

A Message for Those in Despair

Series: Mark (Introducing Jesus)

Speaker: Matthew Black

Text: Mark 7:31-37¹

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Introduction: Please open your Bible to Mark 7. This is “A Message for Those Who Are in Despair”. You may be here this morning with great peace of mind and confidence. This message is not directed toward you this morning. If that is you, I’d ask you to pray while I preach. You may need this message some day, and you probably will, so please listen carefully.

Have you ever felt forgotten? Have you ever felt like no one understood? I think we’ve all had those days where we felt we were a helpless case. What we want to see today is that if you have an omnipotent God, a God who can do anything, and a God who has set His love on you, there is no cause for despair.

I’m asking you to look at a spiritual situation in your life that you’ve given up on. It looks bleak. I want you to say something to yourself. Don’t say it out loud, but in the quietness of your heart, I want you to remind yourself of something. “When I cannot help myself, when I am in despair, when no one can help me, I am not beyond Jesus’ help. Jesus can help me!” I want you to pray a prayer right now. I want you to think of something in your spiritual walk with Jesus that you’ve given up on. Perhaps it’s in your life or in the life of another. I want you to pray this: “Jesus help me”, “Jesus help me!” It’s not eloquent, but it is something that Christ will answer.

So as we come to this helpless case in Mark 7, I want you to see yourself in Him, and I want you to see a mighty and compassionate Savior who loves you. He’s come to seek and to save you. He’s come to help you. You are not forgotten.

We have a helpless case in **Mark 7**. He is deaf. Because he is deaf, he is also somewhat mute. He can hardly talk at all. He has a serious speech impediment. To be blind is awful, but certainly a blind person can talk and communicate and at least relate limitedly with people around them. The deaf, especially in the ancient world, were often treated as insane people. Since they could not talk, they were looked at as either insane or mentally handicapped. So you can have a brilliant deaf person who is treated as if he were an imbecile. Can you imagine if this was your existence?

I want to focus your mind, not on your situation, but on Jesus. The purpose of this message is to give you hope that someone deeply cares, and there is absolutely no cause for despair. You are only in despair because your focus is wrong. If you could understand how loving and compassionate and all powerful Jesus was, you would no longer be in despair, but you would be in amazement.

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture is from the *English Standard Version* of the Holy Bible.

Let me show you in this passage how some people possibly thought they were forgotten took a journey from probable despair to unbridled amazement!

Mark 7:31-37, “Then he [JESUS] returned from the region of Tyre and went through Sidon [20 MILES NORTH] to the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis [ANOTHER 50 TO 60 MILES]. 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. 33 And taking him aside from the crowd privately, he put his fingers into his ears, and after spitting touched his tongue. 34 And looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, “Ephphatha,” that is, “Be opened.” 35 And his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. 36 And Jesus charged them to tell no one. But the more he charged them, the more zealously they proclaimed it. 37 And they were astonished beyond measure, saying, “He has done all things well. He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak.””

[Prayer for Guidance]

What is it that drives us to despair? It is to imagine that we are alone. That no one understands our case. Have you ever felt alone in your day? Perhaps you feel alone in your marriage. Perhaps you feel no one at church, no one in your family, no one, literally no one understand your situation, and you feel alone and perhaps at times you struggle with despair.

I want to tell you that whatever your situation is, there is NO cause for despair because Christ cares for you!

I. You need to Understand the Concern Jesus has for you.

Jesus didn't come to seek and to save the self-confident. He came to save those who were lost. He didn't come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance. He understands your condition. He knows your situation. You are not forgotten.

It says in **verse 31** that Jesus travelled in Gentile territory, from Tyre to Sidon and finally to Decapolis. What is Decapolis?

Explanation: It is Gentile territory, the land of ten cities, including Damascus and Philadelphia. It is on the border of Israel on the other side of the Sea of Galilee. In this passage, Christ is no longer within the borders of Israel. He is among free Greek cities subject to the governor of the Syrophenician realm. Though very near the ancient territory of Israel, this was a Gentile, heathen, pagan area. Tyre, Sidon, and Decapolis were all ruled by the Syrophenicians. As Jesus walked from Tyre to Sidon north, He would have seen the beautiful coast of the Mediterranean Sea. I've seen it on the other side in Spain, and it will take your breath away.

Where Jesus walked along the Mediterranean, He likely would have seen statues along the way of *Poseidon, the pagan god of the sea*. He would have seen

multitudes of the **Ashtaroth** carvings in the trees that they worshiped in Tyre, connected with Baal. If He took the main roads into Decapolis He would have went through the main Gentile cities, and He would have seen statues of **Zeus** and **Diana** and **Athena** statues of **Hercules**, etc.

Important: Among these cities were Jews that Christ was reaching. Christ probably taught among the settlements of Hellenistic Jews in these pagan cities. These were Jews living among the Gentiles. They had adapted to Greek culture but were still religiously Jewish. That's likely what this deaf man was. He was forgotten because he was deaf, and thought to be less intelligent, maybe among some considered insane. He was also forgotten because he was a Jew living among the heathen.

So Jesus goes deep into this Gentile country and comes to help and heal this deaf man. If Jesus did this for this person, He will do it for you.

A. Jesus loves you, and He will go to great lengths to intervene in your helpless situation.

He certainly did for this deaf man in our text. **Mark 7:31-37**, “Then he [JESUS] returned from the region of Tyre [A 50 MILE JOURNEY] and went through Sidon [ANOTHER 25 MILES NORTH] to the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis [ANYWHERE FROM 60 TO 180 MILES]. 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. 33 And taking him aside from the crowd privately...”

You have to understand the great lengths Jesus went through to reach this man. Jesus was on one of the longest journeys of his ministry. First of all, Christ is going far outside of Jewish territory. Jesus took a 50 mile journey on foot from Capernaum to Tyre with the Twelve. He then went another 25 miles north to Sidon. We have no record of what He did in Sidon, but we do know after ward He traveled at least another 60 miles into the region of Decapolis. If He went straight there without using the roads of the time it would be 60 miles if he went as the crow flies. That is unlikely for a number of reasons—safety being the main reason. Another reason would be the desolateness of the land. He likely would have traveled on the main roads of the time passing through cities where there would be more safety, food, and a place to sleep.

The Lord probably traveled the main road of that time that went from Sidon straight west, and then down into Decapolis by the Sea of Galilee. The text seems to indicate He went this route. That would have been about 180 miles on foot. We don't know for sure how Jesus arrived in Decapolis, but what we do know is that it was the farthest outside of the region of Israel He's ever gone. With the great distance compiles with Jesus' healing ministry, Bible scholars believe it is likely Christ is outside the borders of Israel for at least several months.

Jesus is likely in the third and final year of His ministry. He's also near the end of this ministry in Gentile territory. Time seems to be running out. And suddenly Jesus comes to this man who is truly in a helpless, despairing situation. As I said, he is deaf. He is hardly understood by anyone. Deaf people sound unintelligent, but are not at all intellectually impaired. In fact, most deaf people are actually brilliant. Imagine the frustration. Jesus went to great lengths to help this man. He's travelled a long way to help him.

But remember, this is the Savior we serve right now. Jesus loves *you* just as He loved this deaf man, and He will go to great lengths to **intervene** in any situation you have, no matter how helpless it may seem.

B. Consider also that when we feel we are alone, there are always those who God is using to bring us to Jesus.

It says in **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. 33 And taking him aside from the crowd privately..."

Look at these man's friends and perhaps family. They are begging Jesus to lay His divine hand on their friend. Jesus responds to sincere urgent prayer.

Application: Do you have reason to despair this morning? I want you to know there are people praying for you and concerned about you that you are totally unaware of. God always has concerned people pleading for you. And God hears their prayers. Before I came to know Christ, I had numbers of people praying for my soul from various churches. I didn't know until later that they were praying. I was in a time of despair in my life though they didn't know it. My eighth grade year was one of serious depression. Yet during that time numbers of people concerned for my soul visited my house and witnessed to me.

God sends out His Spirit into the hearts of His people to pray. Praise God for these friends that this deaf man had who "begged Jesus to lay His hand on him" (**verse 32**).

It is interesting that Jesus goes to Decapolis. If you will remember, the people of that region had asked Jesus to leave their country, **Mark 5:17**. Jesus had cast a legion of demons out of the Demoniac of Gadera. Those demons had entered into a herd of swine and the pigs had all drowned. The people of Decapolis had rejected Jesus and forced Him to leave.

Now He returns and they receive Him with open arms. Why the change? What made the difference? The answer can be found in **Mark 5:19-20**. That redeemed Demoniac went home and told everyone he met what Jesus had done for him. He was such an effective witness that the people were eager for Jesus to come back to

town, and when He did, they embraced Him. What a lesson for those who know the Lord. We should be in the business of magnifying Him!

Transition: If you are experiencing despair over a situation, you need to meet Jesus and experience his compassion for you.

II. You need to Experience Jesus' Compassion for you (vs. 32-35).

We read in **verses 32-33**, "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. 33 And taking him aside from the crowd privately..."

A. **Jesus Christ understands us when no one else does** (vs. 32). We see that this man had a "speech impediment" and was "deaf". In many places in the world today, and especially in the ancient world, this man would have been treated as if he were insane or an imbecile. Imagine this man who is no different than you or I intellectually being treated this way. No one seemed to understand, but Jesus did.

He had compassion on this deaf man. Jesus refuses to make a spectacle of this man. Jesus takes him aside and does a great work in his life. Jesus has a special compassion for those who are weak.

Sometimes people treat the deaf like they are less intelligent than others just because they cannot hear. Often, the deaf are embarrassed by their condition and they withdraw into themselves rather than face a harsh staring public. But we have to realize that we are *all* are born with many weaknesses. We all need the compassion of Jesus.

B. **Christ has compassion for us individually** (vs. 33). It says that Jesus singled out this deaf man and healed him "privately". Sometimes we feel despair because we feel God doesn't have time for us, that we are just a name or a number. Though many were brought to Jesus, He did not see them as a group, but He loved each one of them. He certainly healed this deaf man among the crowd privately. He showed compassion to him individually.

Why is it significant that Jesus healed this man privately? Perhaps he went into someone's house and healed him, we do not know. Look over at **Matthew 15** for the parallel passage. We are going to see that there is such a great crowd around Jesus this day, but Mark singles out this one deaf man, and He actually deals with him *privately*.

Look at **Matthew 15:29-31**, "Jesus went on from there [THE SYROPHOENECIAN WOMAN'S HOME] and walked beside the Sea of Galilee. And he went up on the mountain and sat down there. 30 And great crowds came to him, bringing with them the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute, and many

others, and they put them at his feet, and he healed them, 31 so that the crowd wondered, when they saw the mute speaking, the crippled healthy, the lame walking, and the blind seeing. And they glorified the God of Israel.”

You are not just a number to the Lord. You may think no one understands, but Christ knows everything about you, and He loves you.

Notice it says these people “glorified the God of Israel” (**Matthew 15:31**). It is curious that it is written this way. But remember Jesus is in Gentile territory. In the next chapter—chapter 8, Jesus is going to do a miracle for the Gentiles. He’s going to feed 4000 Gentiles, just like he fed 5000 Jews.

C. Jesus Christ always meets us right where we are (vs. 33-35).

Verses 33-35, “And taking him aside from the crowd privately, he put his fingers into his ears, and after spitting touched his tongue. 34 And looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, “Ephphatha,” that is, “Be opened.” 35 And his ears were opened, his tongue was released [UNCHAINED], and he spoke plainly.”

Jesus continues His special ministry in this man’s life. He cannot tell the man verbally what He is about to do, so Jesus uses **a form of sign language to communicate His intentions**. He’s not out to embarrass this man. He’d likely been embarrassed all his life by people who did not understand him. But Jesus meets this man right where he is.

They didn’t have American sign language. Jesus has His own version of sign language and He communicates to him in sign language. Four signs that He uses.

1. First, “He put his fingers into his ears” (vs. 33a) to let him know that He is going to do something about his deafness. He was identifying for the man what He knew about his problem. He knew this man wasn’t insane. He wasn’t a maniac. This man simply couldn’t hear, and Jesus knew that. He wanted this deaf man to know that He not only knew that, but that He was about to heal this life long ailment.
2. Secondly, “after spitting”, “He touched his tongue” (vs. 33b), communicating to this man. Christ is saying, “I understand, you’re not insane, you’re not crazy, you’re not mentally deficient, you have a speech problem and I’m going to fix that.” Jesus touches the man’s tongue to let him know that He is about to fix his speech. That’s not all.
3. Thirdly, we read that Jesus was “Looking up to heaven.” (vs. 34a). That’s another sign. This act served two purposes.
 - First, Jesus is saying to the man, “What is about to happen to you comes from heaven.” Everybody understood that. Jesus was looking to His

Father and He was telling this man, via sign language, that his healing was coming as a gift from God above.

- This act of looking toward Heaven also demonstrated the Son's dependence upon the Father. Jesus often looked to Heaven for the help He needed. He did this at the tomb of Lazarus, **John 11:41**. Jesus lived a life of close communion and the Father used Him!

Application: If you want to be used of the Lord, stay close and stay clean! Spend time with Him and spend time in His Word. He blesses those who make Him a priority!

4. Fourthly, after looking toward Heaven, Jesus "*sighed*". This word means "*to groan*". The deaf man could not hear the sigh, but he could see Jesus when He did it and it spoke volume to him. The sigh said "*I care about you and what you are going through!*"

The man would see this. What is the deep sigh? An expression of sympathy, an expression of pain over the man's suffering and an expression of compassion, of tenderness, strong emotion showing that God is going to come down in power and give him his hearing and give him his speech because God is compassionate. And so with sign language, Jesus gives him his first lesson about God. God is powerful and God is compassionate. He cares.

Application: I praise the Lord that we have a Savior Who cares!

- He is "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief", **Isaiah 53:3**.
- **Hebrews 4:15**, "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin." He cares about you and what you are facing in your life.
- **1 Peter 5:7** tells us we are to be "casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you."
- Regardless of what you are facing today, you will find help and hope in Him! **Matthew 11:28**, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

Jesus Christ will meet you right where you are today. No one else may understand, but Jesus does.

III. **If we turn to Christ in our need, we will be transformed by His command.**

Verses 34-35, “And looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, “Ephphatha,” that is, “Be opened.” 35 And his ears were opened, his tongue was released [UNCHAINED], and he spoke plainly”.

A. **Christ’s Word alone has the power to transform us.** We cannot change ourselves. We must determine to give ourselves to God, but when we give our heart to God, He grants us the power to change.

1. Look at the **command**. “**Ephphatha**”! Jesus said one word, “**Ephphatha**”, which means “**be opened**”. When Jesus said this, the man’s ears were healed and his tongue was loosed. He could hear! He could speak! Oh, what a miracle! One command from Jesus and his life changed forever! That is the power of the Word of God!

Verse 35 gives us the results: “And his ears were opened, his tongue was released [UNCHAINED], and he spoke plainly”. His tongue was released, literally “unchained”.

Application: Today you may be chained to a sinful habit. Christ can loose you. He can set the captives free. Go to Him and He will unchain you!

2. Look at the **result**. **Verse 35**, “And his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly”

The word “**plainly**” in the Greek is “**orthos**” from which we get *orthopedics*, it means to straighten things out, correctly would be the right translation, to put something back to the correct alignment. He heard and spoke perfectly. No therapy, no learning curve, nobody had to teach him how to form the letters, form the words, nobody had to teach him what the words were. He received an instant facility in the language to hear it and speak it implanted in his brain. It’s really stunning. No recovery period, but then there never is in Jesus’ miracles. There’s no progression here. ***He couldn’t hear, now he hears. He couldn’t speak, and now he speaks.*** And he hears perfectly and he speaks perfectly. This is amazing! The deaf hears; the dumb speaks!!

Do you understand the extent of this? To hear is one thing, to be able to know that what you’re hearing is language when you’ve never heard language is another miracle, right? There’s no speech therapy here. He doesn’t have to go to language class to learn Aramaic or Greek.

B. **The natural response to experiencing Christ’s power is to proclaim it!** We read in **verses 36-37**, “And Jesus charged them to tell no one. But the more he charged them, the more zealously they proclaimed it”.

As soon as He has accomplished the miracle, Jesus tells the multitudes not to tell anyone else. The tense of the phrase “*charged them*” suggests that He kept on commanding them to keep the matter quiet. But, they did just the opposite. He told them to tell no one and they told everyone!

What a hardship for this deaf man who can now hear! He’s never spoken plainly in his life, and now he’s commanded to KEEP QUIET!

Explanation: Now we’re getting used to this, aren’t we? We’re getting used to this.

- In **Mark 1:34**, Jesus tells the demons not to say anything of Him.
 - In **Mark 1:44**, He tells the leper not to tell anyone of his healing.
 - In **Mark 3:12**, he tells the multitudes of people not to say anything, “he strictly ordered them not to make him known”.
 - In **Mark 5:43**, after Jesus raised Jairus’s daughter from the dead, “he strictly charged them that no one should know this.”
 - We’ll see it again in the **Mark 8:26**, when Jesus heals a man born blind from his birth, and he essentially tells him to avoid people. Jesus tells him, “Do not even enter the village.”
1. **The Demoniac of Gadera.** Why? This seems such a strange command, doesn’t it? Especially in the light of the fact that back in chapter 5 when Jesus was in Gadera, which is also in Gentile territory over in the same area and He healed the man who had the legion of demons, He said to him, “Go home to your people and report to them what great things the Lord has done for you and how He had mercy on you,” and the man went away and began to proclaim in Decapolis what great things Jesus had done for him and everyone was amazed. He tells that man to tell everybody. He tells this man to tell nobody.

What’s the difference here? How do we explain that Jesus commands the Demoniac to preach, and everyone else He says “Be quiet”? The demoniac was the first missionary to Decapolis. There had never been anybody to talk about Jesus there before. And it needed to be established who He was and what He could do and His power.

But I believe we get the reason why Jesus would not allow most people to proclaim Him in **Mark 8:27-32**.

2. **Peter’s Confession.**

Mark 8:27-33, “And Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi. And on the way he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that I am?” 28 And they told him, “John the Baptist; and others say, Elijah; and others, one of the prophets.” 29 And he asked them, “But who do you say

that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are the Christ." 30 **And he strictly charged them to tell no one about him.** 31 And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again. 32 And he said this plainly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. 33 But turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man."

I think we find here that people did not have the whole story. They understood that Jesus was the Messiah, but the story is not yet complete until after Christ's death and resurrection.

After the resurrection, what does Jesus tell his disciples and all of us?

C. With a transformed heart, you will have a transformed focus. Verse 37, "And they were astonished beyond measure, saying, "He has done all things well. He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak."

The phrase "**astonished beyond measure**" is used only once, here in the New Testament. It is a very strong compound word that means "above all measure, over the top, superabundantly amazed and astonished." We would say today, "They had their minds blown away!"

In other words, your despair will be turned into delight. If your thoughts are focused on discouraging things, focus upon Christ. There is nothing discouraging about Him.

Conclusion: Look at what they say in **verse 37b**, "He has done all things well. He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak." These words bring us back to the creation of the world. After God created everything He said in **Genesis 1:31**, "And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day."

How did God create the world? He said, "Let there be light". He commanded with His Word and it was done. And His response is the response these people had. "it's very good". The people said in **verse 37b**, "He has done **all things well**. He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak."

We must not come to Christ simply because He can change our situation. He may or may not change our situation. We must come to Him because He can change us. "He does all things well". He can change the most impossible cases.

If you are in despair, go to Jesus Christ today, and let your despair be turned into delight!