

Doing All things Well

Mark 7:31-37

Over forty years ago I was attending a chapel service as a student at Talbot Theological Seminary. There were about four hundred of us singing with joy about God's goodness. Singing with that many people who love the Lord has always blessed my soul. But I noticed that the elderly gentleman on the platform, who would soon speak to us, was without any emotion and he sang not one word. I was puzzled and offended by what seemed to be a spiritual coldness in the heart of someone who was about to open God's Word.

I soon discovered that our speaker had been completely deaf for more years than I had been alive. And because he could not hear his own voice – articulate speaking became extremely difficult. The fact that he could be understood was due to a tremendous amount of effort and training on his part. He quickly grew in my respect.

The deaf man that we are going to look at today did not have that kind of training. For that reason he could neither hear or speak understandably. Only the Gospel of Mark tells his story. I hope you will follow in your Bibles as I read Mark 7:31-37,

“Then Jesus left the vicinity of Tyre [after expelling a demon from a Gentile girl] and went through Sidon [a city north of Tyre], down to the Sea of Galilee and into the region of the Decapolis [a federation of ten Gentile cities, all of which were located on the east side of the Sea of Galilee and the Jordan River except for one].³² There some people brought to him a man who was deaf and could hardly talk, and they begged him to place his hand on the man.³³ After he took him aside, away from the crowd, Jesus put his fingers into the man's ears. Then he spit and

touched the man's tongue.³⁴ He looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him, '*Ephphatha!*' (which means, 'Be opened!').³⁵ At this, the man's ears were opened, his tongue was loosened and he began to speak plainly [it didn't take long for his friends to discover what happened].³⁶ Jesus commanded them not to tell anyone. But the more he did so, the more they kept talking about it.³⁷ People were overwhelmed with amazement. 'He has done everything well,' they said. 'He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak.'"

In the parallel passage, **Matthew 15:29-31**, which Pastor Jeff read, we discover this was not the only miracle Jesus performed. Let's quickly look at it again,

"Jesus left there and went along the [east side of the] Sea of Galilee [the region of the Decapolis]. Then he went up on a mountainside and sat down.³⁰ Great crowds came to him, bringing the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute and many others, and laid them at his feet; and he healed them.³¹ The people were amazed when they saw the mute speaking, the crippled made well, the lame walking and the blind seeing. And they praised the God of Israel."

While Matthew informs us that many people were healed, Mark, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, was directed to record only the healing of this one deaf man. Let's review how Jesus ministered to this man and see if we can gain some insight as to why this healing was so emphasized. Mark records six actions by Jesus on behalf of this man. But before we look at them, let's not forget that all this was set into motion by the friends of the deaf man. Verse 32 tells us that they begged Jesus to help him. When we pray on behalf of others, we are doing the same. When we have opportunities to speak to others about Jesus, we are doing the same. All kinds of great things happen when we genuinely love our neighbor.

The first action Jesus took on behalf of this deaf man was to take him aside, away from the crowd. In other words, Jesus gave this man His undivided attention. There is no greater gift we can give to someone than the gift of our time. If we give people money, we can usually get our hands on more money. But we can never get time back. Once it is gone, it is gone. To invest our time in serving people, is a wise use of time.

(2) Next we are told that Jesus put his fingers into the man's ears. Jesus could not speak to this man because he lacked the sense of hearing. And so Jesus focused on the senses that the man still possessed, one of which was touch. By embracing him and placing His fingers in his ears, He was demonstrating to the deaf man that He was going to do something for his ears.

(3) What we are told next is a little shocking. Jesus spit [probably on His finger] and touched the man's tongue. I conclude from this information that the deaf man was totally cooperative, which tells me he sincerely trusted Jesus and greatly esteemed Him. In putting spittle on the man's tongue, Jesus was using the man's senses of touch and taste. Through these actions Jesus was communicating to the man that He was also going to do something about his stammering tongue.

(4) Fourthly, Jesus looked up to heaven. By doing this Jesus was visually showing the deaf man the source of His power – it was from heaven. In John 8:28 Jesus said, “. . . I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me.” This is one of the ways we know that Jesus was perfect and we are not. Is there anyone here this morning who

has only done what God has told you to do. I am not raising my hand either.

(5) Next we are told that Jesus sighed. The deaf man could not hear Jesus sigh, but he could see Jesus sigh. Again, Jesus was showing this man that He was fully engaged in helping him.

(6) Finally we are told that Jesus spoke the Hebrew or Aramaic word Ephphatha – “be opened.” I believe this is the first word that man had heard in many years. But not only had his ears been opened, his tongue was also unbound and set free. In verse 32, we learned that this man could “hardly speak” or as the ESV says, he “had a speech impediment.” The Greek word Mark used in referring to the deaf man’s speech impediment is only found in this verse and nowhere else in the New Testament. And what makes this even more noteworthy is that this word only appears one time in the Greek translation of the Old Testament, which was widely used by the Jewish people of Jesus day. The Old Testament passage in which the word appears is strongly tied to the miracles Jesus was doing in the region of the Decapolis. Please listen to **Isaiah 35:1-6**,

“The desert and the parched land will be glad; the wilderness will rejoice and blossom [the area in which Jesus was ministering was literally a desert and parched land, but the people in that area were also spiritual deserts until Jesus showed up] . . . ² it will burst into bloom; it will rejoice greatly and shout for joy . . . they will see the glory of the LORD, the splendor of our God . . . ⁵ Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. ⁶ Then will the lame leap like a deer, and [here it is] the mute [impeded] tongue [will] shout for joy. Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert.”

Was there rejoicing going on among the Gentiles because of what Jesus was doing in their parched land and in their spiritually parched lives? Mark tells us in verse 37, that the people were “huper-perisso” beyond measure with amazement. I am pretty sure that means they were joyful. But Jesus commands them in verse 36, to tell no one about this miracle or the many other miracles that Matthew 15 records.

Why did Jesus do that? I believe it is because the primary reason Jesus, the Son of God, came to earth was to see people rescued from Satan’s domain of darkness and transferred into God’s Kingdom of light. The fact of the matter is that people can experience physical healing without being spiritually healed. The lame can leap for joy while still being captive in Satan’s domain of darkness – which means their joy will not last. The only way people can enter into the Kingdom of God is to embrace Christ as their Savior and Lord. When that takes place, a person enters into eternal life – which nothing can end – not even physical death. If these people had only focused on the physical miracles of Jesus, then they could have still missed the main event – salvation from the penalty their sins.

Physical healing is great, if we give God the glory and then trust in Christ and humbly walk with Him. When I was in highschool, I remember a pastor telling me about a very young girl in the small town in which lived and ministered. She became dreadfully sick and the doctors determined that she was terminal. The pastor was called to the house and a group of Christians prayed together that God would spare her life. God granted that request and the little girl was healed and the whole town

rejoiced. But then tears welled up in this pastors eyes as he went on to tell that she grew up to be beautiful, but very immoral woman, who wrecked havoc in numerous marriages in that town. That girl had been healed physically, but not spiritually.

Friends, when this deaf man's tongue was loosed, it was a blessing if he used his tongue properly, and a curse if he didn't. Listen to what **James 3:9-10**, says about the tongue,

“With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness.¹⁰ Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be.”

In order for this healed man's tongue to be a blessing, he had to let Jesus be the Lord over his tongue [and of course his heart]. One commentator had a very wise reminder to all followers of Christ. He said, “We live between the ages of when God's great salvation has been inaugurated but not yet consummated. And so let's do what Jesus did. He cared for the needs of the hurting but always with an eye on eternity.” We all know that in this age physical healing does not prevent physical death, it just slows its coming. And if people die without embracing Christ as Savior and Lord, then they face an eternity, a “forever” apart from God. Those who do embrace Christ during this age may not escape physical death, but they cannot lose the eternal life they gained through repentance and faith in Christ. For a Christian, to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. But at the consummation, when our Lord Jesus returns to earth in power and glory, all believers will receive glorified bodies that are perfectly suited to live on a glorified earth in the very

presence of our glorious, joyous, Triune God. These bodies die. Our glorified bodies will never get old, never get sick, never die. That is why in this age, I would rather be a Christian with terminal cancer, than be the healthiest unbeliever in the world.

Let's think some more about why Mark recorded only this particular healing, even though Matthew 15 says there were many others. I believe an important principle we can glean from Mark's focus upon this man's healing – is that one of the most important ways we can help people is face to face – as Jesus did here. We may not be able to instantly heal people who are hurting physically – but we can bring them a meal and pray for their healing. Let's also remember that Jesus has raised the bar on God's Kingdom blessings to a whole new level. And because of this – a Biblical worldview has been growing upon the earth through the efforts of people transformed by the gospel. This Biblical worldview has given rise to science, medicine and technology that has dramatically helped millions of people recover from what was once life-ending illnesses.

But besides people who are hurting because of diseases, there are a lot of other people suffering because of poverty, or because of a whole bunch of wrong choices. I do not diminish the good we can do by giving money to faith based ministries that target the poor and needy. Nor am I saying that government programs to help the needy never do any good. But what I have learned from the Bible and life is that face to face is the best way to minister to people.

In the Old Testament, when a person fell onto hard times, the first

people who were to step up to the plate and help, were family – kinsmen. The advantage of this arrangement is that normally, they knew their family member very well, which gave them the clearest insight as to why he or she was facing hardships. If a family member was suffering due to an injury or illness or circumstances beyond his or her control, the rest of the family would usually dig deep and help them through it. God even directed non-family members in the community to give hurting people interest free loans, which were to be paid back if possible. But if the loan couldn't be paid back, the debt was to be forgiven.

However, it was also family members that could best look their loved one in the eye and tell him that the reason he was having a hard time keeping a job is because he was a know it all, with a bad attitude; or because he drank too much and did not show up for work. In those cases, the family may have said that we have already bailed you out a number of times and you now need to experience the consequences of your attitudes and actions. This would require the person in debt to go into servitude to the person who was willing to pay his debt. This arrangement was a mentoring opportunity for a person who did not handle money well, to spend time with someone who did handle money well. At the end of a maximum of six years, the indebted person was debt free and according to how his boss prospered while he was working for him, the debt free person also received a percentage of that wealth to get him started again. All of these ways of helping the poor and the hurting, were face to face.

But pastor Mark, face to face is just me helping one other person. I

want to help lots of people. We need to remember that when we help another person, we are supposed to encourage that person to help someone else. And if the person I have helped does that, and I find someone else to help, then two new people are being helped. And if we all keep doing it, then two becomes four and four becomes eight and eight becomes sixteen. And before long, there are a whole lot of people being helped face to face.

I love the way this passage ends. In verse 37 the people were saying about Jesus, “He has done everything well.” A number of commentators have remarked how similar this statement is to what God spoke in Genesis 1:31, “God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.” The first Adam used his free will and messed that up. But the Second Adam, the Lord Jesus Christ, has come to undo the havoc wrecked by the first Adam. I have said many times to the hurting people I meet with at Wayside Cross, “When you leave Wayside – you need to use what you have gained here – to help others. And if you and I keep doing this, then we can help bless the nations and change the world.” Let’s pray.