



Welcome to Blackburn Baptist Church, on January 1st 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 also plays the piano, and concludes with Holy Communion.

Alec welcomed everyone, he had thought of saying Happy New Year in different languages but decided against it!

We were invited to join in song for our **Opening Hymn, which Alec played on the piano.**

O God, our help in ages past, our hope for years to come,  
our shelter from the stormy blast, and our eternal home.

Beneath the shadow of Thy throne still may we dwell secure;  
sufficient is Thine arm alone, and our defence is sure.

Before the hills in order stood, or earth received her frame,  
from everlasting Thou art God, to endless years the same.

A thousand ages in Thy sight are like an evening gone;  
short as the watch that ends the night before the rising sun.

Time, like an ever rolling stream, bears all its sons away;  
they fly, forgotten, as a dream dies at the opening day.

Our God, our help in ages past, our hope for years to come,  
be Thou our guard while troubles last, and our eternal home.

Authors: Isaac Watts, William Croft CCLI SONG # 43152 Copyrights Words and music: Public Domain CCL no 5664

**We were then invited to continue in song with a video shown on the screen:**

How great the chasm that lay between us,  
how high the mountain I could not climb.  
In desperation, I turned to heaven  
and spoke your name into the night.  
Then through the darkness  
your loving kindness  
tore through the shadows of my soul,  
the work is finished, the end is written:  
Jesus Christ, my living hope.

Who could imagine so great a mercy?  
What heart could fathom such boundless grace?  
The God of ages stepped down from glory  
to wear my sin and bear my shame.  
The cross has spoken, I am forgiven,  
the king of kings calls me His own:  
beautiful saviour, I'm yours forever:  
Jesus Christ, my living hope.  
    Hallelujah, praise the one who set me free!  
    Hallelujah, death has lost its grip on me!  
    You have broken every chain - there's salvation in your name,  
    Jesus Christ, my living hope.

Then came the morning that sealed the promise,  
your buried body began to breathe:  
out of the silence, the roaring lion  
declared the grave has no claim on me.  
Then came the morning that sealed the promise  
your buried body began to breathe -  
out of the silence, the roaring lion  
declared the grave has no claim on me -  
Jesus, yours is the victory, whoa!  
    Hallelujah, praise the one who set me free

Author: Brian Johnson, Phil Wickham Ccli Song # 7106807 Copyrights©2017 Phil Wickham Music (Admin. By / Small Stone Media Bv, Holland (Admin. In The Uk/Eire By Song Solutions Www.Songsolutions.Org)), Simply Global Songs (Admin. By / Small Stone Media Bv, Holland (Admin. In The Uk/Eire By Song Solutions Www.Songsolutions.Org)), Sing My Songs (Admin. By / Small Stone Media Bv, Holland (Admin. In The Uk/Eire By Song Solutions Www.Songsolutions.Org)) Bethel Music Publishing (Admin. By Song Solutions Living Hope Lyrics © Bethel Music Publishing Ccl No 5664  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hqs2W8JepIm> Video

### **Our prayers were led by Becky:**

Dear Heavenly Father, Thank you for the wonderful gift of your son, Saviour of the world, Jesus. As we have celebrated his birth this Christmas day, our with gratitude and thanks for your truly wonderful gift. How truly blessed we are, are. We can come to you just as we are, with all our feelings and faults, and know for absolute certainty that you still love us. In fact love us enough to give your son, our Saviour, to die on a cross for us.

I learned anew this Christmas just how much I want to please you. Just how important you are in my life. I learned how much better my day is when I have a chat with you before anyone else. You calm me, Heavenly Father, and give me direction in my life.

You give me a vision on what is important and what is trivial. You give me a sense of awareness and compassion. I feel happier within myself. You give me self-worth and confidence and a knowledge that I am really and truly loved.

If anyone here today feels sad or lonely, please talk to our Heavenly Father. Tell him how you feel. Nothing is trivial to God. He will be happy to listen to what you have to say, He is happy

to know you have chosen to speak to him. You won't feel foolish I promise. God won't 'pass on' any confidences we confess to. Believe me you will feel better, and God will help you. We may not know exactly when the problem we carried was lifted from you, but you will start to heal, because our Lord and Saviour knows our every need. That isn't to say that we are not moved and upset by the state of the world today. We all have a moan about the cost of living at present, about heating bills and food bills. Even still we do have food in our bellies and our cupboards. Third world countries often don't know, literally, where their next meal is coming from. We moan about the price of fuel for our cars, we can't deny it is draining us. Nevertheless we do have a car. In Africa for example they walk miles just to collect water for their families. I know we grumble, myself included, about the state of our NHS. From recent experiences with my husband John we really do need to applaud the nurses, doctors, Health Centres and ambulance people. We do thank you Father in Heaven for these committed people. Thank you Father for all the committed local people and small businesses who have shown kindness and friendship to a lot of people in dire need of heat and food. Thank you for our church here at Bethesda, for our Deacons and Alec our Pastor. Thank you for each other, for the love and kindness that is between us all. As a church we ask that Bethesda will grow in this next year. Its doors are always open, waiting with open arms to become any new visitors. This morning then Lord, I say thank you for all the love in my life, from family, friends and church. Most of all Lord, for your great love for me, for us. I am so blessed. In Jesus name, Amen.

**Alec then introduced our Offering hymn, again shown as a video on the screen.** This version had a distinct Irish lilt (after all, it is a traditional Irish tune!) with pipes and drums.

Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart;  
naught be all else to me, save that thou art -  
thou my best thought, by day or by night;  
waking or sleeping, thy presence my light.

Be thou my wisdom, and thou my true word;  
I ever with thee and thou with me, Lord.  
Thou my great Father; thine own may I be,  
thou in me dwelling and I one with thee.

Be thou my breastplate, my sword for the fight  
be thou my whole armour, be thou my true might  
be thou my soul's shelter, be thou my strong tower;  
O raise thou me heavenward, great power of my power.

Riches I heed not, nor vain, empty praise;  
thou mine inheritance, now and always;  
thou and thou only the first in my heart,  
high King of heaven, my treasure thou art.

High King of heaven, thou heavens bright sun,  
grant me its joys after victory is won;  
Heart of my own heart, whatever befall,  
still be my vision, O Ruler of all.

**Victor then read our Bible reading for today: Psalm 90**

"A prayer of Moses the man of God.

Lord, you have been our dwelling place throughout all generations.  
Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the whole world,  
from everlasting to everlasting you are God.  
You turn people back to dust, saying, "Return to dust, you mortals."  
A thousand years in your sight are like a day that has just gone by,  
or like a watch in the night.  
Yet you sweep people away in the sleep of death—  
they are like the new grass of the morning:  
In the morning it springs up new, but by evening it is dry and withered.  
We are consumed by your anger and terrified by your indignation.  
You have set our iniquities before you,  
our secret sins in the light of your presence.  
All our days pass away under your wrath; we finish our years with a moan.  
Our days may come to seventy years, or eighty, if our strength endures;  
yet the best of them are but trouble and sorrow,  
for they quickly pass, and we fly away.  
If only we knew the power of your anger!  
Your wrath is as great as the fear that is your due.  
Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.  
Relent, Lord! How long will it be? Have compassion on your servants.  
Satisfy us in the morning with your unfailing love,  
that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days.  
Make us glad for as many days as you have afflicted us,  
for as many years as we have seen trouble.  
May your deeds be shown to your servants, your splendour to their children.  
May the favour of the Lord our God rest on us;  
establish the work of our hands for us— yes, establish the work of our hands."

**Alec prepared to share his message for today**, as he invited us to lift our voices in song  
once more (with him playing the piano)

All my hope on God is founded; he doth still my trust renew,  
me through change and chance he guideth, only good and only true.  
God unknown, he alone calls my heart to be his own.

Pride of man and earthly glory, sword and crown betray his trust;  
what with care and toil he buildeth, tower and temple fall to dust.  
But God's power, hour by hour, is my temple and my tower.

God's great goodness aye endureth, deep his wisdom, passing thought:  
splendour, light and life attend him, beauty springeth out of naught.  
Evermore from his store newborn worlds rise and adore.

Daily doth the Almighty Giver bounteous gifts on us bestow;  
his desire our soul delighteth, pleasure leads us where we go.  
Love doth stand at his hand; joy doth wait on his command.

Still from man to God eternal sacrifice of praise be done,  
high above all praises praising for the gift of Christ, his Son.  
Christ doth call one and all: ye who follow shall not fall.

Authors: Joachim Neander, Robert Seymour Bridges CCLI Song # 2578257 Copyright: words and music Public Domain, CCL No 5664

**Message:** "New Year, New Message?"

January 1, 2023. A New Year. As they say in Japan明けましておめでとうございます. Or as younger Japanese people might sayあけおめ! Maybe younger people don't have the energy or patience for such a long greeting as more experienced elderly Japanese people do.

A New Year has begun and at least one thing hasn't changed as of course many people are delighted with the possibilities of change offered by making and carrying out New Year resolutions. It is a paradox isn't it; the unchangeable quality of the possibility of change!

But if we look ahead to the end of January and ask ourselves whether these resolutions will have indeed led to the changes we sought to make I think we may be disappointed.

In this New Year we may be living in a new context for our world is not static but dynamic and the ways of expressing and communicating our message may change, but the message itself does not change. In Malachi 3:6 we read, "I am the Lord and I do not change." Hebrews 13:8 reads, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever". The Word of God is unchanged this year and is indeed unchangeable.

Last year on the second Sunday in Advent we looked at Isaiah 40 vv. 1-5 and I said then that we would today go further with this chapter and these thoughts which is what we are about to do; and indeed next week we will pursue this theme in our commitment service to which it fits perfectly.

You may remember that last time we looked at a message of comfort and joy but it followed a message of judgement. Now we are all familiar with the question, "which came first, the chicken or the egg?" and I am not going to ask this morning for a vote on that but which message came first? Was it the message of comfort and joy or the message of judgement?

Let's put it another way; when someone close to you comes and says, do you want to hear the good news or the bad news first how do you normally respond? In the context of Isaiah it worked this way. First of all God gave His people the bad news and then the good news.

In Isaiah 39, Isaiah the prophet is speaking to King Hezekiah, and he tells him, "The time will surely come when everything in your palace, and all that your predecessors have stored up until this day, will be carried off to Babylon. Nothing will be left, says the Lord." And then he goes on to describe the significance of what's going to happen in the exile. That's chapter 39 and that's the bad news. When we go directly into chapter 40 we see the Lord comforting His people; and that is the good news. But that is the right order to go in.

Now many people think that Isaiah is actually two separate books. Here is how their argument goes: Isaiah 1-39 and 40-66 are so different in their content that they simply cannot have been written by the same person. The first section is full of judgment and the second is full of comfort.

But when we read straight on from chapter 39 directly into chapter 40 without a break, because, after all, there were no breaks in the original text we realise that the word of the prophet Isaiah in relationship to the exile of the people, the word that has declared their great difficulty and the darkness that will come upon them, is immediately followed up by the story of God's comfort.

As I have already said here several times the story of the Old Testament could be summed up in relationship to the people of God by a consideration of just two things. One would be the exodus from Egypt, where God comes and buys back his people and brings them out, and then the restoration from the exile in which they found themselves. In between were also the judges who were sent whenever the nation of Israel had gone off the rails to challenge them to return to the Lord their God.

This might sound a bit complicated but it isn't; it is very straightforward, but we need to understand it clearly. We need to see that the intentions of God for his people triumphed over their disobedience, that the intentions of God for his people triumphed over their rebellions and the intentions of God for us, his people, triumph over our weaknesses.

I think we cannot understand the height and depth and breadth of the love of God for us until we really have begun to understand how evil our hearts are without him.

This is kind of the ABC of the Gospel; and maybe we think we are well beyond that now; perhaps we think even that we know not just the ABC but the whole alphabet of the Gospel inside out. We might say we know it off by heart. But God knows our hearts; He knows we wander off again and again. But every day He welcomes us when we say from our hearts, "forgive us as we forgive others." God is faithful and reliable. If we confess our sins, he forgives them and cleanses us from everything we've done wrong; and if we don't he doesn't.

Isaiah 40:6 reads: "A voice says, "Cry out." And I said, "What shall I cry?""

Now if we go round saying we hear voices it could be a little difficult. Hearing voices or auditory hallucinations can be a common symptom of mental illnesses such as schizophrenia or other forms of psychosis can't they. But if God is speaking to us we shouldn't deny it or hide it. Schizophrenia is a serious mental disorder in which the person may not always be able to distinguish their own thoughts and ideas from reality and may interpret reality abnormally but when God speaks to us directly through His Word this is not an illness. He is real, His Word is real and His promises are real.

Remember Genesis chapter 1? Again and again I think at least 10 times in that one chapter it reads "God said". He is the God who speaks.

You see at the end of verse 5 last time when we looked at this passage on the second Sunday in Advent we read, "For the mouth of the Lord has spoken." So this is followed in verse 6 by:

"A voice says, "Cry out." And I said, "What shall I cry?"" And then God says to Isaiah: (read 6b-8a). That is the bad news, the difficult news, the hard-to-take bit isn't it. Our life is like a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes, (James 4:14b).

Why are our lives on the earth so short? It is because of the judgement of God on our wrongdoing. Statisticians may ask you what the death rate is in Blackburn or in Montego Bay or in California or in Eastern Europe or somewhere else but my answer would always be the same; it's 1 per person. Everybody dies once. Everybody should be able to realise this by a casual glance around any village or town; and yes it is very sad.

But despite our sadness and our frequent general unwillingness or inability to talk about these things this is an important message for everyone. For it is the truth. To know the truth is to know Jesus Christ who to know is perfect freedom. He is the light of the world; He is the light of life. To the Jews who

had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." (John 8.31-32)

As the Apostle Paul writes in his letter to the church in Rome, what may be known about God is clear to all, for God has made it clear to all mankind. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities –his eternal power and divine nature-have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. (Romans 1: 20)

Death is not the intended consequence of God's creation. Death is God's judgment upon sin: "In the day that you shall eat of this you will surely die." (Genesis 1:17)

The natural man does not like to hear things like these does he. So he cuts out parts of the Bible that say this but at his peril. I mentioned it last time but when a funeral takes place people often choose to read from Psalm 90, but "from it" not "all of it". You see we might miss out verses 7-12, not to make the reading shorter but because we don't like what it says for example in verse 9, as was read to us, "Who knows the power of your anger? For your wrath is as great as the fear that is due to you."

Our natural mind is opposed to God. By nature, we have no interest in God. . We don't want to hear what God may be saying to us even though our lives are racing on towards his judgment. "Everyone must die once, and after that be judged by God."(Hebrews 9:27)

You see there is no reincarnation. But there is hope of new life in Jesus Christ; to all who receive him, to those who believe in his name, he gave the right to become children of God,(John 1:12)

But you see we cannot travel around, move around, be in contact with people of all kinds of backgrounds and experiences and remain so to speak in the neutral zone. Nor can anyone else. There is a heaven and there is a hell, a life with God and a life without God. It is not a matter of opinions but of the absolute authority of the unchangeable Word of God.

Many pastors, many preachers, many ministers, even if they all would believe in its existence, are frightened of talking about hell. It's not the way to fill churches they might say. We don't want to put people off coming into a nice atmosphere, we don't want to spoil people's appetite for the truth. One of my colleagues wrote this book, "Whatever happened to hell?" Well of course that is not a book that I like to recommend, but we should not ignore or worse water down or even distort the truth. I was given this book as a present by a member of one of our sending churches who had it sent to our address in Japan to be there when we arrived to begin a new ministry in a city of 70,000 people but without a church. For you see if there is no need for forgiveness because we are without sin, if there is no need for new life because we are not going to die anyway it makes a nonsense and a mockery of the Cross and the Resurrection. But if we are still in our sins, still living at odds with our Creator, still without hope in this world and the next, if we are living in and going to hell then we need to know why and how we escape from it. Sibylle and I never thought of going to Japan to tell the Japanese how to run their economy or to explain to them how they could adapt their cultural practices to fit in with the west or how they could change their writing system so as to make it more intelligible to outsiders. We went because God called us to speak about our need of a Saviour, of One who could set us free from our sins and deliver us from hell. I say again I think we cannot understand the height and depth and breadth of the love of God for us until we really have begun to understand how evil our hearts are without him.

I am sure we have all read or at least heard of the Narnia stories written by CS Lewis, a very gracious and gifted author. If you follow this link which is now on the screen and which you will be able to find in the text version of this message today:

<https://www.cslewis.com/heaven-and-hell/>

you will see how in many of his writings, for example in "Mere Christianity", "The Great Divorce", "The Screwtape Letters", in "Miracles" and in "The Problem of Pain" he who wrote the Narnia stories and a



well-known science-fiction trilogy highlights the reality of hell, the necessity to talk, inform and teach about it and the fear of believing ministers and churches to do just that. The link is in its length equivalent to one side of an A4 printed text with just 10 interesting points. But he writes very sensitively and cautiously though with confidence and assurance and I recommend this wholeheartedly to you.

But we finally reach the good news. Maybe you were thinking I'd forgotten about that. In verse 8 we read "but the word of our God stands forever." What a big "but" that is!

It is tidings of comfort and joy to those who are otherwise lost for evermore.

By the way one of the methods we can use to learn about what is written in passages of the Old Testament is to find out what people have done with it in the New Testament. You see in this case Peter quotes this exact section when in his first chapter he goes on to say, "the grass withers, and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord remains forever." And this word is the good news that was preached to you." "The good news that was preached to you." The Word of God is not simply there as a contrast to the shortness and weakness of our earthly existence, as a contrast to the shortness and weakness of our earthly lives, not simply there as the contrast to human brevity and frailty but the Word of God is there as the cure to our brevity and our frailty. As 1 Peter 1:3-4 says: "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you." This was the message then, and it is the message now.

Our message is of hope for a helpless world; of hope in the world for those who will put their trust in our loving, compassionate, merciful and caring God and of hope for life everlasting with God thereafter.

God makes all things new; but He does not change the message itself.

The Japanese psychiatrist Michiaki Horie and his wife, the music teacher, children's book author and radio journalist Hildegard, wrote the following words for long-suffering people, which I have translated for you into English.

"What is chaos in our eyes may look very different from God's perspective. We only see a minute part of a very large but as yet incomplete picture. And what we see is out of context, maybe completely confused and perhaps totally contrary to our thoughts and understanding. But that does not mean that God sees this matter in the same way. Our helplessness does not mean that God is helpless. Rather, we should almost be watching with longing in expectation to see what God makes of this situation. That is hope."

God is making something of our circumstances and interceding on our behalf. God holds the year ahead and each one of us in His hands.

In Revelation 21:1-3 we read: "God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away." Hallelujah! Amen.

### **Alec played our closing hymn:**

Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine!  
Oh, what a foretaste of glory divine!  
Heir of salvation, purchase of God,  
born of his Spirit, washed in his blood.



This is my story, this is my song,  
praising my Saviour all the day long.  
This is my story, this is my song,  
praising my Saviour all the day long.

Perfect communion, perfect delight,  
visions of rapture now burst on my sight.  
Angels descending bring from above  
echoes of mercy, whispers of love.  
This is my story, this is my song....

Perfect submission, all is at rest.  
I in my Saviour am happy and bless'd,  
watching and waiting, looking above,  
filled with his goodness, lost in his love.  
This is my story, this is my song....

Authors Fanny Jane Crosby, Phoebe Palmer Knapp Ccli Song # 22324 Copyrightswords: Public Domain Music: Public Domain Ccl No 5664

**Alec moved to the Communion table at the front and led Communion, saying words similar to:**

The apostle Paul tells us of the institution of the Lord's Supper:  
For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you,  
that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread,  
and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said,  
'This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.'  
In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying,  
'This cup is the new covenant in my blood.  
Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.'  
For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup,  
you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

(1 Corinthians 11.23-26)

**Alec then lifted the bread** and broke it with the words

Jesus said, 'This is my body which is for you; do this in memory of me'.

**Alec invited Janet** to come and distribute the bread, cubes of which were on a platter with words such as

Take this in remembrance that Christ died for you and feed on him in your heart by faith with thanksgiving.

**Alec then raised the cup** with such words as

In the same way,  
he took the cup after supper, and said:  
'This cup is the new covenant sealed by my blood. Whenever you drink it,  
do this in memory of me.'

**Alec himself then distributed the wine**, which we retained until all had been served, then Alec invited us to drink together:

Drink this and remember that Christ's blood was shed for you and be thankful.

**After a few moments of silence, Alec closed the service** by asking us to join together saying:

**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.**

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

**FOLLOWING TODAY'S WORSHIP SERVICE  
ALL ARE WELCOME TO JOIN TOGETHER IN THE COMMUNITY ROOM**

**CHURCH MEMBERS MEETING SUNDAY JANUARY 15 12:45**

**SERVICE OF WORSHIP AND COMMITMENT  
SUNDAY JANUARY 8 10:45 FOLLOWED BY CHURCH LUNCH**

**NEW LIFE CHURCH INTERNATIONAL**

**FRIDAY JANUARY 6 PRAYER MEETING/BIBLE STUDY 20:00-22:00**

**SATURDAY JANUARY 7 WORSHIP SERVICE 17:00-19:00**