

July 1-5, 2024 Edition

The Year_(s) Of[^] Jesus Part B1

Ephaphtha: Jesus Heals A Deaf Guy

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When you read the Bible ask yourself if there's anything you're reading where God is speaking to you personally... anything that you need to start applying in your own life. Then try to reflect on what you read... what you heard from God throughout the day and we know you'll be blessed.

*** These are EXTREMELY rough drafts so if you see typos... well you knew the rest ;0) These are essentially the ramblings of thoughts running through Ed or Judy's mind the week before Ed teaches a lesson on these concepts. They are pretty much how Ed gets ready for the weekends. They are not necessarily coherent so if they don't make much sense... sorry about that.

**** Also these devotionals are the product of both Judy & Ed's experiences and education. Figuring out which are from Judy and which are from Ed (sometimes both are contained in a single day) is half the fun.

You can also get these devotionals on Riverside's Facebook page (www.facebook.com/EagleRiverside). You don't have to have a FB account to read them but if you do have an account if you "like" the Riverside page and click the box to get updates the devos will show up on your wall every weekday (along with other news and event updates).

Monday Reflection: This week we're going to look at the time Jesus healed a deaf guy who couldn't really speak. But before we get to this week's story we need to review what is going on at this point in Jesus' ministry. He's about 1 1/2 years into His ministry at this point (which means about 1 1/2 years until the crucifixion). The last story we looked at in the chronological story of Jesus' life was when He left the nation of Israel and went to a gentile town called Tyre. Why did He go there? Well, right before that He had a run-in with the Pharisees over what it is that makes a person "unclean". The Pharisees believed it was an external problem- touching something unclean and then not ritually purifying oneself would make a person unclean.

Jesus tells them they're flat out wrong. That it's not an external thing at all. You can't become "unclean" by touching another human being (which is really what was at the heart of the Pharisee's idea of what makes a Jew unclean- it was touching a gentile or touching anything a gentile had touched). So Jesus packs up His disciples and takes them straight into the land of the unclean. He takes them to a purely gentile town outside of Israel. Why? Probably a couple of reasons. Maybe He wanted to get away from the Pharisees for a bit and He knew they'd never follow Him to Tyre. But I think He also wanted to teach His disciples a lesson they'd never forget about ritual impurity and what it is that makes a person clean and unclean.

While He was in Tyre He has an interaction with a Canaanite woman (gasp! A gentile!) who begs Him to heal her daughter. If you remember the story Jesus is fairly rough on her. He does not make it easy for her to get what she so desperately needs. Turns out there was a good reason for how He treated her (and it wasn't because she was unworthy- if you're curious you can go back and read the reflections from May 26th, 2024) but what's important for the purposes of this reflection is that Jesus treated her in what appeared to be an insensitive manner before He gives her exactly what she most wanted. Today we pick up the chronological story of Jesus' life here:

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 Jesus to place his hand on him. Mark 7:31-32 (NIV)

Ok, so He leaves Tyre but He doesn't go straight home to Capernaum. In fact He bypassed Capernaum and went to the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee (which was also a gentile dominated part of ancient Israel). A man who is deaf and mute is brought to Jesus and the man's friends beg Jesus to heal the guy. But what made the man's friends think Jesus could help the deaf guy? Well, Jesus had already done some pretty amazing things on that side of the Sea Of Galilee. He calmed a storm while in a boat heading to the other side of the lake from Capernaum. When they got to the other side of the lake Jesus cast a demon out of man named Legion (because there were so many demons inside of him). The man who had been Legion begged Jesus to come with Him but Jesus had other plans for the guy:

As Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon possessed begged to go with him. But Jesus said, "No, go home to your family, and tell them everything the Lord has done for you and how merciful he has been." So the man started off to visit the Ten Towns

of that region and began to proclaim the great things Jesus had done for him; and everyone was amazed at what he told them. Mark 5:8-20 (NLT)

Whatever the guy told his friends and family it's obvious that Jesus was now becoming famous on that side of the lake too. He will do some of His best work on that side of the lake as the chronological story of His life progresses. But for this week we're going to look at not just what Jesus does for the man (which is miraculously strange) but also how He dealt with the guy. Turns out Jesus cares about all of us but how He relates to me will almost certainly be different from how He deals with you. Maybe spend some time today reflecting on why you think that might be.

Tuesday Reflection: So I think one important way of looking at this story is to watch how Jesus relates to the deaf guy and then ask ourselves, so then how does Jesus relate to me? How does He relate to you? Because it seems pretty obvious that He doesn't relate to any two people the same way. Remember that the story that immediately precedes this one is where Jesus is fairly harsh towards a Canaanite woman who begs Him to heal her daughter. He eventually gives her what she seeks but it's a strange road getting there. Now we see Jesus being asked to heal this deaf guy and what does He do? Let's read all about it:

Jesus led him away from the crowd so they could be alone. Mark 7:33 (NLT)

He leads the guy away so they could be alone? That's kind of strange, isn't it? I mean He didn't lead the Canaanite woman away so they could be alone and He could be harsh with her without everyone noticing. No with her He does everything out in the open. So why does He get this guy off to the side for some privacy?

Well we'll never know for sure. Probably the guy had been on a tough road. Probably the guy was extremely apprehensive. Maybe that's why the guy's friends had to bring him to Jesus. We'll look more at this particular question (maybe even come up with a theory) on Friday. We may never know the reason but it seems obvious to me that Jesus doesn't deal with us formulaically. He treats each of us exactly as we most need to be treated. Sometimes that may be harshly and sometimes that may be with incredible tenderness but you can bet that however Jesus treats someone it's because of His great love for them:

God is kind, but he's not soft. In kindness he takes us firmly by the hand and leads us into a radical life-change. Romans 2:2 (MSG)

I think we can safely say that even when Jesus is treating someone with what appears to be harshness it doesn't mean He doesn't care. Maybe some of us just need that edginess if we're going to hear and learn from Him. So God's not going to treat you the same way He treats me. Heck, He won't even always treat you with the exact same measure of harshness/tenderness in every situation. Because it's not just who you are that determines how He deals with you and me. There's also the little matter of how life has treated us as we've gone through our lives and how life is treating us at the moment. Sometimes we may need harshness for Him to get through to us and sometimes tenderness is just what the great physician ordered. So why don't you and I spend some time today reflecting on how we've seen God deal with us (and those that we love) over the years. Why was He harsh sometimes and why was He tender at other times?

Wednesday Reflection: This week we're looking at the story of Jesus healing a deaf man who could not speak and trying to understand (based on how Jesus deals with the deaf guy) how Jesus deals with us. Yesterday we saw that Jesus deals with each of us individually. He's never formulaic. He always knows exactly what each of us needs and that's exactly what He gives us. Today we'll see that He also deals with each of us intellectually. In other words He wants us to understand what He's doing (or at least recognize that whatever He's doing, He's doing it because He cares). So Jesus takes the deaf guy to a private place and then He begins to deal with the guy. He doesn't just immediately heal him- first Jesus does something kind of unusual:

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. *Mark 7:33 (NIV)*

That's kind of strange, isn't it? I mean, in the chronological story of Jesus' life we've already watched Him heal lots of people and He never does it the same way. Some people He engages in almost a debate before healing them. Some He cures with a word and not much else. Some He touches, so He doesn't. Heck, some people He heals from afar and never even meets them. Why? Why the differences? Yesterday we looked at how personalized all of Jesus' healing were but there may be another reason for the variety of healing methods- maybe He didn't want us to think that healing was about performing a ritual exactly as He had performed it or repeating His words as thought healing were nothing more than an incantation in which we force God's hand. I guess the point is we can't put Jesus in a box that makes Him predictable to us and the way He healed this deaf guy is UNIQUE.

What's the deal with putting His fingers into the guy's ears and then spitting and touching the guy's tongue? Most scholars agree this is Jesus using some form of sign language to communicate to the guy what He was about to do. Jesus plugs the guy's ears with His own fingers and then, after spitting, He touched the man's tongue. Plugging the guy's ears seems pretty self explanatory, doesn't it? It's like Jesus is communicating that He's going to fix the deaf guy's ears. But what's with the spitting? No matter how you slice it spitting was considered not just uncouth in ancient Israel- it was a sign of disrespect and if someone spit on you the Jewish law said that made you "unclean" and you had to wash your body and clothes and wait til nightfall to be made clean again.

If the man spits on you, you must wash your clothes and bathe yourself in water, and you will remain unclean until evening. *Leviticus 15:8 (NLT)*

But Jesus doesn't spit on the man- He spits and then touches the guy's tongue. What's the message? Maybe the message was that Jesus was disrespecting the work of the devil that made this guy deaf and mute. Jesus spits on the devil- so to speak. Whatever may be going on with the spitting it's seems pretty clear that Jesus is attempting to communicate with the deaf man. Maybe the guy was scared. Maybe the guy just liked to have all the information. Whatever the reason it's clear- part of how Jesus deals with this guy is on an intellectual level. Intellect and knowledge is good but if we're not careful it can become a god or idol in our lives. Using our intellect is important but it's not the only part of the equation. And for some of us the intellect will be the main way Jesus deals with us. After Jesus' friend Lazarus

dies Jesus goes to the funeral (4 days late) and the first person He encounters is Martha-Lazarus' sister. The way He deals with her grief centers around her intellect:

"Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask." Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?" "Yes, Lord," she replied, "I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world." John 11:21-27 (NLT)

Jesus doesn't get emotional with Martha. Why not? Probably because that's not what Martha needed most. What does He do instead? He teaches her. He is the Teacher and when she's dealing with grief He uses teaching to reach her. He does the same with us (if teaching is what you need most or what would be the best avenue to reach you). It's not the only way He deals with us but it is one very important part of how God communicates His love and care for us. Tomorrow we'll look at another way Jesus deals with us but for today maybe spend some time reflecting on how important information and teaching is when it comes to dealing with Jesus.

Thursday Reflection: Yesterday we saw how Jesus communicated with the deaf guy through sign language. Basically Jesus was explaining what He was going to do for the guy and how He was going to do it. But Jesus deals with us on far more than just an intellectual level- He also deals with the man (and us) on an emotional level. After explaining to the deaf man what He was going to do and how Jesus then showed the man how much He cared:

Looking up to heaven, he sighed. Mark 7:34 (NLT)

I think this probably has some continuation of the explanation. When Jesus looks up towards heaven I think He's communicating that He's going to appeal to God. But the sigh (some translations use the word "groan") communicates something else besides intellectual information. It communicates the deep emotion Jesus is experiencing. Maybe you've heard the saying that people don't care how much you know until they know how much you care. It might be a cliche but it's generally true. People want to feel like the person who's helping them feels their pain to some extent. And so Jesus wants to show this guy that He really cares. That this guy's affliction also afflicts Jesus. His emotion demonstrates how much He cares.

Yesterday we looked at how Jesus dealt with His friend, Martha, following the death of her brother Lazarus. She comes to Him and says, Lord, if you had been here my brother would not be dead." How does Jesus respond? With some teaching. He engages her intellectually. But Lazarus had another sister who was also very important to Jesus- her name was Mary. And when she hears Jesus has shown up at her brother's funeral (4 days late but Jewish funerals lasted 7 days- which is where the phrase "sitting shiva" comes from. Shiva is the Hebrew word for the number seven) she makes the exact same observation (accusation?) As her sister:

When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. "Where have you laid him?" he asked. "Come and see, Lord," they replied. Jesus wept. Then the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" John 11:32-36 (NLT)

Mary makes the same comment as her sister but Jesus responds to her differently. How did He respond? With tremendous emotion. The phrases, "deeply moved" and "Jesus wept" are an indication of just how emotional Jesus got. These are words describing what we might call "ugly crying". There were lots of words for crying that John could have chosen to use that run the gamut from misting up to weeping and wailing. The word John chooses means Jesus was weeping and wailing. So what Jesus happened? Why does Jesus go from the seemingly detached teacher with Martha to a blubbering mess with Mary? Remember on Monday when we talked about how Jesus doesn't deal with us formulaically? My guess is emotions wouldn't have been a good way to reach Martha and Jesus knew that. I also would guess that teaching wouldn't have worked well for Mary and Jesus knew that too.

One of the Old Testament prophecies concerning the coming of the Messiah told us that He would be called, Immanuel, which means, God is with us. When Jesus stepped into our world on Christmas Day He proved that God wasn't some detached overseer who didn't care about us. It showed that God was willing to enter into our pain by experiencing the very same pain we cannot hide from. John puts it like this in his gospel:

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. John 1:14 (NIV)

That word that John uses that is translated here as "made His dwelling" is actually the word "tabernacle". Literally what John says is that Jesus "put on human flesh and tabernacled among us. It was a call back to the days of the Exodus. During the wanderings of Israel in the wilderness the people all lived in tabernacles (a tabernacle is just a fancy word for a tent). In the center of the camp and in the midst of all the other tabernacles of the people of Israel was The Tabernacle. God's Tabernacle. The Tabernacle was visual evidence to the people of Israel that God was "with" them. I guess you could say that back then God was Immanuel- God with us. By the time we get to Jesus' birth the glory of God had departed from Israel. God promised He would return one day and when Jesus was born that day had come. Once more- in a sense- God tabernacled among us. His glory contained in Jesus Himself.

When Jesus stepped into our world and tabernacled among us He didn't shield Himself from our pain and we see that in how He interacts with Mary as well as the deaf guy. Their afflictions also afflicted Him. And every single one of Jesus' miracles were a direct assault on something that afflicts us humans. Sickness, paralysis, birth defects, demonic possession, hunger, isolation, blindness and deafness to name a few. When Jesus performs a miracle it's as though He's saying, "this isn't how it was supposed to be. It's not how it was in the beginning and it's not how it will be in the end. For now this is something us humans have to deal with but Jesus' miracles are a guarantee that our afflictions will never have the last word. Do you know who will have the last word? Jesus will. And just as the apostle John begins His gospel

telling us that when Jesus stepped into our world and put on our flesh that He was "tabernacling" among us, he tells us how things will be when all is once again set right:

I heard a loud shout from the throne, saying, "Look, God's home is now among his people! He will live with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them. He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever." And the one sitting on the throne said, "Look, I am making everything new!" Revelation 21:3-5 (NLT)

Can you imagine it? No more tears, no more death or sorrow or pain. That's pretty amazing but if we're not careful we'll miss something else that John tells us at the end of his revelation. Do you see where God says that His home is now among His people and that He will "live with them"? Do you know what word that is translated as "live with them" is in Greek? You guessed it- tabernacle. Literally God says that He will "tabernacle among us". Once more the home of God will be right in the center of His people. And with that will come the complete defeat of death, sorrow and pain. God never intended to be insulated from us. Not from our minds and not from our emotions. The sighing of Jesus when He healed the deaf man is more evidence that God cares deeply about our plight. Maybe today you and I could spend some time reflecting on the idea of God "tabernacling" among us and what that means for us today and for our eternal futures.

Friday Reflection: Today we're going to finish up our look at the story where Jesus heals a man who is deaf and mute by taking him away to a private place, speaking to the man in sign language to let him know what is going to happen and then deeply sighing with emotion right before He heals the guy. Here's what happens next:

Looking up to heaven, he sighed and said, "Ephphatha," which means, "Be opened!" Instantly the man could hear perfectly, and his tongue was freed so he could speak plainly!

Mark 7:34-35 (NLT)

I think Mark's intention was that this one word, "ephaphtha", would tie this whole story up in a nice little bow. How so? Well let's talk about that word. What does ephaphtha mean and why does Mark use an Aramaic word (the language Jesus and His disciples would have spoken in every day life) when there was a perfectly good Greek word (the language the New Testament was written in) to get his point across. Well, Mark does this a lot. He tells us the exact word that Jesus used and then translates that Aramaic word into Greek for those readers who don't know Aramaic.

Why? I think it's Mark's way of trying to help us feel even closer to Jesus. Mark tells us that ephaphtha means "be opened". The Greek word for "be opened" is dianoigo. I think the reason Mark does all of this is he wants his readers to be reminded of an Old Testament prophecy when we read it. It turns out that the word, dianoigo, is used only once in the entire Old Testament. Yes, I realize that the Old Testament was written in Hebrew but it was translated into Greek at some point before Jesus' birth. In fact, whenever the New Testament quotes the Old Testament it's the Greek translation that is used- not the original Hebrew. And in the Greek translation of the Old Testament the word dianoigo is used only once. I'm thinking Mark wanted us to follow the breadcrumbs to that Old Testament prophecy so that we'll understand even more about what's going on in the story with the deaf man:

Strengthen the feeble hands, steady the knees that give way; say to those with fearful hearts, "Be strong, do not fear; your God will come, he will come with vengeance; with divine retribution he will come to save you." Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Isaiah 35:4-5 (NIV)

For anyone intimately familiar with the Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament the word, dianoigo, would lead them directly to Isaiah 35. Thinking that's a bit of a stretch? Well then let's give you one more bit of evidence that Mark wanted us to think of the prophecy from Isaiah. Do you remember all the way back on Monday when we read this?

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 Jesus to place his hand on him.

Mark 7:31-32 (NIV)

Do you see that English phrase "could hardly talk"? It's often translated as "mute" but it wasn't used much for that. There was a word in Greek that is translated as mute but the word Mark uses is one that only appears once in the New Testament. But it is used one other place in the Bible- in the Old Testament. Care to venture a guess as to where that same word is used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament? If you guessed Isaiah 35 then you've won yourself some nice parting gifts. From the moment Mark starts telling the story he's trying to tell us that he's scattering breadcrumbs and when the reader get to the word for "open up" (dianoigo) the reference would be fairly obvious. But why would Mark want us to think about Isaiah 35 as we read this story?

I think it's because Mark doesn't want there to be any mistake- when the disciples saw Jesus heal the deaf guy it meant that the prophecy of Isaiah had been fulfilled. And what does that tell us? That God has come. Go back and read it again. Isaiah says that when we see the ears of the blind opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped then you'll know that God has come. It's going to be one of His signature moves. Mark is making a bold statement about who exactly Jesus is without really coming out and saying it- Jesus is God. And He has come to open our eyes and give us the ability to hear. But notice what else Mark says? He says that when you've seen the healings and know that God has come then you'll also be aware that He has come with vengeance and divine retribution.

Does that sound scary to anyone else? It shouldn't. I used to read statements like that and get freaked out. It sounds like God's bringing His vengeance and divine retribution to us. That we're going to be punished and destroyed. But that's not what it means. Jesus does come bearing vengeance and divine retribution but it's not to destroy us- it's to save us. He will not come to "bring" vengeance and divine retribution but to bear it on our behalf. Do you remember last week as we talked about the very first prophecy in the entire Bible way back in Genesis chapter 3? God tells Adam & Eve that He will send a Rescuer who will pay the debt we incurred by bringing sin into this world. Now Mark says, here He is. If you're not careful you'll miss Him. He's come to pay our debt by suffering the vengeance and divine retribution that would have fallen on us had He not come to take care of our bill. But because of what Jesus did you and I can have peace with God, each other, ourselves and even this Creation.

But in order to do that He'd have to deal with the impact of sin in His own life and body- even though He Himself never sinned. There's another prophecy in Isaiah explaining what the Messiah would do when He came and it shows us just how much the deaf and mute man could identify with Jesus:

He was despised and rejected- a man of sorrows, acquainted with deepest grief. We turned our backs on him and looked the other way. He was despised, and we did not care. Yet it was our weaknesses he carried; it was our sorrows that weighed him down. And we thought his troubles were a punishment from God, a punishment for his own sins! But he was pierced for our rebellion, crushed for our sins. He was beaten so we could be whole. He was whipped so we could be healed. All of us, like sheep, have strayed away. We have left God's paths to follow our own. Yet the Lord laid on him the sins of us all. He was oppressed and treated harshly, yet he never said a word. He was led like a lamb to the slaughter. And as a sheep is silent before the shearers, he did not open his mouth. Isaiah 53:3-7 (NLT)

In order to save us from sin He had to take on the weight of the sins of all humanity. And to be able to heal this deaf and mute guy Jesus have to become like a lamb that is being led to it's slaughter- completely silent. Could Jesus have made the case that He didn't deserve death? Of course. So why didn't He? Because if He did it would have changed the outcome. He came to this earth to bear our punishment- not His own. And now I hope you're starting to see that the way Jesus dealt with this deaf guy is in many ways how He deals with us. Individually, intellectually, emotionally and with tremendous empathy. How else could I end this reflection than by saying:

Jesus is awesome.