

## All Things Well

*Mark: The Gospel of the Kingdom*

Mark 7:31-37

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Randy Lovelace

Well let's do go go and pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you, for you are the one who leads us to pray. You are the one who cleanses us from sin. You are the one who saves us and gives us grace. Lord, we as sinners come to you and we pray that you would now open your word that we would see, that we would hear, that you do all things well. Help us to believe. Help us to receive. For you are good and your love endures forever. Help the teacher. In Jesus' name. Amen.

We turn this morning in the book of Mark to this next segment of healing. As we get beyond this chapter, the book of Mark begins to turn. It begins to pick up pace. The tension rises. And it is appropriate, then, that it is exactly during this particular time that this kind of healing would take place. It is unique. It is fulfilling. It is a demonstration that this Jesus is someone very different, doing something very different. Hear now the Word of God, drawn from Mark 7:31-37.

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

This is the word of the Lord. (Thanks be to God.) Amen and Amen.

You'll see in your outline this morning three points which arise out of this text which point to a much larger thing that the Lord is doing. You will see first and foremost that this act of healing is further **Authentication** of who Jesus is and what he has come to do. There is a **Restoration** happening in this passage, a restoration of a man. The question we ought to be asking: "What are we to see through this restoration?" Which leads us to this third point, **New Creation**. So, **Authentication, Restoration, New Creation**.

So Jesus has just brought the work of giving and of care for this woman, which we saw last week, as John Song brought us the word. And even she, when tested, said I will even take the crumbs from your table. A demonstration of her faith. A demonstration that even the crumbs from the Lord's table overflow far more than all the richest fare the world has to offer. She knew that. She wanted that.

Here in this passage we have these friends bringing this man. Now Jesus is in a place that ought not to receive or understand who Jesus was and what he was doing. And so particularly what we see here is that they bring this man who is both deaf, and of course because of that, might

have a speech impediment. They begged Jesus to lay hands on their friend. So what is happening in this passage as it relates to Jesus's healing? First and foremost it is an **Authentication**, but of what?

We know very clearly from the passage itself, it is not an authentication that Jesus has power. That's already been demonstrated. It was certainly demonstrated to the disciples as he fed the five thousand, though even the five thousand—and it was, we know, it was far more than just five thousand—likely eight thousand plus. [They were] all aware of the miracle that Jesus had done with the loaves in the fish. He was demonstrating that to his disciples. But it is not a demonstration or authenticating that Jesus has power. If that were the case, then Jesus would not have done what the text tells us that he does. And that is in verse 33. "Taking him aside from the crowd privately..." Jesus is not interested in having his powers on display for all to see. Jesus does not need that.

But what it is authenticating is not his power, first and foremost. It is demonstrating and authenticating the kind of Savior that he actually is. Because in taking him privately, Jesus does something very intimate, very personal, very meaningful. And what he does is, instead of drawing attention to himself, as it were, that as his friends bring this man to him, he simply takes the man aside. He sees and hears what the issue is, and he looks at him, and he has compassion on him. This man would have been ostracized. He would have largely been made fun of. And he would have been on the outskirts, on the margins of culture and society. Jesus takes this man and he cares for him in a very personal way.

Most certainly because it is written in the Gospel of Mark for our reading, it is an authentication of Jesus's power, but what kind of power? You see, as one writer would say, left-handed power is all about demonstrating how that power is reflecting on the one wielding it, how it demonstrates how they are the ones to be paid attention to. They're the ones to be given honor and glory. But right-handed power, as this writer says, is something very different. Right-handed power is not about gaining attention for themselves, but rather sharing that power for the love of another. Jesus and his saving grace, his goodness, his mercy, and the kind of power he wields is exactly what is authenticated here. It's not for exclamation and demonstration, but it is for the authentication of Jesus as a gracious, good Savior who gives away.

And who wouldn't want a Savior like this? Who doesn't want leaders who give their power away, not for their glory, but for the good of others. Don't we cry out for that? I know I do. Don't we want to be those kinds of leaders, those kinds of people, who instead of trying to gain glory for ourselves when we have something, we want to be able to give it away to bless others. Isn't that the kind of people we want to be? And yet over and over again throughout history Jesus is constantly rejected. These very miracles, these very acts, are rejected and is laughed upon. How could you believe such things are true?

So the question, as the writer N.T. Wright says, why wouldn't we want to believe this is true? Who doesn't want a Savior who heals? Who doesn't want a Savior who takes his power and gives it away for the care and love and mercy towards others. Who doesn't want a Savior who's...what...giving his life? Who doesn't want resurrection? Who doesn't want the demonstration of power to finally be given away for the sake of others, that others might flourish. That is precisely what Jesus is. And who of us—Who? I would ask—doesn't want a Savior like this. He's not showing off. He's not trying to draw more and more followers. He's simply authenticating, in a very personal way, the kingdom of God is at hand. And by my

hands—literally in this passage—Jesus brings healing.

But let's go further and deeper still. There is **Restoration** here. Again, the text tells us: “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.” What's important about this restoration and about this act is that it is unique. In the Gospel of John there had not been anyone who had witnessed someone who was born deaf who had been healed. And it declares such in John 9: No one has seen such acts. [John 9:32] But this restoration, this miracle is precisely meant for us to see that what Jesus is bringing is the fulfillment of restoration that has been promised from centuries past.

Mark Jones, in his wonderful book, *Knowing Christ*. . . So normally I would not be quite this pedantic, but if you are looking for a good book that is accessible to go deeper in both the Scriptural understanding of who Jesus is, patterned after J. I. Packer's book *Knowing God*, it is this book by Mark Jones, *Knowing Christ*. Packer writes the introduction. And even if you are new to the faith or investigating the faith, it is still a book that is very accessible. This is what he says precisely about this miracle, this miracle of healing someone who is deaf. He says: This promise was clearly emphasized in the Old Testament, as well, as the Lord called for a future gathering in which the spiritually blind and deaf would be healed. “Bring out the people who are blind, yet have eyes, who are deaf, yet have ears!” Isaiah 43:8.

What is so interesting about this particular healing at this particular time is this. That the people who do have eyesight, people who can hear, are neither seeing Jesus for who he is, and they're not hearing what he is saying. And so Jesus, in his authentication of the kind of kingdom that he is bringing, in healing this man of his deafness and his eyes, is doing more than restoring, literally, his physical hearing and his physical sight. It is a symbol, and it is pointing to what's happening to this man spiritually. That the people who have these senses are not seeing. But the ones who are seeing are the ones who are having their hearing and their sight restored. The ones who know they cannot hear, the ones who know they cannot see: these are the ones to whom Jesus bring healing and restoration.

Mark Jones continues and he says: Here were people who could see and hear, yet remained blind and deaf. Indeed, we've seen even up to this point in the Gospel of Mark, his disciples seem deaf and blind to exactly what Jesus doing. And it is roughly, barely outside of these healings. It is demons who actually declare that Jesus is the Lord. Yet they, of course, reject him.

And so here we have Jesus doing this act. Jones says: Was this not the very point that Jesus had to make here, when he told that the blind now seeing, believing man, that he came into the world to give sight to the blind and blindness to the seeing (John 9:39). With their insulting questions, “Are we also blind?” (John 9:40) The Pharisees show that they were starting to understand. Jesus delivered the conclusion of the matter with the force, saying to them, “If you were blind, you would have no guilt, but now that you say, ‘We see,’ your guilt remains.” The healing of the blind man, in the end, was all about the spiritual sight connected with the forgiveness of sin. Jesus, in restoring this man's hearing and his speech, is doing far more than just restoring his physical ability. He's restoring his soul. He's demonstrating what kind of Savior he is.

But there is something further. In Isaiah, as we've already heard read this morning, there is specifically for us to see that Jesus is fulfilling something very particular. Because there is a word here used in this passage to describe this man who is both deaf and could not speak, that is only used here and no other place in the New Testament. It is used in another place, but it is in the Old Testament. And Mark, who is very particular in his writing, would want us—and certainly his hearers, if they were Jewish and knew the Scriptures—to pick up on the allusion to Isaiah 35, where it says this, using the same words. “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 35:5-6] Then again in Isaiah 42: “...to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness.” [Isaiah 42:7] This is what the Lord is restoring. This is a fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy. The deaf will hear and the mute will speak, and they will declare with joy—with joy—that the Lord has come.

But there is yet something further and yet deeper in. We see the authentication that this is bringing to the kind of kingdom, to the kind of Savior Jesus is, to the restoration that he means to bring—yes, senses and healing, but most importantly the restoration of the soul through salvation. But what we see here is the inauguration in Jesus’s action of healing of **New Creation**, of what his salvation would bring about. It’s the beginning of a new act of God, acting anew to bring about something which is very new.

But what is the sign? If you look back at the passage, Jesus says these words which are meant for us to see and hear, and it's easy to pass over it. Again, verse 33. “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...” And maybe you’re wondering, OK, so what's the word? It's this phrase: “He sighed.” Now in English it seems like something we don't... <<<sigh>>>...right? It's just how we think of sighing. But the Greek word and the Aramaic word has something far deeper. It's a groaning. That as Jesus look to heaven he groaned. Why might that be?

Well, I'm grateful for scholars and writers. I'm grateful for the connection that we see through the original languages to Isaiah, and we certainly hear it in Isaiah 35: The eyes of the blind shall be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. But if we look at that word ‘sighed,’ why would Jesus groan? Well, one could certainly say—and I believe it is true—it is Jesus in his deep recognition of this man's brokenness, of his need for healing. It is most certainly pointing to Jesus’s compassion. But I don't believe that is all that it is. It certainly could be that Jesus is seeking in his ‘redeemerhood’, if you will—his being a Redeemer—he is seeking to identify not with the rich and the powerful, but with those who are the down and the out, those who are on the margins, those who need him and who recognize their weakness. I do believe it is an identification with the suffering of others.

But if we were to stop there, we would only be getting half of the kind of kingdom, half of the kind of gospel that I think this word ‘groaned’ actually points to. Because, you see, the healing is not an end in and of itself. This man's hearing being restored is not an end in and of itself. His speech being returned, his tongue being able to declare what Jesus has done is not an end in and of itself. It is pointing to something greater: a greater restoration and, indeed, a new creation. What is Jesus about to do? I mean to tell you that if we see this healing in a drama that is unfolding in the Gospel of Mark, that is about to turn and to pick up pace, that this is throwing down exactly what Jesus is about to do—that Jesus is about to inaugurate a new

creation where he draws to himself, through the act of salvation, people who recognize and say Lord, have mercy upon me, I am a sinner, I am in need of your healing grace. He's bringing about a new kingdom for which he is the king, and the way to start it is to lay down his life.

How do I get that from 'groaning'? Well, see if you can connect the dots with me. Back to Isaiah, it says this in Isaiah 35:4-6. "Say to those who have an anxious heart, 'Be strong; fear not! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, and with the recompense of God.'" Then it says, "He will come and save you. Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped." What in the world does all of that mean? What does it mean that God will come with vengeance, and the recompense of God will be poured out.

Well, let's look at it here in this passage. Does Jesus come to this man? Indeed. Does Jesus—aside from direct challenge—does he pour out wrath on anyone? Does he bring the vengeance of God and the recompense of God because God's holiness has been offended? His name has been attributed to the work of Satan. Does Jesus then bring all of that vengeance and pour it out on those around him, even those who are rejecting him? No, he does not. And so what, then, could Isaiah be pointing to?

I think it's pointing to the reason why Jesus is groaning. Because to bring the new creation—as Jesus looks up to heaven to bring healing to this man—Jesus recognizes this new creation, this restoration, his authentication will bring a great cost. And that great cost will be to himself. God does bring vengeance, and he does bring his wrath. But upon whom does he pour it? He pours it out on his Son. Which is why Jesus from the cross says, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.

Tim Keller in his study of the Gospel of Mark says this. There's something else that Mark wants his readers to think about. Isaiah says that the Messiah will come to save us with divine retribution. 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 is the divine retribution? And the answer is he didn't come to bring divine retribution, he came to bear it. On the cross Jesus would identify with us totally. On the cross the Child of God was thrown away, cast away from the table without a crumb, so that those of us who were 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. Jesus would receive God's wrath, so that we could have our ears unstopped, our tongues able to speak, and our eyes able to see that Jesus is Lord.

I say to you, if you are not a believer and you laugh at the idea that we would preach and teach and even believe on the miracles that Mark declares here, my question is to you. Why wouldn't we? If we do take for a minute this argument. . . If we say that there is a Jesus, the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified dead and was buried, and the third day He rose again and ascended to the right hand of God the Father, and reigns for eternity. If we say, for the sake of argument, if that is true...wouldn't we want him to be exactly like this?

I fundamentally believe in my own heart, as I understand my own walk of faith, the problem is never truly that Jesus isn't who he says he is. It's that do we really want to have the implications of it? Because the implications of believing that Jesus does these things and brings about salvation, takes on the wrath of God for our sin and we are forgiven, means that I, then, worship him. I give him thanks, and I'm stripped of my self-sufficiency. The challenge, I believe,

is not whether this is true. I think the challenge is to our hearts. If it is true, then what is my response? Because if he causes my ears to hear and my eyes to see and my heart to believe that Jesus Christ is Lord, then how will my life be changed? I may have to recognize my life is no longer my own, but I belong, body and soul, to another.

But who is that other? If you do not believe, I invite you to see this Jesus. If you are a believer, I want you to be encouraged this morning that the end of the story is not brokenness. It is not deafness. It is not blindness. It is not being lame. It is not being full of cancer. It is not being full of disease. It is not being broken in relationships. Is not sin. Is not hurt, are not tears. But the Lord will bring restoration a new creation and make all things new. This is the Lord that I need to pray to. This is the Lord that my doubting heart must call upon to say Lord, help me believe and forgive me in my unbelief.

This is the Lord. Because as they witnessed Jesus doing this, they couldn't help but speak about it. He begged them, but he could not keep them silent. And they said—not us—they said, “and they were astonished beyond measure, saying, ‘He has done all things well.’” This is the one we are called to receive, for he is good and his love endures forever. He will restore sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, and he will bring healing in his wings. And that may be today. But in his return—whenever he comes—he will make all things right. This is our hope. If he has already inaugurated this at his first coming, and this is the authentication, this is the restoration, this is the beginning of the new creation—then how much more beautiful and glorious and worthy of praise of that which he is about to do.

As we began the service, I encourage you to hear again Revelation 21. “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and there will no longer be any death or mourning or crying or pain, for the older things have passed away.’” [Revelation 21: 1-4]

This—as Isaiah prophesied—this is John prophesying about the new creation that is coming. And just as in Isaiah's day they were called to believe and to have hope and faith that the Redeemer would come, we now read in the Gospel of Mark he has come and it's been inaugurated. And now we're asked again to live and to walk in hope by faith. The end of the story is the glorious restoration of all things, for he has done all things well and he promises to continue to do so.

May the Lord bless the preaching of his word and may he encourage each of you in your hearts wherever you are today, that he is good and his love endures forever. Let's pray. Now Lord, I ask that you would take your word and strengthen, encourage, uphold your people and protect them. For Lord, we are given to unbelief and doubt and hurt, and we wonder is this true. Which is why we need your word and your Spirit to encourage us and to strengthen us, that indeed you are the Lord. Now Lord, we ask, strengthen us by your word and Spirit to walk by faith and not by sight. For you are a God who loves and who is full of grace, and today is the day of salvation. May you renew us, restore us, and save us, for you have poured out your wrath on your Son for our salvation. Now enable us to leap and to sing for joy. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.