

## He Has Done All Things Well

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Mark 7:31-37

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The words of the beloved hymn, *O For a Thousand Tongues*, has been on my heart and mind this week as I studied the text. Wesley's words are certainly true of the individual Jesus encounters in the Gentile region of Decapolis.

*O for a thousand tongues to sing  
my great Redeemer's praise,  
the glories of my God and King,  
the triumphs of his grace!*

*He breaks the power of cancelled sin,  
he sets the prisoner free;  
his blood can make the foulest clean;  
his blood availed for me.<sup>1</sup>*

*Jesus! the name that charms our fears,  
that bids our sorrows cease,  
'tis music in the sinner's ears,  
'tis life and health and peace.*

Let's turn our attention to the text before us this morning. Let me encourage you to stand if you have the ability as we read God's Word. Mark, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, pens the following words:

*Then he returned from the region of Tyre and went through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis. And they brought to him a man who was deaf and had a speech impediment, and they begged him to lay his hand on him. And taking him aside from the crowd privately, he put his fingers into his ears, and after spitting touched his tongue. And looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, "Ephphatha," that is, "Be opened." And his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. And Jesus charged them to tell no one. But the more he charged them, the more zealously they proclaimed it. And they were astonished beyond measure, saying, "He has done all things well. He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak."  
Mark 7:31-37*

Brothers and sisters, "The grass withers and the flower fades, but the Word of our God stands forever" Isaiah 40:8.

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Wesley, *O For a Thousand Tongues*, 1739.

## I. THE CONDITION OF THE MAN (v. 31-32)

*Then he returned from the region of Tyre and went through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis. And they brought to him a man who was deaf and had a speech impediment, and they begged him to lay his hand on him.*

Jesus and His disciples depart from Tyre (a 50 mile journey northwest of Galilee), and head 20 miles up the Mediterranean coastline to Sidon. From there they traveled south toward the region of Decapolis (a group of ten cities southeast of the Sea of Galilee). This isn't a daytrip. This circuitous route covered some 120+ miles and is presumed by some scholars to have taken up to several months. Why the long journey? This was essentially a traveling seminar for Jesus' disciples. They needed to be prepared for the challenging ministry that awaited them. So Jesus removed Himself from the crowds and clamor of Galilee and set out on foot with the disciples in an effort to solidify all He had been teaching them.

The disciples knew that Jesus was no mere man, but it's only after this journey that Jesus' identity really seems to really click for these men. In chapter 8, as Jesus is walking with His disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi, He asks them, "Who do people say that I am?" And they told him, "John the Baptist; and others say, Elijah; and others, one of the prophets." And he asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are the Christ." And he strictly charged them to tell no one about him" Mark 8:27–30. This was a pivotal, paradigm-shifting trip for these guys.

Notice that Jesus avoids the region of Galilee on the return from this trip. Why is that? I think there are three reasons. First, Jesus was intent on using this journey to teach and equip His men. Second, Galilee was becoming an increasingly hostile place for Jesus. The Scribes and Pharisees hated Him and wanted Him dead (Mark 3:6). Furthermore, the region of Galilee was governed by Herod Antipas, who had beheaded John the Baptist and was no sympathizer to Jesus. The area to the east of Galilee on the other hand, including the Decapolis, was ruled by Antipas' brother, Herod Philip, who had little reason to be concerned about Jesus. Lastly, Jesus' journey into Gentile territory indicates His inclusion of the non-Jewish world in His ministry.

Remember, salvation is from the Jews (John 4:22), but the gospel was never meant to be for the Jews exclusively. They weren't called to be the end of the gospel, but rather a means to an end – that the whole world might be blanketed with the saving truth of the gospel message. And so, after 120 miles of arduous travel, Jesus and His disciples enter into the 10 city region, southeast of the Sea of Galilee, known as the Decapolis.

This isn't the first time we have heard mention of the Decapolis. Remember back in chapter 5 when Jesus healed the demon-possessed Gerasene man? He was from the Decapolis. The crowds at that time begged Jesus to leave their region (5:17). But the restored man begged Jesus to follow

Him. Do you remember what Jesus told this man when he begged to follow Jesus? Glance back at chapter 5, verses 19-20. Mark writes, “And he did not permit him [to follow Him] but said to him, “Go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you.” And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him, and everyone marveled.” This redeemed man, the first Gentile missionary, went back home and shared Christ with everyone who would listen. So when Jesus shows back up in the Decapolis, in contrast to their asking Him to leave on His first visit, they now shove those needing to be healed at His feet.

Upon arriving, Mark tells us that they bring a deaf and speech-impaired man to Jesus. The only counterpart to this story is found in three short verses in Matthew’s gospel. While it’s not as detailed as Mark’s account, for the sake of context, listen to what Matthew writes:

*Jesus went on from there and walked beside the Sea of Galilee. And he went up on the mountain and sat down there. And great crowds came to him, bringing with them the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute, and many others, and they put them at his feet, and he healed them, so that the crowd wondered, when they saw the mute speaking, the crippled healthy, the lame walking, and the blind seeing. And they glorified the God of Israel. Matthew 15:29–31*

Mark says “they brought to Him a man”. Why is “they?” They are likely family, friends, unnamed individuals who care about this man. The man was deaf and had a speech impediment. He was unable to articulate words. These two conditions commonly existed together. It is hard to form words if you can’t hear words. In Jesus’ day, unlike today, there were no modern medical conveniences. There were no sophisticated devices that could be placed in the ear canal to aid in hearing. No cochlear implants to electronically stimulate nerves in the inner ear. If you were deaf or hearing impaired, you had to learn to live that way.

It is probable that this man became deaf as a child. A person who is born deaf usually doesn’t speak well, but this man is said to have a speech impediment. It’s possible that his deafness could have been caused by trauma to the ear or even as a result of a childhood illness. The Jews lumped the deaf in with the insane because there was no way of knowing what they understood. The Jews also considered such maladies to be a sure sign of God’s judgment. As a result, a deaf person was treated somewhat as an outcast. But the man’s condition would have made him somewhat of an outcast even amongst the Gentiles because he wasn’t able to do what “able bodied” people were able to do.

But the man had people who cared for Him and brought Him to Jesus (cf. Mark 2:1-12). Those who brought the man to Jesus begged him (same word used of the woman in verses 24-30) to lay His hand on him. It’s interesting to note that the request for Jesus to lay His hand on the man, which was a particularly Jewish practice, suggests that there might very well have been both Jews

and Gentiles in the crowd surrounding Jesus. William Lane suggests that there were sizeable colonies of Jews in nearly all of the cities that comprised the Decapolis. Well, how does Jesus respond to this poor soul? In verses 33-35 we see the compassion of the Master.

## II. THE COMPASSION OF THE MASTER (v. 33-35)

*And taking him aside from the crowd privately, he put his fingers into his ears, and after spitting touched his tongue. And looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, “Ephphatha,” that is, “Be opened.” And his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly.*

Mark tells us that Jesus took the man aside from the crowd...Why do you suppose he did that? I think Jesus did this to signify that the man wasn't just another problem, but rather an individual. By himself, the man was just another Gentile face in the crowd. But the way Jesus deals with the man demonstrates that He sees the man as a *soul* and not as a *case*.<sup>2</sup> Notice that Jesus doesn't minister to the man from a "safe distance". Separated from the crowd, look at how Jesus attends to the man's needs. It would have been as easy for Jesus to speak a word and command this man's faculties to return at once – but that's not what He did. Instead, Jesus uses His own form of sign language with the man. He gives the man four signs, so to speak, of what He is getting ready to do:

### 1. He puts His finger in the man's ears.

He identifies with the man and signals that He knows exactly what the problem is. It's important to note that while the Jews regarded the Gentiles as unclean, Jesus didn't. Jesus reached out and touched the man. Jesus never recoiled from laying His hands on sinful humanity. He was moved with pity and touched the leper in Mark 1:40-45. Those who brought the man to Jesus begged Him to lay His hand on him and that's exactly what He did. There's tenderness here, an expression of compassion and love. Jesus' touch is a tangible prelude of the fellowship that believers experience with Him through faith.<sup>3</sup>

### 2. He spit on His fingers and touched the man's tongue.

Saliva of certain persons was considered, at least by the Jews, to have medicinal or healing power. Jesus identifies for the man that He is aware of his speech impediment and desires to heal it.

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<sup>2</sup> William Barclay, *The Gospel of Mark* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1975), 181.

<sup>3</sup> James R. Edwards, *PNTC: The Gospel According to Mark* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002), 225.

3. He looks up to heaven.

Jesus looked up to Heaven because, though He is God in flesh, He was dependent on His Father (John 5:30). We see this similarly at Lazarus' tomb when Jesus lifted up His eyes toward Heaven (John 11:41). I think Jesus looked up toward Heaven to let the man know where the power was coming from.

4. He sighed (groaned).

I think this is an expression of grief over the effects of sin. But I also think this was a declaration of sympathy over the man's condition – a sign of God's compassion. This was certainly something the man never received from the myriad of false deities that were commonly sought and worshipped in the Hellenistic (Greek) world of the Decapolis. We see Jesus' compassion expressed all over the gospels – Matthew 9:36-38. Jesus cares about our infirmities. He's a man of sorrow, and acquainted with grief – Isaiah 53:3. He is touched with the feelings of our infirmities – Hebrews 4:15. He cares about what we are going through – 1 Peter 5:7, Matthew 11:28. Jesus, using His own form of sign language, teaches the man a lesson about the character of God.

Look at verse 34. Mark writes, "And He said to him, "Ephphatha (Aramaic)," that is, "Be opened." And his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. One command from Jesus and this man's life was changed. Verse 35 says the man's ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. The ESV, though I'm deeply thankful for its faithfulness to the original text, doesn't translate a word that appears in the Greek. The NASB says, "And his ears were opened, and the *impediment* of his tongue was removed, and he *began* speaking plainly." The ESV captures the essence of the original text, but the NASB includes the word *impediment*. It's interesting to note that the word *impediment* (*desmos*) is the word for chains that would be used to bind a prisoner. Literally, the chains that bound the man's tongue were broken and he began speaking plainly. What a picture of the chains of sin and death that once bound us all.

Jesus came to open the eyes of the blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness (Isaiah 42:7). Notice that there is no progression here. The man could *instantaneously* hear and speak plainly – (ὀρθῶς- *orthos*), correctly. No speech therapy, no learning conjugations, no lesson in vocabulary - the man could speak plainly. This is a miracle! Jesus took what was broken and made it whole.

## SOMETHING MUCH MORE PROFOUND IS HAPPENING HERE

There is more going on here than the expression of Jesus' compassion. I think this is a picture or an illustration of something much more profound. I think Jesus is demonstrating His ability to heal the spiritually deaf. Jesus can give the chief of sinners a hearing ear. He can make him delight in hearing the very gospel message that he once despised. He also has the power to heal the spiritually mute. He can cause the hardest of sinners to call on God for mercy and grace. He can put a new song in the mouth of the one whose tongue was chained to earth. Indeed, He can take the mouth that was once full of deceit, venom, curses, and bitterness (Romans 3:13-14), and bridle it such that it testifies to the gospel of God's grace (Acts 20:24).

Also noteworthy is the fact that in verse 32 Mark uses a word to describe the man that is used nowhere else in the New Testament except here. He says, "And they brought to him a man who was deaf and had a *speech impediment*, and they begged him to lay his hand on him." The word translated speech impediment or mute is the Greek word (*mogilalos*). This isn't the common word used for muteness or the inability to speak. This word (*mogilalos*) only appears in one other place in the entire Bible and that's in the Old Testament – Isaiah 35:5-6. Isaiah 35 follows a series of chapters in the book of Isaiah that deal with God's judgment toward Edom, Egypt, Tyre, Israel, and Jerusalem. But chapter 35 shifts from the theme of judgment to future joy.

*The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad; the desert shall rejoice and blossom like the crocus; it shall blossom abundantly and rejoice with joy and singing. The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it, the majesty of Carmel and Sharon. They shall see the glory of the LORD, the majesty of our God. Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who have an anxious heart, "Be strong; fear not! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God. He will come and save you." Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy. For waters break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert; Isaiah 35:1-6*

Isaiah 35:5-6 celebrates God as the One who comes in order to unstop the ears of the deaf and provide a song for the man of inarticulate speech. What we have in Mark 7:31-37 is a picture of salvation coming to the Gentile world through Jesus Christ, God's eschatological Redeemer! Tyre and Sidon along with the Decapolis are the firstfruits of the fulfillment of Isaiah 35:5-6. Let's look at the final two verses of our text for this morning. We have seen *the condition of the man, the compassion of the Master*, and now we will see *the confession of the crowd*.

### III. THE CONFESSION OF THE CROWD (v. 36-37)

*And Jesus charged them to tell no one. But the more he charged them, the more zealously they proclaimed it. And they were astonished beyond measure, saying, "He has done all things well. He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak."*

Jesus charged them continually (imperfect tense) to tell no one? Why? Because it's not yet time... This isn't the first time Jesus has charged an individual or group to remain quiet (cf. Mark 1:34, 1:44, 3:12, 5:43). Why did He tell this man not to tell anyone? He tells him not to tell anyone for a couple reasons. First, because He doesn't want to just be lumped into the bag with the other resident miracle-workers. He is more – infinitely more. Remember what happened after Jesus cleansed the leper in Mark 1? Jesus told the leper not to tell anyone, but instead to go show himself to the priest. But verse 45 says, "But he went out and began to talk freely about it, and to spread the news, so that Jesus could no longer openly enter a town, but was out in desolate places, and people were coming to him from every quarter." The leper's disobedience caused the masses to flock to Jesus such that he was pressed into the wilderness and His preaching mission temporarily interrupted. It's very possible that Jesus intended to remain in the area a little longer and He didn't want to be regarded as just another wonder-worker.

Secondly, Jesus charged this man not to go and tell everyone because His redemptive work wasn't finished yet. The story isn't complete until the crucifixion and resurrection. It's only after the cross that Jesus gathers His disciples and tells them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age" Matthew 28:18–20.

In spite of Jesus' charge, they zealously proclaimed what He had done. Something to think about...Jesus told the crowd to tell no one and they told everyone. He tells us to tell everyone and we tell no one. They were disobedient, but unfortunately so are we oftentimes. Why did they disobey His charge? Mark writes, "They were astonished beyond measure..." The word translated "measure" or "utterly" in your Bible is only used here in the New Testament. It has the idea of completeness, over the top, or superabundantly. In other words, those in attendance literally had their minds blown by what they witnessed.

Look at what they said in their amazement. They exclaim, "He has done all things well. He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak." "All" is a mighty word, it covers a lot of territory. While the crowd had little idea of the full meaning of the words they applied to Jesus, they were nevertheless true. Everything He has ever done has been done well (*kalōs*) - rightly, correctly, perfectly! Matthew's account adds that the crowds, upon seeing the man healed, "Glorified the God of Israel" Matthew 15:31. These are Gentiles who don't know Yahweh. Why would they glorify the God of Israel? I think it's because they learned a massive truth that day – the God of Israel has compassion for them also.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Herschel H. Hobbs, *An Exposition of the Gospel of Mark* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1970), 114.

It's interesting to note that the confession of the crowd, "He has done all things well," echoes the verdict of God on His own creation in Genesis 1:31. Moses writes, "And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good." When Jesus came bringing healing to men's bodies and salvation to their souls, He began the work of creation all over again. In the beginning, everything was deemed good, but man's sin brought death, destruction, and chaos. Jesus is bringing back the beauty of God in the world by restoring all that was broken by the fall.<sup>5</sup> We, the Bride of Christ, are awaiting the final consummation, the complete re-creation of all things when Jesus returns and once and for all makes all things new (cf. Revelation 21:5).

What we see here in the restoration of this man's hearing and speech is meant to serve as an illustration of God's re-creation work in the heart of man. Just as He restored this man physically, He can and will do the same for you spiritually! The man in our text this morning met Jesus and his life was never the same. Meeting Jesus changes everything! Just as it is impossible to have a personal encounter with a Mack truck and not be forever changed, so it is impossible to have an encounter with the God of the universe and not be forever changed.

Have you met Him? Has He made you new? Paul says, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come" 2 Corinthians 5:17. If you are here this morning and you know Christ by faith, think back over your life. Jesus has done all things well in drawing us out of darkness and into marvelous light, in humbling us and teaching us of our weaknesses, in stripping us of our idols, in placing us where we are, and giving us what we have. And as we look ahead to the future we know not what the days to come will bring. They may be bright or dark, full or lean, many or few, but we have full confidence and blessed assurance that we are in the hands of Him who does all things well! The Great Shepherd of the sheep makes no mistakes (John 10:11). And we want to be found faithful! We long for the one who does all things well to look at us on the last day and say, albeit because of His grace in our lives, "Well done, good and faithful servant" Matthew 25:21. To God be the glory!

## **CLOSING BENEDICTION**

Hear this benediction as we bring our corporate worship to a close this morning. The Psalmist writes, "Praise the Lord! Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty heavens! Praise him for his mighty deeds; praise him according to his excellent greatness! Let everything that has breath praise the Lord!" Psalm 150:1-2, 6. And all God's people said, "Amen!" Go in peace!

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<sup>5</sup> William Barclay, 182.