



Welcome to Blackburn Baptist Church, on August 20th 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.

(The service has been recorded and will be available on YouTube at a later date. In the meantime, here is a basic resume of the service)

Our service today is being led by Alec, with Trevor, Kate and Paul W providing the musical accompaniment. It begins as we watch a video on the screen - "Nearer my God to thee" sung in 4 languages, English, Ukrainian, Hebrew and Portuguese.

Nearer, my God, to thee, nearer to thee!
E'en though it be a cross that raiseth me,
still all my song shall be, nearer, my God, to thee;
nearer, my God, to thee, nearer to thee!

Alec welcomed everyone, and read Philippians 3 12-14

"Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: forgetting what is behind and straining towards what is ahead, I press on towards the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenwards in Christ Jesus."

He then introduced our Opening hymn:

Jesus, keep me near the cross,
there a precious fountain;
free to all, a healing stream,
flows from Calv'ry's mountain.

**In the cross, in the cross be my glory ever,
till my ransomed soul shall find rest beyond the river.**

Near the cross, a trembling soul,
love and mercy found me;
there the Bright and Morning Star
shed His beams around me.

In the cross, in the cross...

Near the cross! O lamb of God,
bring its scenes before me;
help me walk from day to day
with its shadow o'er me.

In the cross, in the cross...

Near the cross! I'll watch and wait,
hoping, trusting ever;
till I reach the golden strand,
just beyond the river.

In the cross, in the cross..

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Notices were shared by Tony

Alec then invited all to join in a time of Praise and worship

The splendour of the King, clothed in majesty;
let all the earth rejoice, all the earth rejoice.
He wraps himself in light and darkness tries to hide,
and trembles at his voice, and trembles at his voice.

**How great is our God,
sing with me: how great is our God,
and all will see how great, how great is our God.**

And age to age He stands, and time is in His hands;
beginning and the end, beginning and the end.
The Godhead, Three in One, Father, Spirit, Son,
the Lion and the Lamb, the Lion and the Lamb,

How great is our God....

Name above all names, worthy of all praise; my heart will sing: how great is our God.
Name above all names, worthy of all praise; my heart will sing: how great is our God.

How great is our God....

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**Alleluia, alleluia, give thanks to the risen Lord.
Alleluia, alleluia, give praise to his Name.**

Jesus is Lord of all the earth.
He is the King of creation.
Alleluia, alleluia...

Spread the good news o'er all the earth:
Jesus has died and has risen.
Alleluia, alleluia...

We have been crucified with Christ.
Now we shall live for ever.
Alleluia, alleluia...

Come, let us praise the living God,
Joyfully sing to our Saviour.
Alleluia, alleluia...

Author: Donald Fishel CCLI SONG # 32376 Copyright © 1973 International Liturgy Publications CCL No 5664

All hail, King Jesus! All hail, Immanuel!
King of kings, Lord of lords, bright Morning Star.
And throughout eternity I'll sing your praises,
and I'll reign with you throughout eternity.

Author: Dave Moody CCLI SONG # 12877 Copyrights@ 1981 Curb Dayspring Music (Admin. by / Small Stone Media BV, Holland (Admin. in the UK/Eire by Song Solutions www.songsolutions.org)) CCL No 5664 3) "All hail King Jesus! All hail Immanuel!"

The Bible reading for today, John 15:1-17, was read by Brenda

'I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

'I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

'As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My command is this: love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit - fruit that will last - and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. This is my command: love each other.

Alec shared his Message "Our calling"

Why are we here?

To worship God, yes. To pray to God, yes. To listen to God, yes. To share our lives together, yes.

Basically we are here because of our shared lives in God through Jesus Christ. He is the one who made us, remade us and is renewing us and transforming us day by day. He is our life.

Jesus who said I am the bread of life (6:35), the light of the world (8:12), the gate for the sheep (10:7), the good shepherd (10:11, 14), the resurrection and the life (11:25), the way the truth and the life (14:6) also said, "I am the true vine" (15:1).

What a great God we have! Jesus is all these things in one person; and he is who he says he is; genuine, authentic, and real.

But why does he say "I am the true vine" and not just I am the vine?

In the Old Testament the vine is a common symbol for Israel, the covenant people of God. We find this in the books of the prophet Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Hosea. It is remarkable that whenever historic

Israel is referred to using the picture of a vine, it is the vine's failure to produce good fruit that is emphasised and at the same time the corresponding threat of God's judgement on the nation. Isaiah 5:2b reads: "he looked for a crop of good grapes, but it yielded only bad fruit."

So in contrast to the failure of Israel to produce good fruit Jesus says, "I am the true vine." That is to say I am the one who brings good fruit.

The most important Old Testament passage on this is probably Psalm 80 because it brings together the themes of the vine and the son of man. Just listen to this:

"Restore us, O God Almighty; make your face shine on us, that we may be saved.

You transplanted a vine from Egypt; you drove out the nations and planted it.

Return to us, O God Almighty! Look down from heaven and see!

Watch over this vine, the root your right hand has planted, the son you have raised up for yourself.

Your vine is cut down; it is burned with fire; at your rebuke your people perish. Let your hand rest on the man at your right hand, the son of man you have raised up for yourself." (Psalm 80:7-8; 14-17)

The true vine is not the people of God who have gone away from him and not been fruitful, whose vine has been cut down and burned with fire. The true vine is Jesus himself. The contrast is not simply with what is false, but with what is earlier or provisional or anticipatory in the history of God revealing himself. Now the true vine is here. Now Jesus has appeared, now Jesus has been revealed in the flesh. He is replacing his people as the vine, as the true vine.

The Jewish people are hearing that if they wish to enjoy the status of being part of God's chosen vine, they must be properly related to and relating to Jesus.

Exactly that is the challenge which we are confronted!

Do we have a relationship with Jesus Christ? Whether we acknowledge him or not he is our Creator but is he also our Saviour and Lord?

Jesus description of himself as the true or genuine vine implies that Israel had been an imperfect foreshadowing of what was found to perfection in himself. He is what God had called Israel to be, but what Israel in fact had never become.

What did God call us to be? Obedient servants? Doers of the Word or hearers only? Have we become and are we becoming the people that He planned and longed for us to be?

Living in forgiveness and love with one another and with Him we are being renewed and transformed into His image from one degree of glory to another as He is renewing and transforming the fellowship of the church here at BBC. It is not just the building; it is the hearts and minds of we ourselves which need ongoing, continual change as He leads and guides us each step of the way.

With Jesus, in Jesus, a new "Israel" has emerged, the members of which are given their spiritual nourishment by Him alone. Or do we look to other sources for so-called "spiritual help and nourishment"? A little bit of esoteric here, a little bit of this or that religion there?

Believers in Jesus are the "limbs" so to speak of His body. We share in the life which results from the sacrifice of that body on the Cross, a truth which Jesus shared with us in John 6:53: "I am telling you the truth: if you do not eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you will not have life in yourselves."

This very same truth is now emphasised in the allegory of the vine. We have been brought into the closest union with our Lord. Our unity with one another as the Body of Christ here at BBC is realised not through organisational structures, (though these are of course necessary and hopefully also helpful). No. Our closeness to one another, our growth together as a fellowship, stems from each one of us being and remaining in Jesus and in our living closer and closer to Him.

We do not have to be the same to be united. We can disagree without dividing. We need to wrestle with both the truths of Scripture and to seek the mind of the Spirit to avoid being something like an emaciated church that is nothing more than a reflection of the cultures around us in this multi-cultural world. Christian unity is built upon the truth of who God is, what he does through Christ and how he has revealed himself to us through Christ in the Word of God. We are not free to change these realities. We are not free to create a different Jesus. We are not free to change what the Bible says according to our own personal preferences or desires.

We need each one of us to spend time with Jesus every day, to read the word and pray. Then we will grow in our relationship with Him and through all doing this we will also grow closer together.

Without being experts on tuning and harmonics we appreciate music of one or more kinds. We identify with the melodies, the sounds and the rhythms and many other features of the music. We benefit from the creativity of the composer.

AW Tozer wrote: "Has it ever occurred to you that one hundred pianos all tuned to the same tuning fork are automatically tuned to each other? They are of one accord by being tuned, not to each other, but to another standard to which each one must individually bow. So one hundred worshippers met together, each one looking away to Christ, are in heart nearer to each other than they could possibly be if instead of looking away to Christ they became 'unity' conscious and turned their eyes away from God to strive for closer fellowship."

The unity Christ longs for is one which is deeply rooted in truth and therefore rooted in him. The more we allow ourselves to be more like Christ, the closer we will come to other followers of Jesus. We do not build unity by pretending there are no differences among us. We build unity by pursuing the Christ who has pursued us. Perhaps the greatest challenge is that we often seek unity by comparing and contrasting our convictions with one another instead of allowing our unity to flow from our mutual convictions which are rooted in God himself.

Fruitfulness and unity are like two closely connected branches in the vine who is the Lord Jesus. He is the true vine. Without being and remaining in him there will be no unity and no fruitfulness. So let's live and remain in Him.

Where are we this morning? Are we in the vine or not? Fruitfulness and unity are impossible apart from Christ. Jesus says apart from him, separated from him we can do nothing. Yet with God all things are possible. Church congregations throughout the world are probably characterised by a mixture of branches that bear fruit which Jesus prunes and trims so that they become more fruitful, those people that accept and obey the message of Jesus; and branches which don't bear fruit which are taken away and burned, those people that reject Christ's message and do not remain in him.

But let us remember, let us not forget, that both these groups have contact with Christ. John 1:9 reads: "The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world." Many see Jesus but do not recognise him for who he is, the Saviour of the world; they do not admit they have made a mess of their lives and ask God in Jesus Christ to forgive them as he longs for them to do. Many hear of Jesus but do not receive him, the living God, into their hearts. Many get close to the true vine, but they do not allow themselves to be grafted into it so they are not fruitful and do not reflect the unity of the body of Christ in their lives.

Where are we this morning?

Our Prayers were led by Jane:

Let us pray:

'All hail King Jesus, all hail Emmanuel, King of kings, Lord of lords, bright morning star,' we welcome You into our midst this morning. To each of us you are Saviour, Lord, Prince of Peace, but also Brother and Friend. Help us, as we have already sung, to remain near to You, Lord, in thought, word and deed. We praise and worship You. Please keep reminding us of the cross where You died to take the punishment that should have been ours, because we were walking in our own way and not in Yours. Thank You for giving us new life, knowing our sins are forgiven and able to know God as our heavenly Father through the power of your Holy Spirit. You are the great God and yet you love and care personally for each of your children. Thank you that You are eager to hear our prayers and give us the desires of our hearts when we pray in accordance with Your will.

Father, it grieves our hearts when we hear daily on the news of mankind's inhumanity towards fellow humans, whether it is between warring nations, or the abuse, mistreatment and neglect of individuals, particularly of innocent children and those who are vulnerable. Lord, this is not how You want the people of Your world to be. Please pour out Your Spirit to change hearts from selfishness, greed and hate to repentance, compassion and love. May all who are called by Your Name, including ourselves, so to demonstrate Your redeeming love to the world that others are drawn to Jesus, who said to His disciples, "Love one another as I have loved you!" Draw us closer to you, Lord, that we may be obedient to your Word and be filled with the joy and peace, that only you can give, through all the ups and downs of life.

Lord, we pray again for our planet and for wisdom for those in authority, who have power to change the way the world's riches are being exploited, resulting in such disastrous extreme climate changes. We pray for all those affected by wildfires, floods, droughts, high temperatures, earthquakes and hurricanes. We pray for the safety of all who work to bring these situations under control and for help to come swiftly to those who have lost loved ones, their homes and all their belongings. Lord, please redeem your amazing world!

Today we remember those of our fellowship, our families and friends who need your help because of frailty, illness, bereavement, or the difficulties of everyday life. We pray especially for Allan, in hospital again, and for Morag, that they may know Your peace and that You would direct those caring for Allan so he may receive the very best treatment. We pray now in the silence for others we know who need your help.

(A few minutes silence.)

Let's bring our prayers together now as we join in the Lord's Prayer.

Our Father.

who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever.

Amen.

We sang our Closing (offertory) hymn:

When I survey the wondrous cross
on which the Prince of Glory died,
my richest gain I count as loss,
and pour contempt on all my pride.

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,
save in the death of Christ my God:
the very things that charm me most,
I sacrifice them to his blood.

See from his head, his hands, his feet,
sorrow and love flow mingled down:
when did such love and sorrow meet,
or thorns compose so rich a crown?

Were the whole realm of nature mine,
that were an offering far too small;
love so amazing, so divine,
demands my soul, my life, my all!

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Alec shared in Closing prayers.