

The Healing of a Mute Man
Matthew 9:32-34
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Matthew 9:32-33 tells the story of the healing of a mute man by Jesus. This is the last of a series of ten miracles that began in the beginning of chapter eight. Since Matthew organized these miracles thematically, this miracle marks the conclusion of his presentation of Jesus as the Messiah through His miraculous work in the lives of many.

Matthew 8-9 provides us with the account of ten miracles that serve to prove the authority of Jesus over all. Matthew has organized these miracles into groups for the purpose of presenting Jesus as the Messiah of Israel.

As with the account of the blind men who were healed, the story is only recounted by Matthew's Gospel.

As we saw with the healing of the blind, the healing of the deaf is also a fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecy in Isaiah regarding the Messiah.

"On that day the deaf will hear words of a book, and out of their gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind will see" (Isaiah 29:18).

"Say to those with anxious heart, 'Take courage, fear not. Behold, your God will come with vengeance; The recompense of God will come, but He will save you.' Then the eyes of the blind will be opened and the ears of the deaf will be unstopped. Then the lame will leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute will shout for joy. For waters will break forth in the wilderness and streams in the Arabah." (Isaiah 35:4-6).

The healing of the deaf was also part of the support that Jesus gave to John the Baptist to prove that He was the Expected One:

"Now when John, while imprisoned, heard of the works of Christ, he sent word by his disciples and said to Him, 'Are You the Expected One, or shall we look for someone else?' Jesus answered and said to them, 'Go and report to John what you hear and see: the BLIND RECEIVE SIGHT and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the POOR HAVE THE GOSPEL PREACHED TO THEM' " (Matthew 11:2-5).

There are other specific cases in the Gospels where demon-possessed people who were mute were healed by Jesus (Matthew 12:22-23; Mark 9:14-29; Luke 11:14) and there is a case where a man who is deaf and practically mute without reference to demons (Mark 7:32-35). There is even the case of Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, who was made mute by an angel because of his unbelief (Luke 1:20).

The mute man is brought to Jesus (9:32)

Matthew 9:32 refers to this man as “mute” (NASB, ESV). The NIV translates the word (KOPHOS) as “could not talk.” Other translations have used the now archaic word “dumb,” meaning one unable to speak. This word refers to those who were both deaf and dumb in ancient Greek literature.

It is possible that this person was unable to speak but was able to hear. Those who are mute are commonly mute because they were unable to hear from a very early age. This fact, along with the usage of the word in Greek literature, leads to the view that this person was deaf. Furthermore, the Old Testament prophecies speak to those who are deaf and being healed by the Messiah. Those who are deaf and lost their hearing prior to their ability to talk are mute, since it is extremely difficult to teach someone who has never spoken to make sounds that can be easily understood as language. This would be even more true in the first century, without developed systems to even attempt to teach someone to speak.

There are various reasons why someone ends up as mute. They may have been born with a deformity, they may have had a serious illness resulting in such a high fever that they lost their hearing, or they may have suffered an injury. In this case, Matthew described the cause of the man’s affliction as demon-possession.

Matthew 9:33 informs us that after the man was healed, he spoke. This fact leads to the conclusion that the issue of muteness was not the result of never having been able to speak. A person who was never able to speak from an early age because of deafness would not be able to speak without learning how to sound out words and what those words meant. They would be starting the language learning process from the beginning. Therefore, while this person may have well been deaf, his inability to speak was the result of the demon-possession.

This parallels a case in Matthew 12:32 where another mute man was healed from demon-possession, *“Then a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute was brought to Jesus, and He healed him, so that the mute man spoke and saw.”*

Demon-possession was not the cause of all deafness since the man in Mark 7:32 did not have this given as a reason for being deaf, “*They brought to Him one who was deaf and spoke with difficulty, and they implored Him to lay His hand on him.*” The reason he spoke with difficulty was because his deafness occurred after he had gained the ability to talk and once he could hear how he sounded, it was corrected (Mark 7:35).

There are several differences between the account of the deaf man and the account of the two blind men. First of all, the deaf man was brought to Jesus rather than following Him. Also, there is no direct evidence of the man’s faith, other than that he was willing to allow others to bring him to Jesus.

The response of the crowds (9:33)

The crowds were amazed that this man could now speak. This miracle was unprecedented in Israel as the cases earlier of the demon-possessed people being healed did not specify the mute being able to speak (Matthew 4:24; 8:16).

The amazement of the crowds is a theme in the early ministry of Jesus in Matthew. The crowds were amazed at His teaching (Matthew 7:29) and those in the boat with Him were amazed that He could calm the sea. Their amazement was based on seeing something that had never been done before. Jesus was certainly unique but they did not connect this miracle with the prophecy of Isaiah 35:6, “*The tongue of the mute will shout for joy.*”

The response of the Pharisees (9:34)

The Pharisees continued their growing opposition to Jesus (cf. Matthew 9:11, 14) by concluding that Jesus “*casts out the demons by the ruler of the demons.*” They do not deny the authenticity of Jesus’ miracles but they considered the source of the power to be from Satan. Their view of Jesus led them to make this criticism privately before their accusation became more confrontational in Matthew 12:24.

It is significant that the final miracle enables a person to speak. A growing number of people were able to testify that He was the Son of David. Yet in contrast, the Pharisees spoke words that concluded the exact opposite, that His power was from Satan. The imperfect tense of “*were saying*” could imply that they were saying this for sometime prior. Regardless, this attitude of opposition to Jesus will become part of the theme of the next chapter as Jesus will commission His disciples for service.

Conclusion

It is appropriate that this section of ten miracles concludes with a miracle of a blind man and a miracle of a mute man. There is a correlation between the healing of the physically blind and the spiritually blind, and there is a correlation between the physical inability to hear and speak and the spiritual inability to hear and speak.

"I praise You, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants. Yes, Father, for this way was well-pleasing in Your sight. All things have been handed over to Me by My Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, and who the Father is except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him." Turning to the disciples, He said privately, 'Blessed are the eyes which see the things you see, for I say to you, that many prophets and kings wished to see the things which you see, and did not see them, and to hear the things which you hear, and did not hear them'" (Luke 10:21-24).

In the case of the men who were unable to see, they still perceived Jesus to be the "Son of David" prior to their healing (Matthew 9:27). Their physical blindness did not limit their spiritual perception. Conversely, the enemies of Jesus, who could see and thus gain more information about Jesus, failed to perceive who Jesus was. These opponents could also speak, and the conclusion of what the Pharisees were saying was *"He casts out the demons by the ruler of the demons"* (Matthew 9:34).

Having the physical capacity to receive information does not bring spiritual insight. Matthew repeats the words of Jesus, *"He who has ears to hear, let him hear"* three different times (Matthew 11:15; 13:9; 13:43). Spiritual truth is spiritually discerned. *"But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised"* (1 Corinthians 2:14).

Those who fail to perceive are thus unable to speak. They will be unable to communicate on Christ's behalf as workers sent into the harvest (Matthew 9:36-10:42). Our dependence upon God's grace is yet another reason why we cannot credit ourselves for any good work, lest anyone should boast (Ephesians 2:8-10). *" But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me"* (1 Corinthians 15:10).