

# Immanuel Lutheran Mail Ministry



**Mark 7:31-37** *Then he returned from the region of Tyre and went through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis. <sup>32</sup> 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. <sup>33</sup> And taking him aside from the crowd privately, he put his fingers into his ears, and after spitting touched his tongue. <sup>34</sup> And looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, "Ephphatha," that is, "Be opened." <sup>35</sup> And his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. <sup>36</sup> And Jesus charged them to tell no one. But the more he charged them, the more zealously they proclaimed it. <sup>37</sup> And they were astonished beyond measure, saying, "He has done all things well. He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak."*

Have you heard about the so-called "Healing Explosion" that's taken hold in various corners of American Christianity? It started with a charismatic husband and wife team, Charles and Francis Hunter, who had promised that they would perform miracles of healing by the power of the Holy Spirit. They've both since passed away, but in their heyday, they claimed to be able to restore perfect eyesight to those with vision problems, straighten twisted limbs, make paralysis disappear, and open the ears of the hearing-impaired. They would travel around the country bringing their "healing explosions" to your hometown, filling stadiums with people hoping to be healed.

These sorts of activities are just a small part of what is known as the "Charismatic Movement" in American Christianity. The Pentecostal denominations and "charismatic cells" in the mainline churches are claiming miraculous gifts. They say that with the power of the Holy Spirit, they can speak in unknown languages, cast out demons, pick up poisonous snakes, and heal sick people. And this is prominent in our own neck of the woods. Perhaps you've driven past Ignited Church in North Lakeland, which sponsors many such healing events, and even has a dedicated healing room within which people can go to receive healing from: "chronic illness, incurable diseases, pain, physical injuries, addictions, anxiety, fear, confusion, depression, financial oppression, and generational curses." (<https://www.ignitedchurch.com/ministries/healing-rooms>)

Back in 2008, the church hosted a six-month long event called "Florida Outpouring" led by a faith healer named Todd Bentley, which tens of thousands of people attended. The revival ended in turmoil as the Bentley was exposed for living in a sinful extra-marital relationship, for his unverifiable claims of raising the dead, and even for actually injuring numerous people during his events after the Holy Spirit reportedly told him to punch and kick people in their faces. It's a very sad story, but the saddest aspect is that it's not an *uncommon* story in the Charismatic Movement.

And yet these types of preachers continue to be popular, because they offer something that lots of folks desperately want—deliverance from physical illness. It's pretty clear that those folks are looking to the wrong person, for the wrong kind of healing. They're putting their hands on the TV screen and listening to televangelists when they should be opening their Bibles and listening to God. Let's do that here today. Let's open our Bible today and look at an example of real faith-healing! In the words of our theme this morning:

## **Jesus—The True Faith-Healer**

- I. He CAN heal our bodies—
- II. He ALWAYS heals our souls!

To me, this account of Jesus healing the deaf and speaking impaired man is a very vivid and important one. Because the man Jesus healed reminds me of somebody I know, a person whom I love very dearly—myself! If you take another look at this man, you might see yourself as well. He was a humble person from a small community. He probably wasn't rich. He was a human being with some physical problems, in his case pretty severe ones. Worse than that, he was a human being with a spiritual problem—the problem of his sin. So far, he sounds a lot like me; he sounds a lot like you too!

We're often faced with physical problems in this life. If you haven't been yet, you will be. Maybe they won't be as severe as this fellow's—but maybe they'll actually be worse! This man couldn't hear a thing, and he had trouble speaking. Why? What was the cause of his suffering? Well, if you've ever gone through a serious illness or disability, you've probably spent hours wondering the same thing. "Why me? What did I do to deserve this? What is God punishing me for?" I heard a story from a CLC pastor once who had a certain member facing the same concerns. His daughter had been diagnosed with cancer. He hadn't been to church for quite some time, and he was convinced that this was God's punishment for his absence. The story goes that the pastor told the man that his coming back to church was right, but his reason was all wrong!

You see, it is true that sin bears its consequences in every part of our lives. Our bodies are imperfect, our minds are imperfect, our *world* is imperfect—all because of sin. But, thankfully, God doesn't measure out punishment for your sins on a clear, one-for-one basis, like "you skip church so God lets you get sick." That's not how God works. Jesus made this same point when the people asked Him about some Galileans who had been slaughtered by Pontius Pilate. He said, ***"Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them: do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish."*** (Luke 13:2-5)

If you or someone you are close to are currently battling some affliction, don't look for a particular reason why you're enduring it! The only reason for sickness or ailments of any kind is that we live in a sinful world. But a day is coming when we'll be delivered from this sinful world, when our bodies and minds will be free from every imperfection. One day, by the power of Jesus' love, we will enjoy perfect health in heaven. As God declares that in heaven, ***"death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things [will] have passed away."*** (Revelation 21:4)

But that doesn't mean that Jesus' healing power is locked up tight until Judgment Day—He can and does use it on this earth, even during our lifetime! The man in our text is a good example. A humble fellow from a small town—with a problem only Jesus could cure. But Jesus was a famous teacher, a local celebrity with huge crowds following him wherever he went. What hope could there be that Jesus would help *him*? But soon the impossible was happening; from our text, Jesus took ***"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."*** The miracle had happened! A deaf and speaking impaired man could now hear and speak plainly. Jesus had again revealed his power as the very Son of God.

Now, the question remains, is that miraculous power gone now? Is the Healing Christ absent from our world of today? No, not at all! Don't assume that. For God has ***"placed all things under His feet,"*** (cf.

1 Corinthians 15:27) including physical disease and illness. **Jesus CAN heal our bodies**, and very often He does!

When a pastor visits a person in the hospital, they always offer a prayer together that, if it's God's will, the patient might be delivered from his illness and restored to health. Sometimes that IS God's will, and some recoveries are nothing short of miraculous. We have a good example of that here today. I often think of Mr. Beymer, who at various points in his life was told by the doctors that he was going to die. And yet, here he is today, 80 years old and still going strong. As he always says, "As the Lord wills!" And that is the truth, isn't it? As the Lord wills. If the Lord wills our health, He will give it. And so, the point is this: don't be afraid to call upon Jesus for physical deliverance. And you don't have to go to a faith healer to get it. As King David said, "**But I call to God, and the LORD will save me. Evening and morning and at noon I utter my complaint and moan, and he hears my voice.**" (Psalm 55:16) Jesus loves you and knows what's best for you. And if it's God's will for your life, He CAN heal your body. He CAN do it—as easily as he unstopped the ears and loosed the tongue of this man.

Jesus is the original, the true "faith-healer." But He has the power to heal more than our bodies. He has the power to touch a much deeper disease than any physical illness: the disease of sin. Some of us go through severe physical problems—ALL of us are afflicted with the disease of sin.

We see the effects of that disease all around us. There have been six members of Immanuel that have passed away so far in 2021. Then this week, friend of Immanuel, Monique Desrochers passed away from COVID. Then there have been several other members who have been hospitalized this year, in some cases with very severe illness. It's enough to make one want to cry out, "Lord, when will it end!" Death—it's so sudden, so shocking, so sad. Jesus Himself felt the effects of death when He visited the grave of His dear friend Lazarus and wept. And it's worth weeping over, for it's the reminder of the sin which plagues us all. It shouldn't have been this way, but due to our sin, someday we will all walk that same path to our graves as well. It's an illness that makes us cry out, with the Psalmist, "**O LORD, be gracious to me; heal me, for I have sinned against you!**" (Psalm 41:4) And for this illness there is only one treatment, only one cure—that's the blood of our Savior.

A few minutes ago, we admitted before God and everyone else that we have been infected with that illness. We said, "*we poor sinners confess unto You that we are by nature sinful and unclean and that we have sinned against You by thought, word, and deed.*" And then we reminded ourselves of the cure for that illness, "*Almighty God, our heavenly Father, has had mercy upon us and has given His only Son to die for us and for His sake forgives us all our sins.*" Isn't that a miracle? Isn't that the most amazing example of "faith-healing" there could possibly be? After all, we had a terminal case of sinfulness. By nature, man never wanted anything to do with God or His forgiveness! Left to ourselves, we would have rather just stayed in our sinful state and taken the consequences in eternity. But even in this rebellious state, God still loved sinful mankind. In fact, Paul says that's *how* we can tell how great God's love really is, "**For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person-- though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die-- but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.**" (Romans 5:6-8)

God has healed us from this most serious illness by giving us faith. Not faith in ourselves, but faith in Jesus. When we pray Jesus to give us this healing, we don't have to wonder what His answer will be. In this matter we know what God's will is! **Jesus ALWAYS heals our souls!** Every Sunday, when you say those words of confession, God is wiping from His book every dark blot your sin has put there.

Every evening, when you ask God to forgive you for Jesus' sake, the sins of the day are completely erased. The healing is complete, not partial; permanent, not temporary. And there are no strings attached. God doesn't say, "All your sins are forgiven, except for this one..." He doesn't say, "All your sins are forgiven, if you do such-and-such..." He simply says, "for Jesus' sake, all your sins are forgiven." Period! **"There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus!"** (Romans 8:1)

Now, if you or someone you love is still struggling through some ailment, perhaps that "CAN" is a matter of some concern for you. As in, we know that Jesus always heals us of the disease of sin, but that He "can" heal our bodies—and that still might leave us with some worry. He can, but will He? I'd like point your attention once more to the man in our text. Notice how Jesus treated him. He didn't just keep walking along and snap His fingers. He didn't simply say the words and the man was healed, as He often did. He took him aside in a very personal way. Confused as the man must have been, unable to hear, Jesus puts his fingers in the man's ears and touches his tongue, indicating what He was about to do. He looked up to heaven to show the man who it was that was about to do this great work for him. Taking into account this individual's very individual needs, He healed the man in this uniquely tailored manner. And that is how our Savior always deals with us, one at a time, with perfect understanding and compassion. He allows those pains into our lives and then helps and strengthens us and ultimately delivers us at just the right moment and in just the right way. That *might* be with full healing. That might be with deliverance home to heaven. But what we do know for sure, is that this is what Jesus' goal for you is: life with Him forever. So He CAN heal, and He might, but whatever He decides will be for your ultimate good.

That's because Jesus is the true, the only "faith-healer." He is almighty God, and He doesn't need tricks or gimmicks to accomplish His miracles. Whatever our illness, let us always look to Him for deliverance. He CAN heal our bodies—and He ALWAYS heals our souls! God grant us the faith to trust Him to do just that in our day-to-day lives! In His saving name, amen.

***"And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."*** (Philippians 4:7) Amen.