

Christ Does All Things Well

The Gospel of Mark: Mighty and Mild / Mark 7:31-37

Introduction:

Have you ever thought about why certain individual stories stand out from others when major events in history are recounted? Take the story of Corrie Ten Boom during the Holocaust. Though there are stories of many who helped the Jews escape the atrocities of the Holocaust, Corrie Ten Booms stands out above the rest. Or how about the story of Rosa Parks during the Civil Rights movement? While there were many people involved in the Civil Rights Movement, including black women before Rosa who refused to move seats, Rosa's story is one that stands out from the rest. Stories like these stand out because of ideals communicated through them, or significant moments connected to them. Corrie Ten Boom's because of her astonishing act of forgiving the S.S. guard after her imprisonment, Rosa because of how her arrest triggered one of the largest social movements in US History called the Montgomery Bus Boycott. Our story today is a similar situation, where an individual story stands out among other similar stories for a very pointed reason. We see this when we compare our story with Matthew's account of Jesus leaving the Syrophenician woman. In Matthew 15:29-31, Matthew records, "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." These verses in Matthew's gospel come immediately following his account of the Syrophenician woman and hold details similar to our passage like Jesus leaving from there, being near the Sea of Galilee, crowds bringing mute people to Jesus, the mute speaking, and the crowds being amazed. When comparing these accounts, it would appear that Matthew focuses on an extensive healing ministry of Jesus in this region, where Mark relays one particular healing and a specific reaction. Why does Mark single out this healing and response? What is it about this story that causes Mark to focus only on it? This story stands out for two reasons. One, for how it solidifies Mark's presentation of Jesus as the promised Messiah from Isaiah's prophecies. Two, for how it continues to highlight the crowd's failure to respond properly to Jesus Christ. Consider the first reason with me, how this story reveals that,

Jesus Brought the Promised Joy of Isaiah

Within this story, Mark captures intentional and clear connections to a prophecy Isaiah made in Isaiah 35:5-6, where the focus is on the joy and gladness of the coming Messianic Kingdom. There may even be connections to the greater context of Isaiah 35:1-10, but we will focus only on the definite connections to verses 5-6. Notice the details of Jesus' journey given in Mark 7:31, "Then he [Jesus] returned from the region of Tyre and went through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis." This journey by Jesus would have been a roughly 120 mile journey as he leaves Tyre, heads north to Sidon, then southeast through Caesarea Philippi to get to the region of the Decapolis, on the east side of the Sea of Galilee. This would be akin to traveling up the coast from San Francisco before traveling southeast along the other side of the bay to get to Fremont. It is also worth noting how this is a long and specific journey through a well-known Gentile territory, ending in the same region Jesus was rejected from when casting out the man with the legion of demons from the country of the Gerasenes. A region where Jesus' fame already spread, so it is no wonder Matthew is able to record an extensive healing ministry. But look at how Mark singles out a particular healing in verses 32-35, "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.'" Each part of this interaction is filled with details. Note first, the details of the man brought to Jesus. Mark says he was "deaf and had a speech impediment."

When describing this man with a speech impediment, Mark uses a Greek word, *mogilalos*, that only occurs one other time in the entire Bible, in the Septuagint's translation of Isaiah 35:6, which was the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible commonly used at that time. Pay attention to what we see in Isaiah 35:5-6, as it speaks of the glory of the Lord being revealed through the coming Messianic Kingdom, "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 [*mogilalos*] sing for joy." Mark using this word in verse 32 begins to link this story with Isaiah's description, drawing our minds to confirm that connection when we see it again in verse 37. After making this link, we see the crowd begging Jesus to lay His hands on the man, indicating a request for more than just healing that would include a blessing. Jesus, then, takes the man privately aside and provides personal and pointed imagery so he could understand what was taking place. The act of Jesus placing His fingers into his ears, spitting and touching his tongue, looking up to heaven, and sighing are visible signs for the deaf man to understand what was taking place since he wouldn't hear Jesus' words. The sigh, as Danny Akin and other commentators suggest, "is an expression of our Lord's love and compassion for this man and also His great grief over the fall of man and the terrible consequences of sin" (Daniel L. Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Mark*, 162). Church don't be mistaken, sin is the cause of every broken part of God's creation and Jesus Christ is the only hope in that brokenness. Each part of this interaction points to a personal disclosure of Christ as the promised Messiah from Isaiah 35 who would bring the joy of God's kingdom. This is further confirmed by the response of everyone to this healing. Notice what happens next in verses 35-37, "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.'" A full healing takes place as this man's ears are opened and tongue released, evidenced by him speaking plainly. When speaking of this man's tongue being released, the original Greek uses a term that is most commonly used to refer to a prisoners chain being broken. Jesus is setting him free from captivity. The people, then, do not obey Jesus' charge, but proclaim, or preach, what happened because they were astonished beyond measure. And pay attention to what they were saying in verse 37, "He has done all things well. He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak." Their confession of Jesus doing all things well echoes Genesis 1 as God creates all things and declared them to be good. As James Edwards notes, "It is a further instance of Jesus fulfilling the role of God. The Son's work in redemption is like the Father's work in creation: it is done well and leaves nothing to be desired" (James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, 227). Their further confession of Jesus making "the deaf hear and the mute speak" confirms the connection with Isaiah 35:5-6 anticipated through the use of the Greek word *mogilalos* in verse 32. This link to Isaiah 35 is Mark's main reason for focusing on this story, and its a link that will continue in chapter 8. The goal is to help us see Jesus as fulfilling the prophetic words of Isaiah 35, where the prophet shifts from the judgment of Egypt, Edom, Israel, Jerusalem, and Tyre to the eschatological joy of the redeemed and creation at the revelation of God's glory. This scene points to the arrival of the glory of God and joy of the kingdom brought by the presence of Jesus Christ and calls for joy in the hearts of all who have the eyes to see what is taking place through Jesus Christ at this moment in history. The first and primary reason for Mark's inclusion of this story is to show how Jesus brought the promised joy of Isaiah drawing our hearts to long for that joy. Consider the second reason with me, how this story reveals that,

Jesus is Worthy of Praise and Trust

As we have noted in our study of this gospel, Mark often contrasts the response of the crowds, who fail to embrace Jesus, with the response of individuals, who exercise true faith. The purpose of this contrast is to move us to determine whether we are responding to Jesus like the crowds, who only come to Christ as a wonder worker, or responding in true faith. This story is more subtle, but we see the same thing as we observe the response of the crowd. Look again at verses 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.’” In one sense, the crowd is right to zealously proclaim that Jesus “has done all things well” and how “He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak.” Church, those are the things we should proclaim. They are words of praise and adoration for our King that we should zealously proclaim as we marvel at Him. Yet, what we discover is they were doing this while repeatedly disobeying the charge of Jesus. Mark not only tells us that Jesus “charged them to tell no one,” but that he repeatedly charged them to remain silent. Yet, “the more he charged them, the more zealously they proclaimed it.” This disobedience is a sign of their lack of true faith. True faith would have trusted Jesus when he charged them to keep the matter silent. They did not obey because they failed to realize the full picture had not been disclosed. Jesus’ repeated commands for silence were given to people because it wasn’t His time to be known yet. He had a work to do first. He needed to suffer and die for His people. He needed to stand in their place on the cross, bearing the just payment for their sin, to secure their forgiveness. These healings would mean nothing if He didn’t provide the ultimately healing from sin. Yes, it is right to praise Jesus like these people did, but that praise must include a knowledge of the full revelation of Christ, not just a knowledge of the wonders He performed. It must include a firm trust in His finished work on the cross and it must be accompanied by full trust in everything He calls us to do. Mark focuses in on this story because it moves us to see how Jesus is worthy of praise and trust. And both of these reasons are meant to give us faith, challenge our faith, and strengthen our faith. So, consider some questions with me as you reflect on the truths we have seen. First,

1) Have You Experienced the Joy Brought by Jesus Christ?

We have seen the connection to the joy found in the revelation of the glory of the Lord as promised in Isaiah 35. In the coming of Jesus Christ, we discover the inbreaking of the kingdom of God on earth. Christ Jesus has come. He has established His rule and reign, holding all authority in heaven and on earth. He is seated in heaven ruling and reigning, waiting for the consummation of His kingdom. God’s Kingdom breaking in to our world means the joy promised by Isaiah is available to us now, and will be fully realized at Christ’s second coming. Do you experience that joy now? Church, I fear many Christians fail to experience that joy because our minds and hearts are so focused on the things we see around us. Our success and goals in life distract us. Our trials weigh on us. Our burdens consume us. And each of these things ultimately rob us of the joy we are meant to have in Christ. Listen to the constant refrain of the Word of God. Psalm 16:11 says, “You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.” John 10:10 says, “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. Jesus says in Matthew 13:44, “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.” Christ and His kingdom are where true and everlasting joy is found. We should be the most joyful people on earth! And we will be when our eyes remain focused on Him. As Paul says in Colossians 3:1-4, “If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.” Have you experienced the joy Christ brought, first for your salvation, but also continually in your life? Are you lacking that joy because your mind has been taken off of the things above? As I continue to grow in faith and strive to follow Christ, I am discovering more and more how many things consume me that are not really worth dwelling on. And when I dwell on them, I take my eyes off Christ and lose sight of the joy Christ brought. Whether it is goals in life or the difficulties I face. Don’t hear me wrong, I am not suggesting we live in denial of the burdens we face in this life. I am not suggesting we don’t seek help for them. We should acknowledge our burdens and work through them with all the means of grace God has provide for us.

But, I do believe the scripture tells us that our greatest tool in battling those burdens is to set our minds on the glory of Christ and the joy of His presence forever, yet sadly this is often the last place we turn to. This story reminds us of that joy to recenter our hearts on it. The second question to consider is,

2) Are You Fully Trusting Christ?

As we have seen the crowds consistently come to Jesus for Him to meet their needs. They leave astonished and even make confessions that look like faith. Yet, they constantly fail to trust fully in Jesus. They don't heed His commands, and they don't remain with Him. How does your life compare with theirs? Do you come to Jesus for blessings, but fail to trust that all of His commands are for your ultimate good? Are you tempted to buy into the worlds lies that tell you that you can reject some of His commands because He "wouldn't want you to be unhappy"? Trust in Jesus means we take everything He says as truth and believe is the ultimate good for our lives. When Jesus says from the beginning God made them male and female, we trust that this is truth, believe it is for our good and say yes. When he says love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, we trust that is for our good and say yes. When he says lay down your life for others, honor those in government, speak evil of no one, you trust that these things are for your good and say yes, I will strive to do them. When he says it is better to give than receive, don't lay up treasure on this earth, you cannot serve God and money, seek first His kingdom, you know that is for your good and say yes help me value your kingdom above everything else. We don't pick and chose what we want to obey. Full and real trust in Christ takes all His commands, believes they are for our good, and seeks to live by them. The crowds lack of trust in Christ's commands should show us their folly and push us to seek to fully trust in His Word. The final question is,

3) Do You Long to Proclaim and Praise Christ for Who He is and What He Does?

While the crowds example of disobeying Christ's command to remain silent before the cross shows disobedience, on this side of the cross, their proclamation serves as an example of proper proclamation and praise. Look at what happened. Their astonishment led to a zealous proclamation, and they only knew part of the story. How much more should our astonishment at the full truth of the gospel lead us to zealously proclaim and praise Christ? Oh church, this should fuel our evangelism. We should be so captivated by the truth of the gospel that we can't help but share it with others. Our lack of zeal for evangelism is often tied to our lack of astonishment at the truth of the gospel. This astonishment should also fuel our worship. Let me speak boldly. We have bought into a horribly faulty notion that we need things a certain way to be able to worship. We need a certain type of music, a particular atmosphere, or a high production quality. That is completely wrong. We should long to worship His name regardless of what song is sung (old or new, fast or slow), what style of music is played (hymn or modern), or what atmosphere is created (lights fully on or fully off). Our hearts should be so astonished by His mercy and grace that if a song is declaring truth, we are zealous to proclaim it. The problem with a lack of worship is not with what is provided for us to participate in, but with where our heart is at when it considers the glory of Christ. If my mind is set on Jesus Christ and His glory, I can zealously sing anything.

Fanny Crosby says it best in one of her hymns,

Redeemed, how I love to proclaim it!
Redeemed by the blood of the Lamb;
Redeemed through His infinite mercy,
His child, and forever, I am.

I think of my blessed Redeemer,
I think of Him all the day long;
I sing, for I cannot be silent;
His love is the theme of my song.

I know I shall see in His beauty
The King in whose law I delight,
Who lovingly guardeth my footsteps,
And giveth me songs in the night.

Redeemed, redeemed,
Redeemed by the blood of the Lamb;
Redeemed, how I love to proclaim it!
His child, and forever, I am.

Conclusion:

As the worship team is coming to lead us in our extend time of response, where we reflect through song on the truths we have heard from God's word today, what is God calling you to believe, desire, or do? In this time, you are welcome to come and kneel before the Lord in a posture of humility before Him if that is how He leads you to respond. We also have a team of people ready to pray with you and for you that you will find worshipping with lanyards on the front rows or bottom of the stairs in the back. You can remain seated as you pray and reflect or stand and sing as the Lord leads you. Lean into responding God's Word and seek His grace for you today.

Would you pray with me as we move into this time of response?