



**Welcome to Blackburn Baptist Church, on February 19th 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 he and Joy are sharing the piano playing, with Joy playing the first and last hymns, and Alec a group of 3 songs sandwiched in between them.

**Alec begins as he welcomes everyone**, and explains that we have rearranged the chairs today following our meeting last week, when it was suggested that people sit closer together at the front of the church!

He then read from Colossians 1, verse 15.

"The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross."

**And then prayed again** the prayer he has prayed for the last weeks, as it has not been completely fulfilled, but with repetition God will answer:

"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." Amen

**Our opening hymn is well known:** How great thou art;

Oh Lord my God, when I in awesome wonder

consider all the worlds Thy hands have made,

I see the stars, I hear the mighty thunder, Thy power throughout the universe displayed:

**Then sings my soul, my Saviour God to Thee:**

**'How great Thou art, how great Thou art.**

**'Then sings my soul, my Saviour God to Thee:**

**'How great Thou art, how great Thou art.**

When through the woods, and forest glades I wander,

and hear the birds sing sweetly in the trees;

when I look down, from lofty mountain grandeur

and see the brook, and feel the gentle breeze:

**Then sings my soul....**

And when I think that God, His Son not sparing,  
sent Him to die, I scarce can take it in,  
that on the cross, my burden gladly bearing  
He bled and died to take away my sin.

**Then sings my soul....**

When Christ shall come, with shout of acclamation  
and take me home, what joy shall fill my heart;  
then I shall bow, in humble adoration  
and then proclaim, my God, how great Thou art

**Then sings my soul...**

Songwriter: Stuart Hine, How Great Thou Art lyrics © 1949 Sony/atv Tree Publishing, Universal Music Publishing, I Am They Publishing, Manna Music Inc CCL no 5664

**Tony then shared our notices for the week**, reminding us that there would be a five minute time of prayer immediately following this service, that there will be a Thanksgiving service for the life of Barbara Riding this coming Thursday, and on Saturday the Deacons are having an Awayday, and would appreciate prayer.

**We were then invited to sing again**, with Alec now playing the Clavinova

**Bless the Lord oh my soul, oh my soul,  
worship His Holy name;  
sing like never before, oh my soul,  
I'll worship Your Holy name.**

The sun comes up - it's a new day dawning,  
it's time to sing Your song again.  
Whatever may pass and whatever lies before me,  
let me be singing when the evening comes.

**Bless the Lord oh my soul, oh my soul....**

You're rich in love and You're slow to anger,  
Your name is great and Your heart is kind.  
For all Your goodness I will keep on singing -  
ten thousand reasons for my heart to find.

**Bless the Lord oh my soul, oh my soul....**

And on that day when my strength is failing,  
the end draws near and my time has come,  
still my soul will sing Your praise unending  
ten thousand years and then forevermore.

**Bless the Lord oh my soul, oh my soul...**

Authors: Matt Redman and Jonas Myrin CCLI Song # 6016351 Copyright © 2011 Thankyou Music CCL No 5664

**We then sang a quieter reflective song from the Getty Collection, which begins and ends** ("Intro and Outro") with words being sung to the tune to which we generally sing "I'm not ashamed to own my Lord" Unfortunately we didnt realise there was this long introduction and so tried to sing the first verse, which didnt scan!! We started again!

(INTRO Lord, from the depths I call to You, Lord, hear me from on high  
and give attention to my voice when I for mercy cry.)

Out of the depths I cry to You, in darkest places I will call;  
incline Your ear to me anew and hear my cry for mercy, Lord

Were You to count my sinful ways how could I come before Your throne?  
Yet full forgiveness meets my gaze, I stand redeemed by grace alone.

**I will wait for You, I will wait for You, on Your word, I will rely.  
I will wait for You, surely wait for You, till my soul is satisfied.**

So put your hope in God alone, take courage in His power to save  
completely and forever won by Christ emerging from the grave

**I will wait for You...**

Now He has come to make a way and God Himself has paid the price  
that all who trust in Him today find healing in His sacrifice

**I will wait for You, I will wait for You through the storm and through the night.  
I will wait for You, surely wait for You, for Your love is my delight.**

(OUTRO I pray my soul waits for the Lord, my hope is in His word.

More than the watchman waits for dawn, my soul waits for the Lord.)

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**The last song in this section was less familiar, but we made a valiant attempt to sing it  
- it was challenging at times matching the slides with the words to the music!**

You are here, You're moving in our midst, I worship You, I worship You.

You are here, You're working in this place, I worship You, I worship You.

**Way maker, miracle worker, promise keeper**

**Light in the darkness, my God, that is who You are.**

**Way maker, miracle worker, promise keeper**

**Light in the darkness, my God, that is who You are.**

You are here, touching every heart, I worship You, I worship You.

You are here, healing every heart, I worship You, I worship You.

You are here, turning lives around, I worship You, I worship You.

You are here, mending every heart, I worship You, I worship You.

**Way maker, miracle worker, promise keeper....**

(Even when I don't see it, You're working. Even when I don't feel it, You're working.

You never stop, You never stop working, You never stop, You never stop working.)

Written by Osinachi Okoro, CCLI SONG # 7115744 Copyright © 2016 Integrity Music Europe (PRS) (admin. worldwide at  
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**Shirley reads for us: Psalm 77**

I cried out to God for help; I cried out to God to hear me.

When I was in distress, I sought the Lord;

at night I stretched out untiring hands, and I would not be comforted.

I remembered you, God, and I groaned; I meditated, and my spirit grew faint.

You kept my eyes from closing; I was too troubled to speak.

I thought about the former days, the years of long ago;  
I remembered my songs in the night. My heart meditated and my spirit asked:  
'Will the Lord reject for ever? Will he never show his favour again?  
Has his unfailing love vanished for ever? Has his promise failed for all time?  
Has God forgotten to be merciful? Has he in anger withheld his compassion?'  
Then I thought, 'To this I will appeal:  
the years when the Most High stretched out his right hand.  
I will remember the deeds of the Lord; yes, I will remember your miracles of long ago.  
I will consider all your works and meditate on all your mighty deeds.'  
Your ways, God, are holy. What god is as great as our God?  
You are the God who performs miracles; you display your power among the peoples.  
With your mighty arm you redeemed your people, the descendants of Jacob and Joseph.  
The waters saw you, God,  
the waters saw you and writhed; the very depths were convulsed.  
The clouds poured down water,  
the heavens resounded with thunder; your arrows flashed back and forth.  
Your thunder was heard in the whirlwind,  
your lightning lit up the world; the earth trembled and quaked.  
Your path led through the sea,  
your way through the mighty waters though your footprints were not seen.  
You led your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron.

**Alec brings his message for today:** LOOK TO THE LORD

In the past few weeks we have been looking together at what God is saying to us through the book of the prophet Isaiah chapters 40-43 because I think that is really why we are here. To praise Him for who He is and what He does, but to listen to what He is saying.

When I was a bit younger I remember going usually at the end of the service to the preacher who in those days stood at the exit door and saying "That was a really nice sermon, thank you very much" and went home and was really quite happy. But I'm not really sure how much it changed my life. Because that wasn't my real emphasis. My main emphasis as a rather younger person was to think is it theologically correct, is it reformed enough or evangelical enough or charismatic enough or something else enough? Could we understand what he was saying? Were the loudspeakers working properly? Did the person in front of me behave themselves? Did they sing in tune? What really matters is what He says to us. The leadership team has the opinion and it's only our opinion that the best question to ask ourselves after a meeting like this is, "What did God say to you today?" I don't think we are arrogant in that because we ask ourselves the same question; and I ask myself that question which is "what is God saying to me today?"

In the past few weeks we have been looking together at what God is saying to us through the book of the prophet Isaiah chapters 40-43: It's really good and I would have gone on to Isaiah 45 and to Isaiah 53 but I think we should do something different.

Let's continue to share with one another how God is speaking to us into our lives at this time. Let us open our hearts to Him expecting Him to speak to us, to lead us and guide us. This week we are beginning a short three-week series on encouraging one another and our theme today is the key to this, "Look to the Lord."

If we think we are completely self-sufficient, if we are self-satisfied, if our self-esteem is so high that we will allow nobody else to correct us or admonish us; if we have never felt discouraged,

down or depressed then we will probably not relate so easily and straightforwardly to what we are hearing this morning.

The Psalm that Shirley just read to us, Psalm 77, expresses intense emotional crisis on the part of God's people. All of us who have known the enveloping pressure of a dark mood can be grateful for the openness of this fellow sufferer whose memories bring out tormenting comparisons coloured with the despair with which he is presently surrounded. It is a Psalm of very personal distress and its questions are consequently equally very tense. Verse 2 reads: "When I was in distress."

So wait a minute. Isn't that us; isn't that you and I? Are we not living in a day of trouble? Are we in distress? Are we suffering sleepless nights, awake in the night, troubled, not finding comfort, distressed, crying out to God and praying with outstretched arms? The day of trouble, the day of distress may be because of the death of a loved one. It may be because of grief that we have never worked through thoroughly. It may be because of our fears and anxieties over our physical and mental condition or that of our loved ones. It may be because of feelings and emotions stemming from any one or more of a very large palette of difficult situations.

In the Psalms and especially in this one we find emotional honesty. Emotional honesty which doesn't pretend to feel better than it is. It doesn't feel sorry for itself and drown in self-pity but it doesn't pretend to feel better than it is. In Psalm 77 the Psalmist manages to come to some comfort and encouragement in the midst of his trouble, but it is a challenging struggle.

"I cried out to God for help; I cried out to God to hear me. When I was in distress, I sought the Lord; at night I stretched out untiring hands, and I would not be comforted. I remembered you, God, and I groaned; I meditated, and my spirit grew faint." (vv. 1-3)

Verse 4 gives us a widening picture of how profound the distress is, how profound the grief and anguish is: "You kept my eyes from closing; I was too troubled to speak."

Of course we never experience this kind of anguish do we? Or do we? If we have times like these where do we actually go? Do we pretend; do we hide; do we separate ourselves from those with whom we are familiar because we feel they will definitely simply not understand the reality of our lives if we share it with them?

Or knowing the reality of our life situation do we try and possibly even succeed to avoid facing up to it?

Or do we not even recognise the reality of our life situation, its conflicts and their probable or possible causes?

Most important of all do we throw out the bath with the bath water so to speak and kick God out of our lives, give Him a cold shoulder, live a life of lip service to the living God or concentrate our thoughts and our feelings on those "gods" we have now remade in our image, deny the reality of God's existence or divide our allegiance between Him and other so-called "gods". That is what we politely might call a "worst case scenario" isn't it.

I hope and pray that these elements of a worst case scenario are never exhibited in our lives and that we demonstrate what the Psalmist begins to say in verses 5 and 6 which gives us kind of a hint of where he is going; he is beginning to cast his mind back to the faithfulness of God. This is not usually an easy way to go; it is not an easy decision to take to look to the Lord.

We may be very familiar with the life experience of Job, whom we encounter in the Old Testament, not as a mythical character in a made-up story but as a real-life genuine historical person. Job lost his children, his possessions and finally his health. But that wasn't really the last blow that connected with his heart and mind, with his soul and his very being, for his wife then said to him, "Are you still holding on to your integrity? Curse God and die!"

You know how Job lovingly responded to his wife? He said, "You are talking like a foolish woman. Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?" Job put God first, even before his wife, and in doing all this the Bible tells us he did not sin in what he said.

Verse 5 reads: "I thought about the former days, the years of long ago." Now you may think I am doing a prompt U-turn on what we said 2 weeks ago that we should forget and not dwell on the past. But we are not doing that. God is doing a new thing amongst us. And I hope our perception and awareness of that is growing as I believe under God it is. But you may also remember that I said we should never forget what God has done for us in the past, and that is true too. The Psalmist says he remembered his songs in the night. Waking up early and singing songs of praise or simply lying awake at night and going through songs of worship is not a false dream even when we know from Psalm 127:2 that God gives sleep to those he loves.

In verse 6 we read: "My heart made a diligent search." "My heart mused and my spirit enquired."

Tough questions, questions that don't go away on a dark night, that are with you when you wake up in the morning and your heart is dark. Verses 7-9

Extreme questions, we feel completely abandoned by the Lord, judged by the Lord, forgotten by the Lord, punished by the Lord; whatever is going on we feel utterly alone.

It's OK to ask God questions. We learn from the Psalms that emotionally and in prayer in the heart of our being we do not have to pretend with God. We don't have to pretend to be other than we are.

God never objects to His people coming to Him honestly.

We should nevertheless aim at coming to Him in faith; I mean if we are coming to God at all we must at least have a little faith Hebrews 11:6 says: "without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him."

In Exodus 17 we read: Then all the congregation of the sons of Israel journeyed by stages from the wilderness of Sin, according to the command of the LORD, and camped at Rephidim, and there was no water for the people to drink. Therefore the people quarrelled with Moses and said, "Give us water that we may drink." And Moses said to them, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the LORD?" But the people thirsted there for water; and they grumbled against Moses and said, "Why, now, have you brought us up from Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?" So Moses cried out to the LORD, saying, "What shall I do to this people? A little more and they will stone me." Then the LORD said to Moses, "Pass before the people and take with you some of the elders of Israel; and take in your hand your staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. "Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb; and you shall strike the rock, and water will come out of it that the people may drink." And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel. He named the place Massah and Meribah because of the quarrel of the sons of Israel, and because they tested the LORD, saying, "Is the LORD among us, or not?"

The real mistake of Israel, the genuine error they were making, the wrong which the people of God were committing in Exodus 17 is that they weren't praying; they were muttering amongst themselves. Now I want to say to you today that I personally and the leadership team as a whole are massively encouraged by the support for the new church prayer chain. 38 people have registered to be included on this. 38. You can still join if you haven't joined yet, simply speak to any member of the leadership team or write to us at [enquiry@blackburnbaptistchurch.co.uk](mailto:enquiry@blackburnbaptistchurch.co.uk). Furthermore we are meeting together for prayer in small groups after each service and praying together whenever we meet each other. This is very significant for the stability and growth of our little church. It is one of the pillars on which God is renewing our fellowship and inspiring others to join us. But God's people were not praying at Rephidim in Exodus 17, they were complaining behind God's back. What was the heart of their complaint? The basic feature, the central thrust, the main characteristic of their complaint was, "Is God with us or not?" It was a complete lack of faith, a complete abandonment of God.

But if you come to God honestly with faith in your heart you can say what is really in and on your heart. And this is what the Psalms say again and again and this is really extremely encouraging.

God has promised His covenant with His people will not fail. Remember we talked about that last week.

We ask ourselves the question has His unfailing love failed? Of course this cannot be the case. Unfailing love cannot fail. We know that but we often don't feel it.

When you begin to wonder if God's promises are reliable then you are really in a deep valley of deep challenging experiences. It makes us perhaps so disorientated. Maybe we thin and feel:

I am suffering so have I done anything wrong? Is God punishing me with this suffering? Is he even being vengeful to me?

When the present is awful and you have questions about God's love and care, remember what He has done in the past.

By remembering, by recalling, by meditating on what He has done in the past it will help us to be reassured that He won't abandon us now.

Is God mighty? Yes He is! He defeated Pharaoh, he opened the Red Sea.

Is God loving and faithful? Yes He is! He remembered Israel. Brought them out of Egypt and led them on.

Then in verse 13 we get not a doubting question but a faith-filled question, "What God is so great as our God?"

As you know in Exodus 15: 11 it reads: "Who is like You among the gods, O LORD? Who is like You, majestic in holiness, awesome in praises, working wonders?"

You see part of what the deliverance from Egypt is all about is the defeat of the Egyptian gods.

The Egyptians had more gods than you could remember the names of. Pharaoh himself was the "living God".

What are we thinking about here? What are we praying through here? What are we meditating on here? The meditation in the first place is not on the victory and not on the power but on the darkness of the moment which is exactly what would be somewhat encouraging to someone in a



very black moment of their lives. We are not only raising our hands and our hearts in praise to God because of the victory He has won, though I hope we are doing that. We are not only getting on our knees and from our hearts singing praises to the King and Kings and Lord and Lords because of His overwhelming power demonstrated in our hearts and lives though I hope also that we are doing that. But when we look back to other dark moments in our lives, when we experience again and again dark moments in these days what we see is not defeat but victory. READ verses 16-18. Our darkest moments are not defeats, but the victories that God has won for us and particularly in us and through us.

I have just two more short points today and then I am finished, but let us continue to listen to what God is saying to us.

Psalm 77:19a reads: "Your path led through the sea, your way through the mighty waters"

What would we have said to God? What would we have said to the leaders of God's people?

We are going where? We are doing what? We are like going to walk through the sea? Are you OK Moses? Maybe you need a rest. Hey, Moses you are well over 80 now, it's probably time for you to retire! Old men dream dreams and all that but this is kind of more like a nightmare. Thank you for all you've done and goodbye! Well of course they didn't have the book of the prophet Joel chapter 2 verse 28 nor Acts 2:17 neither with them in Moses' day but yes old men do dream dreams, dreams given to them by God, visions inspired by the Holy Spirit of how God is going to work in Galligreaves, even in Blackburn with Darwen, even that He is already preparing His workers for the harvest. Yes we are a praying church and He will answer, He is responding to our humble prayers in dependence on Him.

So the leaders say we trust God; we go that way; and the way opened up. "Your path led through the sea, your way through the mighty waters."

The way opened up; it was God who opened it up, you were leading us but we didn't see you, we didn't see your footprints. You see it is like a footnote printed in small almost unreadable letters at the base of a lengthy page of narrative. "YET YOUR FOOTPRINTS WERE UNSEEN"; this is so powerful. Often God leads His people and it is optically obvious, crystal clear and virtually visible to all that He is doing it, like in the wilderness with the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night.

But here the emphasis is on what they didn't see.

What is our experience of God's working in our lives?

It's great to have some things you do see but sometimes we'd like to see more.

And here the question is "Why couldn't we see God?" He led us, but we couldn't see His footprints. There were no footprints of God visible in the sand!

So we just had to walk! We just had to walk through the water but we didn't drown. Didn't we read that last week in Isaiah 43? "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Saviour."

Comfort and encouragement comes to people in all sorts of ways when they are in distress.

God is with you. God is opening the way. But you may not see the footprints.

God's footprints couldn't be seen, but God's servants were there to help, to lead and to guide.



They point those who are in distress, those who are sorrowing, and those who are suffering to a place where they can be helped, be encouraged and strengthened.

Verse 20 reads "You led your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron." That is I believe how it should be. Let us together look to the Lord and continue moving forward in prayer and according to the Word of the Lord in the dynamic and unending power and might of His Holy Spirit within us. Amen.

### **Becky leads our Prayers of Intercession.**

Dear Heavenly Father,

As we gather together this morning we lift up our hearts to you, to thank you for your love and protection over each of us.

It is becoming increasingly difficult Father, for us not to despair at the state of our world. Everywhere around us, there is sadness and despair, in one way or another. It is devastating about the earthquake in Turkey and Syria. The sheer number of lives and families lost and destroyed. It is so hard to listen to the news and see the footage. At the same time though, we see the wonderful work being done by the rescuers. People who have never given up, working all day and all night, some of them, in the hope of finding family members still alive, and they have! After an unbelievable length of time, that they have been buried under rubble. Hallelujah! How quickly has been a response to donate money, something we can do immediately. Quick response to clothes and tents and medical treatment for the injured. May this continue Father God.

Each day when we read our papers and watch our evening news, there are more fresh tragedies. We have watched avidly for the missing mum Nicola. We feel so sad for the little girls and Nicola's partner. Please Lord get into the mind of the "gossipmongers" who are sending out damaging 'vibes'. Please bring this troubled lady home.

We pray for the troubled families of the fatal attack on Brianna Grey. Three families are shattered, parents heartbroken. One young life taken away by two other young children, too young and immature to think straight. Lord these sorts of tragedies seem to becoming every day occurrences. We had the terrible shootings this week of the Dad turning the gun on his wife and child and himself. It is heartbreaking when we have to say goodbye to our loved ones always Lord, but an untimely death, a needless death, makes it so much more difficult. Lord, please let these families that have been ripped apart, feel your comfort. Wrap your arms around them tightly and stay close to them.

We pray also for families nearer to home this morning Lord. We thank you for the life of our dear Barbara. We know that Barbara is with you Lord and at peace. We asked that you stay in Barbara's family on Thursday as she is laid to rest. We ask you to lay your healing hand on all the physically poorly, such as Morag's Allan, Don, Sam, and many more. On those waiting for operations and treatments of one kind and another. We pray also for those mentally sick and troubled, of us. We turn to you Lord. We weep with you, you comfort us, we cry, you drive our tears. Please help those lonely and confused, who feel they have no one, to come to know you Lord. To feel you holding them, weeping with them.

As I bring my prayers to a conclusion Heavenly Father, I pray for our church here at Bethesda. For each and every person present. Please give encouragement to our Pastor Alec. Give strength and good health to our deacons. Each and everyone of them work so very hard. Bring us new people Lord. Give us opportunities to encourage and talk to newcomers. Give us boldness to talk about our love for you and your love for us. Help us to reach out to them and for them to see something in us that they would like to feel. Each member of us in this church love and trust each other. We are there for each other. Please let this happen Lord.

Help us to make the right decisions Lord God. We pray these prayers in your precious name, Heavenly Father. Amen

**Our final offertory hymn was played by Joy:**

Praise the Lord! ye heav'ns adore him; praise him angels, in the height;  
Sun and moon, rejoice before him; praise him, all ye stars of light.  
Praise the Lord! for he has spoken; worlds his mighty voice obeyed;  
laws which never shall be broken for their guidance he has made.

Praise the Lord! for he is glorious; never shall his promise fail;  
God has made his saints victorious; sin and death shall not prevail.  
Praise the God of our salvation! Hosts on high his pow'r proclaim;  
heav'n, and earth, and all creation, laud and magnify his name.

Worship, honour, glory, blessing, Lord, we offer unto thee;  
young and old, thy praise expressing, in glad homage bend the knee.  
All the saints in heav'n adore thee, we would bow before thy throne;  
as thine angels serve before thee, so on earth thy will be done.

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**After a short prayer of thanks, Alec invited us to sing the Doxology "Praise God from whom all blessings flow" to the slightly less familiar tune we sang last week.**

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.

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**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.**