



**Welcome to Blackburn Baptist Church, on August 27th 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, with Trevor playing the piano and Kate the violin. (It has been recorded and will be available on YouTube at a later date. In the meantime, here is a basic resume of the service)

**Alec began with a Welcome & Introduction, including an Opening reading Psalm 62:1-2**

"Truly my soul finds rest in God; my salvation comes from him.  
Truly he is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I shall never be shaken."

**Alec invited the congregation to join in an Opening Hymn:**

Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty,  
Early in the morning our song shall rise to Thee.  
Holy, holy, holy! Merciful and mighty,  
God in three persons Blessed Trinity!

Holy, holy, holy! All the saints adore Thee,  
casting down their golden crowns around the glassy sea;  
Cherubim and seraphim, falling down before,  
God ever living through eternity.

Holy, holy, holy! Though the darkness hide Thee,  
though the eye of sinful man Thy glory may not see,  
only Thou art holy, there is none beside Thee,  
perfect in power, in love and purity

Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty,  
All Thy works shall praise Thy name in earth and sky and sea.  
Holy, holy, holy! Merciful and mighty,  
God in three persons, blessed Trinity.

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**Notices were shared by Tony, then all were again invited to join in song, for a time of praise and worship**

Holy, holy, holy is the Lord; holy is the Lord God almighty.  
Holy, holy, holy is the Lord; holy is the Lord God almighty,  
who was, and is, and is to come. Holy, holy, holy is the Lord!

Jesus, Jesus, Jesus is the Lord; Jesus is the Lord God almighty.  
Jesus, Jesus, Jesus is the Lord; Jesus is the Lord God almighty,  
who was, and is, and is to come. Jesus, Jesus, Jesus is the Lord!

Worthy, worthy, worthy is the Lord; worthy is the Lord God almighty.  
Worthy, worthy, worthy is the Lord; worthy is the Lord God almighty,  
who was, and is, and is to come! Worthy, worthy, worthy is the Lord.

Glory, glory, glory to the Lord; glory to the Lord God almighty.  
Glory, glory, glory to the Lord; glory to the Lord God almighty,  
who was, and is, and is to come. Glory, glory, glory to the Lord.

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**Shown on the screen as a video:**

When the enemy surrounds and my heart grows faint within;  
when the darkness overwhelms and my fears are pressing in;  
I will trust in You, O Lord, in the silence I will wait,  
I will stand upon Your Word

**You're my solid rock and my salvation,  
my steadfast hope that won't be shaken.  
My soul will wait, my soul will wait for You.**

You're my stronghold and my shield, in the midst of every threat;  
Though the wicked never yield, they will vanish like a breath;  
yes, I know the outcome's sure, Satan's evil plans will fail,  
in Your power I'm secure.

**You're my solid rock and my salvation,  
my steadfast hope that won't be shaken.  
My soul will wait, my soul will wait for You.  
You're my comfort when I feel forsaken,  
my refuge and my sure foundation.  
My soul will wait, my soul will wait for You.**

This is love I can't explain, this is mercy unreserved;  
through Your sacrifice so great, I have peace that's undeserved;  
for the battle has been won, and I fear no shame or loss,  
now the sting of death is gone.

(Pouring out our hearts before You we will trust in You.  
Perfect Saviour, strong defender, we will trust in You.)

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eDX9fgGFDUo>

In my life Lord, be glorified, be glorified;  
In my life Lord, be glorified today.

In my song Lord, be glorified, be glorified;  
In my song Lord, be glorified today.

In your church, Lord, be glorified, be glorified;  
In your church, Lord, be glorified today.

In my heart Lord, be glorified, be glorified;  
In my heart Lord, be glorified today.

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qm1dyZGJqWI>

### **Prayers were led by Brenda**

Our Heavenly Father, we glorify You now and offer our worship and praise to You, thanking You for all the good things You have given us. We are amazed as we look at the detail of every living thing, each one having its purpose, from the smallest to the largest. We see the abilities that You have given mankind, some of which we have seen this week in the news - like space travel to land on the moon, transplant of a womb and new ways of diagnosis and treatment. Also the successful rescue in Pakistan and so much more. Thank You for all these wonderful things and also the special answers to prayer some of us have had recently. There is much to say thank You for, but also much that breaks our hearts and must break Yours too. There are so many awful things that shouldn't be, so many corrupt and evil people who have lost all caring. We grieve with the families whose loved ones, even babies, have been murdered and ask for Your caring presence to surround them and pray that perpetrators may know what they have done and are doing and ask for Your forgiveness. We continue to pray for an end to the war and suffering in Ukraine and other countries where there is fighting and persecution and may there be a significant change of minds and a way to peace be found. We bring before You the ones fleeing from their own countries seeking a better life and who risk so much, asking for their safety and a good level of care when they arrive at their destination.

Again we pray for all those suffering because of terrifying events caused by global warming. So many have had homes and livelihoods destroyed and have lost loved ones in a terrible way. We bring them all before You and ask for help and comfort to be available to all those in need at this time. May all of us do what we can in our small way, to combat the effects of climate change.

Now, Lord God, we pray again for this town and the area in which You have placed us in this church. Please give a new vision of You and guidance to a way ahead for those struggling with all sorts of problems in life and those who are unable to pay their way or look after their children as they would like. Also, Heavenly Father, may there be consideration for others in the neighbourhoods where there is unnecessary, disturbing noise, rubbish left about and other thoughtless things. May we all try to love our neighbours as ourselves. There are many we know in our own family and our church family who are really suffering at this time and we ask for Your support and care for all. We bring before You the ones in hospital or care homes and facing illness, dementia and maybe coming to the end of life. We thank You for all those who are carers and pray for them, and ask that help be ready when it is needed. We also bring to You the ones with many health needs and those waiting for appointments and worrying about treatments. We especially remember Allan and Morag at this time following his release from hospital. Lord God, give Your comfort and peace to them and all those we are thinking about at this time. We remember before You children growing up in this difficult world and teenagers sorting out their future plans following exam results recently. May they all find the support that they need.

Thank You for our prayer chain and the way we can come together in prayer when there is a special need.

As Autumn approaches, we are thinking ahead to the restarting of our church activities and we ask for Your presence and guidance for all leaders and those who come along to attend. May there be joy and fellowship as we share with You and each other. We bring our church's future to You and as many of us are getting older, we ask for You to bring new and younger people to us to take on responsibilities and with a fresh approach. We pray for our Pastor and leadership team and ask that You will lead them and any others who feel called to join them. Thank You for the endless work done so that our services and activities can take place and run smoothly, and our building be kept in good repair.

Once more, we ask You to forgive us for all our mistakes, omissions and wrong doings in the name of Your Son, Jesus Christ. We thank You for sending him to earth to be our example and Saviour.

Now we ask that You will take us safely through the coming week and be beside us in everything we do. May we be able to show the 'fruit of the spirit', which we are going to hear about now, in our lives.

Heavenly Father, we offer our prayers to You in the name of Jesus, Your Son. Amen

**The Bible passage for today, Galatians 5: 22-26, was read by Graham.**

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.

**Alec gave his Message: "FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT"**

As part of our ongoing series on following Jesus we looked last week at the theme of fruitfulness and unity. Fruitfulness is an evidence of our discipleship; fruitfulness is a clearly inevitable, highly desirable and natural consequence of being and living in the Lord Jesus, of remaining in the true vine.

For the world and for the church it is a dreadful tragedy if and when we are portraying, displaying or presenting a Christianity which is superficial or which is unreal, rather than fruit which grows as a result of life from within.

At the present time a lot is being said, written, researched and experienced concerning artificial intelligence, a wide-ranging branch of computer science concerned with building smart machines capable of performing tasks that typically require human intelligence. The basic barrier seems to be not having a way of establishing and maintaining meaningful linguistic communication between man and machine, between creator and creation. Now where have we heard of this problem before? So-called advances and improvements, so-called new understandings of spiritual life and particular insights that block rather than enable and enhance the communication between our Maker and ourselves as God's creation.

AI may be relatively new. Artificial foods are much older. Japanese restaurants have been using fake foods for display purposes for a very long time. It is almost real. The picture on the screen was accompanied by the title, "Fake Food in Japan: The World's Most Delicious Looking Plastic."

I wonder whether churches do that. I mean on the outside we display what is on offer and then inside people can experience that? What verses and posters have we had on display in front of our church? I

hope that we display in our life inside and outside the church buildings the truths written on the posters that we sometimes hang up outside. Are we genuinely fruitful? Are we as a fellowship living fruitful lives?

But artificial fruit is very common; isn't that good enough? It is very well-developed. It displays basically all the characteristics of real fruit except that it is not real.

Look at these slides for a minute. They are advertised like this: artificial simulation grapes; life-like artificial grapes; fake realistic grapes.

Then there are these bananas; they look as though they are ripe and ready to eat and probably wonderfully tasty. Good colour, good shape, good everything.

But listen to what they actually are. This is the product description. "This detailed artificial banana would be a great addition to a breakfast buffet display along with other fake fruits in our range. Our realistic food props are ideal for enhancing food presentations, making them appear fuller, more inviting and vibrant. Fake food has come a long way since the days of tacky plastic dupes. Our display fruit and vegetables are made from lightweight and durable polyfoam that's suitable for continuous use and easily passes for the real thing."

Whom do we claim to serve? Is that obvious and clear to those at present outside our fellowship? Are we actually what we claim to be? Are we genuine, authentic and real in our lives of faith or do we just "easily pass for the real thing"? So the challenge to us is to remain in the vine, to be pruned and to produce more and more fruit. Then the world will see Jesus. Then the world will know. Then those whom God has called and chosen will believe. That would be a great and remarkable encouragement!

95% of young people under 18 in the UK do not go to a church. But they are open to the Lord Jesus. They see that what the world claims is not backed up by reality and they are really open for genuine bible preaching and teaching that does not compromise on the nature of Jesus, that does not mess around with his power and authority. They are disorientated and are looking for security, they need direction. They need comfort in a comfortless world. They need hope in a hopeless world. They are open to hearing and getting to know the Lord Jesus Christ. So let us ask ourselves the question, "Are our churches open to the Word of God, to the living God? Are we open for the working of the Holy Spirit in our church life? Or do we in our churches sometimes shut Jesus out? Are we open to proclaiming Jesus in our everyday lives?"

In a kind of conference room pastors and ministers and vicars and the like sat on both sides of a long elongated table with documents laid out in front of each of them. At the head of the table sat Jesus. He asked them what was written in those documents in front of each of them on the table. One minister replied that these were the plans they each had for all their churches.

And then Jesus said quietly, clearly, lovingly and warm-heartedly, "would you all like to see my plans?"

We saw last week the sad, the chilling and the difficult side of John 15; difficult to read, difficult to hear, difficult to accept. It is very challenging, extremely challenging. You know when we reach John 15:5-8 we may perhaps like to leave out verse 6 perhaps because we don't like to think that our Lord would do anything like that. Read John 15:5-8. We might think that that is not very compassionate, not very caring, not loving at all. We prefer to concentrate on verses 5, 7 and 8. Gentle Jesus, meek and mild; care for me your loving child? Maybe that is a little one-sided? Don't we have also responsibilities as followers of Jesus?

Now we looked a few weeks ago at the parable of the sower from Mark 4. But it is also recorded in Matthew 13 where it is followed by another parable as they so often are but this other one is called the parable of the weeds. Doesn't sound like a best-seller title does it?

Well every gardener amongst us knows what weeds are!

Read Matthew 13:24– 30 with me. You know this is a really deeply meaningful story.

Jesus is not talking about weeds any more than he was talking about branches in John 15 or about things growing from seed in Mark 4. He is talking about people. For us and for those around us here in Galligreaves and Bank Top, in Redlam and in Wensleyfold, in Griffin and wherever we live Jesus is saying look people you are at a crossroads in your life. Jesus is revealing himself to you, he is talking to you now. Through the preacher, through your neighbour who is a believer, through your workmate who is a follower of Jesus and like you've got to decide whether you are going to turn to him or away from him. You cannot go on and on forever driving around on the road map of uncertainty or on the helter-skelter of let's just see what it feels like and how it turns out and maybe and perhaps and I'll wait and see what it costs and whether it's worth it and what I can get out of it, what benefits I receive and whether Jesus fulfils my wishes adequately or not.

Because that plainly will not work; Jesus your Maker and the one that gives you breath every day whom you have if you are being honest basically ignored up to now is saying that you have a problem; you have messed up your life; you are not living the way I planned and made you for says God. Without me you went off the rails. So I came into the world as a man and died for you to make it possible for you not to go into an endless hell without your Maker the living God but to be forgiven and through my resurrection from the dead, through my Father, to give you new life.

So it is a choice that we have to make at this junction in our lives; like right now; and everybody else that we come into contact with needs to know about this. We are God's witnesses who need to pass this message on, so we'd better get it right.

Jesus talks and talks and talks using parables; and then in Mt. 13:49 he says quite simply:

“Have you understood all these things”.

And you say Alec I know these things inside out and back to front.

You say I know that there is no other option. In a syncretistic, pluralistic world where we think we have access to so many options, ways of thinking and ways of behaving which exclude or deliberately don't include Jesus; or offer a kind of so-called different Jesus, a humanistic or stereotyped version of a “Jesus” instead of the living dynamic son of God. You say again I know there is no other option. Jesus says I am the way, the truth and the life. No-one comes to the Father but through me.

Maybe you think that is just religious arrogance. But Jesus is so humble. The Son of God, the Maker and Sustainer of the universe, comes into the world as a man to humble himself as a servant and to die a horribly cruel and unjust death on a Cross for you and for me and for all those with whom we connect, to whom we relate, those whom we meet wherever we live and move and have our being. So you may think why is God taking so much time and repeating these basic truths of the Gospel again and again; when we know them off by heart; when we are living new lives as believers already. And the reason is this. Are we ready; are we able and willing to share with those around us what Jesus said; and to say it in love and power?

All the artificial fruits we have seen and see we might perhaps describe as works of the flesh; the fruit of the Spirit is in direct contrast to that, real, genuine, authentic, God-given, ongoing, flowing out of His Body fresh, pure water in the desert of our dry borough. We have enough rain; but we need the water of Life. The people of this area need to meet with Jesus. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

Matthew 3:8 reads: “Produce fruit in keeping with repentance”. “Do those things that will show that

you have turned from your sins". "Do those things that prove you have turned to God and have changed the way you think and act".

"By their fruit you will recognise them. Do people pick grapes from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles?" (Matthew 7:16)

When I once stayed in the most westerly parts of Brittany I walked around the former farmhouse where I was staying and found bushes and bushes full of one of my favourite fruits, fresh blackberries. It was not hot but it was summer so off I trundled in my shorts and sandals towards the bushes and collected and collected and collected tasty-looking blackberries. It was an extremely fruitful exercise. I do not understand the Breton language really at all. But on my way back to the farmhouse the owner spoke slowly with me and made it clear that I was very brave to have done what I did. He told me that without proper protection for my feet and legs I had been in real danger of being bitten by one or more deadly poisonous snakes. In the midst of the magnificently fruit-filled blackberry bushes were often poisonous snakes.

Even where there is fruit there may be a threat to human life.

Even where believers are living fruitful lives they will be under threat.

Particularly where God is working and there is much fruit there will be potentially deadly threats from the enemy.

In the parable of the sower Satan came and took away some of the seed that was sown so that it wasn't fruitful. Don't let him take away what God is saying to you this morning or indeed what he is saying to you on any day of the week. In the parable of the weeds, the weeds are described as the sons of the evil one sown by the devil. The whole of Jesus life and ministry on earth was challenged by the evil one. But his life and ministry were both very fruitful to the glory and honour of his Father.

Be encouraged! "In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 8:37-39)

So that we are fruitful in our lives as followers of Jesus; so that others may come to know and follow him, let us "Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace".

Our feet not like me in my sandals in an area of deadly poisonous snakes but fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.

**We concluded by singing our Closing (offering) hymn:**

How sweet the name of Jesus sounds in a believer's ear!  
It soothes our sorrows, heals our wounds, and drives away our fear.

It makes the wounded spirit whole and calms the troubled breast;  
'tis manna to the hungry soul, and to the weary, rest.

Dear name! The rock on which I build, my shield and hiding place,  
My never-failing treasury filled with boundless stores of grace.

Jesus, my shepherd, guardian, friend, my Prophet, Priest, and King,  
my Lord, my Life, my Way, my End, accept the praise I bring.

Weak is the effort of my heart, and cold my warmest thought;  
but when I see you as you are, I'll praise you as I ought.

Till then I would your love proclaim with every fleeting breath;  
and may the music of your name refresh my soul in death.

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### **Closing prayer**