

The Sigh of Salvation

Why do people sigh? Any number of reasons, I suppose. We let out a sigh when we're *down or depressed* or when we're faced with something that saddens us or bothers us. *We've heard a lot of those over the past year or so, haven't we?* We let out a sigh when we're tired and worn out. There are also good sighs, right? We sometimes sigh a sigh of relief, after a difficult task has been completed. It's a sigh of *satisfaction and accomplishment*, like when you get done mowing the lawn. **Okay... so why did Jesus sigh?** Pay attention to the Gospel lesson, particularly verse 34, where we hear that before working the miracle of healing for the deaf man with the speech impediment, Jesus sighed.

Why? Why would Jesus sigh *before* working such a great and wonderful miracle? Could it mean that maybe Jesus was *reluctant* to do such a thing? I'm sure we can all relate to that, can't we? Who here hasn't let out a *big sigh of reluctance* when you really don't want to do something, but you have to do it? Maybe you're busy with something else and you get interrupted with the problem at hand. You're running late. You're tired. "*S-i-i-i-gh... Let's do this. Let's just get this over with.*" We understand this reality, don't we? ***But...is this why Jesus sighed?*** In a nutshell: No. Such an understanding basically makes Jesus no different than any of us, sighing because He was being bothered or interrupted and He just wanted to get it over with.

Let's come at this from a perspective we can all relate to. ***Have you ever known that something bad is going to result from a very good thing you do?*** You know what I'm talking about...you're going to do something good, but you also know that someone else is going to come along and miss the entire point and misconstrue what it is that you did and basically make a big mess of everything? It's not a matter of reluctance on your part. You're going to do the task set before you, and you're going to do it well because it needs doing, and you have no problem doing it. ***It's a joy/privilege to serve in such a way.*** Doing the task is not the issue. However, there will be some who simply don't get it. They're going to come along and mess it all up. ***You know what's coming.*** Such a foreknowledge; such a reality will, without fail, produce a sigh.

This is why Jesus sighed! It's not that He was reluctant to work this great reversal in the life of this lowly man. In fact, Jesus took this man aside in private so that the man would know and understand precisely what was going on. Jesus touched his ears and touched his tongue, letting him know beforehand that Jesus not only *knew and understood* what ailed him, but that He was going to **personally** do something about it. The sigh actually had nothing to do with the sickly man, but with the rest of the crowd. Jesus knew how they would respond, and it wasn't going to be good.

On the surface, that may sound strange, perhaps even *wrong*. After all, Mark tells us that the crowd was zealously proclaiming how *awesome* Jesus was in His miraculous workings, even making deaf people hear and mute people speak. “*He does all things well!*” Usually you sigh when people say the opposite about you. *Who wouldn’t want to hear accolades like that?* Jesus didn’t. He told them to be silent. In fact, the *more* Jesus told them to be quiet, the *more* zealous they were in their proclamation. *Why did Jesus want to silence such praise and glory?* Basically, it comes down to what was in their hearts. It comes down to their *motivation and [mis]understanding* of who Christ was and what He was all about. This crowd looked at Jesus as nothing more than a magic man; a guy who could simply cure whatever ails you. “*Got a problem? Jesus can fix that! Just sprinkle a little Jesus on what ails you, and –poof— it’ll disappear. Jesus helps you live the good life.*” They didn’t understand who Jesus really was. They didn’t understand that His kingdom was not of this world; that He wasn’t some sort of genie in a lamp who would grant your every wish; everything your little selfish heart desires.

This is precisely why Jesus was so adamant in telling them to be quiet. He wasn’t using *reverse psychology* to coax some evangelism out of them (which is what some so foolishly believe). **NO! He was serious.** He wanted them to be quiet. He didn’t want a wrong, false understanding of Him and His messianic mission to be put forth. If you can’t say something nice, then say nothing at all, right? Well... if you’re not going to say something right about Jesus —orthodoxy (like the deaf/mute was now doing)— *then it’s better that you say nothing at all.* This is why Christ sighed before working such a wonderful miracle. He knew what was coming. He knew how others would wrongly perceive it and misrepresent it, *and it bothered Him. It tore Him up.*

And yet...*He still did it.* Think about that. Look to this cross and think about all that Christ foreknew; all of our sin, all of our disobedience, all of our refusal to listen and obey...He knew it all, and yet He still did it. His incomprehensible love for us is what led Him to persevere and push on all the way to the cross; all the way to the very depths of hellish wrath and torment. ***Just think of all the times Christ has sighed...for you.*** “*Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.*” “*Father, forgive them, for they know EXACTLY what they do... and yet they still do it.*” I understand why Jesus sighs.

And here’s the thing that’s often overlooked. People often think of Jesus only suffering our sins on His cross. That’s simply not true. ***Jesus suffered for us in our place from beginning to end.*** At the very beginning of His life He shed His blood for us in circumcision, already beginning to fulfill the Law perfectly. We hear many times of how He felt such tremendous compassionate sorrow and turmoil in his inner-most being whenever He encountered people who were like sheep without a shepherd, harassed and helpless. The original Greek tells us that He felt

splagnidzomai; that is, His guts were torn up. He physically felt the pain and sorrow in His belly. It tore Him up.

Even here today with the deaf man, Jesus is taking this man's sinful suffering and maladies into Himself. ***This sinfulness didn't just disappear into thin air!*** It was swallowed up by Christ; taken into Him. You don't think that hurts?! Again, Jesus knew what was coming. He knew what needed to be done. And He did it. ***It pained Him, to be sure.*** He sighed because sin hurts. Sin kills. Jesus was willingly taking this man's deadly condition into Himself. And such a miracle of life was treated by everyone else as a mere parlor trick or get-rich-quick opportunity. This is why Jesus sighed. He knew what was coming.

And Christ didn't stop there. He persevered. He pushed on, all the way to Calvary; all the way into the bonds of hellish wrath and death, willingly enduring all of the Father's just and righteous wrath against sin; wrath that was rightly reserved for us. ***We earned it all! Jesus took our place.*** He willingly stepped in and laid down His life as an all-redeeming sacrifice for our lives. Understand: It's not entirely a false premise to say that Jesus became no different than any of us. That doesn't mean that Jesus was every bit as foul and moody and sinful as we are. Rather, it means that Jesus, the holy and righteous One of God, the sinless One, took on our sin, becoming our punishment. ***He became one of us in order to save us.*** As St. Paul states in his letter to the Corinthians, "*For our sake He made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.*"

Folks: That's what all of this is about, from beginning to end. It's all about you. It's all about your forgiveness, your salvation, your eternal redemption and adoption into God's holy family. God knew all along—from before the foundation of the world—how utterly fallen and sinful and corrupt His creation would be, ***and yet He still sent His Son to die for it.*** Jesus Christ fully knew what awaited Him before He ever gave up all of heaven's majesty for a virgin's womb, a feed trough bed, a bloody cross, and newly-dug tomb. ***He knew it all... and He didn't hesitate, not for a single moment. That's how much He loves you.*** And when the high point of God's plan came to fruition on that cross, Jesus didn't let out a sigh of despair or defeat. Instead, He proclaimed victoriously, "*It is finished!*" He let everyone know about it. ***And only then did He sigh; a sigh of loving, grateful relief.*** He boldly proclaimed His victory, and then He peacefully breathed out His last, falling asleep in the hands of His heavenly Father. The sad reality is that no one else got it. The rest of creation understood. The earth shook. Boulders split. Tombs were literally burst open and the dead came back to life. "*It is finished!*" ***This was no sigh left open to interpretation.*** God Himself made it clear. The empty tomb on Sunday morning provided further proof; the veritable receipt that the transaction of ***Christ for all*** was accepted and complete. It really was and is finished, in Christ and because of Christ.

My friends: This is your reality, right now. You have been baptized into this earth-shaking, tomb-rending, life-giving reality. You have been baptized into Christ's death and resurrection. **That's nothing to sigh about!** That's reason to rejoice! Is there a chance you might suffer for such faithfulness? Absolutely! "*Take up your **CROSS** and follow Me.*" In fact, given how things have been shaking out recently, there's a strong probability that you will suffer greatly. Looking around at this world we live in is enough to make you sigh a huge sigh of despair and defeat, isn't it? Count it all joy, my brothers and sisters. Count it all joy to have the *opportunity* to suffer for Christ; to bear witness to Christ. Count it all joy, **for God is in charge.** We have His promise that not even the gates of hell will prevail, so neither will anything this world tries to throw at us. God knows what's going on, *and He's already told us how it will all end.* We know the rest of the story. Christ wins. We win. Through baptism, we're *already* in Christ. **We've already won.** Sin, death, and the devil have no power over us. There's nothing to fear. I know that my redeemer lives, and I know that I will see Him face to face, with my own eyes. Whether I live or die or anything in between, I belong to Christ. That's a joy and a peace that surpasses all human understanding; a joy and a peace only understood in faith. That's a joy and peace that I pray is in your heart and on your lips all your remaining days. *May you ever and always persevere in and trust in God above all things,* who is always working all things for your good, and for the good of those who love Him.

In His name and to His glory...

AMEN