

## Luke 16: 19-31 and Psalm 146

We've just heard 2 contrasting readings from the Bible:

- 1 – a pretty bleak picture
- 2<sup>nd</sup> – a picture with much more hope in it.

We need to treat both passages seriously as we try and understand their meanings for us today.

The passage from Luke 16, on page 992 is a parable, or story, that Jesus told to his friends.

It concerns a man who's wealthy – he probably lived in a nice house, had a decent city job and lived well. Today – he'd be called something like, Mr Chapman, or Mr Jones, or Mr Smith – any of our surnames here today would probably do nicely.

And then there was a man called Lazarus. He wasn't wealthy. He didn't own a house, have a city job or live very well at all. He couldn't afford the price of a prescription to make himself better, buy food from Tesco to fill himself up but lived in hope of a little spare change from the pocket of the wealthy man. *None* of us would probably want to share a surname with Lazarus!

Unfortunately, as will happen to all of us at some point or other – both men died. Their lives on earth had come to an end.

Lazarus, the poor man was taken to 'Abraham's side' – which to a Jew means Heaven because Abraham was God's special founder of the Jewish faith. The wealthy man was taken to Hades – which, to a Jew, means Hell.

Now at this point – it's important to remember that this is a parable – none of us know what heaven and hell are really like – that's not the point this story is trying to make. However, I doubt greatly that people in heaven and hell will be able to see each other and communicate across the great divide.

Back now to the story – where the wealthy man could see Lazarus enjoying himself in heaven. He called across to Abraham asking him to send Lazarus across with a drink to quench his thirst.

Abraham replied – “No way” – implying to the wealthy man – you're getting what you deserve – every day you commuted in to the city – did your job and enjoyed living off of the salary, the bonuses, the company perks. You bought a big house, put in a new bathroom and lived it up. But every day you walked past this poor homeless man – you probably didn't even notice him, or if you did just thought – “filthy addict, littering up the streets, he's probably contagious or dangerous – I'll keep away”.

The wealthy man turned pale – the way that he'd lived his life suddenly became clear – ignorant towards the needs of others, selfishly ambitious, and uncaring. He didn't even try to justify himself...it was obvious! But then in a panic – he remembered his family who were still

alive – he didn't want them to end up in his state – so he asked if Lazarus could go back to earth to warn them about their potential fate.

But it was too late. The implication is – they've already been warned. Through the message of the Bible, the teaching of the church, books written, Alpha courses run – everything they and we need to know about living in a relationship with God and how to treat others is here, available for the taking. God sees how we live our lives, the decisions that we make, and how we care for the needs and lives of those around us – in our workplaces, on the streets...wherever. **Pause**

This parable isn't written as a story about bashing bankers or robbing the rich – which is lucky because living in the UK on a vicar's salary makes me one of the wealthiest people in the world. The story's more concerned with challenging where our focus in life lies – on ourselves and our own comfort, or on God and the people he places around us.

I don't know about you – but I'm terrible at comparing myself to other people. Lots of my friends are medics, or actuaries and I compare their holidays to mine, their house, the size of their conservatory! It's funny though – because I never seem to compare myself to the parents of the kids that I work with from the rough end of Tottenham. I don't look at their flats with envy! I always seem to compare myself with the people who have – just a little more than I do.

And by comparing myself to them – I become self-focussed and I forget to keep a grip on the reality that I'm so wealthy compared to most

people in the world – because when I compare myself to other people – it never quite seems as if I've got enough. And so I stop caring about those who really are needy. That's what I do anyway – you're probably all much holier and more sorted than I am. **Pause**

A parable – told by Jesus to his friends 2,000 years ago – is still relevant to our lives and our attitudes today. A story about a wealthy man who put himself first, forgot all about God and never asked the question – “Is there more to life than this?” The story of a man whose life completely missed the point!

We don't have to make the same mistake. We can change our attitude if we want to. It doesn't matter how selfish we've been up to now – today's a new day – a chance to make a fresh start. God will see the change, welcome our relationship as we talk to him and value the commitment that we make as we follow his ways.

Psalm 146 gives a picture of this contrasting way of life. To end today, I'll read it to you again – it's on page 603 if you want to follow along.

**Read Psalm 146.**