. 5:31, **Who touched me?** ... That was because **30** Jesus, immediately knowing in himself that virtue had gone out of him ... When Jesus healed someone it required real effort on His part. Yes, He is God ... but from the human perspective, it had its effects. ... Jesus was already weary, and yet He was being hounded to keep on healing these needy people. ... Yes, any other time they wouldn't have bothered with Him because they were pagan, idol-worshipping Gentiles ... but what they said they believed and practised did not get in the way of pursuing Jesus for their own purposes! ... It didn't matter who or what He claimed to be ... if He could sort out their problem, they would go to Him!

So, for the time being, they left their idols to pursue the healing-power of Christ, **31** **Insomuch that the multitude wondered, when they saw the dumb to speak, the maimed to be whole, the lame to walk, and the blind to see: and they glorified the God of Israel.** ... And that in itself is a statement recognising the God of Israel

was not their God for the God of Israel was the God of Israel, and not the God of these ten cities.

So, it is within that context the friends of this particular man from out of this Gentile region **Mk. 7:32** ... bring unto him [*Jesus*] one that was deaf, and had an impediment in his speech [*μογιλλάλος, speaking with great difficulty ... to make a strange sound*]; and they beseech him to put his hand upon him. ... Their friend was deaf and because he could not hear what he was saying his speech was all distorted and hard to make out. ... And they didn't care what Jesus was teaching and preaching about but they knew He could heal the sick so *He* was the means to their end which was why they brought their needy friend to Him.

And it comes across too that this man was a bit of a stigma to his family and friends because when they brought him to Jesus, they did not just *bring* him, for the verb indicates they *threw* him there (φέρω), ... There he is, heal him! We've heard You can, so do it! ... That was their attitude, and they beseech [*παρακαλέω, summonsed*] him to put his hand upon him. ... Remember, on another occasion, how the disciples had seen the man who had been born blind, and they quizzed Jesus, **Jn. 9:1** *Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?* ... So that is how these men in Mk. 7 would also have seen it ... This man's condition was some form of justifiable punishment. Nevertheless, they did bring him to Jesus.

Now, many of us would have reacted to the manner in which they brought this man, - There he is, heal him, - but Jesus simply, **33** ... took him aside from the multitude, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spit, and touched his tongue - ... Do you see what that is? ... That is grace, for it was more than the people of this region deserved! But, Jesus saw this man who all his life had suffered scorn and disdain through no fault of his own ... He was a burden to his family and friends ... but not to Jesus!

Can you see the man lying there? Can you see his face as his 'friends' were standing over him? He had never been one of them for he had always been on his own. He was an outcast, a 'weirdo' who people couldn't be bothered with and yet Jesus began by taking him to the one side, - just him and Jesus, a truly personal encounter ... Here is a wretched and undeserving man who was granted an audience with the King of kings! ... And look at how Jesus dealt with him ... He did five things ...

Firstly, **33** he took him aside from the multitude, - He drew him out and away from the crowd (irresistible grace) ... and He set the man apart from everyone else for He had a particular purpose for him.

Secondly, Jesus put his fingers into his [*i.e. the man's*] ears ... He did that to show the man He understood his condition and his problem. Jesus knew the man was not demon-possessed or insane, but he was deaf, and because he was deaf he could not hear properly to form his words so Jesus let the man know He knew he could not hear by speaking in His own type of 'sign language' and put His fingers in the man's ears.

Thirdly, and he spit, and touched his tongue ... Jesus spat on His finger and with the tip of His finger He put it into the mouth of the man and touched his tongue to let the man know He knew he could not speak either.

Fourthly, **34** And looking up to heaven ... Jesus was telling the man who couldn't hear where His power was coming from.

Fifthly, **34** And looking up to heaven, he sighed ... Jesus sighed. Now, usually folk who are deficient in one sensory area are compensated in other sensory areas, for instance, a blind person can often pick up on something they hear, more than we can hear. Their senses are often sharper. Similarly, this man would have noticed how Jesus sighed (στενάζω, groaned). In other words, Jesus gave an expression of sympathy, of compassion, of tenderness, of empathy to the man, - thus *identifying* with him, as the writer to the Hebrews illustrates, **Heb. 4:15** For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities ... Jesus demonstrated to this worthless and hopeless man the personal compassion and grace of God.

So, obviously now the mind of the man is captivated by Jesus. Jesus has his full attention for the man knows within his heart this is a meeting which will change his life! Not only had Jesus touched this man's ears and tongue, but Jesus was reaching into his heart also, and the Saviour said just one word to the man, Ephphatha, that is, Be opened. ... Just one word, that was all ... just one word, **35** And straightway his [*i.e. the man's*] ears were opened, and the string [*δεσμὸν, the band, the bond*] of his tongue was loosed, and he spake plain. ... In a moment, in an instant, the man began to speak as clearly as everyone else! ...

The ‘string of his tongue was loosed’ ... he had been set free! Prior to this, the man knew what he wanted to say but he wasn’t able to say it correctly because he couldn’t hear ... but now he can speak properly ... and his life was changed, - he had a new life through what Jesus had done for him! ... Jesus had set him free!

But now, him and his friends had another problem ... And his problem now is he had to keep quiet about what had happened to him! ... He could speak, but he wasn’t allowed to say anything about Who had done it and how it had happened ... *Bizarre* ... but those were Jesus’ terms ... those were the Saviour’s clear instructions, ³⁶ *And he [Jesus] charged them that they should tell no man.*

How could you *not* tell about such a life-changing experience? Surely the man wanted to tell everybody! ... Aye, but he was told not to! ... Here is this man and every time he had previously tried to tell anyone anything they didn’t want to listen because he was too hard to ‘make out’, and now that he *could* have a proper conversation about what had changed his life ... he was not allowed! ... How do you keep such a thing to yourself?!

It’s not the first time Jesus told the people He had healed not to say anything, so why did He tell *this man* not to say anything? I think the answer quite simply is because the main story is not finished yet. What I mean is this ... you hear people talking about Christmas and you would think the Gospel message begins and ends with Christmas ... but that is not correct. You hear people talking about Jesus healing people ... as if His main purpose in coming to this world is to heal people and alleviate their struggles in life ... but that is not the Gospel either. Neither is the Gospel the calming of the storm, or the feeding of the five thousand ... And the reason Jesus told this man to say nothing was because the Gospel story would not be complete until Jesus had died on the cross of Calvary and rose again from the tomb. The story was not finished until Jesus had completed what He came to do ... to be God’s sacrifice on the altar for the sins of His people.

... Did these people do what they were told? No, not a bit of it! ... *but the more he charged them [i.e. the more He told them not to tell it], so much the more a great deal they published it* ... And the word for ‘published’ (περισσότερον) is an interesting one because it means that each of them might as well have ‘trumpeted’ it throughout every field and lane in the district! ... They told

everybody and anybody what Jesus had done! That is all very ‘well’ and ‘nice’ but Jesus had told them not to do it, but they did it anyway! ... And why were they so disobedient? It was because they ³⁷ ... were beyond measure [*ὑπερπερισσῶς*] astonished [*ἐκπλήσσω ... as in, you could have ‘knocked them out’, they were so astonished, ‘bowled over’*], ... so much so ... saying, He hath done all things well: he maketh both the deaf to hear, and the dumb to speak. ...

How did Jesus do it? How did He heal the man? ... He healed him simply by saying to him, **Mk. 7:34** Ephphatha, that is, Be opened. ... Just one word ... He spoke with all the authority of the Godhead ... Consider that for a moment ... Jesus *spoke* in the same way as at the beginning of creation, **Gen. 1:1** In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth ... ³ And God *said*, Let there be light: and there was light. ... ⁶ And God *said*, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters. ⁷ And God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament: and it was so. ... ⁹ And God *said*, Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear: and it was so. ... God said ... For the impossible to happen, all that is needed is for God to speak! Twice Jeremiah tells us the exact same words, **When he uttereth his voice, there is a multitude of waters in the heavens, and he causeth the vapours to ascend from the ends of the earth; he maketh lightnings with rain, and bringeth forth the wind out of his treasures (Jer. 10:13; 51:16)** ... In everything that He says, there is His power!

When He and the disciples were in the boat on the Sea of Galilee a short time earlier ... and the storm was banging and smashing up against them, **Mk. 4:39** he arose, and rebuked the wind, and *said* unto the sea, Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm.

This same Jesus is the power behind our world today. He has not abrogated His responsibility, and neither has He handed over the reins of control to another. He is still in control, as He has always been!

They tell us ‘our days are numbered’, and the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ is ‘on its way out’. *Not at all!* Many people in His own day considered Jesus to be a passing faze, but those who genuinely met Him realised His power ... And again, it is the same today because when you know Him personally you know He is in control ... and you know also all the promises He made will come to pass. ... For instance, He made many promises about coming back

again ... the next time to establish His Kingdom ... and there is a very special word in Mk. 7:32 which relates to that theme.

This special word is only used once in the New Testament ... *here*, **32** And they bring unto him one that was deaf, and had *an impediment in his speech* [*μογιλάλος, speaking with great difficulty ... to make a strange sound*] ... and it takes us back to the equivalent Hebrew word *pathach* which Mark would have been familiar with in Is. 35. Now, you will know Is. 35 is the prophetic chapter speaking about the second coming of the Lord Jesus and how it will usher in a new period on earth, **Is. 35:1** The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose. **2** It shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing: the glory of Lebanon shall be given unto it, the excellency of Carmel and Sharon, they shall see the glory of the LORD, and the excellency of our God. ... **5** Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be *unstopped*. *That's* the word, *pathach*, and it corresponds to the special Greek word (*μογιλάλος*) used by Mark here for it means exactly what had happened to this man who was brought to Jesus, - his ears had been 'unstopped'. ... These are promises for when Jesus returns to this earth ... **10** And the ransomed of the LORD shall return [*the Jew and the Gentile*], and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

The story is not over yet for there is still more to come! He touched this man ... and took away his deafness so he could hear and speak ... and that is a taste of great things to come in His Kingdom ... when He returns. ... Do you know Him as your Saviour and Lord? Has He touched your life, and are you **Eph. 1:13** ... sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, **14** Which is the earnest [*the mark*] of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.

Here was this helpless and hopeless man Jesus drew to Himself from out of the crowd of Gentiles ... and such is His sovereign grace with which He chooses to redeem the Hell-deserving sinner. Amen.