

# WE SHARE THIS SERMON WITH YOU!

**EPHPHATHA! BE OPENED!**

**Stephen Jones, preaching  
November 22, 1992**

**Text: Mark 7:31-37**



**CENTRAL  
BAPTIST  
CHURCH**

A CARING AND RISKING COMMUNITY OF FAITH

***106 West Lancaster Avenue, Route 30  
Wayne, Pennsylvania 19087  
(215) 688-0664***

*We invite you to worship with us each Sunday morning at 10:45 a.m.  
Classes for all ages begin at 9:30 a.m.  
(Summer Worship Hour: 9:30 a.m.)*

*Free Sunday parking is available  
on the Wayne Avenue side of the church building.*

## **CENTRAL BAPTIST CHURCH WELCOMES YOU!**

Central Baptist Church is an American Baptist community of faith involving children, adults and youth. The church gathers in Wayne, Pennsylvania on Philadelphia's western Main Line. The church acts as a dynamic ministry each week reaching out in a 20-mile radius, where the members live, serve and work. That web is extended through Central Baptist Church's enthusiastic mission support for justice, witness and healing in our metropolitan area and throughout our nation and world.

With the headquarters of our denomination nearby, as well as an American Baptist college and theological graduate school, the church enjoys the leavening which students, faculty, and denominational and community servants offer to the congregation's life.

Our worship is centered in the Worship Commons on Lancaster Avenue. A beautiful, functional and inspiring space, it was rededicated in 1980 after complete renovation as "a place where God's presence can be experienced, and from which we each can be encouraged to offer caring and serving, listening and sharing" to the wider community.

The flexible seating arrangement allows for a wide variety of worship experiences around the communion table, the pulpit, the baptistry, and around other worship centers that highlight the theme of worship.

Central Baptist Church has been a place for significant preaching, exciting music, and where persons are open to share concerns and celebrations from their lives.

Dr. Stephen D. Jones, pastor, came to Central Baptist Church in 1985 after having served pastorates in Ohio and Colorado. He has preached and spoken across the United States and Canada, in Central America, in the Philippines and Singapore. He is the author of three Judson Press books: *Faith Shaping*, *Reaching Youth Today*, and *Transforming Discipleship in the Inclusive Church*.

Newton Woodbury, retired after many years as a denominational leader, is engaged in pastoral visitation at Central Baptist Church.

The members of Central Baptist Church welcome your participation in our Sunday worship services and throughout our congregation's life and witness.

## **EPHPHATHA! BE OPENED!**

**Stephen Jones, preaching  
November 22, 1992**

**Text: Mark 7:31-37**

Anytime a word in the Gospels appears in Aramaic, we can be assured that we are closest to the original, for this was the tongue of Jesus, and not the language understood by the early church to whom the gospels were written. Ephphatha is an Aramaic word, in a command form, meaning, "be opened!."

Obviously, in the context of this miracle, the man's ears were thought to be closed, and the miracle needed was an opening of his ears. And the man's tongue was thought to be restricted, and the miracle needed was a releasing of his tongue. And thus, the miracle of opening.

But when you stop to think about it, openness and healing have much to do with our lives as well. How easy it is to "close-down", to shut-down. When I am with someone who is struggling with a terminal disease, the greatest temptation is to narrow-down the options for prayer until we are seeking only one solution. Our prayers to God then become ultimatums: this is what you must do, God, if you love us. How can prayers open us up to the marvelous and unexpected ways God may intercede?

Too often we have specified for God the solution we desire, the response we expect, the specific kind of healing we will accept, the only way we will allow reconciliation. "Let's do it MY way", is often the essence of our prayers.

And we become the greatest obstacle to our healing. The path to healing is to open ourselves to as many avenues and forms in which healing can come to us. And so, healing and openness have much to do with each other.

God's healing Spirit was present 2,000 years ago through *Jesus the Christ*. And this same healing Spirit is available through the presence of Jesus Christ in our midst. The word of Christ today remains, "Ephphatha! Be Opened!" Healing comes as we open ourselves to this Spirit of Healing as Christ chooses to touch and embrace us.

What we think is our only option is rarely our only option. We need to open our minds, open our will, open our hearts, to the Healing Possibility in whatever shape or form it comes to us.

We can expect to be healed, but in God's way, not necessarily our own.

If Jesus were to speak this word to you, "Ephphatha! Be Opened!", to what would he be referring? What openings do you stand in need of? Where are you closed? Close-minded? Closed in your feelings? Closed in your commitments? Closed in your ability to forgive? Closed in your attitudes? Closed to strangers or enemies? Closed to those who hurt you? Closed in your expectations? Closed to intimacy? to risk-taking?

How can we each open ourselves to God's Healing Spirit today? How can the spirit of Ephphatha! touch you and me here in this place? Where do you need to be open and receptive?

But there is a bind in all of this. Catch me at a good point in my life, when I'm not threatened or feeling vulnerable, and I'm a real "Ephphatha kind of guy!" But in moments when I stand in need of healing, when I am insecure or vulnerable, when I am needy, I am also, inevitably, all locked up, all closed up.

It is fear, plain and simple, that closes us off to God's Healing Possibility. Openness causes us to be vulnerable, and therefore, able to be hurt. But how can you get inside a building when all the doors are locked, and all the windows barred? And how can God's healing Spirit enter our lives if we have closed down?

Dear friends, let each one of us, open up, and be receptive, be ready to receive, this day, God's healing Spirit. Let us, on this Thanksgiving Sunday, give thanks that we can be healed from our brokenness this day, and every day, in the Spirit of Ephphatha! Amen.