

An Extreme Makeover

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Preacher: Jonathan de Groot

[0 : 00] Our reading today comes from the Gospel of Mark, Mark chapter 7, reading from verse 31 to 37. Mark 7, 31 to 37.

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. After he took him aside, away from the crowd, Jesus put his fingers into the man's ears.

Then he spat and touched the man's tongue. He looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him, Ifafatha, which means be opened. At this the man's ears were opened, his tongue was loosed 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.

[1 : 07] He has done everything well, they said. He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak. Well, do keep your Bible open at that passage in Mark chapter 7.

Everybody loves a good makeover. Makeovers are all about making someone or something look better. Listen to this article from Glamour magazine.

I don't tend to read Glamour magazine, but when you're in the dentist's waiting room and you've read the football magazine and you've read the car magazine and you've read the gadget magazine, then you do need something to read.

And so this article was entitled Dramatic Celebrity Makeovers. Makeovers, and it says, Here we chart the evolution of some of the world's biggest names. Take a look at Kim Kardashian then and now and check out the difference the Hollywood touch has really made to the likes of Victoria Beckham, Taylor Swift and Eva Mendes.

And then it says, Tweet us at GlamourMagUK and let us know whose dramatic makeover shocks you the most. It is not an easy decision to make.

[2 : 15] Just for clarity, I didn't tweet Glamour Magazine UK. But a makeover is about a person's appearance. But it might also be a home makeover or even a garden makeover.

And makeovers are great TV. So there used to be a show called Extreme Makeover UK. And in it, men and women would get the opportunity to transform their looks with the help of a team of plastic surgeons, cosmetic stylists and personal trainers.

And there's currently a show running in the US and it's called Extreme Makeover Home Edition. And in it, a deserving family get a whole home revamp to help them change their lives.

And so the family are sent away for a week's holiday. And then a team of designers and builders and even some of their neighbours come in and they create this customised, beautiful new home with no expense spared.

And it's a real tearjacker when the family come back and they discover this beautiful home. They're just overcome with emotion. Makes for a brilliant TV.

[3 : 24] Well, what we've got here in Mark chapter 7 is a makeover. And it's a miracle where Jesus heals a deaf man who could hardly speak.

Jesus opens his ears so he's able to hear. And Jesus releases his tongue so that he's able to speak. But it's not just a random miracle.

Because it tells us that Jesus is the king and his kingdom is coming. So Jesus hasn't just come to give a makeover to individual lives like ours, but to give an extreme makeover to this world.

And deep down, that is something that we all want. Especially right now when our world is in the middle of the coronavirus pandemic. We don't want pain and suffering and we don't want disease and death.

And so as we look at Jesus restoring broken humanity in this man, the great news is that it points to Jesus restoring and remaking this broken world.

[4 : 30] And so that deaf and mute man's restoration is a short trailer, if you like, for the momentous remaking of everything. And so what I'd like to do today is look at this passage really under three simple headings.

First of all, what Jesus did. Secondly, why it matters. And thirdly, what it means. First, what Jesus did. It's a miraculous restoration.

Secondly, why it matters. It's a messianic revelation. And third, what it means. It's a marvellous remaking. So let's look first of all at what Jesus did in this miraculous restoration.

So Jesus is on the move. We see that from verse 31, which tells us, 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. So in terms of what Jesus is doing here, this is an unusual miracle.

[5 : 39] Because Jesus essentially does everything and the man does nothing. The man is passive in this encounter until he speaks at the end. So this is what we read in verse 33 and 34.

After he took him aside, away from the crowd, Jesus put his fingers into the man's ears. Then he spat and touched the man's tongue. He looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him, Ephaphatha, which means be opened.

At this, the man's ears were opened, his tongue was loosed, and he began to speak plainly. So Jesus restores his hearing and then restores his speech through a series of deliberate actions.

It's all very up close and personal. Why is this? Well, not because Jesus needed to do it in this way, but because Jesus knew what was best for this individual.

So first of all, Jesus takes him away from the crowd. And then Jesus has him in a secret place. And what Jesus does is sensitive to the man's physical and emotional needs.

[6 : 52] The man is not a spectacle for the crowd. He's a person. And so secondly, Jesus, he communicates with this man in a personal way. And because he was deaf, Jesus uses a kind of sign language that the man would understand.

So he puts his fingers in his ears and then he spat and touched his tongue. And then he looked up to heaven with a deep sigh and said, Ephaphatha, which means be opened in Aramaic.

But Jesus isn't following some kind of ritual or mumbo jumbo for this healing. Jesus is walking the man through exactly what he's doing.

And so the fingers and the ears help the man understand that his ears will be restored and he'll be able to hear again. And then the spit and touch of the tongue by Jesus help the man understand that his tongue will be restored and he'll be able to speak again.

And when Jesus looked up to heaven, he's indicating to the man that it's God who is going to restore him. And so this is what we read. At this, the man's ears were opened, his tongue was loosed, and he began to speak plainly.

[8 : 09] So it was a miraculous restoration. The man knew it, and so did everybody else when they discovered what had happened. So before we move on, it's worth highlighting here that Jesus deals with people as individuals.

Jesus relates to you and me personally, just like he related in a personal way to this man. Why? Because Jesus knows what's best for us.

And Jesus will restore our broken lives in whatever way he sees fit. So don't ever think that Jesus doesn't know exactly what is going on in your life.

He does. Jesus knows exactly what you and I need as individuals. And Jesus is the only one able to meet the deepest needs of our lives.

And so that's the first thing we see. What Jesus did was a miraculous restoration. The second thing is, well, why it matters. And that is because it's a messianic revelation.

[9 : 18] So, in other words, this miracle reveals the true identity of Jesus Christ. Jesus is the Messiah. He is God's chosen king.

And so what he does fulfills the Old Testament prophecy about the coming of the Messiah. So even the language that Mark uses echoes descriptions of the Messiah in the Old Testament.

So, verse 32, we read that there were some people brought to him a man who was deaf and could hardly talk. And when they begged Jesus to place his hands on him.

So when we read that he could hardly talk, Mark uses an extremely rare word to describe this man's speech impediment.

It's only used here. And yet it occurs in another point in the Bible, in the Greek translation of the Old Testament, in Isaiah chapter 35, Isaiah the prophet.

[10 : 18] So listen to how Isaiah describes the reign of God's coming king. This is from Isaiah chapter 35, verse 4 to 6. 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. Then will the lame leap like a deer and the mute tongue shout for joy.

Isaiah is describing what God's Messiah, his chosen king, will be like and what he'll do when he comes. So Isaiah says, your God will come.

He will come to save you. And so Mark's saying that these very words are fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ. God has stepped into our world in the person of Jesus in order to save his people.

[11 : 22] How do we know? Well, we know because we see blind eyes being opened, deaf ears being unstopped, the lame leaping like a deer and the mute tongue shouting for joy.

That's how we know God has come to save his people. It's all happening here in Jesus Christ. And so the miracle concludes like this in verse 37.

We read, he makes the deaf hear and the mute speak. So it's clear that God has showed up in our world. We're being told that Jesus is God's king who has come to bring God's kingdom here on this earth.

And so we're given a taste of what God's salvation ultimately means. Yes, it's the restoration of individual lives like ours, but it's also the restoration of all things.

So this is a preview of what's to come. A glimpse of the extreme makeover that God has promised for the world, the cosmos. It will be remade and it will be restored.

[12 : 33] We're going to come back to this, but we need to ask, why does Mark place this miracle right here? Well, listen to the reaction at the end again.

Verse 36 and 37. 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. Why did Jesus command them not to speak to anyone?

Why would Jesus want to keep this amazing miracle a secret? Well, it's not the first time that Jesus has reacted in this way in the Gospel of Mark. But it's all connected to Jesus's identity.

Because Jesus doesn't want people to misunderstand who he is. So at this point, the disciples still haven't grasped Jesus's identity. And so the question of who is Jesus has an increasing urgency for them to try and answer.

[13 : 40] So this miracle, the healing of the deaf and mute man, plus the miracle coming up, which is the healing of a blind man, Mark chapter 8.

Both of these demonstrate where the disciples are at in terms of their understanding of who Jesus is. They're deaf and they're blind to the true identity of Jesus.

And so Jesus later challenged them on this. And so we read these words in Mark chapter 8, verse 17 and 18. Do you still not see or understand?

Are your hearts hardened? Do you have eyes but fail to see and ears but fail to hear? So the disciples still don't get who Jesus is, despite all of these amazing miracles that reveal his identity.

But these particular miracles don't just show where the disciples are at, but where they will be. Because both miracles, the deaf man, chapter 7, and the blind man in chapter 8, take place in stages.

[14 : 50] So the disciples' understanding of Jesus also takes place in stages. Because they move from deafness to hearing and they move from blindness to sight.

And so this miracle is also showing that God can open deaf ears and open blind eyes when it comes to understanding the true identity of Jesus Christ.

Because whether back then or now, people can be totally deaf and totally blind to who Jesus is and why he came.

And it takes a miracle to open deaf ears. And it takes a miracle to open blind eyes and help people see who Jesus is.

And so it's worth remembering that coming to understand who Jesus is often happens in stages. So you may not be convinced right now that you should place your faith in Jesus Christ.

[15 : 55] But just because believing in Jesus doesn't make sense to you now, doesn't mean that it never will. So don't stop where you are thinking that you know all there is to know.

I would encourage you to keep pursuing and keep trying to understand who Jesus is. Because if Jesus is revealed to us as the Messiah, if he really is God's chosen king, then surely you need to investigate him further.

It really matters because if he is God come to us, which the Gospel of Mark says he is, then he's come to restore our broken lives. And that means you need him and I need him.

And everybody in this world needs him. So that's our second point. Why it matters. It's a messianic revelation. First, what Jesus did. A miraculous restoration.

Second, why it matters. A messianic revelation. And then thirdly, what it means. This is a marvellous remaking. And so this miracle reveals not just that Jesus, the king, has come, but also that his kingdom will come.

[17 : 07] It's a sign of the marvellous remaking of this broken world. And we are well aware that this world is not as it should be. It is fractured on every level.

It is full of pain and suffering and disease and death. But Jesus has come to heal this broken world and to remake it under his loving rule.

And we catch a glimpse of this in the healing of the deaf and mute man. The man is part of the fallen creation, broken because of sin in the same way that we all are.

And yet Jesus came to restore the image of God and humanity. And then to ultimately restore everything else to what it should be.

How do we know? How do we know this is true? Well, did you pick up the deep sigh of Jesus? He looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him.

[18 : 10] So Jesus is moved by this man's suffering. But there's more going on here. Because when Jesus looked up to heaven with a deep sigh, Jesus is expressing that this world is not what it should be.

The Greek word that's translated here for deep sigh means a groan or a strong complaint. And it's the same root word that Paul uses in Romans chapter 8 when he says the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.

So when Jesus encounters the reality of God's broken and suffering world, he groans about the curse upon it.

Jesus is expressing his deep sorrow, even his righteous anger at the effects of sin on humanity. It impacts everyone and everything.

And so his deep sigh or his groan is an expression of his frustration at the consequences of sin in this beautiful world that God has made.

[19 : 24] And we feel this too, don't we? It's what we've been feeling over the coronavirus. Frustrated. Angry. Because we live in a broken world full of disease and suffering and death.

And we hate it. And we don't want it to continue. We want it to stop. Because it impacts everybody at varying degrees. We realise we are frail.

And we're powerless to do anything about the biggest crisis that has faced us in recent years. And yet, the fantastic news of Christianity is that Jesus has come to do something about it.

That's why this little miracle points us to the miraculous remaking of the world. Jesus is showing us that he has got the power to make all things new.

Even at a time as this, when they saw it, the people sensed something special was taking place in Jesus. Because they were overwhelmed with amazement.

[20 : 28] And they said, he has done everything well. They probably spoke better than they knew because their words echo the creation story in Genesis, where God created the world and humanity in his own image.

And then after the creation, we read in Genesis chapter 1, verse 31. God saw all that he had made. And it was very good.

And so just as the original creation was very good, so the beginning of the recreation by Jesus is also very good. Because in every single miracle that Jesus does, the new creation is breaking in.

With every ear that hears and every tongue that's released, with every limb that's restored, with every body that is revitalized, the kingdom of God, the life that God intended for us is breaking in.

And so in Jesus' life and ministry, we get a preview. And then in Jesus' death and resurrection, we get the promise that this world will be remade.

[21 : 38] It is getting an extreme makeover to end all makeovers. And of course, we're not there yet. But our sure and certain hope is that one day we will be there.

All because of Jesus. That's why Jesus is such good news, not just for our individual lives, but for the whole of creation. Jesus is marvelously remaking our lives and our world into what they should be.

Well, let me wrap up as we conclude. How does this change us? We've seen a marvelous restoration. We've seen a messianic revelation.

We've seen a marvelous remaking. But how does this change us? Well, now that Jesus has started his extreme makeover of this world, when one day everything will be made perfect, the question is, are we going to let Jesus do his restoration work in our lives, in our hearts?

Because we don't need to wait for his return before we enter into the joy of his kingdom. Jesus Christ can transform our lives right now and transform them for all eternity.

[22 : 58] The deaf and mute man was changed by hearing and speech. And so are we. So hearing. Jesus opened up his deaf ears.

So he began to hear the voice of God speaking to him. And our deaf ears need to be open too, so that we hear and we listen to what God is saying to us.

Because God has spoken to us clearly in Jesus Christ. Jesus came to save us by restoring our broken humanity. He took on our humanity.

He became a man so that he could suffer and die. Because only human flesh can die. And Jesus was willing to be infected with the virus of our sin.

He took that sin on himself when he died on the cross so that we could be forgiven. He was punished in our place so that we need not suffer punishment for all eternity in hell.

[24 : 08] In other words, Jesus was broken on the cross so that we can be healed. And so that now, through faith in Jesus Christ, we become a new creation.

And God is getting us ready for the new creation to come in the future. And so, if you're tuning in today and you wouldn't call yourself a Christian, please don't close your ears to the good news of Jesus Christ.

But if you would call yourself a Christian, then this good news will transform what you say. It will transform your speech. After Jesus said, be opened, the man's ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he began to speak plainly.

So, if God has opened our ears and melted our hearts with the good news of his son, then our tongues will be loosened as well.

In other words, when we believe the good news of Jesus Christ, we'll want to praise God, but we'll also want to proclaim that good news to others. Because only Christianity offers a hope that can face everything, even death.

[25 : 23] Our secular world offers absolutely no hope. That's why, at crisis times like these, the best our secular world can do is to get a bunch of celebrities together to sing John Lennon's Imagine There's No Heaven.

And that kind of patronising, preaching so badly misses the mark. It can't offer the hope that people today are longing for. Only Jesus Christ can give that.

Because through his death and his resurrection, we can be sure that Jesus has not only defeated death, but he will destroy all disease, all suffering, and all evil forever.

Because he is remaking this broken world. Everybody loves a good makeover. And the only hope for our broken humanity and our broken world is Jesus Christ.

That's what our world so desperately needs to hear right now, even if it doesn't think it does. So let's go. As those whose lives have been transformed and changed by this good news, let's go and share it with everyone.

[26 : 42] Let me close with a prayer. Thank you, God, for sending Jesus into this world to give this world and our lives a makeover.

To restore our broken lives and to remake this broken creation. We thank you that you're a good God who loves us and who is working to sort everything out.

So that all wrongs will be made right. All because of the life and death and resurrection of Jesus. And so today we give our thanks. In Jesus' name.

Amen.