

Sunday September 25th 2022
Christ the King Morning Worship.

[Luke 16: 19-end](#)

I must admit listening to this reading from Luke's Gospel today filled me with a feeling of dread at the very person I am, my own personal wealth and treasured possessions .

Jesus here seems to be quite clearly teaching us that heaven and hell are real places and separated by a chasm, so that which ever one you go into, you cannot cross the divide .

So a rich man who dies goes straight into hell. He sees Abraham with Lazarus across this divide and he still sees himself as a better person than Lazarus. He still sees him as a slave, a person of a lower standing than himself. So he asks Abraham to allow Lazarus to come over and cool his tongue with water.

When Abraham refuses, he asks that Lazarus be allowed to go back from the dead to warn his brothers. But Abraham refuses his requests as neither he nor his brothers have listened to what the prophets were telling them all along.

It's at the moment he realises he will languish in hell forever. He never asked that his brothers pray for him, he doesn't acknowledge the fact that Lazarus is as important as he himself is; he never took notice of the fact that he could have shared his wealth out and made other people's lives better - including Lazarus who relied on food that had fallen from his table .

He wore the finest purple clothes and gave many a feast for his friends with the best food and wines, but he never heard the words the prophets preached. He lived his best life and as they say "ignorance is bliss." He showed no empathy to Lazarus at all.

Lazarus was so poor that even the dogs showed more love to him by licking his sores clean and sharing the food that dropped from the rich man's table. The rich man finally realises that he has spent his life worshipping money and all that it can buy, believing his wealth would automatically give him a place in heaven.

Lazarus (not the one that was resurrected) was called because his name means 'God helped'. Lazarus had endured everything from being unwashed, thirsty, starving, rejected, full of sores, trapped into poverty merely by is condition of the state of his now failing body; but most of all never felt love. He would try to keep alive by literally eating scraps of food. Dogs in those days weren't the pets like they are today, often living very feral type lives, but even they showed more love towards him than the rich man had.

Lazarus had endured all the worst kind of life whilst the rich man had the best; yet it is God who saves us. Remember he tells us "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No-one can come to the father except through me."

So I believe Jesus saved Lazarus because he saw all that he had suffered and endured in his lifetime and God's own angels had taken him up into heaven, and was now receiving all that should of been his, as well on earth.

So do the rich go into Heaven?

As we all watched the funeral service of our Queen this week, there was quite a divide of wealth played out there for us on the tv screen.

The Queen herself having had many properties, helpers, gardeners, guardsmen, horses and far, far more to write about here.

Then we saw all the heads of state in all their finery that came from the Commonwealth countries and the world leaders - all looked after in posh hotels and transported to and fro. The very members of the Queens own family - some in their uniforms and medals and the rest very smartly dressed. Then out onto the streets where people of all nations and cultural back grounds and also working back grounds standing side by side to pay their respects to our Queen.

All of these so very much richer than the beggar sleeping rough in the underground tube station - unshaven, unkempt and eating anything people gave him, just to remain alive.

So does this mean he will go straight into heaven and the rest of us into Hell?

This really bothered me, but then I thought about the message that Jesus was teaching us about - to provide food for the starving, water for the thirsty, sharing out of our things like clothing, helping charities to provide housing, support, jobs and numerous other things.

It doesn't matter that we can't do it all. After all, God knows we need certain things, our jobs etc, but as long as we are charitable and most importantly hear his message of love for all people, to try to do and keep doing our best and keep our hearts and minds on him. "Jesus be our centre" as we sing. Let him lead us to where he wants us to be, worship him, remember the commandment "You shall have no other gods before me."

That means no worshipping of money, drugs, alcohol, giving in to sexual desires, pop stars or any kind of idolatry, and a thousand other things, but to stay focussed on him - to know he is God.

The Queen for all the splendour that surrounded her, the wealth to which she was born into and now passes back to her heirs, her children etc.

But the Queen always put God at the centre of her life - remember her vow of

"Pray for me, that God may give me wisdom and strength to carry out the solemn promises I shall be making and that I may faithfully serve him and you all the days of my life."

Well, what an example she set for us all. She put God first in her life - she believed this was what he had called her to do and this was her service and duty .

The next time you think about heaven and hell, think about what God is teaching and telling us - love him, keep faithful to him, and love your neighbour as yourself.

I used to think a bit like that rich man, that hell is only reserved for the murders and people who do such dreadful abominations against mankind, but now I see anyone could be cast into hell, by NOT accepting or listening to the message Jesus brought us.

We need to keep on trying to be the best people we can be, certainly keep God at the centre of our lives, pray and worship him, but pay less attention to worldly things. Don't put them before God.

Like our Queen keep faithful to the end of your life and know that it is God that saves. I believe Jesus will intercess for us to save us from ourselves, if we only turn to him, confess our sins and remain faithful to the end of time.

Now it's over to you all. Let's discuss what heaven and hell means to you and who you think goes into these places and why?