

Title: "Who wants to go to Heaven?"

Isa 35:4

Mark 7:31

"Who wants to go to heaven?" In 1885, Mark Twain wrote a book called, the Adventures of Huckleberry Finn. Huckleberry Finn is a young homeless child, living in the town of St. Petersburg, [Missouri](#), along the banks of the Mississippi River. One day, he and his friend Tom Sawyer find a large sum of money. Judge Thatcher, the Widow Douglas and her sister, Miss Watson decide to adopt Huckleberry, specifically, to teach him how to be civilized... how to live in society. Now, Huckleberry is not taking this too well. Living in the town requires following rules. Huckleberry yearns for the days when he could play all day on the Mississippi and do pretty much whatever he pleased. In one of their discussions, Miss Watson tries to tell him about sinful behavior and why we don't do certain things. She then tells him why we avoid sinful behavior. Sinful behavior sends us to Hell. Good behavior sends us to Heaven. She then describes heaven as a place where "all a body would have to do there was to go around all day long with a harp and sing forever and ever." On hearing this, Huckleberry, tells her Heaven sounds like a very boring place. He then tells her, he thinks he'd rather go to the other place. While this is a horrible misunderstanding of what Hell is, the problem is not with Heaven or even with Huckleberry's understanding. The problem is with the way Miss Watson is describing Heaven. In fact, this happens anytime we try to describe heaven in earthly terms. It happens when we try to describe heavenly joy with personal happiness. Personal happiness is subjective. As the saying goes "one man's meat is another man's poison." Heavenly joy is a state of being. So, what is heaven like? What is the joy of heaven? I think this is a great question to ask. The very core of why we go to church, why we study scripture, why we are Christians at all orbits around the question "what happens after we die?" "What is heaven like?" It is a very good question to be asking.

Any description of Heaven will contain paradox. The reason any description of Heaven is impossible is because it is trying to describe something that is so beyond our comprehension that we have no words to describe it. It is futile to speak about that which is unspeakable. The reason any description of Heaven is unspeakable, is because when it comes to experiencing the things of heaven, we are spiritually deaf, and blind. It's like describing a rainbow to a dog. We can describe to him the beauty and splendor of this colorful heavenly display. But he won't believe us. He will never understand, because dogs are colorblind. They can't see rainbows, so they can't believe in them." (Just as an aside, I know that not all dogs are colorblind. But this is just a metaphor. Just go with it.) By our human nature we

are like colorblind dogs in spiritual matters. There is so much all around that God wants for us to see of His kingdom and of His will. Yet we stare right through the best of it because we were spiritually blind.

Yet just because you do not have the vocabulary to properly describe something, doesn't mean it is not beautiful. Though we by our nature are blind to God there is healing. That which we cannot see with our physical eyes, we will see by faith. The fourth chapter of Mark, records several of Jesus' miracles, in particular, miraculous healing. As he has been traveling the Judean countryside has been giving sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, and strength to the lame. At first you might think this healing,... these miracles,... were just Jesus' compassion for the suffering. But there is more to it than just compassion. There is more to it than just the healing of the physical handicaps. There is a wondrous miracle going on. There is a spiritual healing going on simultaneously.

You see, in Jewish teaching, the handicapped, the physically imperfect, were considered to be "unclean" to be unworthy to come before God. God would not hear their prayers. According to Jewish doctrines, they were born with defects because of some sin which they committed in the womb, or a sin which their parents committed. *That which they suffered* was their own fault and there was nothing they could do. They were unclean, unclean before God. And because they were unclean. they were permanently cut off from society... they were permanently cut off from God. Could you imagine how horrible that would be like? Could you imagine what it would be like if you were fired from a job simply because you were not physically perfect, you didn't have the right color hair or skin or body shape? Could you imagine how you would feel if you could never get a job never go to school never go to a movie because you weren't part of the "In" crowd. Could you imagine how horrible it would be if the prejudice was because of something that you couldn't change? How would you feel if you knew you would never be accepted never be loved because you were different. This would be horrible. This was the plight of the deaf man. He was an outcast. He was unclean, living outside of society.

However, this was the plot point of the Mark's gospel story. This is where God steps in and changes the deaf man's life, and in doing so, makes an offer of redemption to the entire world. When Jesus healed the deaf man, he was doing more than being compassionate for the physical suffering of the man. In healing the man's deafness, he was also making the man clean before God. In making the man "clean" Jesus was also restoring the man's relationship with his people. Not

only that In making the man “clean” Jesus restored the Man’s relationship with God.

And the miracle did not stop there. For you see, there was more than one kind of deaf and blindness going around. Though the man was *physically* deaf, the people around were *spiritually* deaf and blind. They were blind to God. They were blind to God and didn’t even know it. In fact, since the dawn of creation, since the time of Adam and Eve, sin has been a part of this world. All their descendants, you and me inherited a physical characteristic... a physical defect called “sin.” Sin is an indelible part of our Earthly selves. Sin caused us to be blind to God. Sin caused us to be deaf to Christ. And because of this blindness, because of this deafness, all of mankind was “unclean” before God. All of mankind was considered to be unworthy of coming before God. Their sinfulness, their corruption, their rebellious attitude, all separated them from God. Had we been left in that situation, Huckleberry’s wish would be granted. We would have had nothing but Hell and suffering to look forward to. To the question “what happens after death?” the answer is “Hell and suffering.” Bum deal.

But God did not leave us in that situation. God in his infinite love, promised that he would bring someone to help us. That someone was “Jesus.” Our reading from Isaiah 35:4 records that promise.

Be strong do not fear; your God will come, he will come with vengeance, with divine retribution. He will come to save you” Then will the eyes of the blind will be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy.

God promised that He would come to save. This is the other miracle, the other healing which occurred when Jesus healed the deaf man. Isaiah spoke of the messiah, healing the lame, opening the eyes of the blind and opening the ears of the deaf. When Jesus healed the deaf man, he was fulfilling Isaiah’s prophesy. This is why, out of the many miracles which Jesus did, St Mark records this one. By doing this miracle by fulfilling Isaiah’s prophecy, he was telling the people who were following him, “I am the messiah.” The miracle Jesus really sought after, was not just the physical healing of the deaf man, but rather the real miracle was the healing of the spiritual blindness which bound his people, their spiritual blindness to God, the spiritual blindness which kept them from seeing their savior. So not only was he curing the man’s physical deafness but he was also to curing the spiritual deafness and blindness of the people around him. The words which he spoke to the deaf man, *Ephphatha*, “be opened,” was being spoken not just to the

deaf man but to all who heard his words. “Be opened.” Stop being deaf to the ways of God. And by the power of the Holy Spirit the eyes and ears of many who heard were opened. For those who would believe in him, for those who would have faith in Jesus, they were no longer deaf and blind to God. God spoke *Ephphatha* to them and their eyes, ears and hearts were opened.

At one time God spoke *Ephphatha* to each of us and our eyes opened. At our Baptism, God spoke *Ephphatha* and our spiritual eyes were opened. We still do not see heaven with our physical eyes, but a different miracle has occurred. We see with eyes of faith. When it comes to Heaven, we still can only imagine what it will physically be like. But what has changed is that “we trust our Lord.” “We have faith in Jesus.” We may not know what Heaven is specifically like. But we do know that Jesus is there. Our savior, the one who loves us and has promised a place for us, our friend, who says he has plans of good for us, Jesus, has gone before us. And so we do not fear.

Having said that however, there is a whole world of people out there, who are still deaf and blind to God. They are spiritually deaf and blind because they do not know Jesus. They have not had their eyes opened. And because of this they are afraid of talking about heaven, they are afraid of talking about what happens after death, they are afraid of talking about what God expects of them. They are afraid because they do not know God, because they do not know Jesus. They are afraid of the door because they do not know that Jesus is on the other side... God is calling us to introduce them to Jesus, to help them get to know Jesus, to let them know His love, comfort and hope. Bring them here to church. This is the mission statement for Lutheran Hour ministries. “Bringing Christ to the nations and the nations to the church.” Jesus is here. In the waters of baptism, with the bread and wine of communion, God will say to them *Eph phath a*, “be opened”. Though they will never see with their physical eyes what heaven is like, they will know with the eyes of faith that their Lord who has gone before them has prepared a place for them. May the eyes of faith be yours forever. May the sight of faith, which is yours be shared with everyone. Amen