

He Does All Things Well

Mark 7:31-37 ³¹ Again, departing from the region of Tyre and Sidon, He came through the midst of the region of Decapolis to the Sea of Galilee. ³² Then they brought to Him one who was deaf and had an impediment in his speech, and they begged Him to put His hand on him. ³³ And He took him aside from the multitude, and put His fingers in his ears, and He spat and touched his tongue. ³⁴ Then, looking up to heaven, He sighed, and said to him, "Ephphatha," that is, "Be opened." ³⁵ Immediately his ears were opened, and the impediment of his tongue was loosed, and he spoke plainly. ³⁶ Then He commanded them that they should tell no one; but the more He commanded them, the more widely they proclaimed it. ³⁷ And they were astonished beyond measure, saying, "He has done all things well. He makes both the deaf to hear and the mute to speak."

This last week, we were shocked to hear the news of the sudden death of someone quite close to several in this congregation. Her brother-in-law and his family were once in this church, and her husband is still an active member of a good church in Pretoria. She was mother to two young girls, and was 38 years old. She was a devoted Christian, a good wife, a good mother, and there were no signs of any ill health. And yet on Wednesday, through really unknown health reasons at this point, she died.

When we hear of things like this, we are perplexed. We try to make sense of how or why this would happen to faithful Christians. We hear of Christians being persecuted, losing their jobs, contracting dread diseases. We hear of believers being forced out of jobs, discriminated against, or rejected by family members and our reaction is to wonder what God is doing. How can this be good, we say? What possible good could this serve? How will this actually be good or right?

William Cowper wrote these words that we sometimes sing:

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust Him for His grace;
Behind a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face.

But how do we do that? How do we trust Him in times of bewildering confusion? We find part of the answer in this passage. At the end of this account, we find these words, "He has done all things well."

To believe that God does all things well is at the root of trusting faith. To believe that God does not simply watch the world and passively let things happen, but that He *makes* things happen, and does so well, is behind real faith. Believing that God includes death, persecution, famine, mistreatment, crime and hardship, but yet does all things well, is what faith does.

"He has done all things well" serves as a summary of what Jesus had done in this area. Everything He has done, it has been done well, right, fittingly. The people of this area, probably Gentiles, were astonished, utterly bewildered by His ministry and commented that everything He did, He did well.

What makes this statement all the more fitting is that, in this passage, we find Jesus doing some rather puzzling things. He goes places that seem out of the way. He performs actions that seem odd and weird to us. He gives commands that seem unreasonable, yet the summary statement is, "He does all things well." As we study this account, we will find fuel for our faith. We will find that whether or not we understand it at the time, God's methods and ways and commands come from a God who does all things well. He does all things well, even when the way is confusing, even when the methods are strange, even when the commands are puzzling.

I. He Does All Things Well When the Way is Confusing

³¹ *Again, departing from the region of Tyre and Sidon, He came through the midst of the region of Decapolis to the Sea of Galilee.* ³²

To understand why this is a strange thing, you need to imagine in your mind the geography of Israel. Jesus has mostly been ministering in Galilee, which is northern Israel. When we looked at His deliverance of the Syro-Phoenician woman's daughter, we saw that Jesus and His disciples had walked the nearly 200 kilometres north and west to get to the area of Tyre. Tyre was on the Mediterranean coast, modern-day Lebanon.

The next thing He does is to head further north to Sidon, 20 kilometres north of Tyre.

(Mark 7:31) *Then he returned from the region of Tyre and went through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis. - ESV)*

He then comes back to Galilee but through the middle of Decapolis. Decapolis was on the eastern side of the lake of Galilee, made up of ten Gentile cities. To get there, Jesus and His disciples would have done a huge semi-circle north and then east, until finally heading south and then west. This is hardly the most direct route or the most economic use of time or energy. It is like starting in Johannesburg, going to the Namibian coast, then returning by going through Botswana, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, and coming back through Mozambique and Mpumalanga.

In fact, it is such an odd route that many sceptical scholars have said that Mark didn't understand the geography and made a mistake. Why would Jesus take His disciples on such a confusing route?

It's not the first time God's people have been taken on a journey or gone through a place or time they did not understand.

Joseph probably didn't understand at the time why the Ishmaelites were taking him down to Egypt as a slave. But it was there that God would use the richest nation in the world at the time to protect His people and prepare them to be a great nation and set the stage for a great exodus.

The Israelites were led from Egypt straight to a dead end with the Red Sea in front of them, and the thundering chariots of Pharaoh behind them. It didn't make sense, but the One who does all things well, planned to reveal Himself mightily. Nor did it make sense when they were led into a desert of all places. But it was there that God could supernaturally feed them and give them water to drink.

Daniel probably didn't understand why he was led to Babylon but it was there that God preserved His people, and gave the most powerful ruler in the world, Nebuchadnezzar, the gift of salvation.

Joseph probably didn't understand why the census had to take him down in Judea just at the time that Mary was due to deliver but Messiah was predicted to be born in Bethlehem, not in Nazareth.

The Jewish disciples didn't understand when Jesus deliberately took them through Samaria but there was a woman there who was going to believe.

Jesus circuitous route was not an accident. This journey would have taken several months, probably six months. It takes us from the 2 ½ year mark to the 3 year mark in Jesus' ministry. And in these six months, He began preparing the Twelve for what was ahead. He began teaching them about the

cross and the resurrection. He began explaining what the program would be, and what they needed to be ready to do. It was during this time of seclusion, away from cheering, hysterical crowds, away from miraculous encounters that must have made every day seem dreamy and unreal, that they were confronted with the sober realities of being disciples. It meant taking up a cross. It meant embracing persecution. It meant being put out of the synagogue. It meant giving up dreams of glory and embracing the place of the servant. And what better time to teach these things than on a six-month walk? He does all things well, even when the way seems confusing.

Maybe you have wondered, or are wondering, why God brought you here, to this place, at this time in my life? Why this country, this city, this church, this family, this job, this ministry at this time?

*Let Him lead thee blindfold onwards,
Love needs not to know;
Children whom the Father leadeth
Ask not where they go.
Though the path be all unknown,
Over moors and mountains lone.* - Gerhard Tersteegen

What we need to know is, He does all things well.

II. He Does All Things Well When the Method is Strange

³² Then they brought to Him one who was deaf and had an impediment in his speech, and they begged Him to put His hand on him. ³³ And He took him aside from the multitude, and put His fingers in his ears, and He spat and touched his tongue. ³⁴ Then, looking up to heaven, He sighed, and said to him, "Ephphatha," that is, "Be opened." ³⁵ Immediately his ears were opened, and the impediment of his tongue was loosed, and he spoke plainly.

Now they are in Decapolis and they bring to Jesus a man who is deaf and has serious speech impediment. Of course these often go together – if one is born deaf, there will nearly always be extreme difficulty in picking up speech.

Sadly, in many ancient cultures, including this one, the deaf and the mute were treated as insane. Even the Rabbis did this, because they said there was no way of knowing what they understood and it is extremely hard to communicate with one both deaf and mute. There were no hearing aids, no advanced sign languages, no schools for children with special needs. This man would have been an outcast, treated as if he were insane. No doubt a painful life, a lonely life, probably harder than being blind, because at least with blindness you can hear and interact with people. Here you can see and understand but cannot communicate, or ever hear what others are communicating.

So some people bring this man to Jesus, in fact the verb here is that they fling him in front of Jesus, and beg Jesus to touch him.

Jesus does seven things which seem odd and strange. He takes him aside. He puts His fingers in the man's ears. He spits. He touches his tongue. He looks up into heaven. He sighs. He says *Ephphatha*. On the surface, those things seem random, odd, senseless. The method does not seem to make any sense.

Is God really doing all things well when the method is so odd?

Other people have struggled with this. Remember when the Syrian commander, Naaman, had

leprosy and came to see Elisha. Elisha didn't even greet him but told him to go and dip himself in the Jordan seven times. Naaman then flew off in a huff, feeling insulted that he should be told to dip himself not once, but seven times in a not-so-impressive river, without so much as special magic words chanted over him. But it was God's method, and when his servant persuaded him to go through with it, it worked.

For that widow to go and borrow as many jars and bowls and vessels from her neighbours seemed like an odd thing to do. But it was going to hold all the oil that Elisha's miracle would bring, to sell and change her situation.

For Jesus to wash Peter's feet seemed like a very strange method, and didn't make much sense. Peter couldn't understand it, and Jesus had to say to him,

“ John 13:7 Jesus answered and said to him, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but you will know after this."

God's methods for bringing down the walls of Jericho, for defeating a 9 foot 6 inch Philistine giant, for teaching Job His sovereign greatness and goodness are not our ways. Indeed, His method for defeating Satan and putting an end to sin and death – who would have thought it would have involved a stubborn nation, a dusty town called Nazareth, and a Roman method of execution.

Isaiah 55:8-9 ⁸ *" For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways," says the LORD. ⁹ "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts.*

In this man's case, though the method seems so odd on the surface. Think about the quiet beauty of it. Here is a deaf and mute man, he cannot hear what Jesus says, so Jesus must give him a kind of sign language to explain what He is doing and where the man's faith must lie.

He takes him aside. He is treating the man as an individual. The man knows that God loves him and sees him. His culture has treated him like a burden, but God loves him. He is face to face with Jesus. Then Jesus takes His fingers and puts them in the man's ears. What is the sign language? You are deaf. You are not mad or insane. Your ears have been closed up. I am going to open them. He then spits and touches the man's tongue. We spit when there is something in our mouths or on our tongues that we don't want. Jesus is communicating, you have an impediment with your speech, which I am going to remove.

He then looks up, showing the man where the grace and power for this healing is going to come from. This is God who is going to heal and man must place his faith in God. He then sighs, a groan to show the compassion and sympathy that Jesus had for him, the sorrow for what the curse had brought. And then He says “Ephphatha” which just means 'be opened'. Perhaps the man could lip-read, perhaps his ears opened as Jesus said it.

³⁵ *Immediately his ears were opened, and the impediment of his tongue was loosed, and he spoke plainly.*

Here is a man who not only hears for the first time, but is given speech like a gift. Whereas usually years of speech therapy are needed to correct what deafness would have produced, this man is given his speech in a moment.

When we see it from the perspective of the man, what seemed like seven, random, odd things make sense. He does all things well, even if they don't make sense to the crowd, to those watching, or to

us who are reading.

He does all things well, even if we don't understand why He allowed the cancer, or allowed the job loss, or allowed the children and friends to emigrate, or to have that disability. We, who are in the situation ask, "Why this way? Why did my life have involve this person? Why did my life have to include this burden, this place, this time?"

You may not know. You may not know for many years to come. You may not know until glory. But you have enough evidence from Scripture, and from your own life, that the methods God uses are the right methods.

Tozer defined wisdom as "the skill to achieve the most perfect ends by the most perfect means." Job didn't understand God's method. Elijah didn't understand God's method. Even our Lord Himself asked the Father if there were not another way, when praying in the Garden. We don't need to understand the ways of God. We need to remember that He achieves perfect ends by the most perfect means. He does all things well.

Not only does he do all things well when the method is strange,

III. He Does All Things Well When the Command is Puzzling

³⁶ *Then He commanded them that they should tell no one; but the more He commanded them, the more widely they proclaimed it.*

Jesus once again tells people not to let this news spread. It is not the first time in Mark we have found what commentators call 'The Messianic secret', where Jesus wants to keep news about Himself quiet.

This is a very puzzling command. We can see how puzzling it was by the fact that no one seemed to obey it. The more He commanded them to keep things quiet, the more they broadcast it.

This is not the only time that people have received commands that seem strange, puzzling. When Israel was told to smash the high places, and not use them for worship, this seemed odd. These were well-decorated places, usually under the shade of green trees, with ready-made stone altars. Why smash those and not just use them for God?

When Saul was told to destroy the Amalekites and not keep any spoil; when Israel was told to destroy Ai and not keep any spoil, this seemed puzzling. Achan thought it was puzzling, Saul thought it was puzzling. Why destroy all that meat and money, when it's there for the taking?

When Gideon was told to thin out his army, it didn't make sense.

When Moses was told to speak to a rock, it didn't make sense.

When Ananias was told to welcome in Saul, the greatest persecutor of the church, it did not make sense.

When Peter was told to cast his net over to the other side of the boat, it did not make sense.

Sometimes, the commands don't make sense. This one did not make sense. Why not publicise the greatest possible news of who Messiah is? The answer is, Jesus did not want to spread the message that He was a miracle worker and a healer. This was half a gospel. Jesus did not want people coming to Him for the temporal, physical benefits. He wanted people to hear His message of repentance and faith, of acceptance of His Lordship as King Messiah. He wanted people to know

that He had come to die for sins, not to defeat Rome or banish sickness. And the more word spread about Jesus the miracle-worker, Jesus the Healer, the more superficial the responses of the people. People came to Him for all the wrong reasons, and were disappointed and even angry when He exposed their shallow motives. Because of all the false hoopla around Jesus, He had to do a lot of pruning, a lot of thinning out of the crowd with some hard demands and challenges.

The command might not have made sense to them, but there was good reason for it. He does all things well, even when we don't see the reason for the command.

There are plenty of commands which, coming from the culture we do, look strange. They look odd, they are counter-culture. Wives submitting to husbands. Children obeying parents and parents training children. Christians making serious covenants with one another to be loyal to Christ and to one another in the local church. Baptising believers in water.. Eating the Lord's Supper. Keeping sex until marriage. Not watching or listening to what the world does, so as to renew our minds and not love what God hates. Giving financially to God. Making prayer a part of your daily routine. To submit cheerfully to authority; to maintain impeccable honesty and integrity. These might not always make sense to us.

Certainly, when you obey them, the world thinks you odd, and tells you so. And we might even be tempted to sometimes try to wiggle out of them, or find exceptions that might overthrow the whole thing.

You will miss out on so much of God's displays of grace in your life, if you only obey the commands that make perfect sense to you. Yes, seek to understand, seek to obey with the heart of a loving, intelligent worshipper. But when the reason behind the command is shrouded in the perfect will of God; when the command does not make sense but it's still as clear as day that it applies to you, as a New Testament believer, then you must say, He does all things well. I hear, and obey. Lo, I come to do your will.

Very often, the understanding comes in the obeying, during the obeying, and not before. Those who hover at the edges of obedience, refusing to obey until God shows up and gives them an explanation, miss out. Those who throw the net on the other side of the boat; those who follow the Ark into the Jordan; those who go and get many earthen vessels from their neighbours, enjoy seeing the great work of God.

The way seemed confusing, but He was doing all things well. The method seemed strange, but He did all things well. The command was puzzling, but He did all things well.

The same man who wrote those words, Judge not the Lord by feeble sense, But trust Him for His grace; Behind a frowning providence He hides a smiling face, William Cowper, often struggled with depression and doubt. He attempted to commit suicide, and one night decided to drown himself. He called for a carriage and told the driver to take him to the river Thames. On the way, a thick fog came down and the driver could not find the river. After driving around lost for quite a while, the carriage driver stopped and let Cowper out. Cowper found himself back at his own doorstep. He saw in that moment that we may not understand what God is doing, but He does all things well.

We don't need better explanations of what God is doing, where He is taking us, why He has commanded this. We need a clearer illumination of how wise and trustworthy He is. Spurgeon said, "We need not know, and we cannot know, what God is doing, but we may be quite

sure that he doeth all things well."