

The Gentile Crumb

(The Feeding of the 4000)

The Life of Jesus Vol.2 (True Religion) Part 19 (Revised)

Matthew 15:29-39 (Mk.8:1-13) 12-18-11

Summary: At the end of Jesus' (long) gentile ministry He feeds four thousand gentile families, implying gentile inclusion in the Messianic Banquet(!). The gentiles get the bread, which not only includes satisfaction of appetites, but also restoration of abilities. Both feeding miracles were surrounded by compassionate healings – healings focused not mainly on pain relief, but on restoration of image-of-God faculties that enable us to participate in the divine nature.

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Matthew 15:29-39 Jesus left there and went along the Sea of Galilee. Then he went up on a mountainside and sat down. **30** Great crowds came to him, bringing the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute and many others, and laid them at his feet; and he healed them. **31** The people were amazed when they saw the mute speaking, the crippled made well, the lame walking and the blind seeing. And they praised the God of Israel. **32** Jesus called his disciples to him and said, "I have compassion for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat. I do not want to send them away hungry, or they may collapse on the way." **33** His disciples answered, "Where could we get enough bread in this remote place to feed such a crowd?" **34** "How many loaves do you have?" Jesus asked. "Seven," they replied, "and a few small fish." **35** He told the crowd to sit down on the ground. **36** Then he took the seven loaves and the fish, and when he had given thanks, he broke them and gave them to the disciples, and they in turn to the people. **37** They all ate and were satisfied. Afterward the disciples picked up seven basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. **38** The number of those who ate was four

thousand, besides women and children. 39 After Jesus had sent the crowd away, he got into the boat and went to the vicinity of Magadan.

Mark 8:1-21 1 During those days another large crowd gathered. Since they had nothing to eat, Jesus called his disciples to him and said, 2 "I have compassion for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat. 3 If I send them home hungry, they will collapse on the way, because some of them have come a long distance." 4 His disciples answered, "But where in this remote place can anyone get enough bread to feed them?" 5 "How many loaves do you have?" Jesus asked. "Seven," they replied. 6 He told the crowd to sit down on the ground. When he had taken the seven loaves and given thanks, he broke them and gave them to his disciples to set before the people, and they did so. 7 They had a few small fish as well; he gave thanks for them also and told the disciples to distribute them. 8 The people ate and were satisfied. Afterward the disciples picked up seven basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. 9 About four thousand men were present. And having sent them away, 10 he got into the boat with his disciples and went to the region of Dalmanutha.

Jesus Spreads the Table for the Gentiles¹

Last week Jesus commended the Canaanite woman for saying this:

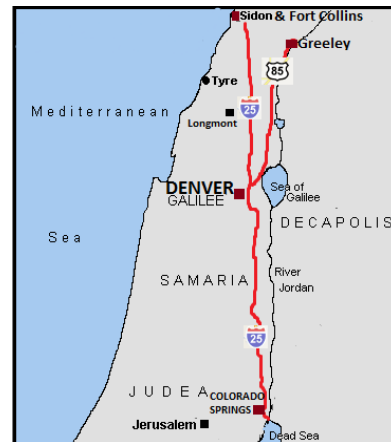
Matthew 15:27 "even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table."

What does it look like, exactly, when a crumb falls from the Master's table? We are studying the life of Jesus and we left off last week with Jesus leaving the borders of Israel and traveling into gentile territory, where He will spend most of the rest of His life. Jesus will spend most of the rest of His life in verse 29 of Matthew 15.

Matthew 15:29 Jesus left there and went along the Sea of Galilee.

That trip most likely took at least eight months of Jesus' final year. He went to Tyre, then Sidon and ended up in Decapolis. That is like if you went out that door, walked up to Lyons, then up to Fort Collins, then Greeley, past DIA, and ended up in Parker.

We do not get a lot of information about those months. We have this event at the beginning with the Canaanite woman, and then the event in today's text takes place at the end of that whole trip. People were bringing the blind and lame and deaf, putting them at Jesus' feet, and He was healing them all. And that went on for three days. Jesus would minister to them all day long, night would come, Jesus and



¹ Liberal Bible scholars believe that there was only one feeding miracle. There are so many similarities between this and the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand that they figure it must have been just one event, and Matthew and Mark got to hold of some other version of that event and assumed it was another event. But if you take any kind of careful look at all at the text you can see that the two events are very different. The first feeding was in Israel, the second in gentile territory. The first fed five thousand with twelve leftover baskets (small, Jewish baskets); the second fed four thousand with seven leftover baskets (large, gentile baskets – different word, and the different words and numbers are consistent in all accounts). Different amounts of loaves and fishes to begin with are also consistent in all accounts. In the first feeding Jesus' compassion was over their lack of a shepherd prior to the feeding, and the feeding was after one day of ministry. In the second feeding the compassion was at the end of three days of ministry, and it was over their physical hunger. And most importantly, Jesus mentioned both feeds in one comment in Matthew 16:9-10.

the Twelve would lay down to sleep, and all the people would stay there and just sleep on the ground. The people were so engrossed in what Jesus was doing that they went three days without food.

Compassion

32 Jesus called his disciples to him and said, "I have compassion for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat.

Here we go again with the compassion. When He fed the five thousand, it all started when He canceled His day off because when He saw that the crowd was like sheep without a shepherd, it aroused His compassion. So then His compassion was over their spiritual need; in this case His compassion has to do with their physical hunger. They are not starving to death – you can make it a lot more than three days without food, but they are uncomfortable. And Jesus feels for them.

Jesus' compassion is mentioned far more frequently than any other emotion, and when the text does mention other emotions, they are usually emotions driven by His compassion. And here, once again, we see Him have compassion on a crowd. Have you ever had compassion on a crowd? Most of the time we just get annoyed at crowds, because they make life inconvenient for us. Usually when we see a crowd we just think long lines, noise, and inconvenience. But when Jesus saw the crowd back in Israel, that was not what struck Him. What struck Him was their need, and it moved His heart.

And by the way – these are non-Christians. I mention that because there is such an emphasis in the New Testament on loving fellow believers that we can sometimes forget that God also loves unbelievers. He does not love them in the same way as He loves us. They are not His children, so His love for us is far greater. But still, He loves them and cares about them and has compassion when they suffer and so should we. Our compassion for their spiritual needs should be greater than our concern for their physical needs, but we should care about both.

The Miracle (How Big is the Crumb?)

How Could They Have Forgotten?

So Jesus makes this remark about the need for food.

4 His disciples answered, "But where in this remote place can anyone get enough bread to feed them?"

The disciples really take it in the neck from the commentators at this point. Some have even questioned the truthfulness of the account because of this. They say, "Jesus just fed a multitude like this one chapter ago. Surely no one is so dumb that they couldn't remember an event like that." Let me give you a few things to consider:

1. This is many months later.

First of all, it may be one chapter in the Bible, but a lot of time had gone by in that one chapter – probably about eight months or so. And isn't it true that every one of us is guilty of forgetting marvelous things God did for us eight months ago? You come to God in desperation, He delivers you, and eight months later you are in trouble again and you are so consumed with worry that you would think God has never answered a prayer in your life. We are all prone to forget God's past mercies.

2. It may very well be that they remember all too well.

But beyond that, I am not even convinced that they did forget. Remember, Jesus rebuked the people in John 6 for expecting Him to repeat the feeding miracle. It could be they remembered that all too well.

3. It has been three days

And in that other feeding Jesus did the miracle after one day, this ministry marathon has gone on three days, and Jesus has provided no food. So maybe they took that to mean He was not going to do it again. For the past eight months all their eating had come through the normal, natural process – not through any miracle. So why assume anything different now?

4. The feeding symbolized the Messianic Banquet

So those are all possibilities. But the most important explanation for why they would not automatically assume Jesus would do another feeding miracle has to do with the meaning of the miracle. Jesus made it clear that the feeding of the five thousand was a foretaste of the great Messianic Banquet at the end of the age. The Messianic Banquet was a Jewish hope. That is for Israel. This is a gentile crowd. For Jesus to repeat that miracle now would confuse everything - it would imply that the gentiles would be in on that great feast. It would imply gentiles will be seated at the Lord's table in intimate fellowship with God at the Last Day. That is unthinkable. Is God going to make Himself unclean by eating with gentiles? No way! Remember, even a decade after this, Peter is horrified at the thought of even entering a gentile house, much less eating a meal with a gentile (Acts 10). Repeating a miracle that promised the Messianic Banquet in a gentile crowd would just confuse everything.

Jesus Created Dead Fish

5 "How many loaves do you have?" Jesus asked. "Seven," they replied. ... 7 They had a few small fish as well; he gave thanks for them also and told the disciples to distribute them. 8 The people ate and were satisfied. Afterward the disciples picked up seven basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over.

One again, Jesus does a miracle of creation. He just keeps creating food right in His hands as He breaks it. This bread they are eating is bread that was never baked. These fish never swam. In fact, they never even lived. Jesus created dead fish – ready to be eaten.

I think that is worth noticing, because sometimes in the whole young earth – old earth debate, those who argue for an old earth have said, “God would never create a mature earth, because that would be misleading. Starlight and other things make it look old, and God would never create something that seems old when it’s really not.” If you think that way, you have got a problem here. Jesus does not create fish eggs, put them in some water, and wait for months and months until they are full grown. He creates them in the form that suits His purposes at that moment – full-grown, already dead, and pickled (or somehow prepared for eating).

The Leftovers

Can you imagine what the disciples are thinking once it becomes evident that Jesus is repeating the feeding miracle with this gentile crowd? They are appalled at the thought of even eating with a gentile, now Jesus not only feeds a meal to this crowd, but does it in exactly the same style that symbolized the Messianic Banquet. What on earth is Jesus trying to imply here? Some kind of Messianic Banquet promise for filthy, unclean, gentile dogs? This must have just been baffling to the Disciples.

When I preached on the feeding of the five thousand, and I talked about the significance of the twelve leftover baskets, one person asked about the significance of the seven leftover baskets in this feeding miracle.

The reason for making extra is obvious. If Jesus made the exact amount needed, no one would know that there was enough. It would appear as though they ran out of food, and you would think, "Surely there was someone who didn't get enough." So Jesus makes sure there are leftovers. But why seven baskets? The number twelve, to the Jew, called to mind the nation of Israel (comprised of twelve tribes). That symbolized provision for the whole nation of Israel.

But this crowd is not Jewish - they are gentiles, so it makes sense that there would not be twelve portions left. It also makes sense that they would not measure the leftovers with Jewish baskets. At the feeding of the five thousand, the scraps were gathered up in twelve *kophinous* - Jewish lunch pails. But these are different baskets. The word used here is *spuridon*. A *spuridon* was a different kind of basket that was used by gentiles. Seven of those was probably much more food than twelve of the little Jewish baskets. In Acts 9 the people were trying to kill Paul, and they guarded the city gate day and night to capture him the minute he left. So his friends lowered him over the wall in a *spuridon* basket. So a grown man could fit in one of these. That is a big basket. They were not lowering him over the city wall in a lunchbox. The closest thing I can think of that we have is a garbage can. That is about the size we are talking about. So seven *spuridon* full of food is a huge amount of food.

And if the number seven symbolizes anything in Scripture, it is completeness. Seven is the number of completeness. So the feeding symbolizes the Messianic banquet, implying gentile involvement, and the seven huge garbage cans of leftover food represent lavish, unending supply.

Remember what the Canaanite woman said at the beginning of Jesus' gentile ministry?

27 "Yes, Lord," she said, "but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table."

You know what Jesus is doing by feeding this massive multitude and having more leftovers than they could even carry away? He is showing us how much a crumb off His table is. The reason that Canaanite woman did not demand a seat with the children at the table, and she was satisfied with just a crumb that fell down, was because she understood just how much a crumb off the Master's table really is.

This is a glorious truth for us. Listen to what Peter says to us gentiles:

1 Peter 2:9 you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. 10 Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

You and I had no claim on mercy, but we received it. Think about it – think of how far you are from Israel. How is it that you get in on all these promises made to Abraham? How is it that you heard this gospel? Answer? Missionaries. And why did the missionaries come? God sent them. In every generation God has commanded some of His people to sacrifice the comforts of this world and travel long distances and spends their lives trying to reach people who have never heard the gospel. And in many, many cases they had to die to get it done. I guarantee, somebody died – willingly laid down their life to reach the people who reached the people who reached you. And that happened and continues to happen because God commands His people to lay down their lives and go. They did not get that in Old Testament times. You know what they got in Old Testament times? Jonah. A reluctant, grumpy, hostile prophet of doom. But we got the Apostle Paul and an army of missionaries in every

generation going to every corner of the world – even Denver, Colorado! That is mercy. That is the crumb we get off the Master’s table. That is our share in the children’s bread.

Restoring Ability (What All Does the Crumb Include?)

Healing (Restored Ability)

And we found that the bread represents all we need for eternal life, and everything we need to satisfy all the appetites of the soul. But there is more to the promise than just bread. There is more to His provision than just the satisfaction of our appetites. We have other needs besides the internal cravings of the soul and the physical cravings of the body. And the promise of those things is illustrated in the kinds of miracles Jesus performed.

If you had unlimited power to do absolutely anything, and you were trying to prove to people you were God, what would you do? Re-arrange the stars? Levitate buildings? Make the Pharisees all disappear? There are so many things Jesus could have done, but mostly what He did was heal people. Healing after healing after healing. And it is even more specific than that. Think of the kinds of healings Jesus did. If Jesus were here right now offering any healing you want, how many of you would like to be healed from back pain or headaches or some other kind of pain? If you look at Jesus’ healings, they were not mainly about relieving pain. They were mainly about restoring ability. Blind people were given the ability to see, lame people the ability to walk, deaf people the ability to hear, mute people the ability to speak.²

Restored Sight

Let’s jump backwards right before the feeding of the five thousand. Right after Jesus raised Jairus’ daughter from the dead, He did a healing that I did not mention at that time, but I would like to show it to you today.

Matthew 9:27 As Jesus went on from there (Jairus’ house), two blind men followed him, calling out, "Have mercy on us, Son of David!"

They use the same title the Canaanite woman would use later, and it sounds like they get the same initial response – which is no response. Jesus routinely did things like that to expose how genuine the person’s faith was.³ But these guys are not turned away - they follow Him right in to His house! (Jesus had no privacy – constant ministry.)

Faith in Jesus’ Ability

Matthew 9:28 When he had gone indoors, the blind men came to him, and he asked them, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?"

Jesus asks if they believe in His ability. Faith is not believing God will do what you ask; it is believing that He can. Faith is believing He *can* do anything, and that He *will* do whatever is best. So Jesus asks, “**Do you believe that I am able to do this?**”

² Other healings had to do with cleanness and uncleanness, like healing the lepers or the woman with the bleeding problem, but mostly Jesus’ healings were focused on restoring some particular ability.

³ There may be another reason as well. The title “Son of David” was a political title for the Messiah that had military overtones. But at His first coming Jesus did not come to raise an army and set up an earthly kingdom. So it could be that was another reason He was not as responsive to that particular title.

Stored up blessing

Matthew 9:28 ... "Yes, Lord," they replied. 29 Then he touched their eyes and said, "According to your faith will it be done to you"; 30 and their sight was restored. 29 According to your faith will it be done to you

Jesus healed them in response to their faith.⁴ Suddenly they can see everything! Christ was willing to heal them, but He delayed in order to expose their faith. Delay is a wonderful thing, because it shows us how real our faith is. When you pray for something and do not get it, the heart of faith responds with the psalmist in Psalm 31.

Psalm 31:19 How great is your goodness, which you have stored up for those who fear you

Did you know that when you pray for some blessing, and God does not respond, all He is doing is storing up kindness for you? True faith does not falter at delay because it knows that God's *timing* is just as important and just as good as the rest of His good gifts.

Restored Speech

Matthew 9:32 While they were going out, a man who was demon-possessed and could not talk was brought to Jesus. 33 And when the demon was driven out, the man who had been mute spoke.

This particular miracle does not get a lot of attention. But it was no less spectacular than all the others. Once again, Jesus effortlessly overcomes a demon and throws him out, then heals them man. And He did so in such a dramatic fashion that...

Matthew 9:33 The crowd was amazed and said, "Nothing like this has ever been seen in Israel."

The Rabbis taught and nothing happened. Jesus spoke and demons fled, storms were silenced, nature snapped to attention, the dead were raised, sins were forgiven, and the Kingdom of God was established.

So that is what happened just before Jesus encountered the crowd of five thousand families. And then...

Matthew 14:14 When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick.

Restored Hearing

Now, fast forward again to the feeding of the four thousand and we see the same thing.

⁴ God always responds favorably to faith. And it is not because faith makes you deserve blessing from God. Just the opposite – God responds to faith because faith is the one requirement God could place on us that shows God to be impressive rather than showing us to be impressive. If God required anything else – like if He said, "You can be saved through religious observance" – then if we did our religious ceremonies someone could point to us as being impressive and earning our salvation or our answers to prayer. But if God requires faith – dependence on Him, that does not show us to be impressive. It shows us to be needy, and Him to be impressive.

Matthew 15:29 Then he went up on a mountainside and sat down. 30 Great crowds came to him, bringing the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute and many others, and laid them at his feet; and he healed them.

Attention to Individuals

Have you ever wondered how Jesus healed large crowds like this? When we just see a report that He healed all the sick in a crowd, does that mean He just waved His hand over the whole group and took care of them all at once? Or did He do them one at a time? This is the perfect place to ask that question, because the parallel account in Mark gives us an idea.

Mark 7:32 There some people brought to him a man who was deaf and could hardly talk, and they begged him to place his hand on the man. 33 After he took him aside, away from the crowd, Jesus put his fingers into the man's ears. Then he spit and touched the man's tongue.

When Matthew tells the story, he just gives a one-verse, offhanded remark about Jesus healing everyone in a crowd. But when Mark tells it, he zeros in on just one of those hundreds of healings. He did them one at a time. Jesus could have been much more efficient in His healing ministry. But He did not want to be efficient; He wanted to love people and express His compassion to people. Jesus was a shepherd, not a rancher. He did preach to huge crowds, and He was efficient when it was wise to be efficient, but He also spent Himself attending to individual people – face to face, talking to them and touching them and tailoring His love for their particular needs. Dr. Paul Brand: “Jesus’ mission was not chiefly a mission against disease, but rather a ministry to individual people.”

Accessible

Jesus was accessible. He was the most important man in the world, but He was never above spending time face to face with common folks. An outcast, marginalized woman with a bleeding problem reaches out, and Jesus suspends what He was doing and spends hours with her. Then He is making house calls for Jairus. He ministers to the blind men in His own house, and touches them and heals them. A nobody Canaanite woman comes up and He takes the time to test and build her faith before healing her daughter. He is not locked up in a hotel suite until five minutes before he goes on stage and then whisked off in a limo immediately after. He took people’s pain and sorrows upon His own shoulders and loved them.

Look down at verse 34. Jesus breathes out a **deep sigh**. That is an expression of emotion. Again and again we see the compassion. Jesus got this guy up close, and the pain on his life – hurt upon hurt upon hurt - it moved His great heart, and it becomes an emotional thing for Jesus. He is touching this man’s ears and mouth, and the whole time the man just stands there. He cannot say anything; he cannot hear anything – and it hits Jesus, this man’s whole life is like this, and it is hard for Jesus to take, and out comes a deep sigh.

It seems to me this had to be the hardest part of Jesus’ ministry. The healing part was easy - effortless. The healings were never labor intensive for Jesus, like they often was for the Old Testament prophets. What was labor intensive for Jesus were the time and energy and effort that went into showing genuine compassion. Creating the universe was not difficult for Jesus, but looking this man in the eye was.

This is the hardest part about ministry. Nothing is as hard as caring. It is so easy to become like the emergency room doctor who may become indifferent to suffering. But a doctor can administer medicine just as well regardless of whether he feels empathy. We can’t. The spiritual medicine we

have to offer has its most profound effect when administered in love. None of us believers were meant to go through this life with dry eyes.

This is such a rebuke to me. I am so prone to do all the easy parts of ministry and leave the hard parts to Jeff Grow or Bob or someone. I am so in love with comfort and ease.

This is an area where we can learn from Jesus. Do you want to have greater compassion for people? Get closer to them. Compassion usually is not activated at a distance. You see a note on our Facebook page that someone is having knee surgery, and you think nothing of it. But if you were close to her, and you walked with her the past several months through the agonizing, debilitating pain she has endured with one medical problem after another, and you were there by her hospital bed, and prayed with her in the depths of her suffering, and then you find out she has yet another surgery, and it is going to take months to recover from it – then it can get inside you and touch your heart. Now, obviously you cannot do that with everyone in the church. I am not saying you have to feel guilty about not being that close to everyone who is suffering. All I am saying is if you are like me and you see Jesus and think, “Man, I need to have greater compassion,” then one way to do that is very simple – get closer to people. And if you can’t get close to everyone, get closer to someone.

Imagine what would happen in this church if every one of us just took one step – one step from wherever we are right now one step closer in the direction of greater compassion. In many cases we do not want to look the needy person in the eye, because we are afraid of what it will end up costing us to show compassion.

The Man’s Condition

Jesus had compassion because this man’s situation was so horrible. Deafness was a miserable condition in the ancient world. In many ways it was even worse than blindness. Blind people did not suffer the social pain and stigma experienced by the deaf – people gawking at them, impatient stares of those who are not aware of the condition. When you cannot hear, it affects your speech. And when you have trouble speaking, people often assume there is a mental deficiency. Deaf people are not any less intelligent than anyone else, but their speech often makes people assume they are.

And on top of that is the fact that there would have been no way for this man to learn. They did not have schools for the deaf. This man could not ask questions, he could not hear any teaching – no doubt he was unable to read, so the truth of the Scriptures were totally cut off from Him. So his friends have compassion on him, and bring him to Jesus.

Sign Language

Mark 7:32 and they begged him to place his hand on the man. 33 After he took him aside, away from the crowd, Jesus put his fingers into the man's ears. Then he spit and touched the man's tongue.

What is all that? Putting His fingers into the man's ears? Spitting? Touching the guy’s tongue? What is all that?

Very simple – it is sign language. Jesus starts by touching the man’s ears - that is not a healing touch. The guy is still deaf. Jesus is communicating to the man. He wants it to be crystal clear exactly what is happening. So before healing the man’s ears, He touches them. That is sign language for, “I’m about to do something to your ears.”

Next Jesus spits. And it is funny – the commentaries have all kinds of things to say about where He spit – spit on the guy’s tongue, spit on His own hand then touched His saliva to the guy’s tongue, others say, “No, He spit on the ground.” I don’t know where they get all that, but when I look at my Bible, it does not say Jesus spit on anything. I take that as a hint from the Holy Spirit that we do not need to know where Jesus spit. We just need to know that He spit. This is more sign language. Jesus

does something with His mouth, and then touched the man's mouth. That is makeshift sign language for, "I'm about to do something to your mouth." Jesus is saying, "Your ears are stopped. I'm going to unplug them." "Your speech has 'dried up' – I'm going to restore it."

The Sigh

34 ...and with a deep sigh

What is that? That is sign language for, "Your situation moves My heart. I care deeply about you."

The Upward Look

Well, are you ready to see Jesus heal this man? It is not quite time yet – one more thing Jesus wants to communicate through sign language.

34 He looked up to heaven

That is sign language for, "You are about to be healed by power from on high. This is not magic; this is God working.

The Miracle

34 He said to him, "Ephphatha!" (which means, "Be opened!").

Mark is writing in Greek – translating everything into Greek. But here he just writes down the Aramaic word that Jesus spoke, rather than translate it. He wants us to hear the exact syllables Jesus said. I am no expert but Ephphatha sounds to me like a word that would be easy to lip read.

Mark does translate the word for us. Turns out it is a command. Jesus is commanding this man's ears and mouth to "be opened." And whenever Jesus gives a command to a non-personal thing (like wind or waves, or tongues or ears), there is never any delay in that command being fulfilled, which means the first thing this man heard, since the time he went deaf, was this word: "Ephphatha." The sound would have taken about one five-hundredth of a second to get from Jesus' mouth to this man's ears, and no doubt by that time the healing was complete, and the first thing the man heard was Jesus' voice.

35 At this, the man's ears were opened, his tongue was loosened and he began to speak plainly.

He did not have to learn to talk. No speech therapy. In a split second, Jesus not only repaired the physical damage in the man's ears and brain, but also instantly trained the man's brain to be able to properly interpret sounds and to speak properly – something that normally takes years even for a healthy person.

The Significance of the Faculties (How Long Does the Crumb Last?)

So what is the significance of all this? What is the significance of the fact that Jesus' healing miracles were mainly restoration of sight or speech or hearing or some other ability, rather than just pain relief? To understand that we need to understand the significance of those abilities.

Why did God give us those abilities in the first place? God could have created us all blind and mute and none of us would have known the difference. But God gave us facilities of both perception and communication – impression and expression. He gave us the ability to perceive the world around us, to receive and understand communication, and to respond with communication of our own.

Language is an essential component of personhood. No animal is even close to being able to use language – that is part of personhood. It is part of the image of God, and He gave it to us to enable us to commune with Him with personal interaction – understanding His words to us and communicating ours to Him, and communicating His words to others.

And He gave us arms and legs to be able to go places and do things and build things, create things, accomplish things. God did not give all these abilities to animals. They can see and hear and move around, but they cannot understand or use language, or do meaningful work. Those are abilities God has given us, and we are stewards of those abilities.

Stewardship

Have you ever thought about the fact that you are a steward of your faculties?

We were not given those abilities just to make life more interesting, we were given them for a purpose. Imagine you were hired at a job and your first day walked into your office, and in the middle of your desk was some strange tool your employer left for you. The first question on your mind is going to be, “What am I supposed to use this for?” That should be exactly our response when we look and see the way God has equipped us. When you consider your ability to perceive reality – both in the physical world and in the spiritual world. Your ability to see and understand. Your ability to hear and understand. Your ability to speak. All these tools God has left on our desk – our first question should be, Why? What am I supposed to use these for? Everything you have – your senses, your emotions, your abilities – maybe He gave you the ability to fix things, or an eye for beauty and art, or the ability to cook. He took all those things and packaged them all together in just the right proportions in a package called you, and He did that for some reason. And the reason is to equip you to fulfill your calling.

Sometimes I ask myself, “Does God have any reason not to take my sight away tomorrow (other than His mercy)? How about my speech? What about the use of my hands or feet, or my intellect? Or my various skills or abilities?” If I am not using those things to be about His work, what reason is there for Him to allow me to continue to have them?

I am not saying this to try to generate guilt. Just the opposite – what I am trying to do is arouse a sense of encouragement and mission in your heart. The tools God has given you are little pictures of what God is like. Language, perception, understanding, strength – all are attributes of God. And we share in those. We participate in the divine nature. And it is for a reason. Every ability you have implies a high calling.

You'll use them in heaven too (promised restoration)

And not just in this life. These tools are going to play a crucial role in heaven as well. Isaiah 35 is one of the most delightful, uplifting, encouraging chapters in the whole Bible. It is one of those points in Isaiah where God just lets loose with promises of what is going to take place in the last Day when He restores all things through the Messiah.

1 The desert and the parched land will be glad; the wilderness will rejoice and blossom...2 it will burst into bloom; it will rejoice greatly and shout for joy...they will see the glory of the LORD, the splendor of our God...

All this wonderful restoration and everything being made right.

5 Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. 6 Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy!

Your ability to perceive and understand and communicate is restored in a partial way when you become a Christian, but in a full and glorious way at the Second Coming. What does that tell you? It tells you that the purpose of these tools is not over when you are done with this life. These are tools you will be needing ten billion years from now in heaven.

Conclusion: Eternal Crumb

What is that crumb that has fallen off the Lord's Table? What is the children's bread? Part of it is the satisfaction of the appetites and cravings of the soul through the presence of Christ. But another part of that crumb is seen in all these healings – restoration of sight, hearing, speech, perception, understanding, communication, ability – all of that is part of the children's bread that is now offered freely to gentiles who believe.

And if you want to find meaning in life, and you want joy and fulfillment and happiness, do not look for it in the way the world does. They think they will get it through pain relief. "If only I did not have this suffering, then I would be happy." Pain relief is nice, but it will do nothing to fill what is empty in your life.

Others think they will get fulfillment and meaning in life through a career, or fame, or wealth, or marriage, or children, or impressive experiences. None of that gives life meaning. Meaning in life comes when you participate in the divine nature, and take the tools God gave you and put them to work accomplishing the thing God has called you to do. And that is the only thing in life that has any meaning at all. And it is what we will be doing forever and ever in His presence.

Benediction - Hebrews 3:1 Therefore, holy brothers, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, the apostle and high priest whom we confess.