

Meet Jesus: As he opens your ears

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[0 : 00] So, continuing our series from Mark's Gospel, and you'll find the reading on page 843, Mark chapter 7, reading from verse 31.

You remember last week we were looking at Jesus as he cast out the demon in this Gentile woman's daughter, and he was previously in the region of Tyre and Sidon, and he's returning back from that region to the area of Decapolis, Decapolis, Ten, Polis, City, Ten Cities.

And this is where we find ourselves in verse 31. Then Jesus returned from the region of Tyre and went through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, and in the region of the Decapolis.

And they brought to him a man who was deaf and had a speech impediment, and they begged him to lay his hand on him. And taking him aside from the crowd privately, he put his fingers into his ears and after spitting touched his tongue.

And looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, Ephatha, that is, be opened. And his ears were opened. His tongue was released and he spoke plainly.

[1 : 23] And Jesus charged them to tell no one. But the more he charged them, the more zealously they proclaimed it. And they were astonished beyond measure, saying, He has done all things well.

He makes the deaf hear and the mute speak. Out of the four Gospels, Mark's is the shortest. It's only 16 chapters.

I can just imagine Mark being a little bit like a news editor. You know, the film crews have disappeared, they've dispersed, and Mark's in the cutting room, putting his Gospel together.

You know, he's got several reels of footage lying around the place, and he's thinking through to himself, he's thinking, how do I assemble all this as a Gospel? How should I put it together?

You know, what can I include? What can I discard? And he's thinking these things through. And he's particularly, he has in mind an audience like ourselves, a non-Jewish audience primarily.

[2 : 26] So, for example, he's left out a lot of the Old Testament references in comparison to Matthew's Gospel. So he's thinking these through. And then he surprises us all.

He cuts out the Nativity scene. You know, the inn in Bethlehem, the three wise men, little baby Jesus, he just sort of cuts it out and discards the footage.

And then we see him getting towards the middle of Mark's Gospel, and he's pondering through things, praying it through, thinking to himself, what shall I include? What can I discard? And he picks the phone up, and he phones Peter.

And we can overhear a little bit of the conversation. And Peter's saying to him, we heard that word in Aramaic, Mark. You must include it. Make sure that's in your Gospel.

And then Mark puts the phone down, and he's muttering to himself, Ephassa, Ephassa, as he sort of unclips our passage and splices it in to his account.

[3 : 29] But we think the nativity scene's more important, don't we? You know, we've already seen Jesus raise the dead. Am I right? Calm the storms.

He's got complete control over creation. He's healed a whole hospital waiting list of patients. We say, you know, give us something new, Mark.

Let's have something here. You know, we've already seen things like this. Jesus, enabling someone to hear and to speak. We already knew, Mark, that Jesus could do that.

And so we ask ourselves, don't we? We say, why has Mark included this account here in his Gospel in chapter 7? And perhaps, friends, we've forgot that there's another hand compiling this Gospel, isn't there?

Weaving it together, guiding Mark, and he's crafting a piece of communication like no other media. In fact, the genre of Gospel is a new literary form.

[4 : 32] And so as we look together at this passage, we realise, listen, that its function is greater than the miracle that it describes.

Because its function is to draw us to Jesus, the person of Jesus Christ, and thereby to save us. I describe chapter 7 that we've been looking at for this past month as moving from a system to the Saviour.

Chapter 7, moving from a system to the Saviour. What I mean is, it's sort of moving away from the religion that we come across, the Manrae religion in verses 1 and 2.

I was chatting with somebody last week after the service finished about this transition. And I said, well, it's a little bit like you've got a son and he's been away on a gap year, you know, he's been to the Far East or something like that and you've really been missing him.

And so now and again you'll go in the kitchen, put the kettle on, make yourself a nice cup of tea and then you'll take the tea into the living room, sit down and get the photo album out, look through it, see the pictures of your son, you know, when you were bringing him up as a child and when he first went to university and all those sorts of things.

[5 : 55] It's a little bit like that. And then one day you find yourself driving to Glasgow International Airport to pick him up. You park the car, get your ticket, go to the arrivals hall and soon there he is approaching you with his baggage trolley, big smile on his face, suntan, there's big hugs in there, kisses, tears probably.

You go home, the whole family's out onto the pavement welcoming him home, back in the kitchen, put the kettle on, make a cup of tea. Now it would be daft, wouldn't it, to go back to those photos when you've got your son with you.

And it's a little bit like that here in Mark's Gospel. Chapter 8, verse 29, Peter realises who he's been sharing his life with.

he realises that where he meets God is no longer the photos but the person himself.

Do you see? The person that those photos reveal. That is, the Old Testament reveals. You are the Christ, he says, doesn't he? Verse 29 of chapter 8, that is the promised one from the Old Testament.

[7 : 09] And chapter 7 is vital to that transition in our understanding. So, from a system to the Saviour. Let's just think about chapter 7, verses 1 and 2.

And we saw, didn't we, a delegation arriving from HQ. They're like, sort of a hawk hovering overhead, looking down, looking down at the phenomenon of Jesus, staring at him.

And it was the freedom of the disciples that caught their attention. Hand washing was their focus. Chapter 7, verse 5 is their charge.

Why do your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands? And so, chapter 7, verse 8, Jesus charges them with desertion.

You leave the commandments of God and hold to the tradition of men. And so, their religion, friends, is hopeless, isn't it? Futile, says Jesus here.

[8 : 10] Your problem's internal, Jesus says, verse 21. It's your heart inside. And so, their religion was a little bit like giving a wee sticky plaster as treatment for cancer.

And Jesus' concluding statement was there in verse 23. He's talking about our hearts. All these evil things come from within and they defile a person.

So, think about that. Hearts, it's a universal problem, isn't it? We've all got... Jesus is talking about the centre of our being. That's all of us. And religion can't even get at it.

Do you see? Do you see? Do you remember the progression? We're moving from a system to the saviour. And Jesus is showing us that external religion can't even engage with our problem of sin.

Because humanity, we're all corrupted naturally, internally. And friends, if we're honest about ourselves, we know he's speaking about us, don't we?

[9 : 23] We know that's our hearts. And then Jesus casts out that evil spirit, didn't he, from the Gentile woman's daughter. And he's ministering into the very, think about it, being of humanity.

Overcoming evil. Remember verse 23, it said, from within. And this seems to be what he's got authority to deal with, the realm of evil, the internal manifestations.

And what's more, listen, he's doing it outside of Israel, outside of the Jews. And he's doing it also without physical contact.

And so as we look on, from 2007, there's no boundaries. is there? It's all crossed. And Genesis chapter 3, verse 15, is being fulfilled.

He's demonstrating victory over evil. At last, on planet earth, somebody has not only the power to resist the temptation of the evil one, he can also at the same time overthrow his realm.

[10 : 38] Do you see? And Isaiah chapter 55, a nation that did not know you, shall run to you, the Gentiles, Scotland. Jesus has broken through, hasn't he?

Chapter 7, from a system to the Saviour. And we arrive at our passage. And verse 31 is returned, hasn't he, from that foray into Gentile territory.

And here's our question. We know he's got the solution to our greatest problem, but how do we approach him? And that's our first point, how do we approach God?

So he's laid on, hasn't he, in this creation, visual aid, par excellence. Think about this, we actually live amidst it, don't we? We're perched on it, and more than that, we consist of it.

He's not sort of shortchanged us, has he, God, when it comes to evidence? sense. But what do we do with that data? What are our conclusions as human beings?

[11 : 46] And friends, for most of my life, bits of the creation were more important to me than the creator, do you see? And friends, we can do that, can't we?

We can spend our short span of lives on this planet, willfully blinding ourselves to the data. alternatively, us human beings, well, we can make up religion, can't we?

We can make up religions, you know, something that satisfies that deep down curiosity, the data sort of evokes in us, and made up religion and say, well, let's be good and please God, see if we can swing things on judgment day, you know, give them an invoice as it were, do you see?

On judgment day, make him owe us, that's what good works are, that's about trying to earn your salvation, you're putting God in your debt. The trouble is, think about this, think about the logic of this, the trouble with that, that philosophy or religion, it's relying on an unjust God, it's relying on a God who will sweep sin under the carpet as if you've not sinned, do you see?

Just let you in, you know, so you can spend your life rejecting him and expect him to accept you for all of eternity. The prophet Isaiah addressed that, didn't he?

[13 : 13] Chapter 64, all your righteous acts are like filthy rags, and Jesus said in verse 7 of this passage, in vain do they worship me.

So either we can reject him outright, or we can make up our own religion, or else we just have warm fluffy feelings, you know, something we might think we'll have a nice reception at our funeral, you know, we'll be alright, God is love, people say, and so we want it both ways, don't we?

Again, we want to reject him in the way that we live now and expect him to accept us as his friend for all of eternity. But friends, to clear our misunderstanding, Jesus breaks into history, doesn't he?

2,000 years ago, he burst into history like a fireman knocking down the door to get at us. And as we lie there, you know, as we lie here half asphyxiated and we hear his diagnosis, it's your heart, says Jesus, that's your problem, it's your heart.

And until that sorted, friends, we're under God's wrath. It's not that we need more teaching, is it? Don't need more teaching. You know how to live a better life.

[14 : 31] We actually need a lot more than that. We need regenerating. We need the creator, don't we, to come into us and do his creation work in us. Creating me a new heart, said King David.

He was on the ball, wasn't he? It's like someone drowning in the cloud, just imagine it on this wet day down the road. There's someone there, they're drowning. What do they need?

They don't need you to shout instructions, how to swim, try and teach them. They need you to dive in to get them, don't they? And that's what Jesus has done. Jesus burst into history.

The initiative is entirely God's. You know, he could have just left us, couldn't he? He could have left us to the consequence of our sin. Do you see?

Our salvation is entirely external intervention and that's what's happening here in this passage. This man is sort of being brought to Jesus, hasn't he?

[15 : 29] He seems entirely passive. Verse 32, just look there, verse 32. And they brought to him a man who was deaf and had a speech impediment and they begged him to lay his hand on him.

So, he's the antithesis, isn't he, of Pharisaic religion. Chapter 7, verses 1 and 2 is the opposite of that. And like the paralytic who was lowered down through the roof in chapter 2, he did nothing, did he?

Like the synagogue ruler's daughter, she did nothing. Like the daughter of the Gentile woman we were looking at last week, she did nothing. Like the apostle Paul on the road to Damascus, what did he do?

Jesus just met him out of the blue. So, point number one, how do we approach Jesus? And the answer is, he makes the first move. And our second point and final point is, how does God approach us?

Which is from verses 33 to 37. And it's an intimate little scene, isn't it, here? Verse 33, Jesus puts his fingers, doesn't he, in this man's ears.

[16 : 45] We can almost imagine Jesus has the palms of his hands on his face. And the man's looking there into Jesus' face, very intimate scene, perhaps can see his dark Hebrew eyes, and it's like there's only those two in the world.

And as he draws you to himself, there comes a point, doesn't there, where the crowd step aside, it's just you and him. And this man, think about him, this poor man, his communication channels were all broken down, weren't they?

They were all closed. He couldn't sort of have found a job in a first century shop, could he? Selling candles or something. Who would employ him? Can't speak, can't hear.

You know, he couldn't hear his friends chatting about Jesus, all the excitement of that. Perhaps he could make things with his hands, I don't know, but he'd never heard the sound of his tools.

And friends, we can go about our lives, can't we, spiritually death? Yes. Mark has decided to bring us this man because, think about it, he's like us, isn't he here?

[17 : 58] We look at him and as we look, we see ourselves and Jesus is finding a way through. Verse 33, oh look at verse 33, what's going on there.

This is hardly the western hospital, is it, in Glasgow, verse 33. hardly what goes on there. We can be shocked at the intimacy of this healing, the earthiness of it, the saliva and all that.

I've never seen a consultant doing such a thing, have you? It's like something your mum did when she took you to school outside the school gates, wiping your face with a hanky.

Jesus had that sort of intimacy with Adam, didn't he? And he is our creator after all. And think about this, Jesus is operating inside this man's environment, isn't he?

He's communicating in sign language and he also gets to us. Like there's a juncture in our lives and he suddenly gets to us, he reaches us.

[19 : 00] It's just like verse 34, Ephatha, that is, be opened. And Mark chose us to bring us this scene. he's carefully selected it for us.

And we can see that if we get stuck in external religion, well, everything is horizontal, isn't it? Being stuck in external religious systems, it's all horizontal, we can soon begin to compare each other's performance, verse 5, or else maybe our whole lives are overshadowed by an uncertainty, an anxiety.

We never know whether we're in or we're out. Like, you know, if you're sailing to New York on a liner. We've all got tickets, but some of us will be seasick all of the way.

We'll all get there, but many of us will be seasick. And Mark's brought us this, he wants to see our salvation as entirely the initiative of God. It's he who opens our hearts and our minds to himself.

It's not our own cleverness and wisdom. And Charles Wesley wrote this. It's a beautiful hymn and it picks up the poetic language of the prophet Isaiah from chapter 35.

[20 : 17] And it's also about this passage. He speaks and listening to his voice, new life the dead receive. The mournful broken hearts rejoice, the humble poor believe.

Listen, hear him, ye death, his praise ye dumb, your loosened tongues employ. Ye blind, behold, your saviour come and leap, ye lame, for joy.

And they were astonished beyond measure saying, he has done all things well. He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak. Shall we pray? dear heavenly father, we thank you for this passage.

We thank you that Mark rigorously looked through all the material of the incarnation and he chose to put this passage here in the centre of his gospel so that we see the person of your son, our redeemer and we can be warmed to the new heart that he can give us through his crucifixion.

And so father, we thank you for this. And we pray father that we'd be drawn closer to you and that when we leave here we'd exhibit what it is to be owned by you, to be recreated by you, to have the righteousness of your son, Jesus Christ.

[21 : 38] And we pray father that folk would see in us, not a system, not religion, but that they would see your son, Jesus Christ, as he lives through us, through his spirit.

And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us this day and forever more. Amen.