

## Hearing Problem

Mark 7:31-37

September 5, 2021

As we age, the sensitivity of our senses (hearing, vision, taste, smell, and touch) changes. They become less sharp, and this can affect our lifestyle. We may have problems communicating, enjoying activities, and staying involved with people. Sensory changes can lead to isolation.

Aging can affect all of the senses, but the most noticeable deterioration is seen in hearing and vision. As the auditory sense deteriorates, we find it difficult to have a clear communication, because we cannot hear clearly. As a result we feel isolated. Our vision also declines and we don't see things as sharply as before. It is frustrating.

We find a man in Mark 7 who was deaf and had a speech impediment. One day, a large crowd brought him before Jesus, and asked him to heal this man. Hearing and speaking are connected. They are one process. As one hears, one speaks. Because he could not hear, he could not speak clearly either.

Without a doubt one of the most important senses in Jesus' day was the sense of hearing. People in those days relied on hearing to get news or information.

We now live in a world of vision. Even if we cannot hear today, we can still get necessary information through television or internet. We can still find out what is happening around the world almost instantly. As people recover from the earthquake in Haiti or people struggle in Afghanistan, we can at least see a glimpse of what is going on when we watch the news on TV or internet. Of course, if we can hear the news, then we will get a fuller report but even if we cannot hear the news, by just watching the pictures, we can have a pretty good idea as to what is going on.

Not so in first century Palestine where auditory capability was the source of information and knowledge. People gathered information and learned new things primarily through listening to others. So, the sense of hearing was very important. It was so important that one of the predictions for the ministry of the Messiah was that he would heal deafness and muteness.<sup>1</sup>

Have you ever wondered why this particular story is in the Bible? Why do you think Mark included this story in his Gospel? The obvious message of this

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<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 35:5-6.

story is to say that Jesus is the Messiah. According to the Old Testament prophecy, the Messiah would do this kind of work. I am sure that is the purpose of the story.

However, another message we should not miss is that Jesus has come to open the spiritual ears of the people, the ears of the heart of the people. How many times did Jesus say, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear”? There were so many people in Jesus’ days that heard Jesus’ teaching but were not willing to listen to his message.

No doubt that losing the physical ability to hear is a great tragedy but the greater tragedy is that even with perfect hearing we are not willing to listen.

There has been nothing that has led to more division and disunity than unwillingness to listen to each other. Unwillingness to listen to each other has led to more divorces, more family break-ups, more run-away children, more mental illness, and more sadness and misery than any other behavior.

When Jesus said, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear,” he was referring to spiritual listening. Many people today, like the people in the first century, suffer a spiritual deafness. People hear the message of Christ but fail to understand it. Not only that but many people today have lost the ability to listen to each other.

Listening is a skill. It is something that can be acquired. It takes practice. How can we become better listeners? We can be better listeners by practicing silence.

There was a fifth-grade teacher who decided to teach her students the art of listening. Every morning for five minutes she required the students to sit still and be totally silent. They were not supposed to move. They were told to close their eyes and be silent. That was hard for those kids. It would be hard for any of us to do, much less a fifth grader. She discovered that a great deal of good came out of that exercise, the practice of silence.

After one of these quiet times, she asked the students if they had heard anything. One boy said: Yes, I heard something. Something told me that I should be more obedient to my parents. Another child said: I heard that I should always be fair. Another student said: I heard I need to be honest.<sup>2</sup> Practicing silence is one of the ways to become a better listener. Practicing silence is one way to encounter our true self.

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<sup>2</sup> Adopted from Brett Blair’s sermon, “*The Man Who Couldn’t Hear*”, [www.esermons.com](http://www.esermons.com).

Life can be transformed when our listening ability is restored. When the deaf and mute person was brought to Jesus, he placed his fingers in his ears and said: *Ephphatha!*, which means, “Be opened.” He touched the man’s tongue and said *Ephphatha!* With that single command the man’s life was transformed.

A world that had always existed around him suddenly became real to this man. All of his life he had seen people talking and all that he could do was mimic them. Now, for the first time, he heard the sound of the language of people.

As a person who speaks English as a second language, I know what it is to be able to understand what other people are saying. Being able to communicate, being able to talk opens the new world.

I am sure that is what happened to him. All of his life he had seen people talking and laughing with each other. He had seen the children playing. Now, for the first time, he heard the actual sound of it, the sound of laughter, and the cries of joy.

All of his life he had seen the temple and the Torah, but now, for the first time, he was able to hear the sound of worship. A world that had always existed suddenly became real. Life can change when you hear!

A family of three, Mom, Dad and a son went to a restaurant for dinner. The waitress came and got the orders from the parents first. Then she turned to the boy and asked, “What about you? What do you want?” The boy said: “I’ll take a Cheese Burger, French Fries, and a Milk Shake. The mother interrupted: “Oh, no, no, no... He will have the Roast Beef, a baked potato, and a glass of milk.” Much to the surprise of both the mother and the boy, the waitress completely ignored the mother. She asked the boy: “And what do you want on that Cheese Burger?” The boy shouted back: “Ketchup, lots of ketchup.” “And what kind of shake?” “Make it chocolate, please.” The mother did not say anything. The waitress smiled and walked away. The boy then turned to his parents with a big smile on his face and said, “Wow, ain’t she something? She thinks that I’m real.”

A few years ago, a pastor received a telephone call from a parishioner. She is a mother of a teenager. She told the pastor that her daughter locked herself into her room and was threatening to kill herself. She pleaded for the pastor to come over immediately. Of course, he came. He talked to the teenager for a few minutes outside of her room and told her to come out, and she did.

All the family members gathered in the living room to talk about what happened. In just a few seconds, they started to shout at each other. Everybody was talking at the same time. It was chaotic.

Seeing that this was getting them nowhere, the pastor asked if he could speak with the daughter alone. Once alone with her, the pastor asked, "Now, what's the problem?" She answered, "Pastor, my parents have sent me to a private school. They have always given me everything I wanted, except the thing that I want the most – their love."

Sadly, that family was hopelessly and tragically divided. Each member was living in a separate state. They don't even talk to each other. They were so busy shouting at each other, so busy trying to get their side of the story across, that they couldn't hear one another. They had no ears to hear. Each of them became like the deaf and mute man in the story. Because they couldn't hear, it affected their speech. They said hurtful things that they didn't really mean but their words hurt each other so deeply that the damage had become irreparable.

We need to restore our ability to listen to one another: husbands and wives, parents and children, church members, leaders of the church, people in the society, and the government officials. Since we cannot expect all people to do this, at least we need to start practicing it ourselves.

Jesus placed his fingers in this man's ears and spoke: "*Ephphatha!*" – be opened. We need to allow the Holy Spirit to place his fingers in our ears and speak "*Ephphatha!*". Then, and only then, will we be able to hear and listen to each other and speak the words of grace.