

Falling On Deaf Hearts

Mark 7:31-37 December 3, 2025

Speech is silver, but silence is...golden. The first recorded use of this proverb in English is in an 1833 novel written by Thomas Carlyle. He attributed it to the Swiss. Others say it came from the Germans or the Dutch. Still others find a version of this maxim in ancient Arabic writings. At least one of those Arab writers from so long ago attribute the saying to Solomon himself.¹ The book of Proverbs definitely highlights the virtues of silence.²

I'm guessing that some of you heard family members say some things that would've been better left *unsaid* at one of your recent Thanksgiving gatherings.

There are times when the best thing we could do is *not* speak. And, believe it or not, there are even times when God would *not* have us share the news about Him. That may not sound right, but it's true. In Acts 16, Paul made a plan to launch a missionary effort into Asia and we're told the Holy Spirit forbade them from speaking the word there.

In *this* text, Jesus performs not only a wonderful miracle, but a specifically *Messianic* miracle. But then He commands the witnesses *not* to tell anyone. But the *more* He commands, the *more* they do the opposite. They refuse to stay silent. They refuse to *obey* the same Person they went to for supernatural help. It is an example to us that a person can have belief in God's power, a desire that God provide for them, but at the same time ignore the *heart* work He wants to do in us.

Mark 7:31 - ³¹ Again, leaving the region of Tyre, he went by way of Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, through the region of the Decapolis.

Jesus has been in what we know as Lebanon today. But now He heads back to the Decapolis. The Decapolis was a league of 10 Greek cities. They were spread throughout modern Syria, Jordan, and Israel.³ Philadelphia was one of these cities. So was Damascus.

Nine of these cities were on the east side of the Jordan river. Though some Jews lived there, these were squarely Gentile populations.⁴ They had relative independence from Roman rule. Not total, but they were allowed to kind of do their own thing.

Jesus has gone to the Decapolis before. In the region of the Gerasenes, where the Lord healed the demon possessed man and the legion went into the herd of pigs, that's part of the Decapolis.⁵

¹ David J. Wasserstein *A West-East Puzzle: On the History of the Proverb 'Speech in Silver, Silence in Golden'*

² Proverbs 10:19, 17:28

³ *CSB Study Bible Notes*

⁴ Frank Gaebelin, D. A. Carson, Walter Wessel, and Walter Liefeld *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Volume 8: Matthew, Mark, Luke*

⁵ <https://www.biblecharts.org/biblelandnotes/Decapolis.pdf>

Mark 7:32 - ³² They brought to him a deaf man who had difficulty speaking and begged Jesus to lay his hand on him.

We commonly call this man deaf and mute, but more precisely he was deaf and unable to speak clearly. He had *difficulty* speaking. Either there was something wrong with his tongue or he had some sort of serious impediment. The point is, he could not hear, nor could he effectively speak.

Now, some friends or loved ones brought him to Jesus. We've seen this many times in the Gospels. It's like when the friends bring the paralytic and lower him through the roof. *They* had heard Jesus was in the area and scooped their friend up. But *what* did they hope Jesus would do?

It does *not* say that they asked Jesus to *heal* their friend. They begged Jesus to lay His hand on him. In Mark 1, the leper comes to Jesus and says, "Please cleanse me." In Mark 5, Jairus comes and says, "Put Your hands on my daughter so she can get well." In the last passage, the Syrophenician woman asks Jesus to cast the demon out of her daughter.

But here, it's not quite as clear. Given the wording *and* the level of shock they show once the healing happens, it doesn't seem like they were counting on a miraculous healing. Perhaps just some sort of religious blessing.⁶ Even so, it's great that they came to Jesus. They *begged* Him for help. That, by itself, is a major development. The *last* time Jesus was in this area, the people of the Decapolis *begged* Him to *leave*.⁷ But the man who had the demons cast out of him was faithful to go through those 10 towns proclaiming how much Jesus had done for him.

This is the first example of a deaf person being healed in Mark's Gospel. And what we might not immediately track is how significant and important it was that Jesus was able to heal the deaf.

We know that Jesus worked a countless number of healing miracles. But remember: Jesus' purpose was to preach that the Kingdom of heaven was at hand and to reveal that *He* was the long-expected Messiah that had been promised and foretold by the Old Testament prophets. So Mark often glosses over days filled with nonstop healings among multitudes of people. But there were specific indicators Jews could watch for so they could *know* the Messiah when He arrived.

Indicators like Isaiah 35:5-6:

Isaiah 35:4c-6 - ⁴ Here is your God; vengeance is coming. God's retribution is coming; he will save you." ⁵ Then the eyes of the blind will be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped. ⁶ Then the lame will leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute will sing for joy, for water will gush in the wilderness, and streams in the desert;

Like many Old Testament prophecies, that passage has both an early and a yet-future fulfillment. It looks forward to the Millennium, but it also explains how to recognize the Messiah when He comes.

⁶ William Lane *The Gospel Of Mark*

⁷ Mark 5:17

When Mark describes the speech defect of the man in our text, he uses what linguists call an “extremely rare word”⁸ that is *only* used twice: Once here in Mark 7:32 and once in the Greek version of the Isaiah passage I just read.⁹ So, this is a very important miracle. And Mark clearly wants us to think so. In fact, he’s the *only* Gospel writer to include this story.

Mark 7:33 - ³³ So he took him away from the crowd in private. After putting his fingers in the man’s ears and spitting, he touched his tongue.

Are you the kind of person that will drink after another person? How about milk? Ever shared gum that someone had already chewed?

It’s a little...different...that Jesus did this stuff with the spit. And it’s not the *only* time Jesus used saliva when healing someone. He’s will again when healing a blind man in chapter 8. What is this about? Some scholars talk about how other healers in that time would do these sort of actions with spit and things.¹⁰ But Jesus did not use incantations.¹¹ He is God of very God. He is the Creator. He can - and has in this Gospel - heal from afar with a thought. So why did He do this?

We can’t exactly know, but we see that Jesus wanted to have a personal interaction with this guy. He brings him away from the crowd in private, though the disciples and the man’s friends were still there. And let’s think about it this way: Jesus can’t verbally ask the man if he wants to be healed. The man can’t verbally communicate whether he has faith or not. If the man was illiterate, they couldn’t write him a message, like we see happen with Zechariah in Luke 1.

Now here’s Jesus touching the man’s tongue. Putting His fingers in his ears. Would the man wrest his head away? Would he recoil? Or would he submit, invasive and awkward as it might be?

We don’t usually permit this kind of hands-on intrusion. We maintain personal space. But there *are* certain people who we allow to do things like this. Physicians, for one. A doctor can do whatever they need to do, *especially* if we’re talking about a surgeon or a necessary treatment. But also parents. When you were young, your father could help you get out that splinter, check for lice in your hair, get his hands in your mouth when you were losing a tooth.

Christ is meant to have total access to our hearts and lives. Like a father. Like a physician. Like the closest, most trusted person you’ve ever known. David understood this in his famous Psalm 139. Lord, *search* me and *know* me. Investigate and find out by means of personal exploration. Expose any weakness, any sickness, any dry rot or infection so that You can *lead* me in the everlasting way.

Mark 7:34 - ³⁴ Looking up to heaven, he sighed deeply and said to him, “Ephphatha!” (that is, “Be opened!”).

⁸ Lane

⁹ R.T. France *The Gospel Of Mark*

¹⁰ James Brooks *The New American Commentary, Vol. 23: Mark*

¹¹ Ben Witherington *The Gospel Of Mark: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*

Ephphatha is probably Aramaic, though some think it's Hebrew.¹² In His incarnation, Jesus spoke three languages: Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic.

But note that it *wasn't* the spit that healed the man. It was the Lord's *word*. And as He uttered it, Jesus sighed deeply. The term refers to an inarticulate sound that expresses strong emotion.¹³

Jesus was truly emotional. His heart overflowed with compassion. With care. With love. At times with frustration or anger. Always in Godly perfection, but Jesus was not some weird, robotic Person. He really felt and He *continues* to really feel. He has *genuine* affection toward you *and* genuine heartache when we disobey Him. When we push Him away. When we doubt Him.

Mark 7:35 - ³⁵ Immediately his ears were opened, his tongue was loosened, and he began to speak clearly.

If I was ranking the miracles, this one probably wouldn't make the top 10 in terms of excitement or spectacularity. But this was a major moment in Messianic news. Jesus just did something that *only God* could do. We'd *assume* the best thing would be to get the word out. But that's *not* what Jesus wanted.

Mark 7:36 - ³⁶ He ordered them to tell no one, but the more he ordered them, the more they proclaimed it.

We've seen this sort of thing happen before in the Gospels, but if we stop to think about it, this is *shocking* disobedience. He *didn't* just ask them once, but again and again.

So, they come to Jesus because then think He has *something* He can do for their friend. Then they *watch Him* heal both the hearing *and* the speech of this crippled man. And when Jesus gives them this one, simple command, they *immediately* and *repeatedly* disregard Him.¹⁴

Mark 7:37 - ³⁷ They were extremely astonished and said, "He has done everything well. He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak."

Their minds were *blown*. Extremely astonished is a term used only here in all Greek literature.¹⁵ They were astonished beyond all measure, in the extreme.¹⁶ And they were absolutely convinced of the goodness and power of Jesus Christ. "He does *all things* well."

And yet, they were unwilling to bring *themselves* under the care and direction of Jesus. They brought their friend, who probably had little idea what was going on, who Jesus was, what he

¹² Witherington

¹³ Robert Utley *The Gospel According To Peter: Mark And I & II Peter*

¹⁴ Lane

¹⁵ Gaebelein

¹⁶ Morna Hooker *The Gospel According To Saint Mark*, Gaebelein

needed to do. But the man's friends thought, "Sit here and do whatever this Guy wants you to do." But when it comes to *their* turn to interact with the Messiah, they keep their independence. As the Decapolis stayed uncontrolled by Rome, so these men refused to be controlled by the Redeemer.

And so we have this amazing juxtaposition. At the scene of a deaf, mute man being healed, the men who *can* hear *won't listen* to Jesus, *and* they will not bridle their tongues at His command.

Their *hearts* were deaf to the Lord. They had genuine excitement, they had a measure of belief, they had some sort of good desire toward their friend and to tell what they had seen, but they *still* would not bow their hearts and minds to the will of Jesus. Everything He does is good! Doesn't that include His commands? His directives?

This scene not only reveals something magnificent about Jesus, it also reveals something malicious in our rebel hearts. We're prone to spiritual deafness. We're prone to be excited about God's *provision*, but not so much His *correction*, His restrictions, or His dominion of our lives. We know that He does all things well. That He is altogether good. But we must remind ourselves that *includes* His commands. His goodness and wellness extends to His directives in our lives, even when they don't make sense or when they confront our self-governance.

In a few verses, Jesus is going to have a frank and direct talk with the disciples. They are not grasping what Jesus is trying to reveal to them, what He's trying to teach them. And in chapter 8 He says, "Don't you understand or comprehend? Do you have hardened hearts? Do you have eyes and not see; do you have ears and not hear?, And do you not remember?"¹⁷

It's not just the physical ears that can be deaf. As always, the primary healing work needs to be done in the heart. In *our* hearts. So that God can transform and conform us, and so that He can continue doing His *good* work in and through us, opening up our lives for His purposes and His glory. So that He can then lead us in His everlasting way, sending us with *His* message to proclaim.

¹⁷ Mark 8:17-18