

Jesus Does All Things Well
Mark 7:31-37
ABC 5/14/23

MacArthur begins his commentary on today's passage with this riddle: *Who is permitted to speak but not able, & able to speak but not permitted?*¹ The answer is the man in our text today. Mk 7:31-37 gives the 2nd of 3 miracles performed by Jesus in Gentile territory recorded by Mark after Jesus' teaching on clean & unclean things (7:1-23). Geographically, Jesus takes a roundabout route, 1st traveling north from the Gentile region of Tyre toward Sidon, then east of Galilee before heading south to the Decapolis. Theologically, the passage builds on the previous account of the Syrophoenician woman to show that God's salvation is for all people, even *unclean* Gentiles. This miracle is only recorded by Mark but Matthew gives a summary of Jesus' travels & ministry in Gentile territory after the encounter with the woman in Tyre, saying,

Departing from there (Tyre), Jesus went along by the Sea of Galilee, & having gone up on the mountain, He was sitting there. & large crowds came to Him, bringing with them *those who were* lame, crippled, blind, mute, & many others, & they laid them down at His feet; & He healed them. So the crowd marveled as they saw the mute speaking, the crippled restored, & the lame walking, & the blind seeing; & they glorified the God of Israel (Mt 15:29-31).

Jesus & His disciples are now in the Decapolis, a Gentile area originally made up of 10 cities. It was considered *Rome outside of Rome*. Although they were idol worshipers, they'd heard about Jesus. As a result, they rushed those who were diseased & disabled to Him & He healed them. Predictably, they **marveled** &, surprisingly, began to glorify the true God. Ironically, the Jewish leaders who saw similar miracles rejected Jesus, accusing Him of operating by Satan's power (Mk 3:22). The deaf man in our text today was also unable to speak clearly. By Jesus' will & power, he was enabled to hear & speak plainly. But when Jesus commanded him to keep quiet, he was unable not to speak.²

1. The Setting (31-32) Mark picks up where the healing of the daughter of the woman near Tyre left off. **31**

Sidon was 20 miles north of Tyre, & the 2 are frequently identified together as key Phoenician cities of trade & commerce. From there He heads to **the region of Decapolis**. Mark never gives a

¹ John MacArthur, *Mark 1-8*, p 373

² MacArthur, p 375

reason for this itinerary & tells us nothing of what happened as Jesus & His disciples traveled. As with so many things from the life & ministry of Jesus, these details are among those that would fill more books than the world could contain (Jn 21:25). Jesus may be avoiding Galilee to avoid threats from Herod or more confrontations with the religious leaders. Though Israel was Jesus' priority, His willingness to minister to Gentiles preview the fact that the gospel was always intended to be proclaimed throughout the world. Although we aren't told what Jesus did on this journey, be assured, there was a divine purpose behind every step. This 120 mile journey allowed more *dogs* to receive the *crumbs* of Jesus' message. By traveling to Decapolis, Jesus returned to the vicinity where He had earlier healed a man possessed by a legion of demons (Mk 5:1–20). Through the witness of that man, along with others from Decapolis who'd traveled to Galilee to see Jesus (Mt 4:25), the news about Jesus had spread to this area. Scholars think Jesus' time in Gentile area could have been up to 8 months. 32

Those who brought the man aren't stated, but they must have been friends or family of the man since they *beg* Jesus to **lay His hand on** the man & heal him. The man is described as **deaf**, a term that can mean *deaf*, *mute*, or both.³ Here deafness is intended, since Mark adds **& spoke with difficulty**. The end of the story suggests he could speak some since after being healed he could talk **plainly**, *clearly*, or *correctly* (35). His speech problem probably resulted from his deafness, a common symptom for those who can't hear. Why does Mark alone include this in his gospel? Why did it seem so important to him? I believe the word translated as **spoke with difficulty** is the key to answering this. This word is found only 2x in the Bible, here & in Isaiah 35, where it appears in the Greek translation of the OT, the Septuagint. Turn to Isaiah 34. Isaiah has been delivering oracles of doom that God had him pronounce on Israel & her neighbors. He told the Israelites that the judgment of God was going to lay their land waste & they were going to go through a period of severe desolation. We get a sense of the severity of that judgment when we read:

For the LORD has a day of vengeance, A year of recompense for the cause of Zion. Its streams will be turned into pitch, & its loose earth into brimstone, & its land will become burning pitch. It will not be quenched night or day; Its smoke will go up forever. From generation to generation it will be desolate; None will pass through it forever & ever (Is 34:8–10).

³ BDAG, p 580

That's desolate, isn't it? Who will inhabit this land?

But pelican and hedgehog will possess it, And owl and raven will dwell in it; And He will stretch over it the line of desolation And the plumb line of emptiness. Its nobles—there is no one there Whom they may proclaim king— And all its princes will be nothing. Thorns will come up in its fortified towers, Nettles and thistles in its fortified cities; It will also be a haunt of jackals And an abode of ostriches. The desert creatures will meet with the wolves, The hairy goat also will cry to its kind; Yes, the night monster will settle there And will find herself a resting place. The tree snake will make its nest and lay eggs there, And it will hatch and gather them under its protection. Yes, the hawks will be gathered there, Every one with its kind (Is 34:11–15).

Do you get the picture? This is a graphic description of divine judgment. God takes the land away from the nobles & princes & delivers it to the jackals, snakes, & wild beasts. This is the crescendo of a rising list of judgment as God lays out the destruction & chastisement He's planned. But when God gives an announcement of judgment for His people, He almost always gives a word of future hope because He never abandons His remnant to desolation. Sure enough, we hear such a word immediately after Isaiah announces the day of the Lord's destruction that was to come on the land.

Isaiah writes in chpt 35:1-2:

The wilderness & the desert will be glad, & the Arabah will rejoice & blossom; Like the crocus It will blossom profusely & rejoice with rejoicing & shout of joy. The glory of Lebanon will be given to it, The majesty of Carmel & Sharon. They will see the glory of the LORD, The majesty of our God.

Do you see the contrast? Isaiah moves from desolation to glory. He describes the wonders of the future millennial kingdom when Christ returns to reign on the earth: the desert will blossom with beautiful flowers, Israel & the surrounding nations will see the glory of the Lord. He continues, **Encourage the exhausted, & strengthen the feeble. Say to those with anxious heart, "Take courage, fear not. Behold, your God will come with vengeance; The recompense of God will come, But He will save you"** (3–4). The weak & feeble will be encouraged & God's enemies will be judged & the righteous saved. Here's the climax:

Then the eyes of the blind will be opened & the ears of the deaf will be unstopped. Then the lame will leap like a deer, & the tongue of the mute will shout for joy. For waters will break forth in the wilderness & streams in the Arabah. The scorched land will become a pool & the thirsty ground springs of water; In the haunt of jackals, its resting place, Grass becomes reeds & rushes (5–7).

When Isaiah rejoices that **the mute will shout for joy** we find the only OT use of this word that Mark uses in 7:32. 700 years before Jesus was born God gave this message of hope to His people, looking past the destruction & desolation to the messianic age, when the kingdom of God would break

through & the Messiah would come. He promised that the Messiah would give sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, & loosen the tongue of the mute. Mark had to have had this in mind as he records the story of Jesus' meeting with the deaf & mute man because he uses the same word. This healing in Mk 7 clearly connects Jesus to this messianic prophesy.⁴ The healings Jesus performed, like the curing of a deaf man with a speech problem, were previews of the glories of His future messianic kingdom (Is 29:18; 30:23; 32:14–15; 65:20). Isaiah 35 continues its description of the millennial kingdom with a beautiful picture of the redeemed who will dwell there:

A highway will be there, a roadway, & it will be called the Highway of Holiness. The unclean will not travel on it, But it will be for him who walks that way, & fools will not wander on it. No lion will be there, Nor will any vicious beast go up on it; These will not be found there. But the redeemed will walk there, & the ransomed of the Lord will return & come with joyful shouting to Zion, With everlasting joy upon their heads. They will find gladness & joy, & sorrow & sighing will flee away (8-10).

Aren't you looking forward to that day? Even the rabbinical traditions saw the fulfillment of this in the days of the Messiah.⁵ While Jesus was on earth He gave a glimpse of that but most Jews missed it. While the people Jesus healed physically during His ministry were right to rejoice, their momentary excitement can't compare to the eternal joys that await those whom He's saved spiritually & to whom He's promised eternal life (Jn 11:25–26; 1 Cor 15:20–28, 35–56). Mark includes this story to show that Jesus is the promised Messiah of Isaiah 35. Back to the story. This man clearly couldn't hear nor speak clearly. Think of being that way. He couldn't ask any questions nor make any requests. He couldn't hear any answers or explanations. Neither could he read or write. That changes life, doesn't it? He had to have had a miserable, lonely, hopeless existence having never heard the Scriptures being read & knowing nothing of the promised Messiah. That was about to change.

2. The Touch (33) As in the healing of Jairus' daughter (5:40), Jesus withdraws from the crowd to perform the miracle in private. He has no interest in turning His ministry into a 3-ring circus. The focus was on the man & his needs, not on Jesus. **33**

⁴ R.C. Sproul, *Mark*, pp 176–178

⁵ Midrash Tehillin 146:8

Jesus often heals by touch in Mark's gospel (1:31, 41; 5:23; 6:5; 8:25), but only here & with the blind man at Bethsaida (8:23-25) does He touch the afflicted area. We may think of what Jesus did with this man as bizarre & hard to explain. But if you think about it, it's pretty simple. Jesus can't speak to the man because he can't hear, so He acts out what He intends to do for Him. Jesus is using touch as a sign of compassion & communication. He begins by putting His fingers in the man's ears, communicating with *sign-language* He knows the problem & He can help him. Using gestures & nonverbal signals Jesus demonstrates He knew the man's problem. As gross & as unsanitary as this sounds to us today, spittle was commonly viewed in the ancient world as having medicinal powers.⁶ Touching the tongue, like touching the ears, is probably meant both to demonstrate compassion & to indicate what He was going to do, heal the man's ears & tongue. Jesus took the man aside & explained by touch what He was going to do. Of course, Jesus could've just healed him without communicating anything. But He chose to touch the untouchable. He was saying to this man, *I understand what you've gone through all your life, I know what it feels like to be you, & I want to make it right.* Jesus' communicated compassion, love, & healing to this man. Next is...

3. The Look 34

Looking up to heaven indicates an attitude of prayer & dependence on God the Father. Jesus does the same thing before blessing the loaves in the feeding of the 5k (6:41). Jesus demonstrated that the creative power He exercised came from God. Even as a pagan Gentile, the man would've understood what Jesus meant by gazing toward heaven. As the psalmist says, **I will lift up my eyes to the mountains; From where shall my help come? My help comes from the LORD** (121:1-2). Jesus was in constant communion with the Father, whether He was speaking to Him or not. To be sure, He got away for special times of prayer, but He was *always* in prayer,⁷ in dependence on His Father. For the blind man this communicated that the power to heal came from God.

⁶ Robert Gundry, *Mark*, p 389

⁷ R. Kent Hughes, *Mark: Jesus, Servant and Savior*, p 179

4. The Sigh (34) The **deep sigh** or *groan* puzzles many & has been interpreted in a variety of ways. What caused Jesus to sigh & why is it so significant that Mark includes it in his gospel? Once again, Jesus communicated by His sigh & this man could see that Jesus was moved because of his own physical condition. It was...

1. A Sigh of Comparison: Just as we might sigh when we see a previously beautiful house or garden ruined by neglect or vandalism, so Jesus sighed when He saw the previously beautiful humanity that He had made (Jn 1:3; Col 1:16) now vandalized by sin & its consequences. **2. A Sigh of Compassion:** As Jesus saw the devastation visited upon this man because of the fall, He sighed with sympathy & empathy. **He Himself took our infirmities & carried away our diseases** (Mt 8:17; Is 53:4). This doesn't mean Jesus suffered all our diseases, experienced our disabilities, & endured chicken pox, measles, Corona, etc. It does mean He was able to enter into such diseases, disabilities, & ailments & feel them as if He was going through them Himself. In fact, with His perfect imagination & sensitivity, He was able to feel such things even more deeply than the actual sufferers.⁸ **3. A Sigh of Prayer:** Jesus has compassion, is emotionally involved with this man & the reality of where the fallen world has brought him to, as well as an expression of prayer. In Rom 8:26 Paul uses a form of the same word to describe the Spirit interceding for us **with groanings too deep for words**. Jesus communicated a sincere sympathy for the agonies of this man's disability by His sigh. His visible groaning showed heartache & compassion for this man. Using nonverbal *speech*, Jesus taught this man about both God's power & His compassion. The Son of God would heal him, with power that came from above, because He cared deeply about him. Jesus touches the man, looks up to heaven, & then gives...

5. The Word (34) **Ephphatha** isn't an incantation, it's not a Jewish *abracadabra*. As elsewhere, Mark provides a translation for his Greek-speaking readers (3:17; 5:41; 7:11; 10:46; 14:36). It means **be opened!** Jesus' use of Aramaic isn't unusual since it would've been widely spoken in the Decapolis along with Greek. As in 5:41, the powerful healing left such an impression on the disciples that the actual words of Jesus were remembered & passed down as the story was told & retold within the

⁸ David Murray, <https://headhearhand.org/blog/2012/05/10/jesus-sighed/>

church. With a simple word from the incarnate Creator, the man was immediately given perfect hearing & his tongue was miraculously loosed to speak. Did he hear Jesus say, **ephphatha**? I like to think so.

6. The Results The healing takes place instantaneously. **35**

At the command of Jesus, those ears that had heard nothing for years & that tongue that had been literally in chains, making it impossible for the man to speak clearly, were set free. He could hear & speak perfectly. I wonder what his 1st words were? I'd hope they were, *Thank You!* He was able to understand & articulate words without needing any speech therapy or vocabulary lessons. The word **plainly** comes from the Greek word meaning *straight* or *right*. Our words *orthopedics*, *orthodontics*, & *orthodox* come from this word. In an instant, the One who created the world (Jn 1:1-3), & upholds it with **the word of His power** (Heb 1:3), supernaturally enabled this man to hear & speak fluently. In addition to Is 35, this healing also recalls Ex 4, where Moses complains to God that he can't be God's spokesman since he isn't eloquent & is **slow of speech & slow of tongue**. The LORD answered, **Who has made man's mouth? Or who makes *him* mute or deaf, or seeing or blind? Is it not I, the LORD?** (Ex 4:11). By giving the man hearing & voice, Jesus acts with the authority of God. He does what only God can do. He has the same divine power as God Himself, which makes sense since Jesus is God. In a very real sense, this is what happens to every Christian. Before the Holy Spirit opens us to the things of God, we're as deaf to the Word of God as this man was to verbal communication. Until the Holy Spirit regenerates our hearts, our tongues practice deceit & **the poison of asps is under our lips** (Rom 3:13), so that our tongues can only blaspheme. God sets us free from these afflictions by the regenerating power of His Holy Spirit through the death & resurrection of Jesus.⁹

7. The Commands 36

This is 1 of the 4x in Mark that Jesus commands silence after a healing (1:44; 5:43; 7:36; 8:26). The **them** here could be those who brought the man to Jesus or the crowd more generally. The command is surprising in this context since in His previous visit to this Gentile area (5:1-20) He

⁹ Sproul, p 179

told the man freed of many demons to **go home to your people and report to them & report to them what great things the Lord has done for him & how** Jesus had mercy on him. This man **went away & began to proclaim in Decapolis what great things Jesus had done for him; & everyone was amazed** (Mk 5:19–20). Perhaps Jesus' reputation had become so well known by this time that even in the Decapolis the command was necessary to cool messianic fervor or to allow greater privacy for training the disciples. In any case, the command is broken. Can we blame the guy? No doubt, the man's reaction was one of exuberant joy. That Jesus commanded him to remain quiet seems strange because He'd just given him the ability to speak. He's just been healed & is now able to speak but is told not to speak about what happened to him. How do you think that would go? Everyone knows he was deaf & couldn't speak plainly but now he can do both. What's the 1st question everyone asks him? *What happened? How did you get your hearing & speech back?* The good news is so good it overwhelms him & it can't be kept a secret. Ironically, though Jesus had healed his ears, the man didn't listen to His command. It seems the main reason Jesus repeatedly insisted on this kind of silence is found in Mk 8:30–31. After His disciples identify Him as the Messiah & the Son of God (29; Mt 16:18), **He warned them to tell no one about Him. & He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things & be rejected by the elders & the chief priests & the scribes, & be killed, & after 3 days rise again.** Knowing that His earthly mission wouldn't be accomplished until after His death & resurrection, Jesus instructed even His own disciples to remain quiet until after His story was finished. Many whom He healed knew Him only as a miracle worker, but Jesus came for a far more wonderful purpose (Lk 19:10). A message that highlighted only His miracles would be insufficient. The full message must include the truth that **Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, & that He was buried, & that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures** (1 Cor 15:3–4). While the crowd proclaimed what Jesus had done, the magnitude of what it signifies escapes them. The reason for their proclamation is they were **utterly astonished** & come to a correct conclusion of Jesus & His work. **37**

Well means *rightly, correctly, or appropriately*. They were commenting on the perfection of His miracles. He makes **even the deaf to hear & the mute to speak**. He does all things well. Jesus never

did anything poorly in His life. When He set His face toward Jerusalem & determined that obedience to the will of His Father would be His food (Jn 4:34), He did it well. There was no failure. There was no blemish to His work. RC Sproul tells of James Montgomery Boice when he was diagnosed with terminal cancer. There were only 6 weeks from the time of the diagnosis to the time of his death. As you would expect, his friends, family, & church were upset & distraught. But Boice said to them, *Be at peace about this. God does all things well.* That's the heart of a Christian. The God who took James Boice home to glory is the same God who healed this Gentile man. It was the same God who created the heavens & the earth, & who, when He was finished with His creative work, saw that it was **very good** (Gen 1:31). What He did in creation, He did well. Eccl 3:11 says **He has made everything appropriate or beautiful in its time.** This is the same God who redeems us. When Jesus carried out His work of redemption for our souls, He did it well. In all His dealings with us, He does all things well. When God does something, He always does it well. He never does sloppy or substandard work. What He begins He finishes & He always does it to perfection. That's good news for us, because if you're a believer, God is in process of working on you. As we read in the book of Philippians, you can be confident of this: **that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus** (1:6). God does everything well and everything He does is wonderful, including you. That's why we can sing, even in the midst of tribulation, *Though great distress my soul befell, the Lord, my God, did all things well.*¹⁰ These Gentiles noticed this about Jesus. *Look at Him, they said, everything He does, He does it well.* The One who creates, the One who redeems, the One who opens deaf ears & loosens tongues, does all things well. He is the sovereign Lord of all things, who is free to do as He pleases. & the testimony of Scripture & of those whose hearts love Him is that He does all things well.

If these OT allusions are intentional by Mark, they reinforce the theme of the restoration of creation we saw in Is 35.¹¹ Again it reads, **Then will the eyes of the blind be opened & the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame leap like a deer, & the mute tongue shout for joy. For waters will break**

¹⁰ *All Praise to God Who Reigns Above*, Johann J. Schutz

¹¹ Mark L. Strauss, *Mark*, pp 323–324

forth in the wilderness & streams in the Arabah (5–6). The immediate context of this passage is the promise of Israel’s return from exile. But like so many similar promises, it points forward to the ultimate restoration of all things, marked by the judgment of the wicked, salvation for the righteous, & eternal joy & peace for God’s people (Is 35:4, 10). Healing episodes like the one we’ve seen today are *snapshots* of the coming kingdom. They serve as *coming attractions*, a glimpse or preview of the restoration that’s been inaugurated through the 1st coming of Jesus & will be consummated at His return in glory. Healings & miracles may be spectacular for those who observe them & life-changing for those who experience them. Yet they are temporary. This man who was healed eventually died & the world continued as a place of sin, suffering, & fallenness. Yet the brief *snapshot* before us points to the future reality, when the salvation achieved through Jesus’ life, death, & resurrection will be consummated with the restoration of all creation. At that time, **the ransomed of the Lord will return & come with joyful shouting to Zion, with everlasting joy upon their heads. They will find gladness & joy, & sorrow & sighing will flee away** (Is 35:10). As we live in this interim period between His advents, when God’s great salvation has come but not yet been consummated, we need to follow Jesus’ example. He was compassionate toward Jew & Gentile, male & female, able & disabled. Yet He always did so with an eye on eternity, calling people to repentance & submission to the kingdom of God & a right relationship with their Creator.¹²

This incident of the deaf & mute man forms an interesting pair with the healing of the blind man in 8:22–26. The 2 not only have features in common, but together they pick up the theme of spiritual sight & hearing that are important in Mark’s gospel. While teaching in parables, Jesus repeatedly called for spiritual discernment, hearing, & heeding the word. **He who has ears to hear, let him hear** (4:9, 23). The religious leaders who are rejecting Jesus & His preaching get the message only in parables, **so that while seeing they may see & not perceive, & while hearing, they may hear & not understand** (4:12; Is 6:9–10). These 2 healing miracles connect to this earlier theme by framing the episode of the **leaven of the Pharisees & ... of Herod** (8:15), where Jesus warns the disciples they’re in danger of having eyes but failing to see & ears but failing to hear (8:17–18).

¹² Strauss, *Mark*, pp 324–325

Responding to Jesus means a heart receptive to God's purpose in the world. & so deafness isn't just a physical condition but can be a spiritual one as well. Isaiah says the Messiah will come to save us **with vengeance** (Is 35:4). But Jesus isn't smiting people. He's not taking out His sword. He's not taking power; He's giving it away. He's not taking over the world; He's serving it. Where's the vengeance? The answer is, He didn't come to *bring* vengeance; He came to *bear* it. On the cross, Jesus would identify with us. There *the Son of God was thrown away, cast away from the table without a crumb, so that those of us who are not children of God could be adopted and brought in. Put another way, the Child had to become a dog so that we could become sons and daughters at the table.*¹³ Because Jesus identified like that with us, we now know why we can approach Him. To open the disciples ears & eyes & to loosen their tongues will take more of a miracle than this man received that we looked at this morning. It will take the miracle of Jesus' death & resurrection & the miracle of giving them new hearts of flesh & the miracle of the Holy Spirit indwelling them. This still is happening today with people like us. The transformation from one who is spiritually deaf & mute into one who hears God's voice & speaks God's words to others is a miraculous one.

By healing physical disorders, Jesus pointed people to something greater: the hope of eternal life (Jn 5:40; 6:35; 10:10; 17:2-3). Through Him, forgiveness from sin & reconciliation with God are readily available to everyone who believes the gospel, whether Jew or Gentile. Jesus is infinitely more than a miracle worker & the greatest teacher. He's the only Savior who died to pay the penalty for sin (Is 53:4-5; Rom 4:25; Col 2:13-14; 1 Pt 3:18) & rose victoriously to demonstrate His power over death (Acts 2:24; 17:31; Rom 8:11; 1 Cor 15:20-22, 54-56). Those who repent & believe in Him will experience His life-giving power for all of eternity. Spiritually, their sinful hearts are cleansed at the moment of conversion. Physically, their bodies will one day be resurrected, never to experience disease or decay again (Jn 5:28-29; 1 Cor 15:42-56; 2 Cor 5:1-4; Rev 21:4). In that state of glorified perfection, free from both sin & sickness, we will forever worship our Redeemer & King knowing that He does all things well.

¹³ Timothy Keller, *Jesus the King: Understanding the Life and Death of the Son of God*, p 102

IF TIME – Charles Wesley writes in his hymn *O For A Thousand Tongues*,

3 Jesus! the name that charms our fears,
That bids our sorrows cease;
'Tis music in the sinner's ears,
'Tis life, & health & peace.

4 He breaks the power of cancelled sin,
He sets the prisoner free;
His blood can make the foulest clean;
His blood availed for me.

5 Hear Him, ye deaf; His praise, ye dumb,
Your loosened tongues employ;
Ye blind, behold your Savior come;
And leap ye lame, for joy.