

Mark 7:31-37

In the tales of the Arabian Nights, Ali Baba secretly follows the forty thieves to a cave where their treasure is hidden. In doing so he learns that one enters the cave by speaking the words, “Open Sesame.” With this knowledge, Ali Baba later returns, speaks the words to open the cave, and brings some of the treasure back to his home.

Although the story is but a tale, it portrays well the power of the spoken word. You and I may not be able to open caves with our tongues, but nonetheless, there is no other part of our body which is so powerful. In our Epistle lesson for today, James warns us to keep a tight rein on our tongue, because with our words, a person’s life can either be helped or hurt.

If there is power in our words, consider then the words of Jesus. In our text we see Him walking through the region of the Decapolis (which means ten cities). A man was brought to Him who was deaf and could hardly speak. Jesus put His fingers into the man’s ears, put His saliva onto the man’s tongue, and spoke the words, “Be opened.” And that’s just what happened. The man’s ears were opened and his tongue was loosened to speak.

And this is no tale. In fact, this is a record of what happened, not just to that one man—it is identical to what happened to you in your baptism. By nature we are spiritually deaf and dumb. But the Water and the Word was given to you just as Jesus gave His water and His Word to the man in our text. In your baptism, water was put on you and the words of Jesus were spoken to you, and as with that man, your ears and heart were opened to hear the good news of salvation, and your tongue was loosened so that throughout your life you can now speak of what Jesus has done for you.

The words which Ali Baba spoke in the tale, “Open Sesame,” did exactly what they said—they opened the cave. In reality, the words of Jesus carried within them the power to open the ears of the deaf man. And those same words of Jesus in your baptism made you God’s forgiven child because they opened your ears and heart to hear and believe that Jesus Christ is your Savior.

But what about a child who is deaf; who cannot hear the words of his baptism? The tale of Ali Baba may be helpful to us here. Even though it is a tale, it serves as a useful analogy. Although the cave had no ears; although caves do not think or understand, it opened when the words were spoken to it. The power was not in the cave, it was in the spoken word.

God’s Word is not limited if we are deaf, or if we have the mind of an infant. The power to believe is not in us, it is in the Word—just as the man in our text could not even hear the words which Jesus said to him, but those words opened his ears nonetheless. The power was not in the man who was deaf—the power is in the Word of Christ.

Now in the tale, what if Ali Baba had said to the cave, “Open for me!” or “Open up!” The cave wouldn’t have opened, would it? It wouldn’t have mattered how sincere he was. He had to say the precise words, “Open Sesame.” No other words could open the cave.

Jesus carefully chose the words He spoke to the deaf man. “Ephphatha” He sighed (“Be opened”). At this command his ears were opened. Jesus was also careful to direct His

Church to baptize with these words, “In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost”—and then also to teach the baptized, not something “close” to what He taught, but exactly what He taught. And He taught His Apostles to preach sin and grace. You and I need to be exposed to the sin that is within our hearts. We need to know how wicked we truly are; that our sinful nature detests doing what God commands, but delights in living according to our fleshly desires. You and I need to hear the precise word of the Law which condemns us for our sinful behavior. Only the words, “Open Sesame” opened the cave for Ali Baba. Only the harsh words of God’s Law humble us before God so that our ears and heart long to hear His word of grace in Christ. And this word of grace must also be preached just as Christ declares and commands.

Your sins are not forgiven you if I only speak words about forgiveness to you. God doesn’t command me to tell you about the Gospel. He commands His pastors to give the Gospel; to deliver the goods; to forgive you. Jesus didn’t talk to the man in our text about the potential for hearing—He said the words to make the man hear.

Because you and I so often close our ears to what God says; because we would rather listen to the voice of our own lusts and sinful desires, we need the forgiveness that God speaks to us. Because we so often use our tongue to gossip about our neighbor and not to speak well of him, we need for God to loosen our tongue, and by His gracious pardon, use our tongue to serve and not to hurt. You and I, therefore, need to hear, not words about pardon—we need the actual word of pardon.

Just as Ali Baba needed to say the precise words to open the cave, here, then, is for you the precise word that God wants you to hear: You, dear sinner are forgiven. God does not count your sins against you. Every one of your sins He forgives. Jesus did not close His ears to the accusations of the mob. They accused Him of wrongdoing and Jesus said nothing. He held His tongue and did not defend Himself. He was charged with your wrongs. He was accused for the sins you have committed. But He accepted every accusation. For you He did this. And He was crucified and He died. That’s why you are forgiven. Your Heavenly Father does not speak any word against you because Jesus died and rose again for you. And this word of forgiveness, which today is in your ears, is the precise word that God wants you to hear. And through this gracious word, God opens your heart to believe that you are, for Jesus’ sake, redeemed, restored, and forgiven.

In the tale of the Forty Thieves, Ali Baba opened the cave to take the treasure out. Not so with God. He speaks His Word to you, not to take from you, but to give His treasure to you. And His treasure is life with Him now and forever. This treasure is yours now, because His word of forgiveness for you delivers this treasure to you.

It has been said that God gave us two ears and one tongue for a reason—that we should listen more than we speak. When Jesus opened the deaf man’s ears and loosened his tongue, that man was then able to hear, perhaps for the first time, that Jesus was his Savior. After all, what good is it to be able to hear, but not hear the Word of Christ? And what good is it to be able to speak, and not speak of Jesus? God didn’t just give you two ears; He opened your ears and heart in your baptism to receive His treasure of eternal life in Jesus Christ. And God did not just give you a tongue; He gave you a tongue so that others may hear what great things God has done for you.

Do you know that you can be like Ali Baba in a way? There may be people in your life who seem to be like “closed caves.” You can talk with them about work, about sports, about the weather, about life in general, and they listen to you. But when you speak of Jesus, perhaps the listening stops—the cave closes up. Friend, God opened your ears and heart and He gave you the treasure of His grace—eternal life, and He loosened your tongue...and the same word which did this for you is the word that our loved ones need to hear. Not, “Open Sesame,” but “God loves you,” “Jesus died for you.”

Dear baptized Christian, the Word of Christ is in your ears and on your tongue, and even though some in our life appear to be like closed caves, deaf to the Word of God, remember that the power is in the Word. What a privilege you and I have to be used as mouthpieces for God, through which He gives to others the same treasure He has given us in Christ.

God gave you two ears and one tongue, however, and as much as He loves it when you speak of His love to others, and sing His praises, and pray to Him—there is nothing greater that He desires than for you to listen to His wonderful words of life. The greatest pleasure God has is to speak His word of forgiveness and grace into your ears, giving you His treasure in Christ. Amen.