

I greet you in the name of our creative, marvelous, forgiving, loving, holy, awe-inspiring Lord and Savior Jesus the Christ!

I bring you greetings from my Pastor, the Rev. Dr. H. Beecher Hicks, Jr. and my Metropolitan Baptist Church family, in Washington, DC. I thank my colleague, the Dr. Ann Riggs for this challenging opportunity to facilitate Bible Study during the National Workshop on Christian.

Let us pray.

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This year's theme is "Open Our Ears and Loosen Our Tongues."

I. Mark's gospel opens by declaring the Good News of Jesus Christ the Son of God

- ✚ Jesus is baptized in the waters of the river of Jordan by John the Baptist
- ✚ Baptized by the Spirit and Declared to be the Son of God
- ✚ Driven into the wilderness for 40 days
- ✚ Tempted by Satan
- ✚ Chapter 1:13 says and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.
- ✚ After John the Baptist was arrested Jesus came to Galilee to proclaim the good news about God;
- ✚ *The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near: repent, and believe the good news.*

II. Mark also describes the cost of discipleship, the cost of following Jesus. At Metropolitan we say we are "Becoming the Kingdom." To be serious in that declaration requires us to be willing to be Christ like, regardless of the cost.

We are called to become like him – as servants.

Becoming the Kingdom means knowing and loving God and each other, reconciling differences, forgiving, worshipping, praising, and by example leading the unsaved to Christ. We study the Word of God to move from knowing about Him to knowing Him.

III. In the Gospel According to Mark -

- ✚ The ministry of Jesus is one of healing the sick, lame, blind
- ✚ Arguing with religious leaders
- ✚ Recruiting and teaching the disciples who remained faint of heart, fickle, faith-challenged, fearful followers – and in the final hours could not be counted on to claim Him.

3:31 Jesus claims his new, extended family in chapter 3 – whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother

Jesus gives speeches and tells stories –teaching in parables

He stills the storm and heals many

Feeds 5,000 walks on water heals the sick in Gennesaret

And after all that has to fight with the Pharisees about tradition at the start of Chapter 7 – the source of our focus this morning.

The Scripture reading for this morning's study is found in the Gospel according to Mark, Chapter 7 verses 31-37.

31 Again, departing from the region of Tyre and Sidon, **He came** through the midst of the region of Decapolis to the Sea of Galilee.

32 Then **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.

33 And **He took** him aside from the multitude, and put His fingers in his ears, and He spat and touched his tongue.

34 Then, **looking up to heaven, He sighed, and said to him, "Ephphatha," that is, "Be opened."**

35 Immediately his ears were opened, and the impediment of his tongue was loosed, and he spoke plainly.

36 Then **He commanded** them that **they should tell no one**; but the more He commanded them, **the more widely they proclaimed it**.

37 And **they were astonished beyond measure, saying, "He has done all things well. He makes both the deaf to hear and the mute to speak."**

IV. These people in the region of Decapolis were becoming the kingdom!

1. They brought the man to Jesus
2. They begged Jesus to touch him
3. Jesus did what they asked.
4. They proclaimed it zealously
5. They were astounded beyond measure.

1. The text simply says - They **brought the man** to Jesus – they were serving him

But who were they? Some say these people may have been Gentiles, not people who shared the Jewishness of Jesus. It is clear they are people who know the man and care about his condition. There is some relationship existing between these people and the man.

These people are sharing experiences as a community. And as a community THEY brought to Him a deaf man who had an impediment of speech.

As believers we know how important it is to get people to Jesus. We can be the THEY for those among our family members, friends, co-workers and neighbors who living like the deaf man – not hearing the Word of God and therefore suffering an impediment of speech –keeping silent not knowing about that God does all things well.

2. And THEY(the crowd at Decapolis) **begged** Jesus to lay his hand on him. They were united in their effort. They were asking for one thing together – they were asking on behalf of one who could not ask for himself – they represented the deaf ministry on his behalf.

As a believers we must get together to bring our concerns before the Lord. We must ask Jesus to help us through our shared dilemmas.

Let it be said of this assembly, THEY worshipped together and worked together on behalf a community.

Let it be said of us - THEY interceded on behalf of those living with HIV/AIDS but abiding in silence for fear of rejection.

Let it be said of us – THEY prayed for the safety of men and women sent to fight a war that is costing more lives each day

And THEY prayed on behalf of a nation that turns a deaf ear to the cries of the poor and needy among us who we strive to serve through outreach ministries.

May we resemble this Decapolis crowd. THEY did more than simply ask Jesus for help. Their intercessory appeal went beyond, 'please help the deaf man.'

The knew the need, they did not just pray THEY Did something!

- They knew what they wanted and they BEGGED Jesus to help- just to lay his hands on the man because they had heard the news of his miraculous healing powers.
- Begging suggests here they asked in a persistent and urgent way.
- Now it is one thing to have one person asking you to do something but there is an even greater impact when you get a crowd interceding, pressing you about the same thing – ask any elected official.

3. As a result - **JESUS DID WHAT THEY ASKED. HE RESPONDED TO THEIR APPEALS.**

He took the man aside from the crowd (maybe to give the man *a little privacy*)

- And Jesus touched him – with an alternative surgical touch requiring no anesthesia, scalpel or prescription medicines.
- First, Jesus just put his fingers in the deaf man's ears.
- He spat and touched the man's tongue.
- He looked up to heaven,
- Then He sighed – I do not know what kind of sigh it was:
 - It might have been a gentle sigh of compassion to comfort the man - (don't worry okay you are going to be alright)
 - It might have been an "O Lord have mercy" sigh
 - It might have been a groan in his spirit
 - It might have been a sigh of weariness – because after the healing touch, the power was draining from Jesus

- It might have been a deep breathing, diaphragm challenging creative sigh – as he summoned all the power that was with him to bring life into the dead ears and a malfunctioning tongue.
- But the Word says, Jesus sighed and said to the man “Ephphatha [Eeph-fa- tha] – which means – be opened.

And immediately his ears were opened, his tongue released, and he spoke plainly.

Beloved there are things Jesus wants to open up in all of our lives. But we are holding on to things that block our blessings. In the beginning of the 7th chapter of Mark, the Pharisees and scribes asked Jesus why his disciples did not honor the Jewish traditions- washing their hands, food, dishes and pots and pans in a certain way.

Jesus responded by calling them hypocrites who honored God with their lips but not with their hearts.

God is calling us to pray more, serve more, study more, smile

Jesus disdains lip service. Jesus wants us to open up our hearts to him and turn from evil, wicked, sinful things. When we come to Jesus and ask anything in His name, in accordance with his will. We can get ready to be blessed!

Our spiritual ears will be open up, our tongues loosed and we will have a praise report. Just like the folks in Decapolis.

STOP Wednesday

4. **Then Jesus commanded them to tell no one**, but the more he commanded the more zealously they proclaimed it. They were astounded beyond measure.

They were surprised – even though they went to Jesus, even though they asked for his touch- they were happy at the result – something says – they really weren't sure anything would happen.

But the good news was all over the region about what this man and his disciples were doing – so they did not miss this opportunity to try.

They were ecstatic about the man's healing

In making the deaf to hear and the mute to speak, Jesus manifested God's power and desire to bring human beings into wholeness – fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy found in IS. 35: 5-6

Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then the lame shall leap like a deer and the tongue of the speechless shall sing for joy.

Jesus did something for everyone who observed this miracle- he opened their eyes, he increased their faith, he gave them something to shout about and the good news is - **they recognized that Jesus was to be praised for what he had done.** –

I want to take a moment of personal privilege and ask you all to pray for me to be a more patient Christian. Beg Jesus to grant me wisdom, patience and understanding, please.

Because I get so frustrated with Christians, men, and women who already know Jesus - who whine and complain and **never have anything to good** to say about anything or anybody.

They always have the same concerns – they are trying to find their purpose in life. They do not know what God is calling them to do, so they don't do anything. Spiritually they

are not going anywhere and they want everybody to keep listening to their story while they try to find themselves.

LORD GRANT ME PATIENCE, BUT HURRY!

5. OPEN UP SHARE THE GOOD NEWS!

But Rev. Brenda Jesus commanded the people in Decapolis not to tell. They disobeyed Jesus, they did not honor his command. We will not debate the Messianic Secret today – but if proclaiming his greatness is the only commandment they failed to keep – may we likewise press toward the mark. Don't stop at Mark 7 – read on Mark 16:15 and follow that commandment – Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation!

With so much strife in our world, communities, churches, families – we need to spread the good news

- As church families we have prayed for sick babies to be healed and those children are here today.
- We have begged God to save marriages and rebuild finances.
- And seen marriages restored. And finances rebuild
- We prayed and We have witnessed some miraculous healings in our lives
- We have seen lost loved ones found
- We have so much to be thankful for we, like the folks in Decapolis, should be zealous in proclaiming the Goodness of God. Nobody should be able to shut us up because God commanded us to open up .
- To open up the dark, secret places in our lives - where we need help but remain silent - afraid, reluctant, ashamed, to break the silence on our pain.
- Sometimes we need others to help carry us to Jesus to tell him all about our struggles.

- God created us to be in relationship with one another – to help one another, love one another as Christ loves us.
- Our stories/ testimonies may encourage someone we do not even know.

Someone in this place has been healed in defiance of medical science – It ought to be difficult to stop you praising Him zealously. You have been blessed BEYOND MEASURE

Someone has received blessings that you know you did not deserve but God blessed you based on his goodness and his mercy.

Somebody here knows that it was the prayers of others that saved you.

Open up - tell somebody about the blessings.

You were too addicted, too sad, too broken, too sinful, too whatever, to believe prayer could help. But somebody, some parents, some family, some preacher, some church folks interceded with the master and begged him to touch you, to open you up to a new way of living and now you are delivered! Open –up and tell somebody – not bragging about yourself but boasting about an awesome God.

God has blessed you BEYOND MEASURE -Open up and praise his holy name!

Does anybody here know that you know that God will make away for you. God is still telling us to open up our hearts and let him come in!

Get to Jesus; Ask for what you need, according to his will.

God will open your spiritual ears and loosen your tongue- if you have been freed, loosed from anything – proclaim the goodness of God zealously

I am certain Jesus sighs as he grants some of our request- wondering if we really trust him yet.
Concerned about our doubts.

And when he blesses you BEYOND MEASURE, - open up your mouth as Pastor Hicks says, “
and run and tell that!”

I said I wasn't going to tell nobody but I couldn't keep it to myself what the Lord has done for
me!!!