

“He Has Done All Things Well”

Mark 7:31-37

³¹ Then he returned from the region of Tyre and went through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis. ³² 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. ³³ And taking him aside from the crowd privately, he put his fingers into his ears, and after spitting touched his tongue. ³⁴ And looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, “Ephphatha,” that is, “Be opened.” ³⁵ And his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. ³⁶ And Jesus charged them to tell no one. But the more he charged them, the more zealously they proclaimed it. ³⁷ And they were astonished beyond measure, saying, “He has done all things well. He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak.” [ESV]

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I. Introduction

A. Origin in Ryle. This sermon had its origin in J. C. Ryle's "Expository thoughts on Mark," a devotional commentary which is very pastoral in its tone. Using that volume for my private worship time led me to believe that I would like to preach from Mark for the rest of my active service as an elder. The target date for requesting *emeritus* status is January 1, 2025, so, depending on just how many study leaves Pastor Robinson takes and on how often I visit the doctor, we just might get through the entire gospel before I retire.

I soon realized the need for another, more scholarly source. Please don't hear that as a sign of intellectual arrogance but rather of love for the written word of God. The scholars dig deep. The Bible itself commends examining the Scriptures daily. ^{Acts 17.11} It tells us how Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the LORD, and to do it and to teach His statutes and rules in Israel. ^{Ezra 7.10}

B. Aided by Edwards. For the scholarly resource, I chose James R. Edwards, **The Gospel According to Mark**, which is one volume in the Pillar NT commentary series. I will refer to "Edwards" from time to time in the course of these sermons, and, unless I tell you that it's a different Edwards, the reference will be to this volume.

C. Purpose. Mark's purpose (Edw. p. 10) is to portray the person and mission of Jesus Christ for Roman Christians undergoing persecution under Nero. My purpose is to portray the person^{hood} of Jesus, especially as compared to His "merely" incarnating a principle (or principles). I am intentionally starting in the middle of the book of Mark because I want to carry with us throughout this series the picture of Him "who does all things well." We will return to this passage in the sequence of preaching through the book (probably in 2016).

D. Themes. Six distinctive themes per Edwards (pp. 16-20) -- discipleship, faith, insiders/outside, Gentiles, command to silence and journey. This passage has the last three (though Edwards does not mention it in describing "journey").

E. Mark Himself. Mark is generally regarded as the first gospel published and Mark himself as Peter's "interpreter." He wrote in Rome around A.D. 65 (after the great fire of 64 and before the siege and destruction of Jerusalem by Titus in 70). His full name was John Mark, and he was the son of a woman named Mary. The early church gathered in her house, ^{Acts 1.13-14, Mark 14.14} ^{Acts 12.12} which may have been the site of the Last Supper.

F. Placing Ourselves in the Story. "All of history is His story" is more than a memory-aiding device. The beloved answer to the first question in the shorter catechism: Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever . . . tells us that there's a story with a setting, characters, a plot, dramatic tension, point of view and a theme. I recently found myself "in" John Grisham's **The Street Lawyer** -- which would end on the last page, sending me in search of another novel and the *faux* intimate connection with the characters which I was enjoying through Grisham. Then -- much to my delight -- I realized that I am a part of His-story, which never ends, and in which (by His grace) I actually play a very desirable part as a member of His body.

Placing yourself in the story is not some Walter Mitty-esque exercise in daydreaming but can be compared to the exercise and development of a "muscle" or a faculty -- imagination -- which God has given you to enable you to glorify Him and enjoy Him continually. (Personal example of rushing around the house and realizing that I was "in" the wrong story.)

You are in His-story. Throughout this sermon series, I will encourage you to participate consciously and not just casually.

G. Jesus as the Leading Character. In common parlance (and using a syntax I rather deplore), "It's all about Jesus." **BUT**: Which Jesus? Who is Jesus? In thinking about those questions, I remembered that Ken Myers, host of the Mars Hill Audio Journal, recently used quotes from the theater film "Talladega Nights: The Ballad of Ricky Bobby" to illustrate cultural confusion over the identity of Jesus. Having searched for these quotes on the Internet and found them buried among many others from the film, I would never watch the film. But it does give us a picture of the confusion which can exist even in the church over the identity of Jesus.

Samples: *I like to picture Jesus as a figure skater. He wears, like, a white outfit, and He does interpretive ice dances of my life's journey.*

Ricky Bobby, offering table grace in the presence of one "Chip" -- . . . *dear tiny Jesus, with your golden, fleece diapers, with your tiny little fat balled up fist . . .*

Chip -- *He was a man; he had a beard.*

RB -- *Look, I like the baby version the best, do you hear me?*

Or: I think of Jesus as a ninja fighting off evil samurai. Or: I like to think of Jesus as a mischievous badger.

Others (not from Talladega Nights): Santa Jesus gives me what I want if I've behaved myself. "BlackBerry" Jesus (or iPhone Jesus) "beeps" me to tell me what to do and when to do it. We all fashion our golden calves. ^{Ex. 32.4} "Mischievous badger" Jesus is no more ridiculous than "These inanimate golden objects are the gods who brought you up out of the land of Egypt."

Finally, we will investigate Christ in this series on Mark -- the real Jesus, the Jesus of the Bible. Whoever Jesus is (and, of course, we approach the study already knowing many of the answers), believers are "in" Him in a sense more intimate than anyone this side of heaven can explain. ^{John 17.21-23}

That Jesus -- the One with whom we are in union and who loved us even as the Father loved Him -- is wonderfully described in today's passage, which neatly divides into **four** parts -- I. v. 31: The circuitous route. II. v. 32: The request for material relief. III. vv. 33-35: The intimate healing. IV. vv. 36-37: The disobedient -- but awed -- reaction.

II. Circuitous Route -- The journey described here is like going from Portsmouth, NH, to Boston, MA, by way of Augusta, ME. I found no explanation for this circuitous route in Edwards or any of the other sources I consulted. The obscurity of the route, like the means of healing (as we'll shortly see), shows the gulf between God and man -- God having the wisdom and the power to travel where He wishes and heal as He wishes and man being unable to discern His reasons. We don't need to know the why of the where in order to learn from it. We can take this gulf as a reminder of our created, dependent state even if we **know** as a certainty that it must mean more and whether or not we can expect ever to understand more about it. Creatures cannot know everything the Creator knows. We'll see that reinforced when we get to the end of our passage.

III. Request for material relief -- "They begged him to lay his hand on him." Scripture does not condemn or correct them for this request. It appears to be perfectly legitimate. Jesus grants it after all. It falls within the scope of what the writer to Hebrews had in mind: "Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need." ^{Heb. 4.16} If we asked Scripture to tell us everything we need to know about prayer, the answer from this passage would come back: *You are at liberty to ask God for physical healing*. Not: God will always grant that request.

Not even that you are at liberty indefinitely to renew that request. *You are at liberty to ask God for physical healing.*

IV. Intimate Healing -- Here Jesus touches the man's tongue with his own saliva. He will spit on the eyes of the blind man in Mark 8.23. Let's consider his method and its messiness.

Method: As with the circuitous journey, Jesus (as God) does what He wants to do when and where he wants to do it. Ryle (p. 150) on why Christ chose the means He used for this healing: "Christ was not tied to the use of any one means in doing His works among men. Sometimes He thought fit to work in one way, sometimes in another. His enemies were never able to say, that unless He employed certain invariable agency He could not work at all. . . . He will not have any means despised as useless, and neglected as of no value."

His choice of means reminds us of His sovereignty -- and not only in the choice of means but in the choice of persons to save, sanctify and glorify. So much for method. Now for "Messiness." The NASB doesn't want us to miss the point, so its translators add "with the saliva" at the end of v. 33. The intimacy -- and the messiness -- are unmistakable. The question is "Why? Why would the Christ -- who could heal from afar (centurion's servant), who could heal by being unknowingly touched (woman with the issue of blood) -- why would He so "sloppily" enter into the body of the one being healed?" Could it be that He was personifying union -- even the marital union with His bride? Could it be that he was personifying the inherent messiness of all intimate relationships in a fallen world? I don't know, but I encourage you not to miss the intimacy in the midst of the messiness. And remember: You are part of this story. When Christ saved you, He entered you just this intimately.

"He sighed" -- Bishop Ryle quotes Martin Luther on Christ's sigh to this effect: "This sigh was not drawn from Christ on account of the single tongue and ear of this poor man; but it is a common sigh over all tongues and ears, yea over all hearts, bodies, and souls, and over all men from Adam to his last descendant." (p. 152) It is our sigh, too, at all forms of "illness."

What next? ". . . and he [*the deaf and dumb man*] spoke plainly." This is amazing in light of the fact that he would not have known what words sounded like. In fact, he might be expected to have a very small (nonexistent?) vocabulary. BUT -- as in Gen. 1.26-28, which reveals freshly created beings immediately and fully possessed of the power of speech -- God's healing of this man is immediate and endows him with the power of speech.

I am inclined to say that Gen. 1.26-28 reveals not only beings capable of hearing and speaking with understanding, but also the primacy of words -- of the power and purpose of speech. Note that the first recorded words of God to man were words of command -- much like the first words of Jesus to the deaf mute were a command to be silent about the healing.

So, touch and speech -- both in Gen. 1 (when God "formed man out of the dust of the ground") and here -- are displayed in God's relationship to man. Neither passage -- nor both combined -- make the full case for touch and speech being essential components of relationship, but they are at least strongly suggestive. When He fixes us, He touches us; He is not a distant and removed "god" who merely issues decrees. Jesus' body *matters*. This passage "proves" the radical nature of the incarnation.

What about the deaf and dumb man himself? He was unable to hear the Word or to proclaim it -- to receive or to give the Word. Though surely his friends had crude ways of signaling him, a full-blown sign language wouldn't be developed for another 1,600 years. He could not hear about God, and he could not call upon God. He is like us before we are reborn. We are he. We are in this story.

V. The disobedient -- but awed -- reaction -- Disobedience first: They could not have considered the divinity of Jesus fully. They saw the miracle that He did and heard His injunction not to tell anyone. Yet they did just that. Their illogic goes something like this: Someone who can heal like that "astonishes us beyond measure" (v. 37) [*superexceedingly* in CLNT] but not to the point at which we will obey Him. They could be "thunderstruck" and yet disobey -- proof positive of the depth of human depravity.

Awe: "Astonished¹ beyond measure" might reflect the degree to which they sought a hero -- the degree to which they were (we are) born to worship.

In order to give us a good picture of the extent of their awe, let me borrow words from another context: The "incomparable excellencies and the entire perfection thereof" -- words which WCF I:5 uses to describe the scriptures but which seem to fit very well the 1st-century reaction (and perhaps our 21st-century reaction) to Christ's healing of the deaf mute.

But there's more. It's not just the material miracle itself which inspires awe. To the student of scripture, this event had a signal place in redemptive history. Let Edwards explain:

The description of the man with the speech impediment . . . uses a Greek word, *mogilalos*, that occurs only once elsewhere in the Bible. In the description of the revelation of the glory of the Lord to the nations in Isaiah 35 we read: "Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped . . . and the tongue of the dumb (*mogilalos*) shout for joy" (Isa 35:5-6). The presence of *mogilalos* in v. 32 links our story unmistakably to the Isaiah quotation. Since Mark is writing for Roman Gentiles, he only infrequently appeals to OT proof texts. On the few occasions when he fortifies his literary architecture with OT reinforcements, however, they are load-bearing beams. The reference to Isaiah 35 is no exception. Isaiah 35 is essentially the final chapter of the first part of Isaiah. It follows a series of chapters declaring God's judgment of Edom, Egypt, Tyre, Israel, and Jerusalem. In chap. 35, however, the theme shifts from judgment to eschatology, and to the joy not only of the redeemed but all of creation at the revelation of the Lord. The allusion to Isaiah 35 is of supreme significance for Mark's presentation of Jesus, not only because the restoration of speech to a *mogilalos* signals the . . . arrival of the Day of the Lord but also because the desert wastelands of *Lebanon* (Isa 35:2) will receive the joy of God. The regions of Tyre and Sidon [[where this story is set](#)] are, of course, precisely the Lebanon of Isaiah 35. Jesus' healing of this particular *mogilalos* in the Decapolis becomes the firstfruit of the fulfillment of Isa 35:10, that Gentile Lebanon will join "the ransomed of the LORD [and] enter Zion with singing"! -- Edwards, pp. 224-225

And so, at last, we come to the doctrine on display in this passage: **The perfection of Jesus' perfection leaves His followers thunderstruck.** I used the phrase "perfection of perfection" as compared to a phrase like "the extent of His perfection," which implies a limit to it. To borrow again from the popular culture, we might say that Christ's perfection just "keeps on keeping on."

¹ [astonish](#) mid-14c., *astonien*, from O.Fr. *estoner* "to stun, daze, deafen, astound," from V.L. **extonare*, from L. *ex-* "out" + *tonare* "to thunder" (see [thunder](#)); so, lit. "to leave someone thunderstruck."

Implications: 1. Why does it matter that He has done all things well (that His perfection is perfect)? Because we have done all things so poorly. Our righteousness is as filthy rags.^{Is. 64.6} Let's not duck it: Our very being here to worship is impure. Before we assemble again on the next Lord's Day, you will either harbor murderous thoughts toward someone or speak murderous words toward someone or both. You will covet someone's spouse, car, job, bank account, good health, house, permissive parent or station in life.

But He who has done all things well has paid in full for your sins, and His well-doing stands as *yours* before God. Church of Christ, "because of God, you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness, sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, 'Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.'"^{1 Cor. 1.30-31}

2. "Perfection of perfection" is what heaven's like. *Jonathan Edwards* from **The End for Which God Created the World**: "*Heaven will be a never-ending, ever-increasing discovery of more and more of God's glory with greater and ever-greater joy in Him. . . . There will always be more, and the end of increased pleasure in God will never come. . . . It will take an infinite number of ages for God to be done glorifying the wealth of His grace to us -- which is to say He will never be done.*"

3. Implications of our being thunderstruck -- of "perfect perfection" being stunning: The perfection of Jesus' perfection often seems so otherworldly and so far beyond us that we dismiss it. I can enter in to an Indiana Jones movie; I can't enter in to Star Trek. What's your analogy?

Why settle for John Grisham? Why settle for a mess of porridge? By God's grace, consciously, deliberately and repeatedly enter into the story -- into His-story.

The healing of the deaf and dumb man is not an isolated incident or story but part of a larger whole -- the story of redemptive His-story. It covers everything Jesus says and does, so that, for example, when John quotes Christ as saying "in Me you may have peace,"^{John 16.33} you can know that this peace-giver is one who does all things well -- perfectly, in fact, and so perfectly that more and more and more of His perfection is continuously revealed to the church triumphant, which we confidently expect to join in God's good time.