

Introduction

As I hope you are well aware by now, this Saturday evening we are celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ as a church family. There will be crafts. There will also be casseroles and cookies. That's what you are supposed to bring. But it would not be a Christmas celebration without carols. And so we will be singing as well. One of the marks of this season of celebration is the music. And it is only fitting. Psalm 33 says, "Shout for joy to the Lord, O you righteous! Praise befits the upright. Give thanks to the Lord with the lyre; make melody to him with the harp of ten strings. Sing to him a new song; play skillfully on the strings with loud shouts." The birth of Jesus, the dawning of God coming to earth in human flesh, is cause to celebrate. When Jesus was born in Bethlehem, shepherds were watching over their flocks nearby. Angels brought these shepherds the good news of Jesus' birth. A multitude of the heavenly host joined together in the praise of God. They employed their tongues to say "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"

As we continue our study of the gospel according to Matthew this morning, however, we encounter a man who could not say things like these. He was mute. He was silent. He could not speak, that is, until he was brought to Jesus. Let's read Matthew's account of yet another amazing miracle of Jesus, this time working to shatter this man's silence.

[Read Text; Pray]

In the space of three verses we see how great a difference Christ makes in one man's life while those who resist him go from bad to worse. Christ Jesus gloriously transforms those who come to him, but those who are hard-hearted towards him sink more and more deeply in their defiance. At the center of the hubbub is a mute man. So let's see his connection with the various aspects of Matthew's account.

Notice first,

I. The Mute Man's Condition.

A. To refer to him as the mute man already indicates part of his problem. He could not talk. It is possible, even likely that he also could not hear, but clearly Matthew is mainly concerned here with the fact that he could not speak. If you have ever had laryngitis you have perhaps gotten a sense of what this condition would be like for a short time. Suddenly you begin to realize how much of what matters in your life has to do with what you say. Being able to communicate is something even animals appreciate.

B. But further we learn here the cause of the man's silence. It was demonic. He was under the abiding control of a demon. How he came to be in this condition we do not know. Again that is not Matthew's main point. The main concern is that the man was oppressed by a demon. And the oppression was expressed at least in part in that he was incapable of speech.

Oppression is a cruel weight of constraint. It is expressed in domination and manipulation. In Egypt Pharaoh was the chief oppressor and through taskmasters he set over the Israelites, he afflicted them with heavy burdens. The Egyptians ruthlessly made the people of Israel work as slaves and made their lives bitter with hard service. Pharaoh was determined to keep these people under his thumb to draw from them what would benefit him and keep them from escaping and turning against him. Pharaoh is the epitome of one who exerts self-centered abusive control over others in order to achieve his own ends. He points us to the chief oppressor. Satan is a thief who comes to take away from another, to steal, kill, and destroy. He is a roaring lion seeking someone to devour. He is the prince of the power of the air. And the other fallen angels are his taskmasters in seeking to squeeze the life out of those made in the image of God in their quest to overturn and undo his glory and purpose. In the course of this aim, they had laid hold of the man who was brought to Jesus, and they made him mute. They had silenced him and were making him miserable.

C. Here again, as we have been doing for the last couple months, we need to consider how afflictions and ailments to the body which were healed by Jesus depict spiritual realities of the soul brought about through sin. The ailment for this man was silence. He was mute through oppressive demonic power being exerted within him. Likewise, every human being by nature

lives under the oppressive power of the devil. I am not saying that every human being is demon-possessed or under the same amount of demonic oppression as was this man. But I am affirming what Paul said about human beings by birth in Ephesians 2. We all followed the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is at work in the sons of disobedience. To the Colossians Paul puts it this way, we were existing in the domain of darkness. Metaphorically speaking, we in our spirits were in the land of Egypt under satanic oppression and demonic influence.

And this dominance affects our speech. The weight and the burden and the impact of sin within us renders us reprehensible and paralyzed and defiled and dead and blind. It also makes us mute. In many ways it renders us speechless. Sin defiles our speech so that in terms of what is good and God-pleasing, we are dumb; we are mute; we are silent.

1. This silence is first a silence before the judgment seat of God. When presented with our sin, there is nothing we can say. We have no dispute. We have no excuse. We are caught red-handed in our sins and rendered speechless before the judge. Paul explains to the Romans that the awareness the law brings to us of our sins renders us speechless, without excuse. He writes, we know that what the law speaks, it says so that "every mouth may be stopped and the whole world may be held accountable to God." The law of God—have no other Gods before me, make no false images, do not take the name of God in vain, keep the Sabbath holy, honor your father and mother, do not kill, commit adultery, steal, lie, or covet—the law of God does not show any of us how good we are. It rather puts on full display that we are breakers of God's law up one side and down the other. We have no argument, no excuse, and no dispute. Living in the domain of darkness, walking under the prince of the power of the air, we are silenced before God because of our sin. We are miserable and oppressed but we are willing in our compliance with the ways of the devil.

2. We can also look at our silence in another way. As sinners we are silent in terms of what is good and godly speech. In truth our mouths are springs of wickedness. James says in chapter 3:6, "the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members staining the whole

body, setting on fire the entire course of our life, and set on fire by hell . . . It is a restless evil and full of poison.”

What kind of fire and poison comes from the tongue? Lies. Slander. Gossip. Malice. Curses. Hatred. Murder. Blasphemy. Profanity. Fighting. Quarrels. Judgment. Adulteries. Immoralities. Evil. Anger. As Jesus told his disciples, it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person but what comes out because what comes out comes from the heart and reveals and gives expression to our nature. And by our words we will be judged.

Now you may be saying, but this is not silence. True, but in terms of righteousness, in terms of what pleases God, in terms of godliness, it is silence. Our words reveal our nature. By nature God-honoring praise and God-pleasing prayer are absent. By nature absent are words that soothe and encourage and exhort and instruct in truth. Absent are words that are selfless and serve others. Absent are words whose motive is to love the Lord your God with all your heart, strength and mind. Absent are words that love your neighbor as yourself. The speech of every human being is destroyed by sin, and we need help.

Even those of us who have come to Christ need help. We need forgiveness and help every day for the words we speak. Remember one of the startling things that Jesus said, “for by your words you will be justified and by your words you will be condemned.” He was not saying you are saved by your words. He was saying that who you are is revealed by your words. Your words display who you are, and so they can be the rule by which you are judged to belong to Christ or not.

So see how the mute man’s physical impediment speaks of the sinner’s spiritual condition? See how it reveals our helpless situation?

Second, I want you to see . . .

II. The Mute Man’s Friends.

A. How did this mute man come to find himself in the presence of Jesus? We do not know who they are, but some friends of his did their part in this man’s healing. They brought him to the only one who could help. The blind men who were just leaving had pursued Jesus, but the mute man was

brought. People get their exposure to Jesus in different ways. But the important thing is getting that exposure. The ones who brought this man to Jesus demonstrated themselves to be his friends because they did the most loving thing a friend could do—introduce another to Christ.

B. The friends saw his hopeless condition and felt pity. They saw him as a friend in need. They knew who could help him out. So they brought him to Jesus. Each of us who has come to Christ at one time was this mute man in need of Jesus. Each of us had friends who brought us to Jesus by bringing the gospel to us. Now it is our turn to be friends to the world of pitiful people. We need to behold their misery, the way in which Satan has them oppressed and burdened. And we need to bring them to him by bringing the gospel to them.

Now , third, I want you to see

III. The Mute Man's Release.

A. Verse 33 says "when the demon had been cast out, the mute man spoke." Now I mentioned to you last week that according to Isaiah one of the indicators of the coming Messiah would be that he would open the eyes of the blind. That's seen in Isaiah 35:5. Now in the very next verse, Isaiah adds another indicator, saying that "the tongue of the mute [would] sing for joy." With Isaiah in mind consider Matthew. Jesus had just healed two blind men, and on the heels of their departure, a mute man appears. His friends bring him to Jesus and Jesus casts out the demon and sets free the man's tongue so that he speaks. When we have some of these crucial details, it becomes mind-bogglingly apparent how poignantly Matthew is setting Jesus before us indisputably as the promised Messiah, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

He demonstrates to us that Jesus fulfills the prophesied portrait of Messiah. He further demonstrates to us his power and authority and his compassion. He shows us that the Messiah is one who comes to bring healing and relief to people living within the oppressive reality of a world under the sway of the prince of the power of the air. Jesus Messiah has authority over the prince, and he has authority over his taskmasters to set free their captives however that captivity is manifest. In this case, he loosens a man's tongue.

B. Now think with me for a moment how this is manifest in the lives of sinners in general. This man's inability to speak is a window into the reality that sinners by nature are mute when it comes to what is good and godly and valuable speech. But the work of Jesus changes all that. God through Christ has delivered those who put their trust in him from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son. And now we have been set free to seek the things that heaven values. Our tongues have been loosened to speak from a transformed heart the things they ought to speak, to speak beautiful things, valuable things, God-glorifying things. Those who have been redeemed by Christ have their tongues set free to honor and glorify our savior. It is both a privilege and an obligation for believers to employ our tongues and speak words that reflect this transformation.

And in what kinds of speech should we be engaged?

1. Praise. We should employ our tongues in the praise of God. The Scripture abounds with calls for the people of God to lift their voices in worship to the Lord. Psalm 33 calls the people of God to worship. It says, "Shout for joy in the Lord, O you righteous! Praise befits the upright. . . . Sing to him a new song; play skillfully on the strings with loud shouts." Psalm 34:1 says, "I will bless the Lord at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth. My soul makes its boast in the Lord; let the humble hear and be glad. Oh, magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together!" Charles Wesley in his great hymn longingly wished he had a thousand tongues.

O for a thousand tongues to sing
My great Redeemer's praise,
The glories of my God and king,
The triumphs of His grace!

My gracious master and my God,
Assist me to proclaim,
To spread through all the earth abroad
The honors of Thy name.

Our tongues have been loosened for a reason. The Lord our God is worthy of praise. It is right that tongues should be used to speak that most glorious of all contemplations, the very being and nature of God. The heavens tell the glory of God and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. Every day and every night declares the greatness of our God and creator and we should be no different. If your tongue has been set free, the most important thing it can do is praise the One who brought the deliverance.

2. A second theme our tongues should repeat is the theme of thanksgiving. A spirit of thanksgiving is gripped with amazement at the grace and mercy of God. Paul says to the Colossians, "Whatever you do in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. Half the struggles in our lives are probably the result of not praising God and not thanking God. We use our tongues for complaining and expressing anxiety and disbelief. But rather we should be expressing to God gratitude. Intentionally doing godly things protects us from the attacks of the flesh and the devil. Have you seriously used your tongue besides in the organized singing of hymns and songs this morning to praise God and to thank God? Is it something you do daily? The first words off your tongue and my tongue and even just in our minds ought to be words of praise and thanks.

3. And there is a third matter for which we should regularly be using our speech. And that is to confess our sins. Sinners by nature and the flesh itself resists the confession of sin. We hide from our sins. We deny we are sinners. Or at least we seek to diminish the evil of our sins. But one of the signs or indicators of a changed heart by the grace of God is the determination to own up to one's sins. So John says, "If we confess our sins he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." David exhibits the twofold experience of silence and confession in Psalm 32. He says about his sin, "When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. [But] I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,' and you forgave the iniquity of my sin." That occasioned these words at the

beginning of the psalm, "Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven. Whose sin is covered."

4. Not only should we use our tongues to speak to God and to speak about God, our tongues have been loosened by Christ to benefit others. Our tongues have been loosened to be set free from lying, deceiving, slandering, demeaning, condemning, wounding, and quarreling. They have been set free to bless. And we bless by encouraging, instructing, warning, and praying. We need to bear in mind this encouragement from the Apostle Paul. He said to the Colossians, "let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person." And above all we need to employ our tongues to tell the world about Jesus, to confess him before the world, to proclaim his goodness, and to proclaim his gospel that other sinners might be delivered. With our words let us be like the friends who brought the mute man to Jesus.

Now finally this morning I want you to see

IV. The Mute Man's Stir

When Jesus healed the mute man, it got a lot of attention. It caused quite a stir.

A. For one thing the crowds looked on with amazement. They marveled remarking that "Never was anything like this seen in Israel." They had never seen the blind regain sight nor had they witnessed the dumb being able to speak. But Jesus had just done both of these works and the crowds were loving it. Their excitement was demonstrative. It underscores the uniqueness of Jesus. In fact it points to the fact that he is Messiah. For that reason it is notable excitement and amazement.

But something else I notice is that while the crowd is amazed they do not seem to be grasping that Jesus is being shown to be Messiah. In this way the crowds remind me of the world. The world looks at superficial things and gets excited like those crowds did. The world looks at outward things as the great enemy. It sees cancer and addictions and disease and fires and earthquakes and hurricanes and tornadoes as what threatens us with destruction and misery. If we could only stop or overcome these things, every thing would be alright. That would be great power! We would

marvel as though never has anything like this been seen before. But we would be amazed by something less than the most important thing. Jesus' ability to cast out the demon and loosen the tongue of the mute man is not so important because of what it accomplished in and of itself for the mute man. What is really important here is that this work bears witness to the fact that he can do so much more.

The Bible does not see muteness as our biggest problem or threat. Our greatest enemy is our own sinful heart. And the greatest change in the whole world is far greater than the healing of a disease or the preventing of a natural disaster. It is the forgiveness and cleansing of sin and the transformation of a life. And this is ultimately why Jesus came and it is the great work he performed on the cross. We need to watch it that we do not set our sights, hopes, and dreams on worldly things but on heavenly ones. That is the lesson from the amazement of the crowds.

B. There is a second part of the stir. And that is the reaction of the Pharisees. To all the amazement and hoopla of the crowds, the Pharisees hardened their hard hearts even more, saying, "This is the work of the devil." "He casts out demons by the prince of demons." This was their expert analysis. After all, they were the religious experts in the land. Jesus was not the kind of Messiah they were looking for. He was not bringing Rome down like they wanted. He was mixing with sinful people. He speaks accusingly to Pharisees. He is threatening their place in Jewish society. This cannot be the work of God. It must therefore be the work of Satan.

Beware of bitterness that grips your heart when righteousness is exalted and when Jesus Christ is glorified. Repent of it or risk being hardened further against him. What Matthew is showing us is that the evidence for the fact that Jesus is Messiah is literally piling up like a mountain, but there are those who are so set against him, so disgusted by him that they determine to disavow it. They are filled with contempt. They have such contempt for Christ that they foolishly say he is in league with the devil. See where contempt and bitterness can take you no matter how religious you may think you are. Religion will not take care of your greatest problems or threats. Only Jesus can do that.

Conclusion

The angels used their tongues to glorify God on the night of Jesus' birth. The mute man's tongue was used to demonstrate a small taste of Christ's power. The crowds used their tongues to express amazement at the astonishing work of Christ. And the Pharisees used their tongues to ascribe the work of Jesus to the devil. What about you? How will you use your tongue today in regards to Christ? Will you extol him? Thank him? Will you speak grace to others? Will you use your tongue to proclaim the greatness of his saving work on the cross?