

Miracles of Jesus 12-09-09a

This is Sunday, the 9th of September, 2012. We're in a series looking at the miracles of the Lord Jesus. And we're now looking at what, on my list, are miracles 22 and 24.

They're somewhere in the early 20s, depending on how you count them. And we established the introduction for them last time. We're going to move into an analysis of the details and, most importantly, attempt to answer the question, so what? Jesus heals somebody with a particular kind of affliction.

He does it in a particular kind of way. He says a particular thing, and there's a particular kind of response. This is sort of the model for all of our miracles, right? So why are these presented as they are? That's what we'll take up once we pause for a moment and go to the Lord in prayer.

Father, we do thank you for the wonderful blessing that you have bestowed on us of freedom in the Lord Jesus Christ, of unity, of fellowship, of familial bond, of support and encouragement, and a like-mindedness and an enthusiasm that comes and is sustained and grown through our contact with one another, recognition that we are not alone, that we have others who are making the same journey through life with the same goals in view, who share a perspective on future things and the fulfillment of your promises and the establishment of the kingdom of the Lord Jesus and your own kingdom in the eternal ages to come. We thank you for this time in our lives, this initial phase where we are on this earth and we find ourselves initially limited and fallen and in need. And as we see your provision and your grace meeting that need, rescuing us and transferring us out of darkness into light, into purpose, into meaning, into things that are eternal, we can do nothing but kneel in gratitude and thank you for your grace and for the Lord Jesus Christ who has made all these things possible for us, who had no redeeming value, no quality, nothing to recommend us, being lost and hopeless and without you in this world.

We thank you that not only have you saved us, not only have you granted us the tremendous gift of eternal life, but you have converted this world of cursing and fallenness and our sinful nature and our shortcomings and failures into an opportunity to produce that which is good, to strengthen our faith, to learn about the details of your character and your plan and purpose both now and in times to come. We pray that as we study together this morning that God the Holy Spirit will teach us and impress these things on us in a way that will stick, that will be memorable, that will change the way we think and prioritize the goals that we set, the actions that we perform so that by faith we can lay hold of righteousness, we can learn to be of service both now and later, we can inherit blessing both now and later, we can reflect the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ both now and forevermore. We ask your blessing on us as we study together in Jesus' name.

Amen. The two miracles of which we speak and at which we look this morning are

uniquely communicated to us in a single gospel. This is the gospel of Mark, chapters 7 and 8. We laid a foundation for this last time.

We'll just briefly review the fact that these are on each side of the feeding of the 4,000 in Mark's account. And this ties back to our study of bread. And this is a very important theme in Scripture.

We have a lot that is said about it. Of the many things that we have already noted, I will just add that God gave the Israelites a kind of bread as they journeyed from Egypt to the Promised Land and ended up wandering in the wilderness. And this manna, God says, He gave them as a test because it wasn't a free, no-strings-attached gift, was it? Along with the gift came a requirement.

Along with that provision came instructions. Only gather what you need. Use what you gather.

Gather twice as much on the day before the Sabbath. What happened if they defied those instructions? It spoiled. The truth that God gives us is bread for our souls.

It is manna from heaven, but it comes with instructions. And there is a process. There is a way to use the truth that God gives us.

Having it is not enough. They didn't just go out and gather some manna, stick it in a pot, and everything was great. They had to do something with it, right? You could eat it straight.

You could grind it. You could cook with it. You could do different things.

It reminds me of the cartoons where the guy is stranded on an island. All he's got is a cookbook that says 1,001 ways to prepare coconut. Yosemite Sam, I think, had one of those before he decided that he wanted some rabbit.

And they had the 101,001 ways to prepare manna. And some of them grew tired of it. They said, Well, this isn't interesting.

It's not stimulating. It's not a fancy French dish. It's just manna.

And sometimes we have the same trouble. We can struggle with, Well, I know the Bible. I know what's in Genesis.

I know what's in Revelation. I know what's in the Gospels mainly. And it's all just review and repetition.

I don't see where the fascination is. And yet it is essential for our life, and it is essential that we always remember the instructions that come with it. Well, oddly enough, this relates to these miracles.

Because these miracles specifically address defects of perception. In the first case, you have a man who cannot hear and seemingly, therefore, cannot speak. People that are deaf from birth have an extremely difficult time speaking because they've never heard speech.

They can't hear their own vocalizations and compare them to others. They don't learn. We're so attuned to this when we're young and our brains are developing that we pick up accents from our parents and our surroundings that sometimes we carry our entire life.

And somebody born up north, you can pick it up in their speech. Somebody born down south, you pick it up in their speech. Someone from Australia, someone from England, someone from Ireland, it's in their speech.

And try as you might, those early conditioning things can be very difficult to shake. In the same way, this man, his problem really begins with his deafness. And he can't speak until he can hear.

The second episode in chapter 8, beginning at verse 22, is blindness and inability to see. We noted last time the strong parallels in these two accounts. Do you remember those? I don't really have time to review them this morning, but we went in great detail last time, and I hope you recall that these are structured to almost require us to compare them.

They are so similar in their sequence and in their details and in the way that they are presented that you cannot help but say, I think we're supposed to look at these side by side. And that's what we're going to do this morning. So let's review the details of this first account, Jesus healing the deaf mute.

Beginning in chapter 7 of Mark, verse 31, Again, departing from the region of Tyre and Sidon, this was the occasion of the healing of the Syrophoenician woman's daughter by the casting out of the demon. He came through the midst of the region of Decapolis to the Sea of Galilee. And there's sort of a transition there.

Why would you loop around through Decapolis? Well, I'm sure he had practical and physical reasons, but think about it conceptually. Tyre and Sidon are entirely Gentile, right? Decapolis is mixed. And when you get back to Galilee and the shores of the sea, you're back to a largely Jewish context.

So he has been among the Gentiles, he travels through the mixed multitude, and he's now kind of back in the vicinity of his own. They brought to him one who was deaf and had an impediment in his speech, and they begged him to put his hand on him. Now, Jesus has just done a miracle at a distance, right? They probably haven't heard about this.

The account hasn't traveled along. What do they think is required of Jesus in order for

the man to be made whole? Well, you've got to lay your hand on him. You've got to touch him.

You've got to minister him in some way. This goes back to the Old Testament prophet-type healing, does it not? Where the prophet would touch, would stretch out on him three times. You can't believe the stuff that's in commentaries.

You go back and read about these healings by Elijah and Elisha and so on, and they talk about how, well, actually what happened, when the prophet got on top of the child, it produced sort of a compression. There was a, what do you call it, where you do CPR on someone. Off and on, off and on three times, he basically did sort of a crude CPR, restarted the child's heart.

Oh, please. If you can't get any, well, never mind. This idea, though, comes forward, and people assume, well, Jesus, this will be a big deal.

We think he can heal, but it's going to need some mechanics. It will be mechanical. And they said, put your hand on him.

Now, of all of the different things that they could have said, they said, please heal him, please restore him, do something for him. But they say, lay your hand on him. They believe that this laying on of hands will heal the sick.

And you have this as a strongly rooted Jewish concept. You even have it over in James. Remember the anointing of oil and laying on of hands by the elders? The prayer of faith will heal the sick.

So, he took him aside from the multitude, put his fingers in his ears, spat, and touched his tongue. Now, Jesus didn't just spit on the ground and then touch his tongue with his finger. What's implied here, what is communicated here is that Jesus spat on his fingers and then touched his tongue with this little dab of saliva.

And people say, ew, that's not sanitary. Well, be that as it may. He put his fingers in his ears first.

Notice he didn't spit on his fingers. People have done this when you're a little kid. They get their finger wet and stick it in your ear.

And that's very uncomfortable. But he puts his fingers in his ears. Now, why? Fingers, plural.

You expect that this indicates that it was one on each side. Jesus reaches out. And what does this require? He is looking at the man full in the face, face to face.

The man is not blind. He sees Jesus. Jesus sees him.

Jesus reaches forward and puts his fingers in his ears. Now, what does this do? They did not have, I don't know what you would call it, GSL or Aramaic SL or whatever. They didn't have Israeli Sign Language.

They didn't have Aramaic Sign Language or Greek Sign Language. Jesus could not fingerspell to the man and say, I am about to work on your ears. I'm going to fix your problem with hearing and speech.

So what does this constitute? Does the man have any doubt of what Jesus is up to when he looks him full in the face, reaches forward and puts his fingers in his ears? He is communicating to a man who cannot hear, I am going to fix your ears, right? Is there any other explanation for this? Does Jesus need to touch his ears? When he's healed other people, did he touch them? We don't know what the details are. But in this particular case, the detail is given to us. Why? Because there is a communication of what is about to happen before it happens.

This is how I construe it. There's no need. Jesus could have healed this guy before they ever brought him.

Somebody could have come up and said, hey, I've got a brother-in-law that's deaf. Could you do something? Be it to you according to your faith. He returns and the man could hear and speak.

So there is a significance to it on the occasion. And notice, he's not with the multitude anymore. So this isn't communicating to the multitude.

Who is Jesus communicating with here? The guy. The guy can't lip read. So Jesus reaches out and puts his fingers in his ears.

I think that's what this is for. I'm pointing to your problem. I am addressing your problem.

I know you're deaf. That's why you're here. That's why you and I are face to face.

You've got this problem. I'm about to fix it. Notice, by the way, that when Jesus touches the man's ears, he isn't made undeaf.

It wasn't a touch required for healing. So what's it for? Well, the only conclusion I can draw is it is communication. This pertains, by the way, to our overall interpretation of the passage.

So Jesus is essentially telling the man in what we would call dumb show, in symbolic or graphic way, what he is about to do. I'm going to fix your ears. Then he spits on his fingers and moves the moistened fingers toward the man's tongue.

Now, it doesn't say, And behold, Peter and John got on each side of the man and pried his mouth open. Right? How can he touch his tongue if the man is standing there? How

does he touch his tongue? He didn't say, Open, open, open your mouth. The guy doesn't lip read.

So when Jesus spits on his fingers and then reaches out to touch the man's tongue, the man opens his mouth, right? How can you touch somebody's tongue unless they give you that opportunity by opening their mouth? The man knows. I can't hear. I can't speak.

He's already pointed to my ears. Now, he has taken his own mouth, which apparently works, and he seems to be telling me that he's going to fix my speech as well. And the man opens his mouth.

I would construe this as response, as invitation. Yes, Lord, heal me. I believe that you can do it.

And even though saliva in the Jewish world is an unclean, you spit on somebody, you render them unclean, I trust you that you know what you're doing. And even though in technical terms this is not a good or proper thing, in your case, it's okay. In the same way when Jesus would touch a dead body, when Jesus would touch a leper.

He's got the saliva. And so when the man opens his mouth, this is in nonverbal terms, assent, invitation, right? I would say he agrees. He doesn't startle back and say, like Peter, you're not going to wash my feet, Lord.

You're not going to touch my... You've got spit on your hands. What are you getting your hands near me for? You want to render me unclean? I've got enough problems. He opens his mouth and Jesus touches his tongue.

You can't touch somebody's tongue unless they allow you in this sort of context. Then, by the way, the man is still not healed. He still can't hear.

He still can't speak, right? Because it says in the next verse, then looking up to heaven, Jesus groans, he sighs. But he looks up to heaven. Now, who's the audience? Who's the audience? Who's the audience? Just this man who only has the power of sight, right? If Jesus prays to his Father, how's the man going to know he's praying? How's the man going to know that Jesus is getting the source of the power to perform this miracle from heaven? Jesus looks up to heaven.

The man knows this is an appeal to the God of Israel. The power of the God of Israel is being invoked here. Jesus looks up.

Isn't it amazing how adept and how gracious Jesus is to communicate with this man in terms that he can understand despite his limitations? His limitations do not keep the Lord Jesus from communicating everything he needs to know. He does it with his fingers. He does it with his tongue.

He does it with his gesture looking toward heaven. So the man knows exactly what's going on, and he hasn't heard a word. He has assented.

He has invited the Lord to do this without speaking a word. Those limitations are no limitation when it comes to Jesus. Looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, ephphatha, which is Aramaic for be opened.

It's an imperative. Now, this is the one place where you could argue that it gets a little strange because Jesus said to him, to a man who cannot hear, be opened. And this is a nice single command that addresses two problems.

Ears be opened. Mouth be opened. It's difficult to think of a better single command you could give that would apply to both.

Otherwise, you'd have to say, hear and speak, or listen and talk. But there is one common command that you can give for both hearing and speaking, and that's the one that Jesus chooses. He speaks it in Aramaic.

He says, ephphatha. But he speaks it to a man who is deaf. And this is interesting from a theological perspective.

I won't digress very far, but it's one of my areas of enthusiasm to address the arguments of those who say that when you're lost in sin, when you're an unbeliever, and God decides to save you, it is all of God, because you're dead. You're like Lazarus in the tomb, and you can't come out unless God, you cannot believe unless God enables you to believe, and God only chooses some to be enabled. But you look at the examples that are given.

The most common example I hear is from John 11 and Lazarus. Lazarus, come forth. Well, Lazarus was dead.

So Lazarus could do nothing to obey. It's all of grace. It's all of God.

And yet, somehow, Jesus didn't go in and wake up Lazarus and lay his hands on him and bring him back to life and say, okay, Lazarus, come on out now. Jesus spoke to a dead man. The dead man heard him and complied.

So to me, this makes that not a very good illustration if you want to argue that God has to pre-save you before you can respond in faith and be saved. He has to pre-select you. He has to elect you.

He has to preveniently enable you. And, of course, if he doesn't give you that enablement, you don't get saved, and he doesn't give that enablement to everyone. So basically, God decides who's saved and who isn't.

This is a very common theological view. Well, same thing here. He is giving a command

to a guy who can't hear, but he has already communicated with him ahead of time.

While he was deaf, while he was dumb, Jesus has communicated in terms he can understand. This is exactly what happens with us when we are lost. God communicates with us in terms that we can understand.

We attended a debate last night about the existence of God with a guy who's in an atheist club, and most of the people there were from the atheist club, and they wanted to see the Christian take a drubbing. But the idea that you have to have God enable you to believe doesn't comport with Scripture. God communicates.

One of the issues is if you're an atheist, you're still aware. God puts the knowledge of himself in three places. In our hearts, in creation, and in the community of people.

You say, well, I've got a sense that there's a God. If you talk to other people, you find out they've got the same sense. You're not alone in that.

You look around, and cultures all have some mythology or some nod to the otherworldly, the supernatural, the above and beyond. It's not just me. There's not something wrong with me that I've got this weird sense that there's something invisible.

Everybody seems to have it. That's communication. That's a revelation from God.

It's a general revelation. And what we decide to do with that revelation determines whether or not God is going to give us the further information that is specifically related to Jesus Christ, resurrection from the dead, forgiveness of sins, and eternal life with God. If you say no to the first general revelation, there's no point in giving you the second revelation.

You've already said no at the first point. It's not like that's going to change your mind. You've been given the first best pitch, and if you say no to that, the additional isn't, oh, well, if I'd only known that Jesus died on the cross, I would have believed.

But the whole idea that there's a God and that I should have a relationship with Him, well, I'm totally not interested in that. But, oh, now that I find out that Jesus died, well, no, it doesn't make any difference. It is a two-stage process of coming to faith in Jesus Christ.

The first is Hebrews 11.6. If you come to God, you have to first believe that He exists. You have to assent and say yes, that God exists, and that He will benefit those who seek Him out. Not only do I believe there is a God, that there is a great other, that there is a mind and intelligence and something behind creation, but He needs to be sought out.

There are scientists who say, you know, I think there probably is some sort of intelligence behind the design of the universe, but that's as far as I want to go. I'm not

interested in knowing Him or developing a relationship with Him or finding out who He might be or if we have any other evidence. I acknowledge that this didn't happen by accident, but I go no further.

Well, you don't make it past stage one. You might believe that He is, but you have no interest in Him being a rewarder of those who seek Him. Well, you're never going to get to Christianity.

You're never going to get to faith in Christ because you have not sought out God. Seek Him early while He may be yet found. Come to Him while He's yet near.

You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart. You will find Me when you seek out God as the benefactor of those who do so. Well, Jesus speaks to a deaf man.

He has communicated to him in other ways, but now He sort of requires of him something that he seemingly can't do, and yet he does it. He says, Be opened, and He says it to the man. He says to the man, Be opened.

And again, this implies or suggests that the man has a response here. And he seems to hear what Jesus says, even though he doesn't have the physical ability to hear, because he responds by being opened. Jesus doesn't talk to his ears and doesn't talk to his tongue.

Jesus talks to the man, and He says, Be opened. And what happens? Immediately his ears were opened and the impediment of his tongue was loose, and he spoke plainly. You want to talk about a miracle, how long does it take us to learn how to speak? Boy, I got my words backwards, and, you know, we have accent problems and consonant problems, and, you know, you don't have all your teeth yet.

You're trying to do speech. You have to listen to other people. You have to learn the nuances.

What is vocabulary? There's a whole area of your brain that develops with vocabulary and linking syntax and grammatical structure into making yourself intelligible to others. When Jesus says, Be opened, and immediately the man can hear, not only can he hear, but he can interpret what he hears. We talked about this Friday night.

You know, vibrations in the air, what does your brain do with that? Your brain converts it into something understandable to itself. The sound of my voice isn't really reality. It is your brain's interpretation of vibrating molecules in the air.

This isn't actually a real thing. It's your brain making a pattern and making an understandable sense out of. There's no such thing as a voice.

There's not an entity coming out of my mouth and entering into your ear. There is a mechanism that is vibrating the air in this room or vibrating the speaker of whatever you're listening to me on now. Your brain is interpreting those vibrations that your ear mechanism is picking up.

So the point being, immediately his ears were opened and the impediment of his tongue was loosed, all of that brain apparatus is miraculously emplaced. It is as though he grew up as a child and learned to speak and learned to interpret sound. He knows the difference between somebody dropping a basket of bread and somebody talking.

And he has vocabulary. He has syntax. He knows what verbs mean.

He knows what nouns mean. Even though he's never heard it before in his life, he hears and speaks plainly. People say, hey, Uriah, how are you doing? And he says, it's amazing.

Boy, this speech thing is great. What an efficiency. What a convenience.

Now I don't have to mime and do a bunch of symbolic stuff. I can just move my lips and my tongue and you know exactly what I mean. This is what everybody loves about babies growing up into toddlers who can speak.

Because when they're crying, you say, what's the matter? And they say, I'm hungry. He says, ah, great. I didn't have to deduce this by process of elimination.

Well, not wet. It doesn't have a rash. It's already burped in.

It's not mealtime. What could be the matter? Oh, you're overstimulated. There's too much noise in the room.

Let me put you down in a quiet place. And then they calm down. We have to do it by deduction and by inference until they can speak and communicate.

This guy gets the whole package all at once, the ability both to communicate. Now how does this happen to us at spiritual birth? God the Holy Spirit comes and gives us the ability to pray to God and the ability to understand the Word of God through the Holy Spirit instantaneously. We don't have it as carnal minds.

We can understand the things of the Spirit. They're spiritually discerned. But instantaneously that apparatus is given to us.

What a tragedy if we have it and don't use it. Well, that leaves us with the response. I mentioned that both of these miracles have details of what the problem is, what Jesus' solution is, and then what the response is.

We're going to pause here and take our break. When we come back we're going to look

at the response to this first miracle and see what that entails. Then we have a lot of background already to look at the second miracle because the concepts are the same.

The questions and answers are largely the same. So let's pause here and take our break.