

*Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.*

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

If God does all things well, and is the perfect source of all that is good, then why is there misery in this world? Why are there people in real need? Have you ever been asked that question by an unbeliever? Or maybe you've even wondered that yourself. If there really is a God and he really is good, then there most certainly should not be misery or need, defects, problems or anything lacking. Seems logical at first. And there are plenty of examples brought to the table. The human back is vulnerable and weak. It's susceptible to nerve damage that causes great pain. More than one member of this church can attest to that. The back isn't done right! Bodies are susceptible to out of control growing cells we call cancer. That's not right! The world has famines, earthquakes, tornados, and other natural disasters. It's not done well! And the list could go on and on.

How can we come to grips with this apparent blatant contradiction? Let's take a look at today's Gospel lesson and receive some words of wisdom from our God – words which give understanding and increase our faith.

The text begins: **“Some people brought to Jesus a man who was deaf and could hardly talk, and they begged him to place his hand on the man.”**

This man had a big problem. His ears were not working right. He could not hear. He had a major disability. Today, our society is much more friendly toward those who are deaf and hard of hearing. We have closed captioning on our TV programs. There are schools for the deaf where they can learn sign language, lip reading and develop the ability to speak. But even with modern assistance and sensitivities, it's still very hard to be deaf. What often happens is that those who are deaf have deaf friends. A subculture often develops because they have a unique way of understanding and interacting with the world. They have a unique language that most others do not understand. So there is a real detachment from the hearing world.

But in Jesus' day, this man would have had an even more difficult life. He was isolated from the rest of the world, unable to communicate effectively. There were no schools for the deaf. No standardized sign language. He was excluded from most human companionship because of the inability to hear and his difficulty in speaking. By the way, because he did have some speaking ability, some think that perhaps this man was not born deaf, but became deaf later in life. Whatever the case, this man was suffering, and his friends wanted to help.

But did you stop to think about the greatest tragedy for this man? He was unable to hear. It was likely that he was unable to read. This man was also cut off from the ability to hear God's Word. The greatest tragedy here is that the man was unable to hear God's Word and promises.

Now, some look at this story and others like it and say, “Here is the evidence that there is no God. If God is good and loving and does all things well, why was this man deaf? Why was he incapable of hearing God's Word? Here we see misery, need, and suffering. This isn't right! This isn't good. So some reach the conclusion: there must not be a God.

The man had this problem in his life. What problem do you have in your life that brings misery and challenges your faith in a God that is good? Do you or a loved one suffer physically? Back pain. Flu. Cancer. Or something else. Have you or a loved one been the victim of crime? Rape. Theft. Mugging. Credit card stolen. Have you or a loved one been the victim of a natural disaster? Tornado. Strong winds. Fire. Flooding. Or have you had a loved one taken from you in death? Any of these

things... all of these things... make us question God Why the misery and suffering? Why this unfulfilled need?

Let's recognize the misery and the need for what it is. It's caused by something destructive. It's cause by sin. Sin is a destructive power, ruining what is right and good. "But God allows it!" This is true. God allows it. Why does God allow it? He allows it because God is bringing about a greater good. God is teaching us that self-sufficiency may be the American way, but it's not God's way. He created us to have God-dependency. The problems and challenges of this life, and especially as we face death, are just the slap in the face we need to understand and believe, we are not sufficient to take care of this misery, this need. We need God. And what blessings are ours when we turn to God and our trust in him in our time of need. Look how the deaf man was blessed because he came to Jesus:

**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. He looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him, "Ephphatha!" (which means, "Be opened!").**

What happened here? "The man was healed," is probably the answer that just popped into your head. But look at something more. How did Jesus treat the man? Did you notice his attention, sensitivity, understanding and compassion? He deals with the man on an individual basis, fulfilling his personal need. Amazing!

Jesus took the man aside, away from the crowds. Remember, the man is deaf. He can see a huge number of people crowded around Jesus. But he has no idea what's going on. He sees lips moving and gestures and maybe a little bit of chaos, but he has no idea, no clue, what's happening here. Jesus takes him away from it all. He wants the man to know him personally... to see and know the one who is healing him. Then note how Jesus does things so visibly. Jesus could have certainly simply have spoken words of healing, but what good would that do? The man would only see Jesus' lips moving. So Jesus communicates to the man that this healing comes from him and him alone... how? Jesus puts his fingers in the man's ears. The hearing he was about to receive was coming from Jesus by God's power. He spits he touches the man's tongue. The speaking he was about to do was coming from Jesus and by God's power. Then Jesus looks up to heaven. The man understood what Jesus communicating. This is power from the heavenly Father. Jesus sighs deeply. The man can't hear it, but he can see Jesus' chest go and back down. Jesus was telling him without words, "I feel for you. I feel your suffering." He was communicating nonverbally that he was fulfilling the prophecy in Isaiah 53:4: "Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows." In his sigh, Jesus communicated compassion and empathy. He literally felt the man's pain. And then Jesus said **to him...** "Ephphatha!" This was an Aramaic word in the man's native tongue which means "Be opened." The world is utter silence for the man until the very first words his fixed ears hear: "Be opened!"

Let's pause here briefly. Friends, whatever your misery right now. Whatever your need, understand this: You are **not** facing it alone. With you, ministering to your personal need in your exact problem, communicating to you in the way you understand, feeling your pain and your heart ache... is your Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. He knows you like no one else does. He deals with us one at a time with personal love and attention. Isn't that already a great comfort? But there's more:

**At this, the man's ears were opened, his tongue was loosened and he began to speak plainly.** Jesus spoke a single word and the man was cured. Instantly full hearing returned. Instantly clear speech returned. It was a genuine miracle. The man would be part of society again. He wouldn't be the odd one out in every conversation. Communication was again possible! What a blessing. Jesus not only felt for the man, he delivered the man from what was afflicting him.

But let's not miss the bigger miracle. Sin was the root cause of this defect that resulted in

hearing loss for the man. The word of Jesus was the cure. Sin is the root cause of all misery, suffering and need. Praise be to God that he takes care of not just one of the effects of sin (like deafness), but by his creative power and his mighty word he removes the cause: sin itself. Jesus Christ is the Word of God made flesh. That same Word which created the universe is the powerful Word which was made flesh to remove sin and restore what was lost.

Truth is that spiritually the Bible describes every last one of us as deaf. God our Creator speaks his law to us, revealing his will for our lives. We owe everything to him, yet his words fall on deaf ears. God says, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, souls strength and mind." And we spiritually deaf hear: [Only lips move.] *Love the Lord your God with all your heart, souls strength and mind.* Our deaf spiritual ears can't comprehend putting God on the throne of our hearts all the time and living always and only for our king.

God says, "Love your neighbor as yourself." And we spiritually deaf hear, [Only lips move.] "*Love your neighbor as yourself.*" We live for self, not for our neighbor.

Sometimes the opposite happens with just as dire consequences. Our conscience convicts us and we feel guilty over our sin and our way of living. In fact, we may be on the verge of despair. In such times, we can also be spiritually deaf... this time to God's promises. God says, "I credit my Son's perfect and holy life to you! You are clothed in him and are forgiven." Our spiritually deaf ears can't hear it. "His life was laid down on a cross for your sin and guilt! You are free! You are forgiven!" We can't hear it. We remain in despair.

Just as the Word of Jesus opened the man's ears, the Word of God which we are hearing right now opens our spiritual ears. In a miracle we call faith we hear what we were once deaf to: we are sinners, and that cuts us to the heart. We are forgiven by God through the Lord Jesus Christ. Rejoice that you can hear! Thank God for this miracle.

Look at how the text ends: "**Jesus commanded them not to tell anyone. But the more he did so, the more they kept talking about it.**"

Don't spread the word! Why? Jesus doesn't want publicity getting in the way of his march to the cross. Think of the disaster the feeding of the 5,000 almost became. Most didn't understand his purpose or goal. Sharing the news about this miracle wouldn't help. But they couldn't keep quiet. This was too amazing. Too good not to share.

Now it's different for us. Jesus has told us to share the good news! It's no less amazing that we can hear spiritually. Is our reaction the same? Can nothing restrain us from sharing this good news?

And the text concludes: "**People were overwhelmed with amazement. 'He has done everything well,' they said. 'He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak.'**"

When all was said and done, the people were not saying, "God does things poorly." They were forced to concede that he does all things well.

God allows the effects of sin to bring misery and need. He does. Is this evidence that he doesn't care? Just the opposite! He is the one provides in need. He teaches us our dependence on him. He always deals with us, one at a time, with perfect understanding and compassion. He allows the needs that we need and then helps and strengthens and ultimately delivers us at just the right moment and in just the right way.

Friends, whatever you struggle with today or in the future, may God open your spiritual ears and hearts and minds that you may understand the truth that the crowds took home that day, and confess it always: "Jesus has done everything well." Amen.