

Ephatha! And Listen Well!

Listen for the purpose of Christ's coming; Listen to what He has said to you.

Mark 7:31-37

TEXT: *Then Jesus left the vicinity of Tyre and went through Sidon, down to the Sea of Galilee and into the region of the Decapolis. There some people brought to him a man who was deaf and could hardly talk, and they begged him to place his hand on the man. After he took him aside, away from the crowd, Jesus put his fingers into the man's ears. Then he spit and touched the man's tongue. He looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him, "Ephphatha!" (which means, "Be opened!"). At this, the man's ears were opened, his tongue was loosened and he began to speak plainly. Jesus commanded them not to tell anyone. But the more he did so, the more they kept talking about it. People were overwhelmed with amazement. "He has done everything well," they said. "He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak."*

In Jesus' name, my fellow redeemed:

Three or four years ago my wife tricked me into getting hearing aids. She went to Anderson Eye Associates for her annual eye exam and then called to tell me that they were offering free hearing tests. So I went. They put me in a sound proof room with ear phones through which I was to listen to taped conversations and then answer questions regarding what I had heard. My answers had the audiologist rolling on the floor with laughter because of my answers based upon what I thought I had heard. Her reaction seemed very unprofessional since I was completely honest in my responses. I didn't want hearing aids. And yet my wife had been telling me that by my responses to you in Bible Classes and normal conversations were often just as disjointed, even to the point of embarrassment.

Today I thank my dear wife for my hearing aids and will not leave home without them. Being able to hear, and to be able to LISTEN to what is being said and a great gift from God.

Jesus' restoration of a deaf man's hearing also resulted in his renewed ability to speak. He was both deaf and mute. I've come to appreciate the blessing of this miracle even more. And for all who can hear, today's Scripture reminds us to listen even more closely to what our Lord in His Word is revealing to us. EPHATHA! It is the Greek for "Be opened!" Not just to hear the sounds of the words, but to LISTEN TO THEM! Ephatha! Listen for the purpose of Christ's coming; Listen to what He has said to you.

As we stand with this ancient crowd of people through the pages of the Bible, we should ask ourselves if we have listened to what our Lord has told us concerning the purpose of His coming to this earth. These ancients, especially the Jews, looked for God's Messiah, His Christ, with the hope that He would fix things for them here on this earth. Look at that! He can heal the sick, raise the dead, make the deaf hear and the dumb speak! Talk about free health care! What would be the political implications of Jesus' miraculous powers on display here today? Would these modern day leaders not join in with those who were trying to force Jesus into an earthly leadership role?

The Bible says: *There some people brought to him a man who was deaf and could hardly talk, and they begged him to place his hand on the man. After he took him aside, away from the crowd, Jesus put his fingers into the man's ears. Then he spit and touched the man's tongue. He looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him, "Ephphatha!"* The crowd could only watch the miracle from a distance. They saw Jesus communicating with him, touching his ears, touching his tongue, indicating that He was about to do something for him. Then at His word, *Be Opened!*, the man's ears could hear, his mind could understand words he may have never heard before, and he could speak them with precision and perfection.

Then turning to the crowd the Bible says: *Jesus commanded them not to tell anyone.* Jesus purpose for coming to this earth was NOT to heal the sick the blind or the deaf. It was NOT to be an earthly king or healthcare provider. His purpose for coming was to be the Sacrifice for the greatest and most fatal disease of all: SIN. Yet the Bible also says: *But the more he did so, the more they kept talking about it.* They weren't listening to Jesus!

The opposite command has been given to us. We have been given the command to preach the Gospel, to proclaim forgiveness of sins and life through the name of Jesus to all the world! But once again, it seems that no one pays attention. They more we are invited to proclaim the good news of salvation, the little is said about Jesus as our Savior from sin. Instead, Jesus is being sold as someone who will make your life easier in some way or another. If we only had some kind of fish lure to catch these poor dying souls. A school? If we

have a school, maybe people will join our church!

Our ears are working, but here is the concern: are we listening to Jesus? After opening the ears of the deaf mute he commanded him and all the others to not say anything because medical miracles was NOT the purpose for his coming. The purpose for his coming was to die for our sins. He clearly said this to Pontius Pilate before his crucifixion: ***For this reason*** (namely, to be crucified) ***I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.*** Jn 18 Are WE listening? Crucified for ME! Crucified for whom the Catholics call “The Blessed Holy Virgin Mary.” Crucified so that both the “Blessed Virgin” and me might go to heaven.

Listen up, now, and listen good! Look at me while I’m talking to you: Our Lord today continues to accomplish His purpose through THE PREACHING OF THE GOSPEL. Paul wrote to the Corinthians: ***God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.*** 1 Co 1 This defies human reason, because human reason wants to see miracles, healing, transformations and victory. Human reason does not see how Jesus’ words: ***It is finished; and, Father, into your hands I commit my spirit,*** is any kind of a victory, UNLESS the one in whose brain that reason resides knows that this is the atoning sacrifice for his sins.

Listen closely to the purpose for Christ’s coming, then and now through the Gospel. Listen well to what He says to you personally!

It was a noisy crowd that surrounded the poor deaf mute, and Jesus took him away from the crowd and used sign language to communicate to him what He was about to do: I’m going to touch your ears with the gift of hearing, and your tongue will speak plainly so that can hear what others say, and respond with words communicating what is in your heart! ***Ephphatha! Be opened!***

Now this is where the Gospel that you’ve heard and believed becomes such a personal blessing to you. Let me use Martin Luther as an example. Martin Luther is known as the leader of the great Reformation of the Christian Church. Billions of souls will be in heaven because the Lord used Luther to bring the pure Gospel of salvation to the ears and hearts of countless souls. Nevertheless, Luther himself held his own personal assurance before all: Jesus, Jesus, only Jesus! For Luther, it was the assurance of a clean conscience before God. Without a clean conscience before God, there is no hope.

That’s why Martin Luther held tenaciously to the Gospel in Word and Sacrament. He did not allow the Anabaptists, those Protestants who believe that baptism is only for believers who are able to accept Jesus as their Savior, to empty Baptism of its power. The power of Baptism is in God’s promise that the Holy Spirit does a miracle upon the ears and hearts of people, even infants, so that they can hear and believe. A miracle! Jesus said of Baptism: ***I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.*** Jn 3 Throughout your lifetime on this earth, that most important blessing is assured you by your Baptism, for Peter writes: ***Baptism ... saves you also-not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ...*** 1 Pe 3 Listen! Listen and believe what this says to you! It says that you are the Lord’s and you are going to go to heaven!

Listen closely to what He says to you when you receive His Holy Supper: ***This is my body; this is My Blood, given and shed FOR YOU for the forgiveness of your sins!*** Listen closely and know that as you kneel before this altar and receive the Lord’s Supper again today, your God is telling you that you are held in the palm of his hand. Despite your unworthiness to be here, Jesus still comes to you for the forgiveness of your sins!

Finally, wake up to the fact that this world is going to hell in a hand-basket, with the Devil happily dancing his own way to hell with all who do not listen to what Jesus has told us. Know that there is nothing you can do about that. But what is necessary for the world’s salvation has been done, and the Lord has touched your ears to hear and your tongue to speak so that others might hear and believe what you, by God’s grace, already know: ***God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors ... We***

implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. 2 Co 5 So we pray: Ephratha! Listen up and listen good! Listen, believe and be saved!
Amen.