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Aramaic expressions in Mark's Gospel

Talitha cumi, Ephphatha, Abba and Eloi, Eloi

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One has often pondered over the question as to why the Spirit of God has left on record, in the gospel of Mark, these four occasions where the words of the Lord Jesus are preserved for us in the actual language that He spoke. I have recently realized that each one of them are incidents of intense intimacy. Let us consider them.

Talitha cumi

In Mark 5:35-43, we have the death and raising of Jairus's daughter. As soon as the awful words "Thy daughter is dead," are told to Jairus, the Lord Jesus is immediately right by his side with words of comfort and encouragement, "Be not afraid, only believe." This reveals that in moments of extreme sorrow and anxiety we can experience the nearness of our Savior, and receive from Him the support that will sustain us through those circumstances.

He goes with Jairus right into the scene of death after having put out every element of unbelief and scorn, but takes with Him the father and mother and three privileged disciples. "He took the damsel by the hand, and said unto her, Talitha cumi."

Under the law, for a Jew to touch a dead body, and she was dead as her spirit had left her (Luke 8:55), would have rendered the person unclean for seven days. Nevertheless, not so the Savior, as He could never be contaminated by sin and its

consequences, but in infinite grace, He came down to where sin had brought us, even to taking hold of death on the cross. This beautiful act of taking hold of that young girl's hand is one of intense intimacy and demonstrates the words in Luke 10:33, "as He journeyed, *came where he was.*"

Ephphatha

In Mark 7:31-37, we have the healing of the man who was deaf and had an impediment in his speech, a pitiful physical condition which has sad moral implications, which were typical of the nation of Israel at that time, but also true of everyone who does not know the Saviour. Israel, under the law, was greatly privileged to have been given the "words of God," but they had become deaf through unbelief, and so there was no response to God in praise and worship. So it is with us if we have not heard and believed the gospel, because, "without faith it is impossible to please Him" (Heb. 11:6).

"And He took him aside from the multitude, and put His fingers into his ears, and He spit, and touched his tongue; and looking up to heaven, He sighed, and said to him, Ephphatha." Again, He takes the poor man away from the unbelieving multitude, because this is not a public matter but one that is private and intimate. Then the Lord Jesus puts His fingers into the man's ears. This is the only mention of the Lord's fingers in this gospel; in fact there is only one other, in John 9.

How impossible it is to speak adequately of this incident, to picture in our minds the Son of God, putting a finger into each of the man's ears, and then spitting and putting His spit on the man's tongue, associating Himself with the condition with His fingers, and putting on his tongue something of Himself. I cannot think of anything more intimate than this: It calls forth worship and adoration. Then it says "He sighed." A word that expresses deep sorrow, as He feels how sin had spoiled everything for God, and then says "Ephphatha, that is, Be opened."

Abba

In Mark's account of the Lord's sufferings in Gethsemane, when He addresses His Father He uses the word "Abba" (14:36). This form of address, "is the word framed by the lips of infants, and betokens unreasoning trust" (W. E. Vine). In verse 33 we read that He "began to be sore amazed, and to be very heavy." The word amazed comes from a root meaning to become "immovable" and is often associated with "terror"; being very heavy is an expression of deep distress. I hesitate to comment

on these words that the Holy Spirit uses to describe the effect the contemplation of what was before Him had on His holy person, as they involve such extreme depths of emotion that is beyond our comprehension.

So “He went forward a little, and fell on the ground.” This reminds us of His word to Peter, “Ye cannot follow me now,” as He was entering that final pathway that led only to the cross, upon which no one could accompany Him. Yet He then in speaking to His Father does so in terms of the sweetest simplicity and intimacy.

How amazing it is then to read in Romans 8:15, “But ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.” As we have been brought into the relationship of sons and have the nature of that relationship in the power of the Holy Spirit, we can enter into the intimacy that was His, as a man here below, and can address the Father with this same word, “Abba.”

Eloi, Eloi

Finally, in Mark 15:34 we read, “And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani.” In the previous verse, we read of the darkness that was over the whole land for three hours, because no human mind can enter into what was taking place between that perfect man and His God during those hours.

Verses 1 and 3 of Psalm 22 help us to understand a little what caused Him to utter those words of extreme emotion, as well as the intense physical suffering He was enduring. Why was His God, whom He had served so faithfully, forsaking Him? In verse 3, He gives the answer to that profound question, “But thou art holy.” So, in perfect righteousness, He justifies God in forsaking Him, as He was “made sin” and was bearing our sins in His body on the tree.

Again, I believe the preservation of the very words that came from His mouth during those hours of deepest suffering conveys to us the intimacy that the Holy Spirit would bring before us, as solemnly, but with adoration, we contemplate those holy sufferings.

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