

Zealous Proclaimers

Proper 18

Pastor Josh Frazee

Mark 7:31-37

Grace, peace, and mercy be to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

In the front page of the hymnal there's a list of prayers. The bottom one asks for blessing on God's Word. It reads: "Lord God, bless Your Word wherever it is proclaimed. Make it a word of power and peace to convert those not yet your own and to confirm those who have come to saving faith. May Your Word pass from the ear to the heart, from the heart to the lip, and from the lip to the life that, as You have promised, Your Word may achieve the purpose for which You send it (LSB, front page)."

This is the prayer of every pastor and everyone who knows and believes God's Word. In it we ask that God would open our ears to the hearing of His Word; and that from that opening, the Word would well up so much in our hearts that we would have no other choice but to zealously proclaim it to those around us.

A couple weeks ago, though, God asked what good it would do if someone had a book but no one around could read it—whether because the book was sealed or if the book was unsealed and the person being asked could not read. Truly it would do the one wanting to learn from the book no good at all. Today, we have a person who can neither hear nor speak properly.

More than that, we have a whole crowd who Jesus tells not to speak—but He could not stop them. Did the crowd continue speaking for their better or for their worse? What about us? Are we to speak or to remain silent?

Verse 1

Our text begins: "Then (Jesus) returned from the region of Tyre and went through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis. 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."

After a failed attempt to get away by Himself in the region of Tyre and Sidon, Jesus returned to the region of the Decapolis. They, that is, a crowd, brought Him a man who could neither hear nor speak properly. When they do, what is the first thing Jesus does? Look at the next verse: He took "him aside from the crowd privately."

While it is good, right, and proper that we Christians who know who Jesus is proclaim Him to others, there are those who should not speak about Jesus. This crowd brought Him a man to be healed, but keep in mind that even Herod would later desire to see Jesus perform a miracle—what he may very well have thought was nothing but a trick, an illusion. Jesus will heal this man, but He does so privately—in secret. He does this because this crowd is not made up of ones who knew who He was and why He was here. They did know that Jesus could heal this man, but again, even Herod knew that Jesus had done great deeds, yet thought He was a gimmick, not the Savior who He would prove to be.

Are there those today who should keep from speaking about Jesus? Again, yes. Those who have not attended church and heard the Word—those who do not know Jesus should not speak about Him. Yet that does not stop some from speaking about Him. They speak, even though they have not been sent. This only reminds us once again that there were those making proclamations about God in Jeremiah's and Isaiah's times, even though they had not been sent. They claimed that Egypt was an acceptable way to look for help, even though God had clearly spoken against trusting Egypt by those whom He *had* sent—that is, Jeremiah and Isaiah.

Verse 2

We continue our text: “And taking him aside from the crowd privately, he put his fingers into his ears, and after spitting touched his tongue. And looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, ‘Ephphatha,’ that is, ‘Be opened.’ And his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly.”

Now to be fair, the miracles that Jesus did were signs of who He was as the Messiah to come. Even Peter got that right, confessing Jesus to be the Christ, the son of the living God. Yet even Peter refused to accept that Jesus would die. The miracles were not the only things necessary to know who Jesus was and what He had come to do. So Jesus took the man aside and healed him privately.

So what about you? Are you supposed to remain silent? Are things different now than they were then?

Remember that you are now living after Jesus’ death and resurrection. His death and resurrection were the keys to understanding His whole purpose, which was to save humanity from their sins. The people away from whom Jesus took the man and healed him were living at a time before Jesus’ purpose had been revealed. But on top of that, these people were not Temple-goers; they were a crowd. And again, God doesn’t want just anyone speaking about Him because, as God has made clear, without knowing Jesus, one doesn’t know God.

Unlike the people of that crowd, you are living after Jesus’ death and resurrection; and you are ones who know Jesus. Through the witness of the apostles written down and the power of the Holy Spirit to believe it, you know who Jesus is and what His purpose was and continues to be.

Verse 3

“Jesus charged them to tell no one. But the more he charged them, the more zealously they proclaimed it. And they were astonished beyond measure, saying, ‘He has done all things well. He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak.’”

Look again at those closing verses. Jesus charged the crowd not to speak because He knew they would focus on the wrong things. They said that “He has done all things well”—namely, the healing of the deaf and mute man. And it is true that Jesus healed the man very well—to the point that he could speak plainly, even after years of having a speech impediment. Yet is this what they were to focus on? No. The miracles only pointed to Jesus as the Messiah to come, but did not reveal His ultimate goal.

Today we know that ultimate goal; we live after it; and we believe on it for our salvation. Yet the forgiveness of sins is not just for us. It is for all the world. So our prayer has been and continues to be: “Lord God, bless Your Word wherever it is proclaimed. Make it a word of power and peace to convert those not yet Your own and to confirm those who have come to saving faith. May Your Word pass from the ear to the heart, from the heart to the lip, and from the lip to the life that, as You have promised, Your Word may achieve the purpose for which You send it (LSB, front page).”

Our desire is that all people would hear the Word. So we invite them to “Come and see”—“Come and see” this one Jesus who is the fulfillment of the promises of God for our salvation! And we hope and pray that the Holy Spirit may take hold of their hearts and implant saving faith in them, as He has for us. In Jesus’ Name. Amen.

