

## **I Need a Miracle, part 3 – “Deaf Man Hearing”**

*Scripture: Mark 7:31-37*

Good morning, church. Today marks the beginning of a five-week marathon where I will counsel at two camps, spend one week at seminary, and spend two weeks in Germany. The Bible says, “Thou shalt not covet,” but I certainly covet your prayers in the coming weeks. Actually, every Sunday morning, I covet your prayers. I know I always ask you to pray with me, but really, I should be asking you to pray for me. Having just finished my preaching class at seminary, giving good sermons is heavy on my mind. But I also remember that it is the Holy Spirit who makes a sermon come alive and linger, long after the preacher has stopped talking. So I ask that as I pray, you pray for me, that God would use me. Let us pray.

Holy God, I am yours, to use or to set aside. I simply ask that you speak through me this morning. Speak your truth. Speak your love. Show us yourself in the Savior, Jesus Christ. May the words of my mouth and meditations of my heart be acceptable in your sight, my God. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

*Introduction: Helen Keller*

You probably have a long bucket list of books to read and movies to see. I need you to add one to your list: *Miracle Worker*, the story of Helen Keller’s early life. I want to show you a short clip this morning, and even though it will spoil the ending just slightly, I love this moment. I will probably cry. Throughout the film, Ann Sullivan has been trying to teach Helen about words. Watch this clip with me.

*(Miracle Worker – “It has a name.” to “She knows!”)*

At this amazing moment, Helen realizes everything in this world has a

name. She can now talk with her loved ones.

Helen was seven years old when this moment occurred. Consider the world she was trapped in for seven years. She had no way to communicate with anyone around her. The book and movie are rightly called “The Miracle Worker,” for it was truly astounding that Ann Sullivan was able to teach Helen at all.

*Trouble in the text – A man is deaf and mute.*

A similar miracle confronts us in the scripture today. The passage in Mark 7 starts with “some people brought to him a deaf and mute man.” Like so many of the people who came to Jesus for healing, this man had clearly had no way to take care of himself. Admittedly, this is where the resemblance to Helen Keller suffers a bit. This man was not blind. He could see others and probably interact with them on some level. But I imagine his problems with society must have been similar to Helen’s. What do you do with someone who cannot hear you and cannot talk to you? This man’s condition cut him off from society. He was an outcast. He was mute. Could he even beg for a living? I do not know. All I know is that these people brought him to Jesus.

What is it like to be deaf? I do not know, but how many of you have used these? (Show ear protection.) We wear these when we do not want to hear something. When I am hunting, or when I am working on the table saw, these devices are useful and protect me. But if I had to wear them all the time, it would be unbearable. God gives us our five senses to work together to enjoy the world around us. If we lose them, our bodies can compensate, but it makes us incomplete. I think of the tragedy of Ludwig Beethoven – who lost his hearing in his adult life. His brilliant mind composed some of the greatest music that the world has ever heard, but his ears never did. I have great sympathy for him, and

others to whom the world is silent.

In our own world, there are some people who literally cannot hear. Fortunately, they can access resources, like hearing aids and sign language. But there is greater trouble in our world today: we have people who can hear but do not listen. It is not that they cannot hear – it is that they will not hear. Have you ever told someone, such as a child, a spouse, or a parent, “You never listen!”? Then you know what I mean. I admit, I have been on the receiving end of that comment! It is completely true: some of us have selective hearing. But there is a greater deafness. I am speaking of those have tuned out to the world and cannot hear God’s voice.

Consider these verses:

*Romans 1:20*

*“Since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.”*

*Psalms 19:1-4*

*The heavens declare the glory of God;*

*the skies proclaim the work of his hands.*

*Day after day they pour forth speech;*

*night after night they reveal knowledge.*

*They have no speech, they use no words;*

*no sound is heard from them.*

*Yet their voice goes out into all the earth,*

*their words to the ends of the world.*

The Bible says God displays himself all the time. But some people live like they do not hear God. For example: I heard a lot of fireworks last weekend. I saw them, too. But as my family and I looked up, I saw how beautiful the moon and stars were. Jupiter and Saturn were visible. Those creations of God are visible almost every night, but how often do we notice? How often do we listen to their voices? How often do we stop to listen to birds singing, waters rushing, the wind whistling through the tree? Why does it take something like thunder to get our attention? When was the last time you actually listened to silence? (Do this for a moment in worship.) Why do we feel the need to drown God's voice with our racket?

Perhaps we are not literally deaf like this man, but I believe many of us are spiritually deaf. We no longer hear God's voice calling because we have ignored it for too long. Our spiritual ears have been stopped up. There is something blocking us from hearing God's voice and responding. And maybe it is our own choices.

*Grace in the Text - Jesus opens the man's ears and mouth*

Have you seen the movie "What the Deaf Man Heard?" In the film, Sammy pretends to be deaf for 20 years. He intentionally chooses not to respond to the people around him, and it is quite amusing. Watch this clip.

*(What the Deaf Man Heard, news interview scene.)*

You see how hard it is for people to relate to Sammy, and he is just pretending to be deaf and mute. The man in our gospel story is not pretending! His condition is very real, and I suspect people in Jesus' time also had a hard time relating to him. How could he communicate what he is thinking or what he needs? Consider the simple fact that he cannot even ask Jesus to heal him!

But the friends who brought him do beg Jesus to do something. And honestly, this is where the Bible gets a little gross. I think it is great that the Bible does not leave out details that we think are “improper”. The Bible is a real book about real people with real bodies. And strikingly, Mark gives us explicit physical details about this healing. First, Jesus goes privately to the side to help the man. Next Jesus spits and touches the man’s tongue. Gross, Jesus! Then Jesus looks up to heaven and groans. He commands “Ephphatha” – that may sound like a sneeze, but it is actually Aramaic for “open up.” (Aramaic was the language of the common people in Jesus’ time, but Mark’s gospel was written in Greek.) “At once,” the scripture says, “his ears were opened, his tongue was loosened, and he began to speak plainly.”

The Abingdon Commentary explains, “literally, ‘his hearing was opened up, and his tongue's fetter was released, and he spoke straight.’” The spiritual ear plugs are removed and the gag is out. And then there is this ironic command. Immediately Jesus commands them not to tell anyone about the miracle. Obviously someone must have been watching, probably his friends and family, and the disciples. But the opposite happens – more people talk about it, and more people hear the miracles Jesus is performing. Jesus wanted them to be quiet about a miracle that gave a man his speech.

*Grace in the World -Jesus can open our hearts and minds.*

Would it be strange to have someone touch your mouth? Think about going to the dentist. You have to be committed to a certain result to let someone else touch your mouth. You have to know, something important is happening. What would you do if Jesus tried to touch your ears and mouth? Even though that cannot literally happen, imagine it for a moment.

I believe there are people whose ears and mouths, and eyes, are shut out to the existence of God. If they even talk about it, which many do not, they say, "I do not believe in God. I cannot see, hear, nor touch any evidence that God exists, let alone believe that God loves me."

If that is you, let me say this to you: You are in a dark place, my friend. The whole spiritual world is active around you, but you are like a spiritual Helen Keller, oblivious to all that is going on around you. Your interaction with the world God created is limited or cut off. But that world can be opened to you. You can let Jesus cry, "Open up!" to your heart. God can do a miracle in your life.

I also believe that there are people who hear God quite plainly, but they pretend that they cannot. They pretend that they cannot speak. They are like Sammy, the Deaf Man who is not really deaf after all. The blockage is not really there. Listen, this might be you. You sang the songs today, you heard the scriptures, and you prayed the prayers. But what will happen when you walk out the door? Do you put on a spiritual headgear and gag? Do you deny that God is speaking to you? Do you deny that God has a plan for you to share your faith with others, outside these four walls? You do not have to live like that. There is another option.

You can be a miracle worker. You can be an Ann Sullivan. You can be someone who says, "I listen to God, and I speak for others." This is what we should all aspire to be. Listen: let God make you into a miracle worker. Find someone whose eyes, ears, and heart can be opened. Start by praying for them. Pray for an opportunity to talk about Jesus with them. Jesus loves them. And Jesus can use your mouth, your ears, your eyes, your hands, your feet. Allow God to use you to work a miracle in someone else's life.

Memory Verse: **Psalm 35:28**

“My tongue will speak of your righteousness and of your praises all day long.”

Reflection Questions:

1. Do you like to sing? Why or why not?
2. Have you ever spent an extended time in silence? What was it like?
3. Do you feel like you regularly “hear” God’s voice? Why or why not?
4. What do you need to do to give a voice to others?
5. How can you raise your voice to praise God?