

QUEEN ELIZABETH II (1926-2022) — A LIFE TRANSFORMED BY THE LOVE OF GOD

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The Queen's death on 8 September was a defining moment in British history and in all of our lives. At the great age of 96, her departure from this life was not unexpected, but nevertheless it shook the nation, the Commonwealth and the world.

The Queen was the longest reigning monarch in British history. For those of us under the age of 80, she is the only monarch we have ever known; she has always been there - always a constant and reassuring presence and a steadying influence throughout the changing times in our lives.

Since her passing, we have witnessed a tremendous outpouring of love, respect and grief from the public and from individuals who wanted to pay tribute to her selfless values, her devotion to duty, her diligence, her unwavering commitment and her steadfast faithful service to the nation and the Commonwealth over the 70 years of her reign.

Undergirding all of this was her personal faith in Jesus - which shone throughout her life.

Her 21st birthday speech declared that her whole life would be devoted and dedicated to serving God, the nation and the Commonwealth.

These solemn promises were made at her Coronation in 1953 and she asked for prayer: *'Pray 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.'*

Those prayers were answered - the Queen was a woman of integrity, faithful to the promises she made throughout her long reign.

The Queen rooted her life and her reign in God's word to inspire and guide her - she referred to her faith in God to be like an anchor.

Her Christmas broadcast messages to the nation and Commonwealth over the years were an opportunity to share something of the hope, peace and joy found in Jesus. In 2002 her Christmas message said this: *'I know just how much I rely on my faith to guide me through the good times and the bad. Each day is a new beginning. I know that the only way to live my life is to try to do what is right, to take the long view, to give of my best in all that the day brings, and to put my trust in God... I draw strength from the message of hope in the Christian gospel.'*

Her passing touched the nation as we watched thousands who joined the long and winding queue to view her Lying-in-State at Westminster Hall. The queue had become like a pilgrimage, with countless individuals streaming from all around the country and some from around the world to join it. Many made friends with strangers as they queued for the long hours together throughout the day and night; all with the common purpose of making it to the same destination to take a last look at their faithful Queen. They came to pay their respects to a Queen who had been an inspiration and an example; living out godly qualities of kindness, resilience, gentleness and forgiveness. All this alongside a genuine human touch; making people feel at ease, a keen wit and sense of humour - often seeing the funny side when things went wrong! She was a real and relatable person; genuine, never wavering, faithful to the end.

Writer and broadcaster Gyles Brandreth, whilst commentating on the queue to see the Queen's Lying-in-State, said: *'The Queen was an exemplar of goodness, people are reaching out to touch that; they want something of that.'*

She was a beacon of hope, and an inspiration to us all.

And then the momentous and spectacular state funeral - with its solemnity, dignity and pageantry - watched by over 4 billion viewers around the world. It brought people together

- whether watching at home, via a live link on a big screen somewhere or from a bagged space along the route of the funeral cortege.

The funeral was all that the Queen had planned and wanted it to be - an evangelistic message of hope.

The Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby said this in his sermon in reference to the reading from John 14:6: *'Jesus - who in our reading does not tell his disciples how to follow, but who to follow - said: 'I am the way, the truth and the life.' Her Late Majesty's example was not set through her position or her ambition, but through whom she followed.'*

And went on to say: *'We will all face the merciful judgement of God: we can all share the Queen's hope which in life and*

death inspired her servant leadership. Service in life, hope in death. All who follow the Queen's example, and inspiration of trust and faith in God, can with her say: 'We will meet again.'

The focus towards the end of the service was on the sparkling Imperial State Crown proudly positioned on top of the coffin. This crown had been placed upon the Queen at the commencement of her reign at her Coronation. It was a profound and poignant moment as Charles Wesley's hymn Love Divine was sung. The concluding line said it all: *'Till we cast our crowns before thee - lost in wonder, love and praise!'*

The Queen was a woman appointed for such a time as this Her unwavering Christian faith boldly proclaimed in life and in death.

