



Welcome to Blackburn Baptist Church, on February 5th 2023 at 10:45, meeting at Bethesda Chapel.

Whilst some are able to meet in person, others we know are still at home. We hope and pray that you will find this outline of our service helpful, as we seek to worship God as a Church family, wherever we are.

Our service today is being led by Alec, and focusses on the work of the Baptist Missionary Society. All the deacons are taking part, and Joy is playing the piano. The service includes Communion

We begin the service as we watch a video by The BMS, outlining some of the challenges they face and the situations with which they are involved. Following this Alec reads from Isaiah 41 "For I am the Lord your God who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, Do not fear; I will help you."

Alec then prays:

"We pray that this day in our little church will be a day that everybody remembers. We pray it will be a day that brings glory and honour to the Name of our loving Lord. That God is so mightily present, that no-one will be unaware of how real, how great and how near to us He is.

May God bless us all anew each day from now on that Galligreaves is truly the place from which people speak saying, "That is where the living God and His praising people are."

"Not by might, not by power, but by my Spirit says the Lord."

He then read Ephesians 3, 20 and 21 "Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! "Amen."

Our first hymn this morning, played by Joy, is

Guide me, O Thou great Jehovah, pilgrim through this barren land;
I am weak, but Thou art mighty, hold me with Thy powerful hand.
Bread of heaven, bread of heaven,
feed me now and evermore; feed me now and evermore.

Open now the crystal fountain, whence the healing stream doth flow;
let the fire and cloudy pillar lead me all my journey through.
Strong Deliv'rer, strong Deliv'rer,
be Thou still my Strength and Shield; be Thou still my Strength and Shield.

When I tread the verge of Jordan, bid my anxious fears subside;
death of death and hell's Destruction, land me safe on Canaan's side.
Songs of praises, songs of praises,
I will ever give to Thee; I will ever give to Thee.

Authors: John Hughes / William Williams CCLI Song 1448 Words and Music: Public domain CCLNo 5664

Colin then leads in prayer - standing in for Brenda, who prepared the prayers but is unwell so cannot be present. **The congregation were invited to join in the words in bold type:**

Today is the Baptist Missionary Society's (ie BMS) Day of Prayer.

We are asked to say specific prayers and so they have been arranged so that we can all pray them together from the screen. Some of our own prayers are added at the end.

Let us now join together in prayer.

We come to you, our Father God, this morning and thank you that you are our loving Father and are beside us in our lives and here in our time of worship today.

We bring our prayers for the work of the Baptist Missionary Society and then for others, before you.

The Baptist Missionary Society have a clear view for Mission in the world for the future and they are seeking to set apart women and men for leadership.

We pray, O Lord, that leaders with holiness and discipleship can be found and with the conviction to share that Jesus Christ's sacrifice is for all.

God has led the BMS to Lesbos, the island in Greece where people fleeing conflict and violence arrive, many from Afghanistan. There, they have partnered with the Christian charity All4Aid.

We give thanks for the safe space provided on Lesbos and we pray that as well as practical support, people will experience a deep sense of your love.

Many women are becoming disciples of Christ in North Africa.

Heavenly Father, we pray that the BMS partner BigLife can identify four women to be sent there to mentor and disciple women coming to faith.

Almost one in three women worldwide have experienced violence of different kinds, just because they are women.

We remember them and pray for those who are fighting for justice and dignity for all women and girls, and will not allow those who have been abused to be forgotten.

In Uganda, Christian lawyers have volunteered some of their work without charge.

We pray, O Lord, that through their compassion and ministry, more people will gain access to justice.

Three church plants have been started in Thailand, where missionaries Wit and Helen focus their work on communities without any church.

We give thanks that 17 people have become Christians and some have been baptised.

Christians the world over have a responsibility to take care of Your creation wisely, protecting those living in the most fragile regions.

We pray that the BMS can uphold care for creation across all their work, and be able to invest in projects in places like Uganda and Afghanistan, to combat food fragility and loss of soil fertility.

BMS publications give news of both joy and difficulty around the world.

We pray that this is done sensitively and wisely, honouring those who have trusted them with their life stories.

Our Link Missionaries, Brian and Jackie Chilvers, are carrying on with their difficult work in the hospital in Chad.

Lord God, we ask that they can continue to expand their work and build up relationships in the hospital, at their church and in the local community.

In Ukraine, the people are suffering in many ways and coping with trauma, displacement, damage, death and injury.

We pray for that country and earnestly ask for an end to the fighting. We give praise that the BMS is supporting the churches there through the Baptist European Federation.

Millions of people worldwide have been pushed more into poverty in recent months, especially the most vulnerable.

We pray for all and today also for BMS and its mission partners as they reach out to help. We thank you for all that is being done to give aid in different ways.

In this Galligreaves area, and in our town, many are struggling, and needing a new way in their lives.

May You guide Christians to find the best ways to reach out with the good news of Your love.

Our numbers at Blackburn Baptist are small and many are getting older, Lord.

We pray that you will bring younger people to us to share in our outreach and that some we have lost for now, may return.

Many here in our own church are suffering with illness, pain, frailty or mental trauma.

We pray for your presence and healing with those who are in special need of it at this time.

We commit ourselves and our world into your hands again, O God our Father, and as we think of our failings in the last week we ask you to forgive us. May we go out into the next week with renewed hope and energy to serve you wherever and whenever we can.

Now, we offer all our prayers to You in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour. Amen

Tony was then invited to share our notices for this week, reminding us of the meeting to discuss 'The way forward' next Sunday (after our bring and share lunch), The prayer chain forms also need to be returned by next Sunday, and the following week we will have a church members meeting following the service to authorise the expenditure on the roof, as discussed at the January meeting.

Alec then moved to the Clavinova for play for our next song (which he played through first to remind us of the tune): **O praise the name of Jesus**

I cast my mind to Calvary where Jesus bled and died for me;

I see His wounds, His hands, His feet, my Saviour on that cursed tree.

His body bound and drenched in tears, they laid Him down in Joseph's tomb.
The entrance sealed by heavy stone, Messiah still and all alone.

O praise the Name of the Lord our God, O praise His Name forevermore.
For endless days we will sing Your praise Oh Lord, oh Lord our God.

Then on the third at break of dawn the Son of heaven rose again!
O trampled death where is your sting? The angels roar for Christ the King!
O praise the Name of the Lord our God....

He shall return in robes of white, the blazing sun shall pierce the night,
and I will rise among the saints, my gaze transfixed on Jesus' face.

O praise the Name of the Lord our God.....

Songwriters: Martin W. Sampson / Benjamin William Hastings / Dean Ussher O Praise The Name (Anástasis) lyrics © Hillsong Music Publishing Australia CCL no 5664.

And then, shown on the screen, **King of Kings**, by Hillsongs

In the darkness we were waiting without hope, without light,
'til from Heaven you came running, there was mercy in your eyes.
To fulfil the law and prophets to a virgin came the word;
from a throne of endless glory to a cradle in the dirt.

Praise the Father, praise the Son, praise the Spirit, three in one;
God of glory, Majesty, praise forever to the King of Kings

To reveal the kingdom coming and to reconcile the lost,
to redeem the whole creation you did not despise the cross,
for even in your suffering you saw to the other side,
knowing this was our salvation, Jesus, for our sake you died.

Praise the Father, praise the Son....

And the morning that you rose all of Heaven held its breath
'til that stone was moved for good for the Lamb had conquered death.
And the dead rose from their tombs and the angels stood in awe,
for the souls of all who'd come to the Father are restored
and the church of Christ was born. then the Spirit lit the flame;
now this gospel truth of old shall not kneel, shall not faint
by his blood and in his name in his freedom I am free
for the love of Jesus Christ who has resurrected me.

Praise the Father, praise the Son.

Authors: Brooke Ligertwood, Jason Ingram, Scott Ligertwood CCLI SONG # 7127647 Copyright ©2019 Fellow Ships Music (Admin. by Essential Music Publishing LLC) So Essential Tunes (Admin. by Essential Music Publishing LLC) Hillsong Music Publishing Australia (Admin. by Hillsong Music Publishing UK) CCL No 5664King of Kings, Hillsongs

Jane then shared a Testimony Time:

Following on from what Nadja shared with us last week, I really felt God was asking me to share a little of what he has been doing in my life recently.
Just before Christmas, when it became clear that the size of our leadership team was going to be

considerably reduced, I knew that, as Church Secretary, I was going to have to take on more responsibilities. I asked God to equip and enable me for whatever he wanted me to do. I was also aware that, similarly to Nadja, I was not as close to the Lord as I had been in the past – I wasn't hearing from Him personally and clearly for my life, if at all.

When I retired seven years ago, I was looking forward to doing all the things I hadn't been able to do whilst working long hours at a demanding job. I have always believed that God is interested in and wants to be involved in every aspect of our lives, not just the 'spiritual' bits, because he has continually shown me this - by so arranging simple things, in even the darkest of times, that I knew without doubt that he was with me and working for my good.

I have recently realised that, subconsciously, I had started to compartmentalise my life, religiously doing my 'duties', including daily Bible reading and prayer and jobs for the church, but always trying to protect time for myself, to do some of the things I wanted to do but, strangely, I was never actually getting round to doing them! It's no wonder that I wasn't hearing much from the Lord as I was holding back so much from Him and from others.

I am now in my 70th year, having known Jesus as my Lord and Saviour for over 50 years; I'm leaving middle-age behind and moving into older-age. (I won't say 'old-age' as so often I still feel like a child inside.) I was beginning to wonder whether this was it, drifting on in a regular routine with no specific personal purpose or aim.

Thankfully, God knew where I was and, over the last few weeks, he has turned my life with Him around but it's still a work in progress! I am so thankful to Him for people who have recently made kind and positive comments to me, including some friends who don't yet know Jesus, and that has reminded me that I still have value. Why is it that, with true British reserve, we are so reticent to pay compliments to one another, to build each other up, to say when someone has done well? And yet we are so quick to criticise! Everyone needs to know they are valued and appreciated, especially, if I may say, those who live alone who don't have a loving husband or wife to tell them how wonderful they are! It's made me think: How well do we actually know each other? How often do we ask someone how they came to know the Lord, or what God is doing in their life at the moment?

Over the last few weeks, God has also sent me challenges outside my previous experience and well outside my comfort zone. This has made me turn back to him, lean on Him and seek Him wholeheartedly. He has renewed my spirit within me by His Spirit, reminding me that He does love me and has a purpose for me. The result: I am no longer time-conscious when doing my 'duties' and I know that, in His time, He will enable me also to do some personal creative things I want to do, because He has given me the desire to do them in the first place. He has also given me a freedom I have not known for a long time, a freedom to be the person I am and to say what he gives me to say and not to worry about the reaction (as long as I say it in the way He wants, with love and respect.)

In Psalm 51 v. 12, we read, '**Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit to sustain me.**' That is exactly what God has done for me! I have got back the joy of just *being* in His presence, He *has* made me willing, and I know that He *will* keep me going! '**The One who calls you is faithful and He will do it.**' (1 Thessalonians 5:24) It is not about gritting your teeth and trying even harder! It's about letting go and letting God!

I have come to realise that God does not recognise age; He, after all, lives outside of time. He wants to have a close and personal relationship with each one of us, and He can restore His joy to us at any stage of life. The old adage says, 'It's not what *you* do for God, but what *God* does for you' and I take this to mean what He does IN us and THROUGH us. It isn't about *doing* but about *being*, being the

person He wants you to be and experiencing His peace and joy, no matter what trials and tribulations you have to go through. It's through us just being *His* people that He can change the world.

We are learning today about BMS and how its workers are changing people's lives in so many countries. It's unlikely that many of us will be called to go overseas at our stage of life, but that doesn't matter because God has brought the world to us, in Blackburn, in Galligreaves and Bank Top and even into our church. We just need to commit ourselves to being open to Him, to live every part of our lives in His presence and then wait to see what He will do, in our own lives and in the life of this church.

We're now going to sing quite an old song of Chris Bowater's which I hope you may remember: *Here I am, wholly available; as for me, I will serve the Lord.*

As we sing the words, perhaps we could all ask ourselves, 'Am I really **wholly** available to God, *living and moving and having my being in Him?* [Acts 17:28a] Is there anything or any part of my life that I am holding back from him, either because I want to keep it all for myself, or because I think it's too insignificant for Him to be interested in it? He is interested in you; **you** are very precious to Him!

Here I am, wholly available, as for me, I will serve the Lord

The fields are white unto harvest but oh, the labourers are so few
so Lord, I give myself to help the reaping to gather precious souls unto You
Here I am, wholly available,

The time is so right in the nation for words of power and authority
God's looking for a people who are willing to be counted in His glorious victory
Here I am, wholly available,

As salt are we ready to savour in darkness are we ready to be light
God's seeking out His very special people to manifest His truth and His might
Here I am, wholly available,

Author: Chris Bowater CCLI Song # 39489 Copyrights © 1981 Sovereign Lifestyle Music. CCL No 5664

Alec invited us to share a time of response: asking are we wholly available to God? The Lord who gave his life for us. He is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, and has the best plan for our lives. Alec continued by praying that we open our hearts and minds to God, thanking and praising him for all he does for us and has been doing in Jane's life.

Alec then asked Janet and Tony to join him at the Communion table before saying:

"For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you, the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said,

'This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.'

In the same way after supper he took the cup also, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.'

For whenever you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Tony led in a prayer of thanksgiving:

"Lord we pray that you will bless this wine and bread to us now, that we will remember that it is your body and blood, shed for us at Calvary. We pray Lord that we will eat and drink in a worthy manner, that we will remember exactly who and what you did for us, that we will remember who we are, that we are nothing without you, that everything we are is because of you that we are here to serve you, that we want to give ourselves wholly to you, that everything we want is for you Lord. Please Lord help us now to eat and drink this bread and wine in a worthy manner and may you bless it to us and may we be spiritually refreshed through it, in Jesus name. Amen"

Alec continued: The Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said,
'This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.'

Joy played softly "It is a thing most wonderful", as Tony and Janet distributed the bread, which we ate as we received it as a sign of our individual faith in God.

Alec again continued: In the same way after supper he took the cup also, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.'
For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Tony and Janet then distributed the wine, which we would drink together as a sign of our unity whilst Joy played "All hail the Lamb."

Alec: "The blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, let us drink together" and after all had drunk, Tony and Janet returned to their seats and Alec returned to the pulpit.

Jean shared our Bible reading for today, Isaiah 42, 1-9

'Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight;

I will put my Spirit on him, and he will bring justice to the nations.

He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets.

A bruised reed he will not break, and a smouldering wick he will not snuff out.

In faithfulness he will bring forth justice; he will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth.

In his teaching the islands will put their hope.'

This is what God the Lord says - the Creator of the heavens, who stretches them out, who spreads out the earth with all that springs from it, who gives breath to its people, and life to those who walk on it:

'I, the Lord, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand.

I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles, to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness. I am the Lord; that is my name!

I will not yield my glory to another or my praise to idols.

See, the former things have taken place, and new things I declare; before they spring into being I announce them to you.'

Jean concluded saying: "Thanks be to God for his word."

Alec then shared his message - Looking to Jesus

“In Matthew, chapter 12, we have in part, the story of how Jesus healed the man with the withered hand on a Sabbath day. It’s an amazing story; not least of all because the man had a withered hand, and he couldn’t stretch it out because it was withered; and because Jesus said to the man, “Stretch out your hand,” which the man couldn’t do. But he did. He did what He couldn’t do; because Jesus spoke and He obeyed Him. That is awesome; that is wonderful; that is just so beautiful. And that is exactly what Jesus is doing here now. We are doing what we can’t do because Jesus is speaking and we are obeying Him.

We are few in number. Most of us are not that young anymore. But really that is so that God can show His glory because we ourselves can do so little. God is kind of a specialist for choosing small groups of people to demonstrate how powerful He is and how gracious He is. In the Old Testament we read, “For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be His people, His treasured possession. The LORD did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples.”

Hearing the voice of Jesus we should obey and stretch out our hand like I think we did just a few minutes ago. As a result of the man being healed, the Pharisees were annoyed. And so Jesus in verse 15, “withdrew from the place and many followed him, and Jesus healed all those who were ill.”

Whom did He heal? Those whom He knew had been waiting the longest? Those who were at the front of the queue? Those who were financially well-off? Those to whom He really felt He could relate? No. He didn’t feel, think or work in that way. It says clearly He healed all those who were ill but those who were with Him and could be healed were those who had first withdrawn from the place and followed Him. Does it say Jesus healed the religious people? Well of course actually because the religious group of people called the Pharisees were annoyed that He had healed the man with the withered hand He had left being with the religious people, “withdrew from the place and many followed Him.” Many followed Jesus.

To those He healed He gave a warning to them not to say who He was. The reason was he didn’t want to cause a crisis. He was moving according to His own time-scale. He had God His Father’s plan in view. He could see it and followed it. And He really did not want people to get the wrong idea and cling to Him simply as a miracle worker because the real miracle that He was about to perform was the miracle of being a life-giving, life-renewing, life-reviving and live-sustaining rescue service for those who had cut themselves off from and out of a living relationship with the Creator God, the King of Kings, the Lord of the universe. And so he said he didn’t want them to tell anyone.

Maybe we might think that this is a little strange? Should Jesus not rather have said, now you know who I am and what I am doing spread the Word? Talk about me; no. But listen to how Matthew explains it. “This was to fulfil what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: ‘Here is my servant whom I have chosen, the one I love, in whom I delight. I will put my Spirit on him, and he will proclaim justice to the nations. He will not quarrel or cry out; no one will hear his voice in the streets. A bruised reed he will not break, and a smouldering wick he will not snuff out, till he has brought justice through to victory. In his name the nations will put their hope.’” Where is this quotation from? It is from Isaiah 42 from verse 1!

Once again we see to understand the New Testament we need to know our Old Testament. Jesus knew it inside out. He quoted from it again and again. So let us not be conned into thinking that the God of the Old Testament is not the God of the New Testament; let us not be deceived into thinking that the

Old Testament is made up mainly of dubiously reliable historical stories, myths and fables and from crazy outbursts of weird so-called prophets. This, all of it, is the Word of God. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness. So we are looking today and I hope every day to Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith. He is the servant who acts in dependence upon God. He is the servant who acts in keeping with his character. The servant was humble. The servant was gentle. The servant was faithful. The servant acts in accordance with his mission.

Jesus is not essentially a self-promoter. He is not promoting Himself. You wouldn't find large photographs of Jesus in the entrance hall of his local synagogue. He is usually talking about His Father and the relationship which He has to His Father. You won't find him shouting, you won't find him crying out, and although He is relating directly and personally to individuals and to crowds, He spends a lot of time alone with His Father. You won't find him out in the middle of the community just making a big hullabaloo.

What interest is there in this servant who comes for the bruised, the smouldering, and the no-names, unless somehow or another we say, "You know, that is me. That actually is me. I am bruised, I am worn-out, I am nobody at all: I am very interested in this servant." "Jesus please come to me, please be with me, please speak to me, please heal me."

You know that which others are tempted to reject and discard, Jesus picks up and uses.

What can you do with a bruised reed? You cannot lean on it; you cannot be supported by it; you can't make music with it. But Jesus can, and Jesus picks up that which others have discarded and makes beautiful music in and through their lives. You may be here today and you just feel yourself horribly bruised. Bruised by what others have done to you, bruised by your own bad choices, but you're just bruised. And you've been tempted to believe that you're bruised and broken and useless. But Jesus says to you today, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."

And Jesus also says he makes use of smouldering wicks. He doesn't snuff them out. He doesn't say, "Oh, this thing is just flickering; it's on its way out; it's useless. Let's throw it out and get another one entirely." No, he takes this flickering stump of a candle, and he makes it a shining light. Again, you may be here and someone says to you, or you say to yourself, "You know, you're pretty useless, aren't you? I mean you've had your day. You're like an old flickering candle. If you haven't got it figured out by now, there's probably no hope for you at all." Well, I've got good news for you. There is hope for you. And the hope is in this servant.

He will not crush the weakest reed or put out a flickering candle. He will bring justice to all who have been wronged.

We have said before that the people of Isaiah's day were guilty of creating heart-level substitutes for God. And they were essentially going to false gods for false salvations. And instead of finding fulfilment along this route, they discovered that their lives were deprived of meaning and of freedom and of enjoyment.

What does it say in Exodus 20:3? It says: "You shall have no other gods before me."

All of our idolatries, all of our idolatries, can do nothing for us because all they are is the extension, the magnification of our own attempts at saving ourselves. They're just at the apex of our designs which say, "No, I don't want to consider a God who saves. Frankly, I will save myself." And we might honestly say to one another, "Well, how are you doing?" How were they doing in Isaiah's day? Remember God challenges them: "Why don't your idols say something? Why don't your idols do something?"

“The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands. He is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else.” (Acts 17:24-25)

This God, who speaks, this one who introduces himself in this way, is eternal. He is self-sustaining, he is self-determining, and he is sovereign. He is eternal. He is self-sustaining.

That is why you can trace lines in cultures and in communities where you have a community that has said, “We believe in God, the creator of the ends of the earth and in his Son, Jesus Christ, our only Saviour, and in the Holy Spirit who comes and invades his people. We believe this, and therefore, we do this, and we uphold this, and we affirm that.”

And a society that says “We do not believe in God, the creator of the ends of the earth, nor do we have any place for his Son, the servant one of Israel, nor do we believe in the personality of the Holy Spirit who comes and opens eyes and so on. We don’t believe any of that. We reject all of that.”

Well, just as there are implications to its acceptance, so there are implications to its rejection.

Let’s return briefly to the servant.

The servant opens the eyes of the blind.

The servant frees captives from prison.

The servant releases from the dungeon those who sit in darkness.

The servant opens the eyes of the blind. In the song, “I will sing of the Lamb”, Stuart Townend wrote, “Once I was blind but believed I saw everything.”

C. S. Lewis, when his eyes are opened to the truth of God says, “I believe in Christianity as I believe in the rising of the sun: Not simply because I can see it, but because by it I can see everything else.”

The servant opens the eyes of the blind.

He acts also in keeping with his mission to free captives and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness.

We live in a dungeon of our own making.

According to the Guinness Book of Records the largest box of chocolates is a Thorntons Moments box weighing 1,690 kg (3,725 lbs). It was produced by Thorntons and Russell Beck Studios, and weighed in Bethnal Green, London, UK, on 2 April 2008. The box was 5040 mm (16 ft 6 in) long, 3420 mm (11 ft 2 in) wide and 1000 mm (3 ft 3 1/2 in) deep.

I am using this chocolate box as an illustration of what happens to us when we go our own way; about what eventually will happen if we do our own thing. Imagine the chocolate box here in front of you. You open the box because it is attractive to you and apparently full of delicious chocolates and you take one chocolate out; and so on and so on. After a while you can only reach the chocolates with a fully-outstretched arm and eventually you even have to get into the box in order to continue reaching and eating the chocolates which you so desire. Further down the line you start to realise that you are really stuck deep down into this and you try to find your way out but you can’t. You push against the sides, you push against the base of the box and then you notice that the lid of the box has closed and it is dark. Then the box goes deep down into the earth and you are lifeless in it.

Where is the dungeon that we have made or are making in our lives? The servant releases from the dungeon those who sit in darkness. He is the light of life, the Light of the World.

You see how different it is from the sort of notion of Christianity that Christianity is about this Jesus who came to help those who are doing pretty well thank you just to do a little bit better? To help these nice people, these sorts of religious people, these people who are interested in God and everything else, just to have a little encouragement as they're going on their way? No, it's not that at all. No. It's that Jesus comes to fulfil a mission: the blind, the imprisoned, and those who live in a dungeon.

The story of the servant is not a story about what we must do in order that we might be accepted by God, but it is a story of what He has done making it possible.

What God felt compelled to do so to speak, His compulsion, is our liberation, is our freedom. You see, what God does is he flies in under the radar. He flies in under the radar of our attempts to create our own nice little universe that is devoid of him and removed from him. He comes in under the radar. Why does He do that? He does that because he loves saving people. Why? Because he wants to come and show us that even when life has plunged us into its deepest pit, we find Jesus there, because He seeks us and finds us.

The God, who speaks, reveals his person and his power and his purpose. The servant acts in dependence upon God, in keeping with his character, in line with his mission. And what is the response of the listener? Is it a joyful song, a heartfelt cry, or utter shame and total desolation? What is your response to God today?

Father, we bow down before you. You are a great God, and there is no other.

The Creator of the heavens spreads out the earth with all that springs from it, and gives breath to its people, and life to those who walk on it. How do I know that God exists and what He is like? I go for a walk! He "gives breath to its people and life to those who walk on the earth." (Isaiah 42:5)

We know three things: God speaks; the servant acts; and the reader responds, as is true always. But God is speaking, the servant is acting, and the listener is responding.

There was with God no time when there was no time. But God created time. The eternal speaks into our universe. So this is very, very important, that we distinguish in Biblical terms what it is we are saying when we encounter God. When we encounter the God of the Bible, we are encountering a God who is not the God of human invention; God made man in His image; we shouldn't make God in our image. He's not the God of man's creative ingenuity, he is not the God of looking inside yourself, he's not pantheism, he's not everything. He is distinct from that which he has made. And in introducing himself in this way, we discover him to be the living, reigning, powerful sovereign God.

We will never, ever be as satisfied in life as when we discover that God's purpose is that he is to be glorified in our lives. "The chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever."

And it is on account of that he says in 8b, "I will not give my glory to another or my praise to idols." Now people read that and they say, "Well, what kind of God is this?" Maybe people say, "Well, this God is some kind of megalomaniac." I mean, is there anyone else in the entire universe that is prepared to say, you know, "I'm not prepared to share my glory with anyone else?" No, there isn't; because there's no one else in this position. If God were to share his glory, he would be denying himself. He would be negating his own nature.

Let's look each and every day to Jesus the author and finisher of our faith. What He has begun in our individual lives and in our little church He will bring to completion. As we read in Philippians 1:6 "being confident of this that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."

What is required in the absence of reality is the ultimate reality.”

Our final offering hymn was again played by Joy:

Immortal, invisible, God only wise, in light inaccessible hid from our eyes,
most blessed, most glorious, the Ancient of Days,
almighty, victorious, thy great name we praise.

Unresting, unhasting, and silent as light, nor wanting, nor wasting, thou rulest in might;
thy justice like mountains high soaring above
thy clouds, which are fountains of goodness and love.

To all life thou givest, to both great and small; in all life thou livest, the true life of all;
we blossom and flourish as leaves on the tree,
and wither and perish but naught changeth thee.

Great Father of glory, pure Father of light, thine angels adore thee, all veiling their sight;
all praise we would render, O help us to see
'tis only the splendour of light hideth thee

Author: Walter Chalmers Smith CCLI song #124466 Words and Music: Public Domain CCL No 5664

As we were bringing our time together to a close, we were invited to watch a video. You may remember that, during the pandemic, singing The Blessing (The Lord bless you and keep you, make His Face shine upon you every day of this new year, the Lord turn His Face upon you, and give you peace) became popular worldwide. **We were shown “The Blessing from 154 nations in 257 languages”**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d48-qbcovVY>

We closed as we sang together the Doxology

Praise God, from whom all blessings flow;
Praise Him, all creatures here below;
Praise Him above, ye heav'nly host;
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.
Amen.

Authors:: Louis Bourgeois, Thomas Ken CCLI SONG # 56204 Words and Music: Public domain CCL No 5664

And now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us evermore. Amen.

For those who weren't at the service on Feb 5th, notice was given of a Special Church Member's Meeting that has been called for after morning worship on 19th February. This will be a very short (15 minutes) meeting simply to approve the finances required to carry out urgent repairs to the roof. It is anticipated that the meeting will start at 12.45.

A quorum of 15 is required to make a decision. Thank you.

