Today is the final week in our four week ‘Known’ series, our look at four separate moments in the life of Jesus all found in the book of Mark… and I think I can say with great confidence that the first three passages we looked at in this series have all pointed to this one important truth: that Jesus, while he is a man with great power and authority, he is also someone who knows and loves each of us. These passages have all shown us that We are Known by Jesus. And the passage we will be looking at today will also emphasize this same truth. In fact, if I had been told that I only had one week to speak about each of us being known by Jesus, today’s passage is the passage I would have chosen. I don’t say this to downplay the other 3 passages we’ve already looked at in this series. They are all remarkable pictures of Jesus’ awareness of the details and the circumstances of our lives. But today’s passage… well, here, let’s just turn to it together and I’ll show you why I feel so strongly about today’s passage… it’s Mark 7:31-37 and you’ll find it on page ??? in the house Bible. **Welcome and pray.**

Just as a reminder, the three passages we looked at during the first three weeks of this series were all events that happened on the same day in the short span of a few of hours! That, in itself, is remarkable! Now, today’s passage happened sometime after that amazing day… just how long after that day we don’t know… but what we do know is that everything Mark tells us about Jesus between that extraordinary day when Jesus freed the man with the legion of demons and raised Jairus’ daughter from the dead and healed the woman who’d suffered from 12 years of bleeding… everything we learn in the verses that separate that remarkable day that is described in chapter 5 of Mark until we get to today’s passage in chapter 7 is all purposed to answer the big question in Mark’s gospel… the question the disciples asked when Jesus calmed a raging storm with a simple 2-word command… ‘Who is this man?’ And if you take the time to read what happens in Mark between his calming the storm in chapter 5 and the passage we will be looking at today in chapter 7 here is what you’ll find: Jesus is a man who can control the forces of nature; Jesus is a man who can control all spiritual forces; Jesus is a man who can heal our broken bodies; Jesus is a man who can raise the dead; Jesus is a man who can multiply food; Jesus is a man who can walk on water; Jesus is even a man who authoritatively speaks for God! And yet, and here is what is so extraordinary about these passages, they also show us that Jesus is a man who, even with all this power and authority, knows and cares deeply about each and every individual he encounters. And so, knowing all of this about Jesus, we come to today’s passage: Mark 7:31 where we read, *Jesus left Tyre and went up to Sidon before going back to the Sea of Galilee and the region of the Ten Towns.* There is a lot that could be said about this geographical information, but I will just tell you this: Jesus going from Tyre to Sidon and then back to the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee into the region of the 10 towns was a very odd journey… from all that we can tell this was a journey made up almost completely of rough, rugged, mountainous trails. There were no roads at the time that followed this route at all. All I can think of is that Jesus must have been doing his best to stay away from crowds during this journey, most likely because he wanted to have some time alone with his disciples. And when this rocky journey ended in the region of what Mark calls ‘the 10 Towns,’ Jesus and his disciples were right back in the exact same gentile area where Jesus had met that poor man with the legion of demons that Maron told us about in week one of our series. So, the people in this area had some notion that Jesus was someone that could do powerful things… I think this is why we read this in verse 32: ***32****A deaf man with a speech impediment was brought to him, and the people begged Jesus to lay his hands on the man to heal him.* The Greek word Mark uses to describe this man’s speech impediment is ‘magelalos’ (magilalos) and this is a very unusual Greek word… we only find it 1 time in the New Testament. And what this word means is horrible! This man wasn’t mute… ‘magelalos’ means that a person has a speech impediment that is so profound that no one can understand anything they say. And to make matters worse, the Greek also implies that this man wasn’t born deaf; he could hear at one time but could never speak in a way to be understood and **then** later he went deaf! This is a terrible situation! Now, it is true that deaf people were protected under Jewish law; they weren’t considered unclean like most people with disabilities… BUT they were classified with women, slaves, minors and imbeciles as people who were not capable of being educated enough to keep the law. I find this man’s circumstances heartbreaking… But there is one bright spot here: there was a group of people, who they are we don’t know, but there was a group of people, people I’m guessing had probably heard about Jesus’ healing power from the man who’d been delivered from the legion of demons, and they cared enough about this poor man to bring him to Jesus. But what Jesus does next is unexpected. Verse 33 says, ***33****Jesus led him away from the crowd so they could be alone.* The Greek literally says Jesus, ‘took him away from the crowd, privately.’ This is the only place in the Bible where Jesus takes someone he is going to heal off to be alone with him. I think there are a couple of reasons Jesus did this and they all point to Jesus’ compassion for this man in this moment. First, my bet is that no one had given this man direct, personal attention in a long time, and Jesus was so moved by this man’s tragic situation that he wanted to make certain that this man knew that he had Jesus’ complete attention. I’m sure he’d gently taken him by the hand or arm and led him off to a private place. And secondly, this man probably had no idea who Jesus was at all. He couldn’t hear what the people in this crowd were saying about or to Jesus and he couldn’t ask Jesus any questions about what was going on… and my thought is that Jesus wanted to make certain that this man felt comfortable with him! And the only way to do this was to take him off to a place where they could be alone, where Jesus could look him in the eyes, settle him down and calm any fears he might have about what was going on. Next we read that, ‘*He put his fingers into the man’s ears.’*  It was common for 1st Century healers to touch the part of the body that needed healing and I’m sure there had been many other times that ‘healers’ had put their fingers in this man’s ears in failed attempts to heal him… so, Jesus, by putting his fingers in this man’s ears wasn’t giving us a templet for healing deafness… no, what Jesus was doing here was showing this man he knew exactly what needed to be healed. Then we read, ‘*Then, spitting on his own fingers, he touched the man’s tongue.* Last week I talked about the fact that people in the ancient world believed that healing power was resident in a healer’s body, their clothes, their bodily fluids and even in their shadow. Again, I am certain that many other ‘healers’ had spit on their fingers and touched this man’s tongue, again in failed attempts to heal him… but Jesus, again, did this so that the man would know that Jesus knew what needed healing! ***34****Looking up to heaven, he sighed and said, “Ephphatha” which means, “Be opened!”*Now, this is just my thought, but I think Jesus looked up to heaven because he knew that his father was looking down on this scene from Heaven… they were both on the same page! And then we read, ‘He sighed.’ The Greek that our house Bible translated as ‘he sighed’ is actually much stronger than a simple sigh… the word is (stenazw) and it is a very unusually, emotional Greek word that means to ‘groan deeply from your inner being.’ It is used to represent the letting out of very emotional deep feelings… and I can’t imagine all that Jesus was feeling in this moment: he’d looked into the eyes of a man who’d been lumped in with imbeciles… he’d touched the ears and tongue of a man whose deafness and speech issues had isolated him from almost everyone and everything in life. My thought is that this deep groaning was a compassionate expression of sadness to Jesus’ father as he thought about all this innocent man had been through over the years… And then Jesus says to this man, ***“Ephphatha,”*** which Mark tells us means, ‘Be opened.’ The reason Mark tells us what this word means is because it was an unusual Aramaic word… and Mark’s first readers were Romans who most likely only spoke Latin or Greek… and Mark didn’t want anyone to think that ‘Ephphatha’ was some kind of magic, hocus-pocus word that anyone could use to heal deafness. Mark was making sure that everyone knew that this was just a regular word that Jesus was using to command this man’s ears and tongue to ‘Open up!’ And verse 35 tells us that, ***35****Instantly the man could hear perfectly, and his tongue was freed so he could speak plainly!* I think we can all get the picture of how amazing this moment was… and to me the most important word in all of this is ‘instantly!’ What a miraculous, instantaneous, immediate change!

Then we read,***36****Jesus told the crowd not to tell anyone, but the more he told them not to, the more they spread the news.*  The actual Greek of verse 36 reads like this: ‘And he ordered ‘them’ that no one should tell, but as much as he ordered ‘them,’ they more exceedingly proclaimed.’ Jesus was ordering, or more literally ‘commanding’ ‘them’ not to tell what had happened; the ‘them’ here are the people that brought this man to Jesus. And here is what is important in this: Jesus was NOT telling this man not to tell anyone… but Mark does tell us twice that Jesus firmly said, ‘Those of you who brought this man to me, keep your mouths shut! You are not to tell anyone what had happened here today!’ And there are a couple of reasons why: first, the way Jesus went about this healing, sticking his fingers in the man’s ears and spitting on his fingers and touching his tongue… while Jesus did these things as a way to carefully tell this man that Jesus understood where his suffering resided and that he was about to heal him, the truth is, that what Jesus did could have been mistaken as acts of magic to those who were watching what was happening from a distance… and Jesus didn’t want it spread around that he was some sort of magician. But the more important reason that Jesus told everyone to keep quiet was that Jesus wanted this story of miraculous healing to be told by the one man who just moments ago couldn’t say anything. Jesus wanted this man, and this man alone to tell the world about what Jesus had done for him. This makes sense to me. You talk about giving this man what he really needed… what he needed was dignity and giving this man the exclusive right to tell his own story gave him a public platform to regain community-wide dignity! Mark does, though, let us know that this miracle was far too overwhelming for anyone to keep secret… Our house Bible says, ‘the more he told them not to, the more they spread the news,’ but this is really an understatement. The Greek is ‘they more exceedingly proclaimed!’ as in ‘they loudly shouted the good news!’ And let me tell you, I get their shouting!

And the passage ends with these words, ‘*They were completely amazed and said again and again, “Everything he does is wonderful. He even makes the deaf to hear and gives speech to those who cannot speak.”* And let’s not forget, as I said earlier, the last time Jesus was with the people in this part of the world, he so frightened them that they begged him to go away! Not that long ago they wanted nothing to do with Jesus. And now they can’t say enough good things about him… what a remarkable turn-around. Everything is different because of Jesus!

So, as we have been asking each week, ‘What do we do with this story?’ and ‘How does it relate to our lives?’ Well, first off, it further answers the question, ‘Who is this man?’ We’ve now learned that Jesus is a man who can heal the deaf and the speech impaired. This alone is amazing! But what Jesus does here goes far beyond just giving this man the ability to hear and speak. What this passage shows us, just as we have seen in the other passages in this series, is that Jesus knew this man intimately and he knew exactly what he needed. This man had been about as isolated, marginalized and undignified as a person could be and Jesus knew, yes, he needed to be healed… but he also needed to be saved from ALL these other things that came with his terrible circumstances as well… And this is why the first thing Jesus did was make this man the center of his attention… and why Jesus gently explained through his actions what he was going to do… and why he let this man know through his deep sighing that his soul was overwhelmed by all this man had suffered… and why after healing him Jesus said so strongly that this man alone should use his new found perfect speech to tell others about his healing. Jesus ordering the crowd to keep quiet may not have had any effect, but Jesus’ intensions were clear: the only person with permission to tell the community about any of this was the one person that just moments earlier wouldn’t have been given the time of day by his community. Jesus knew him and gave him the right to speak as often and as loudly about his moment with Jesus as he wanted… and my bet is that he did just this!

And so once again, we see that Jesus is a man with great power and authority… he is a man who is amazing beyond our ability to imagine and yet he is also a man who knows us… knows our struggles and our pains and our needs and in his great compassion for us, wants to bring us healing… healing from anything that keeps us in bondage.

This passage has a great deal of resonance with me. My life has been nothing like this man’s life, but I know what it is to have had a time in life when I had difficulty speaking… getting the words out in a way that could be understood… that’s a story for another time… and I am at an age now where, to be truthful, my hearing is failing. I know what it is to be uncertain that I know what those around me are saying and I’ve experienced the isolation that comes with from this uncertainty. I’m not telling you this so you will feel sorry for me. The speech problem cleared up… and many people my age experience this kind of age-related hearing loss… but, as I prepared for this sermon I couldn’t help but identify with this man… in a number of ways… and I found great comfort in the fact that Jesus knew him and gave him not only the healing he needed but more importantly the dignity that that he deserved! And Jesus wants to give each one of us deliverance from whatever it might be that isolates us from others and robs us of our dignity and keeps us from living the life that we were created to live. And what this entire series has shown me in spades is that, yes, Jesus is a man with great power and authority… someone who can still do the miraculous and all he wants from us, from you and me, is for you to give him the chance to take you by the hand and walk you to a place where he can look you in the eye and work in your life in ways that lets you know that you are known by him... that you are known by Jesus.