

Sermon preached by Pastor Ben Kuerth on Mark 7:31-37 September 13, 2015 at Victory of the Lamb.

**Series: Chiseled**

**Today's Focus: Personal Touch**

**“Jesus Always Knows What He Is Doing”**

This is not news to any of you who know me well, but using power tools is not my forte. I just don't have experience with power tools so I don't really know what I'm doing with them. For example, Roger was one of our Builders For Christ volunteers this summer and he's an amazing worker. He's fearless, works fast, and most importantly really knows what he's doing. The first day I volunteered this summer, I got sent up on the roof to work with Roger who immediately recognized that my skill set is...let me put this positively...limited. So no sooner had I been sent up there to help Roger then he said, “Go back down and get me the sawzall.” You know at that point I was just happy that I knew that a sawzall is an actual real life tool and not just something he made up to play a joke on me!

So I got the sawzall, gave it to him, and then did something that I think was pretty smart. I got out of Roger's way as he hopped across a couple open trusses and made a few cuts in a wall with the sawzall. I had no idea what he was doing. I'm pretty sure either a) I would have fallen off the trusses or b) I would've wrecked the wall. Both of those seemed like bad options. The bottom line is that the sawzall was a very effective tool in Roger's capable hands even though I didn't really know what he was doing. But that power tool in my hands up there would've been be dangerous because I don't know what I'm doing.

Sometimes people wonder if God is up there like me up on the roof of our building, “Does God know what he's doing?” Have you ever wondered this yourself? Many of you have had your lives shaped by powerful, sometimes painful events. Troubling things happen in our world. Have you ever been tempted to ask, “What are you doing up there, God?” Or “God, don't you know what you're doing?”

I wonder how many times the man in our Bible lesson today may have asked this a question like these. <sup>31</sup> *Then Jesus left the vicinity of Tyre and went through Sidon, down to the Sea of Galilee and into the region of the Decapolis.* <sup>32</sup> *There some people brought to him a man who was deaf and could hardly talk, and they begged Jesus to place his hand on him.*

Now in the context of Mark chapter 7 here Jesus has been doing ministry in Gentile country. In other words by his travel itinerary every bit as much as his teaching, Jesus has been letting people know that God wants all people to be saved. All people. Not just people of a certain ethnicity. Not just people from a certain country. Not just people of a certain culture. All people—including people with disabilities...those whose lives have been so often shaped by circumstances far beyond their control and often from birth. So some folks heard that Jesus had come to their town. They brought their friend to Jesus in the hope that Jesus would help him somehow. And the thing about this guy whom

they brought to Jesus is that he couldn't hear and he couldn't really speak. Imagine not being able to hear music or birds singing. And because those who are unable to hear often have difficulty learning to speak correctly, it is likely that this man had been handicapped from birth. So he couldn't hear and he couldn't speak. Yet he could see, he could feel. He was still fully human in his needs.

So Jesus takes this man aside, away from the crowd. And here's what it says, <sup>33</sup> *After he took him aside, away from the crowd, Jesus put his fingers into the man's ears. Then he spit and touched the man's tongue.* Now to you and me this might sound a bit weird, but think what Jesus was doing. The man couldn't hear and couldn't speak but he could see and he could feel. So this was like a form of sign language. Jesus was making the effort with this one man away from the crowds of people who all wanted a piece of Jesus to let him know that he was about to receive special, divine, personally designed help. Then here's what happened next: <sup>34</sup> *He looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him, "Ephphatha!" (which means "Be opened!")*.

Now don't pass over any of this too lightly. Jesus looked up to heaven. Why? Because he knows that what this deaf man needs is something only God can give and he wants this man to see and know that too. Then Jesus let out a deep sigh. Why? Why did he sigh? Well in a way it's the same question as "Why did Jesus cry?" Because Jesus once did that too (some of you know this as one of the shortest verses in the Bible where it says, "Jesus wept" – John 11:35). Anyone remember when he wept? Outside the tomb of his friend Lazarus. And right before that it says that Jesus wept, John tells us that he was *deeply moved in spirit and troubled* (John 11:33). Jesus who is both true God and truly human is deeply acquainted with our suffering as poor mortals and he deeply cares about the collateral damage that sin has caused in our lives.

Last week I helped out building Kayla's Playground and I worked with a man who had a tattoo on his arm. It was a picture of Jesus crying with a Latin phrase that I could read which said in Latin, "the tears of Jesus." So I said, "Hey, I notice you've got a Latin phrase on your arm...the tears of Jesus...what does that mean to you?" And he told me his story. His wife died of a devastating cancer two years ago. His life since then has been completely upended. He is now alone with his little girl. She just started 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. I told him I too have a 3<sup>rd</sup> grader and I can't imagine going through life now without her mother. But we talked about what it means that Jesus cried. It means God isn't indifferent about our suffering. He does care. He sees the hurt and the pain that we poor mortals experience here on earth. Our pain isn't imaginary. It's not just something you can wish away or pretend isn't real. Oh it's real. And it hurts. This world isn't the way God made it to be. We all live now under the curse of sin and the result is that we all experience seasons of suffering but it doesn't mean God doesn't care because in Jesus Christ, God's Son, we see that he does.

<sup>33</sup> *After he took him aside, away from the crowd, Jesus put his fingers into the man's ears. Then he spit and touched the man's tongue.* <sup>34</sup> *He looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him,*

*“Ephphatha!” (which means “Be opened!”).<sup>35</sup> At this, the man’s ears were opened, his tongue was loosened and he began to speak plainly.*

So what happened? There was a double miracle, did you catch it? First of all it was a miracle that the man could both hear and speak. But second that he was able to all of a sudden speak plainly. I’ve got a very talkative two year old at home, but she’s still learning how to talk. It typically takes a long time to learn how to speak plainly and be able to make all the sounds. But this man could hear clearly and talk plainly because Jesus performed a double miracle. So what would you think Jesus would tell him to do now that he could speak plainly? Well listen to this.

<sup>36</sup> *Jesus commanded them not to tell anyone. But the more he did so, the more they kept talking about it.* Not what you expected to hear Jesus say, is it? You might think now that the man could talk plainly Jesus would want him and everyone who knew this guy to go tell others what had happened. Yet we hear Jesus say things like this all throughout the gospel of Mark: “Don’t tell anyone.” ... “Don’t tell anyone.” Finally then at the end of the book we hear Jesus say, “Go, tell everyone! Preach the good news to all creation!” But here it’s, “Don’t tell anyone.” Any ideas why? Well the short answer is because at this time people still misunderstood who Jesus is and why he had come. Many people thought he was just some miracle worker here to fix all our earthly problems and take all our physical and emotional pain away. Many people expected Jesus to be some sort of earthly, political Messiah whose job was to make life here on earth easier.

But let’s not be too hard on those people because the truth is we do this too, don’t we? When powerful, painful experiences happen to us which shape our lives we’re tempted to question, “What are you doing, God? Don’t you know what you’re doing? Don’t you care?” And when we question God or assume he doesn’t care, we get it wrong. But here’s what the people got right: <sup>37</sup> *People were overwhelmed with amazement. “He has done everything well,” they said. “He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak.”*

He has done everything well! In other words, **Jesus always knows what he’s doing.** Friends, throughout this series what we’re going to see is that God is always up to something bigger and better beyond what we could ever see from our limited perspective. We’re going to see how Jesus’ mission as the Son of God wasn’t just to provide physical healing for our bodies once in a while but true spiritually healing for our souls once and for all. Because the thing God wants us all to recognize is that the greatest suffering we all face comes about as a result of sin. And the thing about sin is that it’s not just something that makes you bad. It’s something that makes you dead. You and I are spiritually dead without Jesus. We deserve to be recipients only of God’s wrath and punishment in hell without any of his mercy and privileges. So by nature you and I don’t just need rehabilitation, a little helping hand. We need a resurrection. And for that we need a Savior God in whose nail scarred hands he now holds the keys of death and hell because he took the full brunt of the punishment we deserved as our substitute.

So friends, perhaps you're thinking, "How can I experience God's loving personal touch?" Well here again we can say that **Jesus always knows what he's doing**. The Holy Spirit opens our ears as we hear the message of God's Word about what Jesus has done for us as our Savior. He uses this powerful tool of God's Word to minister to our broken hearts to bind them up with the message of God's love in Jesus. In God's Word we are told "*Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you*" (1 Peter 5:7). But that's not all. Jesus has given us the visible word. We call them sacraments—baptism and holy communion. He wouldn't have had to give us sacraments – the visible gospel – but here's where we receive God's personal, loving touch where Jesus himself ministers to each one of us individually and personally. As you receive the bread and the wine, Jesus also ministers to you as if to say, "See, hear, touch, smell, taste...this is for you, this is my body, this is my blood, this is what was given and poured out for you, for the forgiveness of all your sins." Friends, **Jesus always knows what he's doing**. He always knows just what we need.

I questioned this just a bit at the beginning of this week. Tuesday morning after dropping off my kids at St Jacobi where they go to school, my car wouldn't engage into gear. What I learned is that my shifting linkage cable had snapped. So I was stuck. I had to get it towed. This meant I had to cancel my morning meetings. And this seemed to be an obstacle to me being an effective pastor, don't you think? But you know what happened? God turned it into an opportunity. He used it as an opportunity for me to personally touch a couple other people's lives with God's Word. You see riding home from the auto repair shop I got to talking with a guy who hasn't been to church in years. He told me about a couple life endangering accidents he had been in and how he recently had survived a stroke. So I had a very natural opportunity as he gave me a ride back to my house while my car was in the shop to talk how God cares about us and how much we need him.

Then when I got home I realized I had accidentally left my coffee mug in the tow truck, my favorite coffee mug mind you, the one with my favorite Bible verse on it. You see I got to talking with the tow truck driver about how dangerous it is working at night in the city and it was pouring when I stepped out of the truck. So I left my mug on the floor. I was bummed about that. I thought, "Could this day get any worse?" until I realized this was another opportunity. On the one hand this was my favorite mug. On the other hand this mug had the perfect verse God wanted me to share with that truck driver. So I texted him and I said, "Hey, thanks again for the tow this morning. I accidentally left my favorite coffee mug on the floor of your truck. But no worries. I want you to keep it. When you're working in the middle of the night please take to heart the words of the verse on the cup and know that you are safe in God's hands." So here's what this verse says, "Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding" (Proverbs 3:5). Friends, we can trust God to use his power personally in our lives. **Jesus always knows what he's doing**. Amen.