



Sermon Notes: Trevor Ackman,

30 March 2025

“He has done all things well”

Readings: Mark 7:24-37, Isaiah 49:5-6, Ephesians 2:11-13

As we continue looking at the exciting Good News presented by Mark, I am reluctant to introduce a negative element. However, I have a problem with many of the healings in the Gospels.

It's not that I have any doubt they occurred. My God created the whole world. He would have no problem altering the laws of nature which he created and maintains, in the first place. That is not my problem. Rather I wonder about why people flocked to Jesus. Did they come to hear about God's amazing entry into our world by becoming a human being? Were they interested in whether Jesus was the promised Messiah? Did they even care about his message about the Kingdom of God and their need for repentance? Or were they merely fixated on what Jesus could do for them? I wonder how much faith was involved?

What do you think the crowd meant when they declared “He has done everything well”?

Let's see what we can learn from this small glimpse of the ministry of Jesus on earth.

In contrast to the busyness until now, Mark's narrative slows to consider two particular healings.

After his confrontation with the Pharisees, Jesus heads north to Tyre, in modern day Lebanon.

Tyre is a curious choice for a Jewish prophet. It's the land where the wicked Queen Jezebel came from – think in terms of Elijah and the 450 prophets of Baal. Tyre also has the dubious distinction of being one of the places specifically condemned by Old Testament prophecy:

“... your coastlands will tremble at the sound of your fall, when the wounded groan and the slaughter takes place in you” (Ezekial 26:15-17)

What on earth is Jesus doing so far from home?

Fortunately, Mark tells us. Jesus was seeking a little R & R.

Immediately before this, his life must have been exhausting: -

“wherever he went, whether villages or towns or even the countryside, sick people flocked to him – they begged him to let them touch even the edge of his cloak” (6:56).

No wonder Jesus wanted to get away. **Yet even here he could not hide.** Who knows how the message got out, but there's a clue way back in chapter three. When Jesus taught near the sea of Galilee, people flocked to him from Judea, Jerusalem – clearly Jewish territory ...and the regions around Tyre and Sidon!

A desperate mother comes to Jesus. Nothing unusual about that. Except for the first time in his ministry, Jesus seems reluctant to help. On other occasions he heals all comers, even people who merely touched his clothing (6:56). What is going on here?

Mark reveals this request is different ... because the woman is a foreigner. To make sure we don't miss the point, He uses a two-fold description. She is a Greek woman, born in Syrian Phoenicia – a gentile woman living in gentile territory.

And it seems, this is a step too far.

“First let the children eat all they want. For it is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs”

Matthew's version confirms 'children' means Jews, or the nation of Israel. Jesus explains

“I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel” (Matthew 15:24)

OK. I get that Jesus thought reaching Israel was his first priority. But is Jesus really calling this woman a dog? Ouch!

Seems a heartless and cruel way to refuse help to a desperate mum.

Which then makes us inclined to look for ways to soften his uncharacteristic racial slur.

Some tone it down by suggesting Jesus is referring to a cute household pet – think in terms of a sweet little Poodle or a cuddly Labrador – if those breeds existed then. Maybe not flattering but not a full-blown insult.

The problem is that dogs generally have a bad name in the Bible. A typical example is when the evil Queen Jezebel's body is thrown to the dogs to stop anyone mourning her passing. (2 Kings 9:37)

I suspect Jesus is not referring to cute little puppies yapping playfully under the dinner table.

In Matthew's sanitised version (15: 21-28), it's possibly a lesson to his disciples, who wanted to send her away. After acknowledging that Israel comes first, Jesus is praising her faith.

“Woman, you have great faith. Your request is granted”.

So, according to Matthew, Jesus is mocking the way his very Jewish disciples looked down on Gentiles as dogs. The drawing out of her faith shows his disciples that even Gentiles can be part of God's kingdom. Some commentators even picture Jesus with a cheeky smile on his face, as he looks lovingly on this mother.

If faith is the big issue, we might wonder why Mark's version doesn't even mention faith.

I'm not suggesting Matthew is wrong, but the human authors of the Bible were not mindless scribes, mechanically recording the message God dictated to them. We shouldn't be surprised when even eyewitnesses observe things differently. Not that Mark was an eyewitness. The conventional wisdom is he got his information from Peter.

Did you notice the implication of Jesus' response in v.29?

“For such a reply, you may go; the demon has left your daughter.”

Does that surprise you? If not, it should! **For such a reply.**

Here's a bit of a radical suggestion. I know it is radical, because when I raised it in Bible Study, I received a fair bit of blow back. Is it possible that – Jesus was wrong? Did he think Gentiles – or dogs in Jewish speak, would only get a look in after the children i.e Israel had “eaten all they want”. Is it possible Jesus changes his mind after this woman convinces him of his error? It might not be stretching it to paraphrase his response as something like

Ok, You got me. I didn't think of that. I'll do as you ask.

Maybe part of what it meant for Jesus to be fully human was a genuine ability to learn. Luke tells us that the 12-year old Jesus “grew in wisdom and stature.” (2: 52). As the God part of Jesus already knows everything, Luke must be talking about his human side. Perhaps the human Jesus needed a response like this woman's, to set him straight – to teach him his ministry was for everyone, not just to Jews.

By the time we get to the healing of the deaf mute, it seems Jesus has been living amongst Gentiles for some time. From Tyre he heads back home, although not exactly directly. First, he heads further north into Sidon, another Gentile stronghold and ends up in the Decapolis region, closer to Galilee, but still in a largely gentile region. You might recall this is near where he healed the demon possessed man in chapter 5. Why would he return to the place where people had begged him to leave them alone? Fortunately, there's not a 'kamikaze pig' in sight,

so his rejection isn't repeated. Is it possible the Syrophenician mother's rebuke has impacted his thinking?

Once again, the treatment of the deaf man seems different to other healings. Firstly, he takes the man aside. Not totally unique, but unusual. Then he touches his ear and tongue. Why not just heal him immediately? Perhaps it's a nice way to communicate his intentions to a deaf person, who possibly had no idea who Jesus was, or what was happening to him. Did you also notice, although the friends are keen for Jesus to heal him, there is no reference to faith?

After seeing what Jesus has done for their friend, the crowd declares

He has done everything well.

It's tempting to see this as some sort of confirmation of prophecy, such as Isaiah's prophecy about the Messiah unplugging the ears of the deaf and causing the mute to sing for joy. (Isaiah 35:5)

However, if they were a largely Gentile crowd, it's doubtful they knew anything about Jewish prophecy. Like many others, their focus is on what Jesus can do for them. And so, they ignore his request not to tell others.

He has done everything well.

I wonder what the crowd meant by that? More importantly, what are we meant to do with such a claim? Why has God included it in his inspired word, so we could study it 2000 years later?

When Jesus was on earth, not every sick person was healed, not every death was prevented, or reversed. It would be a gross exaggeration to claim - "everything was done well" to each and every person Jesus met or throughout Israel. Although we might get excited by miracles, they end up being relatively few in number.

Most of us are comfortable with the idea of Jesus being the God/man come to Earth. 100% God and 100% man at the same time. It's tempting to treat all those miracles and wise sayings as proof of his divinity. But what if part of becoming a man meant putting his God qualities on hold?

From this side of his death and resurrection, it's easy to see Jesus had to become human – so he could pay the penalty for our sins.

Does that mean everything we learn about Jesus in the gospels is merely a precursor to his sacrificial death in our place?

If Jesus is really human, if he is truly embodied as we are, perhaps we need to rethink the relevance of his humanity.

How does your understanding of Jesus deal with his being tired, seeking to hide from people, perhaps misunderstanding his ministry to gentiles, becoming angry and distressed (Mk 3:5)?

What are we meant to do with claims like Hebrews that Jesus

"learned obedience from what he suffered." (Heb 5:7)

In living as a human being, Jesus experienced the same growing pains and struggles and temptations we all encounter – except, unlike you and I, he never gave into temptation.

I recently came across a cool explanation of something that has bothered me for a long time. Why do we make such a big deal that Jesus never sinned, when, as God, it was impossible for him to sin?

Anyone intending to swim the English Channel will soon discover it is almost mandatory to have a rescue boat nearby, just in case they don't make it. If they succeed and someone asks 'why is it the swimmer could not drown?', the answer is obvious – they had a rescue boat standing by. However, if they ask 'why didn't they drown?', the answer has nothing to do with the boat.

Rather we would look to the characteristics of the swimmer – their preparation, skills, determination and so on.

As God, Jesus could not sin. As man, Jesus did not sin.

Jesus didn't live on earth as God, but as a man. His life is a role model for us precisely because he set aside his divine power.

How did he do it – what was his secret? We should be greatly encouraged to realise He used the same resources that are freely available to every Christian today.

Prayer – often we read about him going off to a lonely place to pray. Jesus prayed before choosing his Disciples. Prayer is often mentioned before many healings.

The Bible; there is the wisdom of God's revelation– for him, the Old Testament, but now expanded for us into the New. Look at his arguments with the Jewish leadership. Every time Jesus relies on the Bible, as he did in his response to Satan in the wilderness.

And then there is the **Holy Spirit**, who came upon him at his birth and was reconfirmed at his baptism. It was the Holy Spirit, by the way, who performed all those miracles if you're wondering.

So, there you have it. Whatever you're going through at the moment, Jesus understands. Rather than being surprised by his limitations, be grateful Jesus cared enough to assume our weaknesses. It's not a sin to develop in wisdom and understanding.

Whatever the crowd meant, there is truth in what they said. By becoming one of us, Jesus has done everything well.

Amen