

When Jesus performed miracles, he was performing signs. People often wanted to see signs so that they could be convinced that Jesus was God's Son and Anointed One. But they wanted these signs on their own terms. They wanted to decide whether the signs were good enough. Yet, Jesus performed signs to teach specific things. His signs were not meant simply to wow the crowds and overwhelm them to admit who he is. His signs were meant to signify what God wants to teach. Today we consider how Jesus healed a deaf man who had a speech defect. He didn't just wave his hands over him or snap his fingers. Instead, what Jesus did with this man was much more intentional. Using sign language, Jesus was teaching how God gives eternal life.

First, Jesus took the man aside away from the crowd. Here, Jesus is teaching him that he does not need to be made right before the world. Certainly we sin against each other, those around us can find faults in us, and we can find faults in them. But as David confesses to the Lord in Psalm 51, "Against You, You only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight." The Lord takes this man aside so that he is facing none other than God himself.

This is how we are to hear God's Word. When you sit here this morning, listening to the Word of the Lord, you are not dealing with your standing before other people. Put away any thoughts about what this or that person thinks of you. Don't dwell on what this or that person said to you before church. Don't be distracted by how well you can sing, about what things you are hearing from anyone else. And listen to the voice of the living God. Stand before him and face him.

As Jesus, God in the flesh, stands alone with this man, he continues his sign language. He puts his fingers into the man's ears. Here, Jesus is signifying something else. He is teaching the man that he is going to open his ears. As he had spoken through Moses so many years before, "Hear, O Israel! The LORD our God, the LORD is one!" The one Lord Jesus Christ, God in the flesh, shows himself, and no one else, to this deaf man. And he signals for him to hear. Those who have ears to hear let them hear. And who gives us ears to hear? None other than God himself.

In the Scriptures, the finger of God refers to the Spirit of God. The Ten Commandments were written on stone with God's finger (Exod 31:18). And Paul tells his hearers that we are Christ's letter, not written with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on stone tablets but on tablets of human hearts (2 Cor 3:3). So the finger of Jesus signifies that the Spirit of God who carved the Ten Commandments on tablets of stone is the same Spirit of the living God who would open up his ears to hear God's Word.

Here is the difference between the two services of God. The one service is the law, written on tablets of stone. This service sets before us what we should do – love God above all things and your neighbor as yourself. It reveals the sin of our hearts and God's condemnation against it, just as fire and thunder were revealed on Mount Sinai. This service came with great and terrifying glory. But here comes Jesus. He is the very glory of God in the flesh. His finger is the very finger of God. The Holy Spirit comes forth from him. And he comes with an even better service. The service of the law would simply point out that the man is deaf. It would only reveal the deep death of the poor guy. But this service Jesus brings is greater. It has even greater glory. Because this service brings life. It opens up the ears of the deaf and causes them to hear the words of God written in the scrolls of the prophets and apostles. This is what Jesus' fingers are signifying. His own Spirit is about to open this man's ears so that he may hear.

Next, Jesus spits and touches the man's tongue. Out of Jesus flows not only the Spirit of God, but with him living water. To the eyes of bystanders, this might look like an unsavory and perhaps vulgar sight.

He spits. It seems kind of gross, just like it would be kind of gross to go up to some and start breathing into his face. But God wants us to pay attention to what he is signifying. The same Lord who breathed into Adam's nostrils the Spirit of life is he who sits before this deaf man spitting and then touching his tongue.

He again is using sign language to communicate to this man. He is teaching him that he is about to heal his tongue. He not only wants the man to hear, but he also wants him to speak. Faith comes by hearing God's Word. And what proceeds out of faith is a confession of the name of Jesus. With the heart you believe and are justified, and with the mouth you confess unto salvation (Rom 10:10). Jesus, who was obedient all the way to death, who took every sin of thought, deed, and word upon himself, who did all things well, who made the good confession before his accusers and before Pontius Pilate, who bore our guilt on the cross – this Lord Jesus is about to make this man speak. He teaches us to confess just as he confessed. He gives us boldness first before God and then before all people. And he promises that those who confess him before men, he will also confess them before his Father who is in heaven (Matt 10).

Next, Jesus looks up to heaven. He looks to heaven to show the man where this power comes from. He is the only Son of God, the Son of Man who is in heaven and has come down to poor sinners here on earth to redeem them.

Then Jesus sighs. Here he shows his great compassion. Through his sighing, groaning, and dying on the cross he bore all your sins and carried all your troubles. He intercedes for you, pleading for you before the Father in heaven, showing before his thrown his pierced hands and feet, advocating for you. And he gives you his Holy Spirit who helps you when you are not able to express what you need with words. When your tongue is stuck and you can't articulate what your faith clings to, the Holy Spirit intercedes on your behalf with sighs, which are too deep for words (Rom 8:26). So giving this man the very finger of God, the Spirit of the living God in his ears, he also lets out this sigh too deep for words, teaching this man how great God's compassion is for him.

Finally, Jesus speaks. This is the most important part. The whole time, Jesus has been communicating with him. He has been using sign language. My grandparents on my mother's side were both deaf, and they were taught the gospel through sign language. This is because of God's great mercy. He is so determined to give people faith that even when they can't hear he is going to great lengths to communicate to them his saving gospel. He does this with little babies as he pours water on their heads, uniting to that water his own name, his own Word, his own promise. But just as the little babies are to grow in their baptism, continuing to hear God's Word, so Jesus doesn't only use sign language. He actually speaks with his plain voice. He uses the language of the people. He says, "Be opened."

This teaches us that God wants us always to hear his Word. My grandparents who spent their lives knowing the Word only through sign now hear it in the presence of their Savior, and on the last day we will all hear more clearly than we could ever have imagined. This is our hope as God opens up our lips even now to confess and sing of what God has done for us in Christ.

Jesus' Word opened up the deaf man's ears and loosened his tongue. And the man spoke. There are a couple different ways we can translate how the man spoke. We can say he spoke plainly or naturally. He didn't have a speech impediment anymore. But we could also translate it to say that he spoke rightly or correctly. They both go together. God gives us the boldness to speak what is right, to speak what is

true, to confess the correct teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ. He also helps us in our weakness so that we may speak clearly and plainly.

Now, not all of us are as articulate. None of us is as eloquent as we should be. But our ability to confess God's Word, to sing of what Christ has done, or to explain what our Lord teaches in the Bible are all gifts from God. Only God has done all things well. Only Christ has defeated sin and death, loosing whatever chains might bind us in our hearts or mouths. Only his Spirit gives us the faith to believe his words and the tongues to confess, even as he places and pours on our lips the body and blood of our Savior. This remains the ground of our hope as we wait for Christ to heal us completely on the last day. On that day, every knee will bow and every tongue will confess who Jesus is. He is the Lord, the Lord who has saved us, the Lord whose Word rings in our ears and whose name rests on our tongues. We therefore rely on his sure Word, whatever our weaknesses might be.

Jesus told the crowds not to tell anyone what they had seen. It's not that Jesus didn't want anyone to know about this. It's that he was about to do something much greater. He was going to make all things new in his death and resurrection. But the fact that the people didn't follow Jesus' instruction teaches us just how powerful Jesus' words are. They can't help but talk about it. They are overwhelmed by what Christ has done and said. So it is today. For better or for worse, people can't help but talk about Jesus. Whether they are using his name in vain or they are talking about the things he has done, his name will continue to be uttered in this world until he returns. But in the meantime, Jesus teaches us to confess his name rightly. He gives us his Holy Spirit to keep us from error and false doctrines. And he assures us that as often as we eat his body and drink his blood, we confess his death until he returns. This is our confession. This is our hope. May he continue to give us ears to hear and tongues to confess! Amen.