

God's Word Works(?)

It's clear from all three lessons today that the point to be made and understood is that **God's Word works**. It accomplishes what He says. "*Let there be...*" and there is. There is reversal. The Word kills and the Word makes alive. There is glory. "*Ephphath; be opened,*" and the ears are opened, the tongue is loosed, and the words of joy and praise flow immediately flow forth from this man. **The Word works**. That's the whole point. It doesn't get any clearer than that.

But...if you're paying attention to the Gospel lesson, you have to admit that there does seem to be a flaw with the premise. God's Word works. God speaks, and things happen. And yet...Jesus commands the crowd to NOT speak, and the more He commands them to be quiet, **the more they speak**. Apparently, God's Word isn't working in this particular case(?) What gives? What's the deal?

Now, to be sure, there have been all kinds of hypotheses put forward over the centuries. One of the most popular; one that has been around for a **LONG** time (and still gets a lot of play today) is the theory that Jesus was using "reverse psychology" on the crowd. You see, Jesus really does want the people to evangelize and proclaim, so the best way to do that is to **tell them to not do it**.

I'll be honest: As a parent, the whole "reverse psychology" thing makes sense to me. I get it. Even more, as a proud and rebellious child of Adam, I get it. I understand. If you tell me to do something, no matter how good the idea is (e.g., "go to the doctor"), I'm not gonna do it. I'm gonna rebel. I'm gonna fight it. I'm too proud (and stupid) to take advice or help from someone else. I'm too proud and stupid to admit that I might be wrong and need some help. But...if you tell me that I **shouldn't** do something or that I **can't** do something, **IT'S ON!** I'll show you! Hold my beer. I'll be right back. I'm gonna do it! I'm gonna do it, and I'm gonna do it better than anyone else!

Here's the problem with this hypothesis, though: This makes Jesus to be **crooked and deceitful...just like us**. We use reverse psychology to get what we want. I think that's why we like the theory so much. It speaks to our own sinful reality. It makes all that we say and do seem **not so bad**...maybe even good and God-pleasing, for that matter. After all, Jesus did it, right? **WRONG!**

Well...then that leaves us with a real problem, doesn't it? If Jesus isn't using reverse psychology, secretly getting the people to do His will by **tricking** them into doing it, then we're back to facing the possibility that maybe God's Word doesn't always work. Maybe there are some things that God's Word has no effect on; things that God's Word is powerless to change. If we're honest, we'll

confess that such a theory does seem very plausible. After all, God does say a lot of things that we do *ignore and disobey*. “*Thou shalt not...*” and we still do. There’s nothing reverse-psychology about any of that. We just don’t listen. We do what we want. We’ll just repent later. Maybe God’s Word doesn’t always work.

Let’s go back to the original premise; that premise that God Himself presents to us throughout Scripture, again and again and again: God’s Word works. It accomplishes *exactly* what He purposes. It *never* returns to Him void or empty. God never whiffs. He never swings and misses. Remember this: God is **ALWAYS** working all things for the good of those who love Him. That includes us, right? As Paul says in his first epistle to the Corinthians, “*These things happened to our Israelite forefathers as an example...written down for our instruction.*”

I want you to think about that. An example, written down and recorded for our instruction.... What good can we stand to learn from this crowd’s wrong and disobedient profession? On the surface, that may sound strange, perhaps even wrong, to say that the crowd was wrong. Disobedient? Sure...kind of, but wrong? “*He does all things well. He even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak!*” **What could possibly be wrong with that?!** Basically, it comes down to what was in their hearts. It comes down to their *motivation and understanding* of who Christ was and what He was all about. This crowd looked at Jesus as nothing more than a magic man; a guy who could simply cure whatever ails you. “*Got a problem? Jesus can fix that! Just sprinkle on a little Jesus and all your problems will magically disappear.*” They didn’t understand who Jesus really was. They didn’t understand that His kingdom was not and is not of this world; that He wasn’t some sort of *genie in a lamp* who could or would grant you your every wish and desire, and give you the ultimate warm and fuzzy feeling you so selfishly crave.

This is precisely why Jesus was so adamant in telling them to be quiet. He wasn’t using reverse psychology to coax evangelism out of them. **NO! He was serious. He really did want them to be quiet.** He didn’t want a *wrong, false* understanding of Him and His messianic mission to be put forth. Such a self-centered, self-serving wrong focus; such unfaithful misinformation could, would, and does lead to rejection of the Truth of Christ and His Gospel. This is why Christ sighed before working such a wonderful miracle. He knew what was coming. He knew how others would wrongly perceive it and misrepresent it, **and it bothered Him. It tore Him up.** And yet...He still did it.

Think about that. Think about all that Christ foreknew; all of our sin, all of our disobedience, all of our refusal to listen and obey...He knew it all, and yet He still did it. His incomprehensible love for us is what led Him to persevere and push on all the way to the cross; all the way to the very depths of hellish wrath and

torment. Just think of all the times Christ has sighed...for you. “*Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.*” Or worse yet: “*Father, forgive them, for they know exactly what they’re saying and doing.*” I don’t know about you, but I shudder to think about how many times I’ve given my Lord and Savior reason to tell me to be quiet because I was giving Christ and Christianity a bad name.

And here’s the thing that’s often overlooked. People often think of Jesus *only* suffering for our sins on His cross. ***That’s simply not true.*** Jesus suffered for us in our place **from beginning to end.** At the very beginning of His life He shed His blood for us in circumcision, already beginning to fulfill the Law perfectly. We hear many times of how He felt such ***tremendous compassionate sorrow and turmoil*** in his inner-most being whenever He encountered people who were like sheep without a shepherd, harassed and helpless. The original Greek tells us that He felt *splagnidzomai*; that is, His guts were torn up. He felt that pain and sorrow in His belly. It tore Him up.

Even here today with the deaf/mute man, Jesus is taking this man’s sinful suffering and maladies into Himself. ***This sinfulness didn’t just disappear into thin air! It was swallowed up by Christ, taken into Him. You don’t think that hurts!?*** Again, Jesus knew what was coming. He knew what needed to be done. And He did it. It pained Him, to be sure, but He did it. He did it out of His love and compassion. That’s just who He is.

And Christ didn’t stop there. He persevered. He pushed on, all the way to Calvary; all the way into the bonds of hellish wrath and forsakenness, willingly enduring all the just and righteous wrath of His heavenly Father; wrath that was rightly reserved for and earned by us. Jesus took our place. He willingly stepped in and laid down His life as an all-redeeming sacrifice for ours.

Folks: That’s what all of this is about, from beginning to end. ***It’s all about you.*** It’s all about your forgiveness, your salvation, your eternal redemption and adoption into God’s holy family. God knew all along how fallen and sinful and corrupt His creation would be, ***and yet He still sent His Son to die for it...for you.*** Jesus Christ fully knew what awaited Him **before** He ever gave up all of heaven’s majesty for a virgin’s womb, a feed trough bed, a bloody cross, and newly-dug tomb. He knew it...and He didn’t hesitate, ***not for a single moment.*** And when the high point of God’s plan came to fruition on that cross, Jesus didn’t let out a sigh of despair or defeat. Instead, He proclaimed victoriously one single word—Tetelestai, which we translate as, “It is finished!” With one almighty Word He let everyone know about it. And only then did He sigh a sigh of ***loving, grateful relief.*** He proclaimed His victory, and then He breathed out His last and surrendered His spirit, going home to heaven.

The sad reality is that no one else got it. No one else understood. The rest of creation understood what was going on. ***That single Word of reversal, restoration, and victory worked.*** The earth shook. Boulders split. Tombs were literally burst open and the dead came back to life. *“It is finished!”* God Himself made it abundantly clear. The proof hung there lifeless, for all the world to see. The empty tomb on Sunday morning provided further proof; the veritable receipt that the bloody transaction of Christ for all people had been paid in full. It really was and is finished, in Christ and because of Christ.

My friends: ***This is your reality, right now.*** You have been baptized into this earth-shaking, tomb-rending, life-giving reality. You have been baptized into Christ’s death and resurrection. ***His Word is true. His Word works! His victory is your victory! That’s reason to rejoice!*** And make no mistake: You do know the truth. You know the full truth of God’s Law and Gospel. By God’s grace and working, you do know the full truth of Christ Jesus and His means of grace. Faith knows, and faith responds: *“Lord, to whom shall we go? Where else would we be? You have the Word of eternal life. You, and you alone, have the peace that passes and surpasses all understanding.”*

Folks: I’ll close now by simply reminding you that there is no prohibition on you to go and proclaim and show forth the joy within you. In fact, your Lord ***commands*** you to go and tell and show all that Christ has done for you. What goes in the heart is, by His design, meant to be confessed, not just with words, but with good and God-pleasing fruits of repentant faith. Shout it from the roof tops! Let Christ’s light shine, in you, through you...**and never in spite of you.** You have been made alive and set free in the blood of Jesus Christ. Now go and tell all that Christ has done for you and for all the world in His all-redeeming, all-restoring life, death, and resurrection. This Word works! Let Him work.

AMEN