

St. Mark 7:31-37

Dear Friends in Christ,

You know the question: "If God is love then why does He let so many bad things happen?" But that is not the correct question. The question must be this: If man is so good and deserves God's love then why doesn't man stop doing the things he does? Jesus spells it out: "...out of the (human) heart, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness." (Mk. 7:21,22) And what's in the human heart translates itself into words and actions. Anybody here innocent??

And the most salient point is this: It is the love of God that enters into a corrupted, crooked and God hating world and reveals itself in the person of Jesus Christ; loves what is unlovable.

Martin Luther wrote:

No misfortune we experience in this life can do any injury to our soul. Quite the contrary! Misfortune serves to our advantage. St. Paul says, "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose." (Rom 8:28) In our bodies we suffer woe, and it must always be so, for we would not be true Christians if we did not suffer with Christ, and if we were without sympathy for those who suffer. (James Atkinson, Editor, "Daily Readings With Martin Luther," Templegate Publishers, Springfield, Illinois, 1987, p.78)

No, God doesn't take away all the bad things of this world that are the result of man's ...well...man's *badness*. At least, not yet. But He does point us to the ultimate healing. It's an old theme, but on target:

HE HAS DONE ALL THINGS WELL

I. In Spite of Our Thinking.

"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." (vs. 32) It's how humans work. The human agenda. "We know what's best so we beg you to lay Your hand on the man." Humans know what's best. Well, considering this world's history of hatred and blood - considering how everything is tailspinning into a pit of filth and meanness - I don't believe that for a minute!

How do you see it when Jesus deals with you? We all have our agendas. He ought to do this or that, this way or that way. And when it doesn't happen - look out! I've got two points for us this morning.

First, this most familiar Word of God from Isaiah 55: "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts." (vss. 9,10) We have a hard time holding on to those words. "For my thoughts are not your thoughts" (God doesn't think as humans think)...neither are your ways my ways." We have our plans. God has His. Guess Whose plans prevail. I know, most here will agree with the truth and importance of what God says here, until His thoughts and ways enter our lives.

Here's the second point. We need to remember who we are. Paul says, "for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ." (Gal. 3:26,27) We belong to God. It's old ground, but so easy to forget when we get caught up in this world; its ways and thinking.

It has been said, "In dismissing the God he cannot understand, man is left to possess the things he cannot enjoy." In spite of the human agenda and thinking, all the things of this world are destined for the grave. That kind of sours the enjoyment of a "fun and games" lifestyle, don't you think? So much for the human agenda.

II. God's Agenda.

And that brings us to God's agenda:

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." And his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. (vss. 33-35)

Again, our theme this day is ***He Has Done All Things Well***. Such is the case here. Consider, once again, the fact that the crowd had "begged him to lay his hand on him." What Jesus does goes much further and begins with this: "...taking him aside from the crowd privately." Just the two of them. Removes the man from the hustle of the crowd.

Next, Jesus speaks to the man in a language he could understand: "...he put his fingers into his ears...". Would that not indicate to the deaf man that Jesus is going to do something relative to his deafness? And then, note the next two actions of Jesus: "after spitting touched (the man's) tongue." The action of spitting draws the man's attention to the mouth. The touching of the tongue indicates that something quite dramatic is to happen.

And then, the next action: "And looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, 'Ephphatha,' that is, 'Be opened.'" The man sees Jesus looking up to heaven. He is to grasp the truth that what is to happen is from heaven; from God Himself. And then, the most wonderful part of this moment: "And his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly."

God's agenda was tailormade for this man, wasn't it? The "how" of the healing the people wanted was quite different from how Jesus did the healing, wasn't it? There's no doubt about it, even when doubt is the only thing that seems to be left in a situation: God knows what's best and deals with each of us according to what's best!

And something else here: We can say that all Jesus did was designed to arouse faith in the man. But the miracle was not dependent on the man's faith. R. C. H. Lenski clarifies the situation well:

Jesus sometimes tried to instill faith before the miracle. He sometimes let faith follow after the miracle. It all depends on the case. The deaf-mute may well have received a spark of faith before the almighty word was spoken; but it was not his faith that enabled Jesus to heal him, it was solely the power and will of Jesus.

III. Its Meaning for Us.

The question, of course, is, "What does this mean for us?" And the answer is obvious and simple, though some might debate it. The answer is that Christ does all things well for us, as well.

Maybe it would be good to first recall something I have quoted in the past: "We should be completely clear about these two facts: God is not obligated to heal, and healing is not His greatest gift." That's correct on both counts.

The great and most profound healing - that is, gift - He has given us is the forgiveness of sin and, as a result, the assurance of everlasting life. The healing of the man in our text was a reminder that Christ has the power to forgive and grant heaven to those who believe. It is as Paul writes - that which we cherish: "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God. Not a result of works, so that no one may boast." (Eph. 2:8,9)

I have something else for you to hear from Martin Luther. Something he wrote to one who was struggling with the nature of life in this world:

“You do indeed ‘seek peace and ensure it’, but altogether in the wrong way. You seek the peace the world gives, not the peace Christ gives.

“Are you not aware...how God is so wonderful among his people that he has set his peace where there is no peace, that is in the midst of all our trials?....

“It is not...(the) man whom no one bothers who has peace. That kind of peace is the peace the world gives. It is that man whom everyone disturbs and everyone harasses, and yet, who joyfully and quietly endures them all.

“You are saying with Israel, ‘Peace! Peace!’ When there is no peace. Say, rather, with Christ, ‘Cross! Cross!’ and there is no cross for the cross ceases to be a cross the moment you say gladly, ‘Blessed cross! Of all the trees that are in the wood(s) there is none such as thee!’

“Seek this peace and you will find peace. Seek for nothing else than to take on trials with joy... You will never find peace by seeking and choosing what you feel and judge to be the path of peace.” (Atkinson, Daily Readings with Martin Luther, p. 72)

Our text closes with these words: “And they were astonished beyond measure, saying ‘He has done all things well. He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak.’” (vs. 37) He has done all things well - for you - and me. He has given us ears to hear and mouths to speak His eternal love! He gives us eternal peace!

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott

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II. God’s Agenda.

III. Its Meaning for Us.

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