

Life after Death

Bible Reading - Matthew 25:31-46 (AMP)

(The Judgment)

³¹ *“But when the Son of Man comes in His glory and majesty and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. ³² All the nations will be gathered before Him [for judgment]; and He will separate them from one another, as a shepherd separates his sheep from the goats; ³³ and He will put the sheep on His right [the place of honor], and the goats on His left [the place of rejection].*

³⁴ *“Then the King will say to those on His right, ‘Come, you blessed of My Father [you favored of God, appointed to eternal salvation], inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. ³⁵ For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me something to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; ³⁶ I was naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me [with help and ministering care]; I was in prison, and you came to Me [ignoring personal danger].’*

³⁷ *Then the righteous will answer Him, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You something to drink? ³⁸ And when did we see You as a stranger, and invite You in, or naked, and clothe You? ³⁹ And when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?’*

⁴⁰ *The King will answer and say to them, ‘I assure you and most solemnly say to you, to the extent that you did it for one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it for Me.’*

⁴¹ *“Then He will say to those on His left, ‘Leave Me, you cursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels (demons); ⁴² for I was hungry, and you gave Me nothing to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me nothing to drink; ⁴³ I was a stranger, and you did not invite Me in; naked, and you did not clothe Me; sick, and in prison, and you did not visit Me [with help and ministering care].’*

⁴⁴ *Then they also [in their turn] will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry, or thirsty, or as a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister to You?’*

⁴⁵ *Then He will reply to them, ‘I assure you and most solemnly say to you, to the extent that you did not do it for one of the least of these [my followers], you did not do it for Me.’*

⁴⁶ Then these [unbelieving people] will go away into eternal (unending) punishment, but those who are righteous and in right standing with God [will go, by His remarkable grace] into eternal (unending) life.”

SERMON

As I was checking through my files I discovered that 3 years ago - in September 2015 - I talked about a topic that used to be taught from the pulpit regularly on Sundays in Church but you rarely, if ever, hear it talked about in Church anymore. The subject I preached about then, concerned what Jesus Himself taught frequently in the Gospels; something that is therefore true but nevertheless overlooked by most preachers – it’s a difficult subject, it’s the subject of ‘Hell’.

The problem I see today is that many preachers and church leaders have become liberal in what they want to preach about, because they think if they teach subjects that are ‘hard to believe’ or those they consider ‘out-dated’, people might leave the church and won’t come back again. Some church leaders quite deliberately focus on ‘nice’ teaching rather than the full truth of the Bible; and that’s because some of what we learn from the Bible is deemed as unpalatable to many of our population today.

Well it was interesting that, so far as I recall, those of you who attended the September 2015 service when I preached on this subject DID come back the following month!

So that was good and it proved to me that teaching on the subject of Hell doesn’t necessarily keep people away from the Church.

And I am not really surprised, because most people today have lost their moral compass and, I have read that in some parts of the world, people are returning to, or for the first time coming to church in their droves.

And I believe that in these days of ‘relative truth,’ the reason many are coming to Church for the first time is because people are searching for *absolute truth* and God is supernaturally telling people, that absolute truth is only to be found in His Holy Word – the Bible. Michele and I have discovered by searching on the internet that millions of folk are coming to Christ all around the world, but you don’t hear about it on the news, do you...

OK, let's move on, I've got a lot to get through - Today I want to look again at the parable Jesus spoke (which we have just read) known as the parable of 'the Sheep and Goats', but which is actually about 'The Final Judgement' which will take place when Jesus returns to the earth in triumph. But first, I feel a need to re-explore some Biblical truths.....

Often here on a Sunday afternoon I have spoken about our need to be 'born again'; we have discussed what that means. To remind you, in a nutshell, being born again means being filled with the Holy Spirit, so that as a result, Jesus can do in us what we cannot do in our natural, fallen, physical state. The Holy Spirit transforms us into the likeness of Christ.

Transformation is a process, and for some of us the process is very rapid whilst for others it can be much slower, depending on our willingness to yield to the Lord's will, through obedience to His Word.

And Jesus tells us clearly - in John Chapter 3 - that if we are not born again we will not **'enter the kingdom of God and'** - we will not **'see the kingdom of God'**.

We have also read in the past in that same chapter of John's Gospel that **'Anyone who believes in God's Son has eternal life. (But) Anyone who doesn't obey the Son will never experience eternal life but remains under God's angry judgment.'** (NLT).

We have talked about confessing our sins (admitting them to God) and **repenting** - turning away from them – back to God's ways.

Sometimes we may find ourselves thinking along these lines: What if I am **not** born again?

What if I do not believe that Jesus is the Son of God and I do not believe that He is the only way to salvation?

What if I do not obey His teaching? What if there are sins in my life I have not confessed to God, and what if I have not repented of those sins?

And, if I haven't obeyed the Son, what does it mean to **'remain under God's angry judgement'**?

What will be my fate when I die?

Today I want to look at God's answer to these kind of questions.

As I said earlier I am going to share once again with you what many would consider is a very hard teaching, but nevertheless, it is the truth as written in the Word of God.

What I want to share with you is what the Bible's answer is to those questions.

We are getting older by the minute and, because of the rapid increase of unpleasant things happening in the world that are foretold in the Bible; including unprecedented global chaos, floods, famines, earthquakes and financial collapse in various countries, many Christians feel Jesus could return at any moment.

If we do not know what the Bible says about salvation, and if we do not do something about it before Jesus returns or before we die, it will be too late! Once we have died, there is no further opportunity to repent and be saved.

In his book *'MERE CHRISTIANITY'*, that amazing man of God, (once an atheist) CS Lewis, said this, in the context of sin – things we do that are displeasing to God:

'If anyone thinks that Christians regard unchastity as the supreme vice, he is quite wrong. The sins of the flesh are bad, but they are the least bad of all sins. All the worst pleasures are purely spiritual: (for example) the pleasure of putting other people in the wrong, of bossing and patronising, of being a spoil sport, and back-biting; the pleasures of power, of hatred.'

He then says this: ***'That is why a cold, self-righteous prig who goes regularly to church may be far nearer to hell than a prostitute. But, of course, it is better to be neither.'***

I wonder if people would buy his books if he had written that truth today? Isn't it more likely that people would buy a book telling them there is no such place as hell and that we are all going to heaven when we die?

In any case, how could C.S. Lewis think this? How could he write in his book that some church-goers could be nearer to hell than a prostitute? Could he be right?

Well, maybe he had just read the following Scripture, before he wrote down his thoughts in his book. This is what we read in Luke chapter 18, verses 9 to 14:

'Then Jesus told this story to some who had great confidence in their own righteousness and scorned everyone else: "Two men went to the Temple to pray. One was a Pharisee, and the other was a despised tax collector. The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed this prayer: 'I thank you, God, that I am not a sinner like everyone else. For I don't cheat, I don't sin, and I don't commit adultery. I'm certainly not like that tax collector! I fast twice a week, and I give you a tenth of my income.'

"But the tax collector stood at a distance and dared not even lift his eyes to heaven as he prayed. Instead, he beat his chest in sorrow, saying, 'O God, be merciful to me, for I am a sinner.'

I tell you, this sinner, not the Pharisee, returned home justified before God. For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."'

I am sure that most of us prefer a comforting, reassuring message from our preachers and Christian writers and such a message is fine if it's sincere, but today I have a solemn message of truth to share with you.

The message today is not **my** message but God's message from His Holy Word.

As I regularly tell you, I want you to check everything you hear me say each month, with the Word of God. If I am in error, please tell me, so I can stand corrected and confess my sin.

In today's Bible reading from Matthew's Gospel there are some things especially worthy of note.

First, note who is speaking to us. **Jesus**, the Son of God is speaking to us, not Matthew – Matthew is the author of this specific Gospel, although God is the author of the Bible (He used people like Matthew to write under the influence of the Holy Spirit).

Jesus is telling us clearly that there are one of only two places where we will go when we die. There is no 'middle ground', so to speak.

As I've said before, we live in a body, we have a soul, but the real us (you and me) are a spirit. So when our body dies, which one day it must, our spirit and soul come out of our body, and will go 'somewhere.'

Paul tells us what happens to us after we die. This is what we learn from 1 Corinthians chapter 15 (verses 51 to 53). He says:

'But let me reveal to you a wonderful secret. We will not all die, but we will all be transformed! It will happen in a moment, in the blink of an eye, when the last trumpet is blown. For when the trumpet sounds, those who have died will be raised to live forever. And (those) who are living will also be transformed. For our dying bodies must be transformed into bodies that will never die; our mortal bodies must be transformed into immortal bodies.'

So, the Bible says our natural body dies, but the real you and I will live on in new immortal bodies. The question is where will our immortal bodies live, and what will that life after bodily death be like?

Jesus tells us in the passage I read earlier, that we will either 'inherit the Kingdom' or we will go 'into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his demons.'

He then re-phrases this to say 'they (the goats as He calls them) will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous (the sheep) will go into eternal life.'

That statement should concern us all!

Because, if you or I are considered by Jesus to be a sheep, we are Ok, and we can have peace, and be reassured that one day we will spend eternity in Heaven with Almighty God, Jesus, all the angels, and other believers.

BUT, if we are what Jesus refers to as a 'goat', we need to be very concerned. We need the conviction of the Holy Spirit to bring us to confession and repentance, in order to be sure of our salvation.

Right now, some might be thinking, this is a strange teaching. This can't be right. My vicar, my minister has never talked about this. Everybody who goes to church will go to Heaven. Surely?

Well, if that were true; if what I am sharing with you today is a lie, why does Jesus tell us about - and warn us about - the fact that anyone who he considers a goat will end up in Hell?

Listen intently to some verses spoken by the Son of God in the Bible. I have chosen just three scriptures but there are many others that Jesus speaks saying the same thing about the subject of Hell.

Talking to His disciples in Matthew 10 v 28, Jesus said:

28 “Don’t be afraid of those who want to kill your body; they cannot touch your soul. Fear only God, who can destroy both soul and body in hell.”

In Matthew 13, Jesus speaks to the crowds a parable - ‘The weeds in the field’. His disciples ask Him to explain it to them and he says this: (Mathew 13 v 40-43)

40 “Just as the weeds are sorted out and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the world. 41 The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will remove from his Kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. 42 And the angels will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. 43 Then the righteous will shine like the sun in their Father’s Kingdom.

Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand!”

And in Luke 13 v 23 – 28 we read the following:

23 Someone asked Jesus, “Lord, will only a few be saved?”

He replied, 24 “Work hard to enter the narrow door to God’s Kingdom, for many will try to enter but will fail. 25 When the master of the house has locked the door, it will be too late. You will stand outside knocking and pleading, ‘Lord, open the door for us!’ But he will reply, ‘I don’t know you or where you come from.’ 26 Then you will say, ‘But we ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.’ 27 And he will reply, ‘I tell you, I don’t know you or where you come from. Get away from me, all you who do evil.’

28 “There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, for you will see Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and all the prophets in the Kingdom of God, but you will be thrown out.”

These are difficult words to hear aren’t they, BUT they are the truth of God’s Holy Word!

If you check your Bible, you will see there are many other scriptures that tell us that, tragically, many people are heading for Hell when they die. They live either in ignorance, rebellion, or unbelief. Many evangelists and preachers are failing to teach the **whole** truth about this subject...

An old friend of mine – a Jehovah’s Witness – said to me twenty years ago ‘How could a God of love send anyone to Hell?’ My friend explained to me that Jehovah’s Witnesses do not believe in Hell. But it was a good question. At that time it stumped me. I had no answer for him.

I later turned to the scriptures. And there I found in 2 Peter chapter 3 verse 9, this sentence: The Lord does not want ***‘anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.’***

So, God wants all people to come to repent of their sins in order that they do not perish and go to hell. God wants all people to spend eternity with Him in His perfect Kingdom. Clearly then it is not His will that anyone should go to Hell. And the truth is that **we** condemn ourselves to that place through failing to believe in Jesus, who gave His life on the Cross to redeem us from hell. If we choose **not** to believe in Jesus, then we remain in our sins and our unbelief, and our refusal to confess and repent of our sins means that God cannot forgive us, and so He cannot save us.

In the reading today, Jesus said this:

“Away with you, you cursed ones, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his demons.”

Clearly then, Hell was originally created by God to be the place where ***Satan and his demons*** would spend eternity.

If we are not following God, through Jesus Christ, but are following some other version of a god, or if we are an atheist who does not believe in God, then God’s Word says that the only place such a person will spend eternity ***is Hell*** – unless they repent.

As I said earlier, according to the Bible, according to Jesus, there are only two places people will go to when they die; one is Heaven, the other is Hell. There is no ‘place of safety’ that exists between these two.

So, which are we.... ‘Sheep or goats’?

How can we be sure? Who can be saved?

Well there **absolutely is hope!** There **is great hope** in Christ. As the Bible says in Colossians 1 verse 27, ***‘Christ in you, your hope of glory.’*** – Jesus Christ alone can save us, but we have an important part to play.

Let me help you be clear about how we can know we are saved; how you and I can be sure that Heaven is our final resting place. The Bible is clear:

There is only one faith, and one God, that leads to everlasting life. Jesus **alone** is the way, the truth and the life. No man or woman comes to the Father, the one true God, (the God of the Jews and the God of the Christians), except through God's only Son, Jesus Christ. As I have said to you before, in order to see and enter the Kingdom of God we must be baptised for the repentance of our sins, be born again of the Holy Spirit, believe and trust in Jesus Christ for our salvation, and live our lives in obedience to His Holy Word.

As C S Lewis was saying in effect, in the earlier quote I read to you, 'Just because you **go** to church does not guarantee your salvation'.

We have to believe, obey, and follow Jesus Christ. We are not to resist or neglect any part of His teaching simply because we may feel uncomfortable with it! It is a sad fact, however, that many people simply go to church - and may have done so for decades - but have never actually given their lives to Christ or been baptised or been filled with the Holy Spirit.

If that's you, it is never too late, it doesn't matter what you have done in the past; today you can give your life to Christ and be saved for eternity with the King.

Once you decide to turn to Christ, follow Him, and love Him, then out of that love of Christ, will flow the fruit of the Spirit which - in a word - is 'Christlikeness'.

And so it will be natural to Christ's followers to 'give to the hungry something to eat; give the thirsty something to drink. To invite strangers in, or clothe the poor; to look after the sick and to visit prisoners.'

These things will be natural to those who will inherit eternal life. After all, Jesus said in Matthew chapter 7 verse 20 concerning His true followers: '**by their fruit you will recognise them**' and what is that fruit? – Christlikeness; the willingness and commitment to do what Jesus would do, every opportunity we have.

Jesus said the road to eternal life is a narrow one. It isn't an easy one.

We are sent many challenges along the way.

As I close, I want to say that in the very last book of the Bible, the risen Christ gives his disciple John a vision. In the first three chapters of the Book of Revelation, He gives John a different message to seven of the very first churches that were established on earth. You might think they had got it all together. After all, some of those early Christians probably walked around

with Jesus – they listened to his teaching. But **only one** of those seven churches was commended by Jesus for doing what was right – to the others, Jesus gave a stark warning to wake up and repent of the sins they were allowing and excusing **within** their churches. How much more so, would he warn our churches today?

Here's a sample of what He said - to three of those early churches.

To the church in Ephesus, He said:

4 "I have this complaint against you. You don't love me or each other as you did at first. If you don't repent, I will come and remove your lampstand from its place among the churches" (in other words, your church will be no more!)

To the Church in Sardis, He said:

"Wake up! Strengthen what little remains, for even what is left is almost dead. I find that your actions do not meet the requirements of my God. 3 Go back to what you heard and believed at first; hold to it firmly. Repent and turn to me again. If you don't wake up, I will come to you suddenly, as unexpected as a thief."

And to the Church in Pergamum:

"Repent of your sin, or I will come to you suddenly and fight against you with the sword of my mouth."

So even back then, in the days of the early Church, Jesus warned them that just because people went to church did not mean they would go to Heaven when they die.

As I have said, it's all about belief in Jesus as your Saviour, confession, repentance and a life-style of obeying and following Christ – and further confession and repentance when we make mistakes.

I will close now with a word of encouragement which Jesus Himself spoke to the people in one of those very first churches; in this case the one in Sardis:

4 "Yet there are some in the church who have not soiled their clothes with evil. They will walk with me in white, for they are worthy. 5 All who are victorious will be clothed in white. I will never erase their names from the Book of Life, but I will announce before my Father and his angels that they are mine."

And He says the same thing to the rest of the Church today - to anyone who is a true believer, those who confess and repent of their sins, and obey and

follow Him. Jesus says this: **'Your name is written in the Book of Life. YOU are Mine!'**

Let's make sure we – each of us individually - are one of His; that our name is written in the Book of Life, then, if we have any doubts at all, we can rest assured that after we die, Jesus will welcome us into His eternal kingdom!

AMEN

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