



Welcome to Blackburn Baptist Church, on March 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, who began by checking that we were all happy with the open windows! He welcomed everyone, especially our Lord in heaven, who reigns and controls, and felt that perhaps this week we would be able to share with someone how God had controlled part of our lives, and experiences that we would like to share either after the service or some other time.

He then read from Psalm 25:

In you, Lord my God, I put my trust.
I trust in you; do not let me be put to shame, nor let my enemies triumph over me.
No one who hopes in you will ever be put to shame,
but shame will come on those who are treacherous without cause.
Show me your ways, Lord, teach me your paths.
Guide me in your truth and teach me,
for you are God my Saviour, and my hope is in you all day long.
Remember, Lord, your great mercy and love, for they are from of old.
Do not remember the sins of my youth and my rebellious ways;
according to your love remember me, for you, Lord, are good.
Good and upright is the Lord; therefore he instructs sinners in his ways.
He guides the humble in what is right and teaches them his way.
All the ways of the Lord are loving and faithful
toward those who keep the demands of his covenant.

We were then invited to join together in our Opening hymn, played by Trevor, Paul W, Kate and Judith.

How firm a foundation, you people of God,
is laid for your faith in his excellent word!
What more can he say to you than he has said
to everyone trusting in Jesus our head?

Since Jesus is with you, do not be afraid;
since he is your Lord, you need not be dismayed:
he strengthens you, guards you, and helps you to stand,
upheld by his righteous, omnipotent hand.

When through the deep waters he calls you to go,
the rivers of trouble shall not overflow;

the Lord will be with you, to help and to bless,
and work for your good through your deepest distress.

When through fiery trials your pathway shall lead,
his grace shall sustain you with all that you need;
the flames shall not hurt you his only design
your dross to consume and your gold to refine.

Whoever has come to believe in his name
will not be deserted, and not put to shame;
though hell may endeavour that Christian to shake
his Lord will not leave him, nor ever forsake.

Jubilate Hymns version of 'How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord', sometimes attributed to Richard Keen (fl.c. 1787)
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Our Notices were presented by Tony, inviting all to join in 5 minutes of prayer in the sanctuary immediately after the service, or to go through for refreshments in the hall. The Deacons and Alec will be meeting on Monday night, and will also be meeting with the leaders of St Lukes on Thursday afternoon for a time of prayer. No regular weekly activities are due to take place. Nomination forms for the Diaconate are available. Next Sunday, our regular second Sunday of the month, we will have a bring and share lunch.

After welcoming Prem and Anju, his wife, here for her first service, Alec led Communion, joined by Tony and Jane at the Communion table, as we sang:

Here is bread, here is wine,
Christ is with us, He is with us.
Break the bread, drink the wine,
Christ is with us here.

Here is grace, here is peace,
Christ is with us, He is with us.
Know His grace, find peace,
feast on Jesus here.

**In this bread there is healing, in this cup there's life forever.
In this moment, by the Spirit, Christ is with us here.**

Here we are, joined in one,
Christ is with us, He is with us.
We'll proclaim, 'til he comes,
Jesus crucified.

In this bread there is healing...

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Alec continued: saying this was a time of remembrance, of thanksgiving and of hope, as we long for Jesus to come back to this world. It is also a time of forgiveness and love, and we were invited to spend some moments in silence asking Jesus to forgive us and cleanse us. "For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: the Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, 'This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.'

Tony led a prayer of thanksgiving for the bread and wine before he and Jane distributed

the elements. The bread was eaten as we received it, whilst we retained the cup that all were able to drink together, as a sign of unity and fellowship.

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

After a brief time of silence, and after Tony and Jane had returned to their places in the congregation, **our prayers were led by Shirley:**

"Great and loving God, we greet you this day with praise and wonder. We greet you as the Creator of the ends of the Earth, Sovereign over space and time, greater than we can ever imagine.

Gracious and living Christ, we greet you this day, with joy and thanksgiving. We greet you as our Lord, our friend, and our Saviour.

Mysterious, and mighty Spirit, we greet you this day with awe and worship. We greet you as our guide and inspiration, our source of strength, and comfort, and living inner reality.

Almighty, God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we greet you this day, and we praise you that you are here to greet us and everyone, today, and every day, here and everywhere.

Help us to meet with you and grow closer to you, through this time of worship. Help us to glimpse your glory, and make it known, through all we say and do, to the glory of your name. Amen.

Dear Lord, we bring to you now, our thoughts and concerns for our world, the people and countries in which we live. As we experience heavy rain and floods, wildfires, burning unexpected, heat, et cetera, causing damage, heartache, and even death to some, we pray to you Creator God, who has given us the privilege of participating in the care and nurture of this world.

You call us to work in partnership with you and one another, not simply serving ourselves, not looking only to short-term interest, but conscious of our responsibility to our children, and those who will follow them.

Teach us to be faithful stewards of creation.

Forgive us for mistakenly imagining we can work independently of you, living and acting as we please, with no thought of the consequences.

Teach us to be faithful stewards of creation.

Forgive us for exploiting the treasures of this earth, as though they are ours by right, wantonly destroying the environment and our thirst for gain.

Teach us to be faithful stewards of creation.

Forgive us for losing our sense of wonder before the magnificence of your creation, abusing all you have given instead of handling it with respect.

Teach us to be faithful stewards of creation.

Forgive us for living today as if there will be no tomorrow, squandering finite resources, heedless of our responsibilities to others or to you.

Teach us to be faithful stewards of creation,

Forgive us for always seeking more while others have nothing, satisfying our needs, while a multitude go hungry.

Teach us to be faithful stewards of creation.

Creator God, teach us to work, not just for ourselves, but for all, to recognise that we are indeed stewards of creation rather than its masters, answerable, finally, to you for what we

do with it. Teach us to give thanks for all you have given us, and to play our part and ensuring that those who come after us must share it too.

Teach us to be faithful stewards of creation. In the name of Christ, we pray. Amen.

We continue to pray for war-torn countries, Ukraine, Yemen, Afghanistan, Myanmar, and so many more, dear Father. We pray against all corruption in their leadership, that the hearts of all in whatever country may be turned to you. We pray particularly for our own government that their decision-making on so many concerns at this time may be selfless and honouring to you. As we pray for our government, we pray that it may be so for us, as your people here at BBC. May we go forward with you first in our hearts and a longing that whatever we say or do should bring glory to your name.

We thank you for our town of Blackburn, with all its problems, homelessness, financial hardship, and closing shops, and pray that all of us, who know you, not just in our own fellowship, and peace-loving people, who, dear Lord, will know you soon, will continue to pray, seek your face and love all who we come into contact with, as we know that your word says "trust in you, with all our heart, lean not on our own understanding, in all our ways submit to you, and you will make our path straight"

Over the last week or two it has been quiet here at BBC with Bible study, Ladies afternoon, Tiddlywinks et cetera having a summer break, and we look forward to starting up again soon, hopefully with something new as well, for you are always doing a new thing dear Lord. During this time, Nigel and others have been busy making our church beautiful with new carpets and decoration. We thank you Father for their dedication to you and our fellowship.

We pray for Alec and the deacons as they seek to lead us forward and pray too that others will pray to know whether or not you are calling them to be a deacon.

And now dear Father, as there are many needs in our fellowship, for those who are unwell, or unable to be with us, for whatever reason, at the moment, waiting for hospital appointments, still grieving for loved ones, and awaiting for the desires of their hearts, we pray now in the silence, knowing that you hear us.

Thank you for your presence Lord for your peace that passes understanding. Amen."

Our Bible reading Psalm 19: 7-11 was read by Janet:

The law of the Lord is perfect, refreshing the soul.

The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple.

The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart.

The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes.

The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring for ever.

The decrees of the Lord are firm, and all of them are righteous.

They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold;

they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the honeycomb.

By them your servant is warned; in keeping them there is great reward.

(At this point in the service, it was intended that we sing, but in fact this was left until after the message).

Speak, O Lord, as we come to you to receive the food of your holy word.

Take your truth, plant it deep in us; shape and fashion us in your likeness,

that the light of Christ might be seen today in our acts of love and our deeds of faith.

Speak, O Lord, and fulfil in us all your purposes, for your glory.

Teach us Lord full obedience, holy reverence, true humility.
Test our thoughts and our attitudes in the radiance of your purity.
Cause our faith to rise, cause our eyes to see, your majestic love and authority.
Words of power that can never fail; let their truth prevail over unbelief.

Speak, O Lord, and renew our minds; help us grasp the heights of your plans for us.
Truths unchanged from the dawn of time, that will echo down through eternity.
And by grace we'll stand on your promises; and by faith we'll walk as you walk with us.
Speak, O Lord, 'til your church is built and the earth is filled with your glory.

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Message

Last week we began looking at a story which Jesus told known generally as the parable of the sower. You may remember we made the point that it is not about the work of politicians or power wheels of any kind but that the main figure in this story is a farmer who sows seed and the story tells us about what happens to the seed when it lands on different kinds of soils. Maybe you have read it for yourselves in the last few days and have thought and prayed about what it means for your life and for my life and for the life of the fellowship here. Basically it is really simple and anybody may understand it and Jesus says if we don't get this one we won't understand any of them.

The script is basically that Jesus is the sower of the seed and the Word of God is the seed itself so it sounds easy enough doesn't it.

You may well remember that we talked a lot last week about listening to Jesus. This parable teaches us that whenever Jesus says something there will be varied responses, different reactions, a whole palate of different behaviour patterns and that is what we are now looking at this morning.

One person might have looked at Jesus and thought, "Well he is just a carpenter from Nazareth, an almost unknown place; a strange man telling stories. He doesn't really know who we are and what we need. We really need someone to liberate us from political oppression, so what use to us are Jesus and his boring stories?"

Another person said, "I heard the voice of Jesus say, "Come to me and rest; lay down, you weary one, lay down your head upon my breast." I came to Jesus as I was, so weary, worn, and sad; I found in Him a resting place, and He has made me glad."

Somebody else said, "I heard the voice of Jesus say, "Behold, I freely give the living water, thirsty one; stoop down, and drink, and live." I came to Jesus, and I drank of that life-giving stream; my thirst was quenched, my soul revived, and now I live in Him."

Have we been listening to Jesus this week? Have we been listening to His voice? What has He been saying to us? It is so precious to have a relationship with the living God through Jesus Christ, through His death and resurrection. He is someone that we cannot but want to share with others. Tell others the story of how Jesus spoke to you and turned your life around. Tell others the stories of how he speaks with you each day, challenging you and encouraging you, comforting you and strengthening you.

And then somebody else might through the grace of God and through you sharing your story be able to say, "I too have found in Jesus the only One who could sort out the mess I was in in my life; I have found in Him the Saviour who forgives my wrongs, my Lord and my King who leads me and guides me each day."

We need to share the gospel of Jesus through stories! Yes through our life stories and through simple constructs like this parable.

A few months ago on February 26 I led a message on connecting with one another and with God. I called it the Lego message. Maybe you remember? If you missed it or have forgotten it you can find it on our website.

When we talk about having good connections it can mean many different things can't it?

I remember some long time ago taking my Renault to the garage for repair-it wouldn't start except on a hill going downwards. Well we know that traditionally and historically alternator and starter motor are important; the alternator converts mechanical energy into electrical energy allowing the car to charge the battery while you are driving and the starter works in a different way converting electrical energy of the vehicle into mechanical energy. Both the alternator and starter can wear out over time needing repair or replacement. Indeed the mechanics suggested the starter motor might need to be replaced and eventually I agreed to that.

They installed a new starter motor and I collected the vehicle. But it still would not start, except on a downward slope! I took it to one of my family who worked for a different Renault garage some distance away, explained the situation and asked him for his opinion. When I came back to him he explained the very simple reason why the new starter motor was not working. The mechanics at the officially recognised as a first-class service garage had replaced the former starter motor with a brand new one of the appropriate make; but they had not connected it to the engine. Outwardly the car looked fine. There was nothing wrong with the form of the vehicle at all. Just one thing was missing. The starter motor wasn't connected to the engine.

As Paul wrote to Timothy, "They will look like they are religious but deny God's power. They retain the outer form of religion but deny its power. They will hold to an outward form of godliness but deny its power." (2 Timothy 3:5)

We have to be aware of this and beware of it. Paul writes: "Avoid these people. Stay away from these people! Don't have anything to do with such people."

This is clear and firm advice. But first of all we have to make sure that we ourselves are living in and with Jesus and not just displaying an empty, powerless form. We need to be connected to the Lord God through Jesus Christ and live in the power of the Spirit. If you don't know how to do this, speak with one of us today after the gathering and we can talk and pray together. We want to help you and encourage you.

Jesus is the farmer. The farmer sows the seed. The Seed is the Word. The seed lands on various different types of soil.

These soils respond very differently; they show very different reactions to the Word.

Read Mark 4:15.

The impact of the seed on this first group of people is zero. The seed lands where they are and they are impervious to it. It is irrelevant to them; they simply don't grasp why Jesus keeps talking about the need for those who are living without God to turn back from their evil ways, seek forgiveness and believe. But that is exactly what they don't do. The seed is taken away as soon as they hear it-gone. Well of course we read that the reason is that Satan comes and takes away the Word that was sown in them. There may be a lot of people in this category. They hear the Word once and we never see or hear from them again.

Read Mark 4:16-17.

The second group of people who receive the Word receive it with joy. But as soon as they experience trouble, opposition or persecution because of the Word, because they are not rooted in the Word they quickly fall away.

Maybe they think and say things like “Well now that’s not the kind of spiritual package I am looking for.”

Or maybe they say, I have my self-respect; I think I’m important. But this preacher tells me I am a sinner in need of a Saviour. I don’t like that. So as soon as they get into any difficulties they give up. They are not rooted and grounded in love; they are not rooted in the Word.

Read Mark 4:18-19

In our next group are people who are like seed sown among thorns. They are sub-classified into three different groups.

There are those who are obsessed with worries of this life.

There are those who are deceived by wealth.

There are those who have desires for other things.

In all these people the seed has been sown but this process is unfruitful because of worrying about this life or being deceived by wealth or having desires for other things.

Read Mark 4: 20

In our final group are those who hear the Word and accept it and produce fruit. In these cases the seed has been sown on good soil.

Some people might be a bit worried on hearing this parable and thinking I have given my life to the Lord, but am I living a fruitful life? Maybe it helps you to be reminded of Phil. 1:6 where Paul says, “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”.

But if we are sharing our stories and talking about Jesus to others sharing with them the need to give our lives back to Him and follow Him, these other people are not all going to show fruit. But we will keep sharing the Word, because in very many cases this will indeed be very fruitful.

This parable is not about four different church marketing strategies; it’s not about four different plans; it’s not about four different ways of doing things and then we will like eventually perhaps find the right way and our seed-sowing will be fruitful. You know like we try this and then we try that and then we try something else and then we find eventually something that actually works.

It’s not about the right strategy. It’s not basically about that at all. It is about four different soils-four different hearts. It’s about preparing the soil and knowing the right seed and sowing it in the right place and at the right time. It’s about planting and watering and offering in our fellowship protection from the heat of the battle and the strength and force of the winds of the age. It’s about God-given growth and about being strong in the Lord and in His mighty power. Because if we try to grow this church in our way with our ideas and our thoughts but don’t know and sow the Word we might fail to realise that our thoughts are different from God’s thoughts and His Ways are different from ours and we land up gluing together ways of thinking and behaving that are nothing and I mean absolutely nothing to do with the Kingdom of God instead of seeing God breaking us and humbling us to seek and to follow His Will and bringing into His fold other broken people, like us, who are seeking and finding Him and it’s about our being bound together with them in Jesus, in love and in forgiveness, through the grace and mercy of God. That is what God does.

There is only one God, There is only one King; there is only one Body that is why we sing:
Bind us together Lord; Bind us together With cords that cannot be broken. Bind us together with love.
Made for the glory of God, Purchased by His precious Son; Born with the right to be clean, For Jesus the victory has won.

We are the family of God, We are the promise divine; we are God's chosen desire, we are the glorious new wine.

Remember what we sang just before this message?

“WORDS OF POWER THAT CAN NEVER FAIL; LET THE TRUTH PREVAIL OVER UNBELIEF.”

Our Gospel is not hidden to those whose hearts are opened by the living God. His Word is like dynamite; it is not passive and static but powerful and dynamic and produces fruit. God said through the prophet Isaiah, “My word that goes out from my mouth will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire, and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.” (Isaiah 55:11)

Amen.

We closed with our (offertory) hymn:

O Word of God incarnate, O Wisdom from on high,
O Truth unchanged, unchanging, O Light of our dark sky:
We praise You for the radiance that from the hallowed page;
A lantern to our footsteps, shines on from age to age.

The church from You, our Saviour, received the gift divine,
and still that light is lifted o'er all the earth to shine.

It is the sacred vessel where gems of truth are stored;
it is the heaven-drawn picture of Christ, the living Word.

The Scripture is a banner before God's host unfurled;
it is a shining beacon above the darkling world.

It is the chart and compass that, all life's voyage through,
'mid mists and rocks and quicksands, still guides, O Christ, to You.

Oh, make your church, dear Saviour, a lamp of purest gold,
to bear before the nations Your true light as of old.

Oh, teach your wandering pilgrims by this their path to trace,
till, clouds and darkness ended, they see You face to face.

Authors: unknown, words updated. CCL No 5664

Alec led a prayer of Thanksgiving,

Loving heavenly Father, we thank you for sending your son, you're only son, you're beloved son to the Earth to die, to give his life for our sins that we might be able to experience and know forgiveness of sins. We thank you for raising him to life that he lives in us by the power of the spirit, and that we thank you for all the other good gifts you give us and ask you to bless all those that we give now and give freely, bless them Lord, multiply them for the extension of your kingdom, for the sake of your name, for your honour and glory, for we pray in Jesus name, Amen.

before we joined together saying:

The Lord bless you and keep you, the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you, the Lord turn his face toward you and give you his peace. Amen

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

