

Daily Bread with Brother Hwa-Chi (Not reviewed by the speaker, for personal use only)

Mark 07: 31-37

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you; this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord, it's time for us to read the Bible again. Today, we'll continue to read Mark 7:31-37.

Jesus, for the second time, is traveling with His disciple, to preach the word, marking the second stage of His discipleship training. This stage began in the wilderness near Bethsaida, where He miraculously fed five thousand men with five loaves and two fish, most likely all Jewish males. Afterward, Jesus led His disciples northwest, passing through the region of Phoenicia to Tyre and Sidon. In Jewish territories, Jesus focused on preaching, casting out demons, and healing—starting with preaching because the Jewish people were God's chosen people, familiar with God and the prophecies of the Messiah. Thus, Jesus aimed to make the Jews recognize Him as the incarnate Word of God.

However, in the Gentile regions, Jesus did not openly deliver formal, lengthy sermons. Instead, He compassionately addressed individual needs and provided specific messages during interactions, akin to allowing the Gentiles to gather the crumbs from the ground. Yet, these crumbs should not be underestimated; when Jesus fed five thousand with five loaves and two fish, the leftovers filled twelve baskets. The abundance of fragments far exceeded the original amount of bread and fish. Let's continue with Jesus's second travelling missionary trip in the Gentile region.

Verse 31: "Again, departing from the region of Tyre and Sidon, He came through the midst of the region of Decapolis to the Sea of Galilee."

We should thank the Lord for Mark's detailed account. According to Mark, Jesus led His disciples on a significant detour in the Gentile region. After leaving Tyre, they first headed north, covering 40 kilometers to Sidon, then turned east, traveling 90

kilometers to Damascus in Syria. Decapolis refers to ten large cities east of the Jordan River, with Damascus being one of them. After passing through Damascus, they headed south, traversing the Golan Heights to reach the southeastern part of Decapolis near the Sea of Galilee, covering approximately 120 kilometers. Finally, they arrived at the southeastern shore of the Sea of Galilee, likely near the port of Gadara.

Gadara was the largest of the ten cities in Decapolis. In total, Jesus covered around 250 kilometers in the Gentile region, taking about two weeks at a pace of 20 kilometers per day. During this time, Jesus undoubtedly performed many deeds, but Mark did not record every detail like a chronological account. Mark selectively chose to document events with particular significance. In Tyre and Sidon, Mark recorded Jesus delivering a Phoenician woman's daughter from a demon. Now, in Decapolis, he documents Jesus healing the sick.

Verse 32: "Then they brought to Him one who was deaf and had an impediment in his speech, and they begged Him to put His hand on him."

In the region of Decapolis, predominantly inhabited by Gentiles, a person brought someone who was both deaf and had difficulty speaking to Jesus, imploring Him to lay His hands on the afflicted individual. How did someone in a Gentile area come to know about Jesus? Let's not forget the events in Mark 5:1-20, during Jesus's first travelling missionary trip, where He had previously visited the region of the Gerasenes. There, He cast a legion of demons out of a man, who wanted to follow Jesus afterward. However, Jesus instructed him to return home and testify to his relatives about the great things Jesus had done for him. As a result, the man traveled throughout Decapolis, bearing witness to Jesus. Perhaps this person heard such testimonies, acknowledging Jesus's power, and thus brought a deaf and speech-impaired person to Him.

Typically, the ability to speak originates from hearing, as one learns to speak by imitating what they hear. Therefore, a person who is deaf is often speech-impaired, meaning their tongue is tangled, making it difficult for them to express themselves

smoothly. Mark intentionally chose to record this incident, highlighting that, spiritually, Gentiles were deaf and speech-impaired because they had not heard about God. Consequently, they couldn't understand God's words; they were deaf to His message, and being deaf, they were also speech-impaired, unable to articulate words about God. This person being brought to Jesus is akin to our first encounter with Christ when we were not yet acquainted with Him.

Verse 33: "And He took him aside from the multitude, and put His fingers in his ears, and He spat and touched his tongue."

Jesus took the man away from the crowd, recognizing the distracting noise of many people, making it difficult for individuals to focus on God. By leading him away, Jesus provided an opportunity for the man to be alone with Him. A person who cannot quiet their mind finds it challenging to truly see God; a busy mind is also a hardened heart, preventing the seed of life from taking root.

What Jesus did next was quite remarkable. He could have simply spoken a word for the man to hear and speak, but instead, Jesus first put His fingers into the man's ears. This action indicates that ears unaccustomed to hearing the Lord's voice require Jesus to personally touch them, using His fingers to probe and remove any hindrance, as if eliminating all barriers. The cacophony of worldly noise can numb one's ears, and when a layer of thick callous builds up, heavy and dense, it hinders resonance with God's voice. Therefore, Jesus used His hands to reach into the man's ears, removing years of accumulated obstacles.

Next, Jesus used saliva to touch the man's tongue because it was knotted. Even though his ears were now open to hearing, the tongue remained constricted, preventing him from speaking. Jesus's saliva represents the words that come from His mouth, carrying life. His words have the power to bring healing. By applying His saliva, Jesus loosened the man's tongue, making it smooth and free from entanglement.

Verse 34: "Then, looking up to heaven, He sighed and said to him, 'Ephphatha,' that is, 'Be opened!'"

After Jesus had inserted His fingers into the man's ears and applied saliva to his tongue, He looked up to heaven and sighed. Why did Jesus sigh? Mark does not explicitly state, but personally, I believe the best explanation can be found in Romans 8:20-23, where it says, "For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body."

In the initial creation, the second person of the Holy Trinity, the Son, who became incarnate as Christ, was the Word of God. God spoke, and everything came into being—a beautiful and harmonious act. However, after the fall of man, sin entered, and death reigned. All created things fell under the realm of futility, unable to escape corruption. Thus, creation collectively groans, longing to be liberated from the bondage of decay and to attain the freedom of the children of God. Even those who have received grace and salvation groan, as their bodies are not yet redeemed, and the full realization of sonship has not been revealed. Moreover, Romans 8:26 tells us that the Holy Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.

Christ, being the Creator, observes that all created things are under bondage, much like the man before Him who was deaf and had an impediment in his speech. They are not free. Therefore, Jesus, seeing the constraints on creation, couldn't help but sigh. Then, addressing the man, He said, "Ephphatha," an Aramaic word that the man could understand, meaning "Be opened!" Jesus used His words to open the man's ears and release his tongue.

Verse 35: "Immediately his ears were opened, and the impediment of his tongue was loosed, and he spoke plainly."

The man who was deaf and had a speech impediment experienced healing through Jesus. His ears were opened, his tongue was loosed, and he could now speak clearly. Dear brothers and sisters, in various gatherings within the church, do you find yourself like a person with deaf ears and a speech impediment? Many believers may be talkative in daily life, but when it comes to sharing God's word during gatherings, they become like those with deaf ears and a speech impediment. The reason is often the lack of exposure to God's word. Since speaking starts with listening, a scarcity of listening results in a tangled tongue. Let us strive to set aside time each day to be alone with Jesus Christ, free from distractions, where we can listen to His words; Christ often speaks to us based on the Scriptures. By hearing Christ's words, we can learn to speak His words. Christ's words bring life, and life brings healing. Our tongues will no longer be entangled, allowing us to articulate God's message fluently.

Verse 36: "Then He commanded them that they should tell no one; but the more He commanded them, the more widely they proclaimed it."

Once the tongue of a person who was deaf and speech-impaired was loosened, he naturally couldn't refrain from speaking. He became a witness for the grace he received. At this stage, Jesus' primary mission was the training of His twelve disciples. He didn't want too many crowds to distract them, so He consistently instructed those who experienced His grace not to tell others. However, once their tongues were loosened, it was challenging for them to remain silent, and they spread the fame of Jesus even more.

Verse 37: "And they were astonished beyond measure, saying, 'He has done all things well. He makes both the deaf to hear and the mute to speak.'"

The people, upon hearing the testimonies of those healed by Jesus, were exceedingly astonished. They acknowledged that everything Jesus did was excellent. Mark specifically notes that the deaf could hear and the mute could speak. Particularly for these Gentiles, who were previously like the deaf and mute, hearing about Jesus Christ became a testimony for them. Formerly deaf to the message of Christ, now they heard and testified. Formerly mute in speaking about Christ, now they could articulate their experiences.

What Jesus did in the region of Decapolis is also recorded in Matthew 15:29-31: "Jesus departed from there, skirted the Sea of Galilee, and went up on the mountain and sat down there. Then great multitudes came to Him, having with them the lame, blind, mute, maimed, and many others; and they laid them down at Jesus' feet, and He healed them. So the multitude marveled when they saw the mute speaking, the maimed made whole, the lame walking, and the blind seeing; and they glorified the God of Israel." According to Matthew's account, Jesus did many things there. He caused the mute to speak, healed the maimed, enabled the lame to walk, and restored sight to the blind. As a result, the multitude glorified the God of Israel.

Previously, there was a perception that the God of Israel only healed Israelites, but now, with Jesus Christ coming to the Gentile regions, the Gentiles also received healing, glorifying the God of Israel. This seems to fulfill the prophecy in Isaiah 35:5-6 regarding the Messiah: "Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the dumb sing." In Isaiah's prophecy, the blind see, the lame leap, and the dumb sing, all three components present in Matthew's Gospel, while Mark's Gospel focuses on the deaf hearing.

As Jesus took His disciples to train them in Gentile territories, the New Testament era arrived, demonstrating that the salvation of Jesus Christ is not only for the Israelites but also for the Gentiles. Although the twelve disciples were Jews, through their training, Jesus expanded their vision and broadened their perspective. The Gospel is for all nations.

Let's pray together: Lord, we thank You that You open the ears of the Gentiles, release the tongues of the Gentiles, enabling them to hear the Gospel and testify to it. We were all once Gentiles, enemies of God, lost in darkness without hope. Yet, through the grace of Jesus Christ, He not only sought the Israelites but also personally came to the Gentiles, bringing the Gospel to them. In Gentile territories, Jesus cast out demons and healed the sick, allowing Gentiles to experience grace and salvation, becoming part of the kingdom of God. We are so blessed by the marvelous grace of Jesus Christ, becoming members of the Church and family of God. In gratitude for this incredible grace, we cannot remain silent; we must speak out and testify. Lord, loosen my tongue so that I may witness for You to my friends and family, allowing them to experience this grace as well. We pray in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.