



Welcome to Blackburn Baptist Church, on January 22nd 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 focusses on the work of the Leprosy Mission. Joy plays the piano as we prepare for worship. Great is thy faithfulness.

(The sanctuary had been re-arranged slightly differently today, in preparation for a 5 minute time of prayer following the service, as agreed at the Church Members Meeting last Sunday. All are invited to join in this time of prayer, although refreshments will be available as usual for those who wish to go straight through to the hall)

Our service begins as Alec quotes: "O Jesus, I have promised to serve thee to the end; be thou forever near me, my Master and my friend; I shall not fear the battle if thou art by my side, nor wander from the pathway if thou wilt be my guide," and prays: Loving Heavenly Father, we come to you this morning with joyful hearts for you are our God and you never change. you are the same yesterday, today and forever. You are the everlasting God, all-knowing and all powerful. You are kind, compassionate, merciful and loving. You are faithful, just, righteous, jealous and holy. This morning we praise your name together, we worship and adore you. Open our ears to hear your word, open our eyes to see your face, open our mouths to sing your praise. Lead and guide us together we pray. In Jesus name. Amen.

He then welcomes everyone, including some attending Bethesda for the first time. He then shares the notices for the week before we join in our opening hymn: sung to the tune Solid Rock and played by Joy:

My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus blood and righteousness;
I dare not trust the sweetest frame but wholly trust in Jesus name.
On Christ the solid rock, I stand,
all other ground is sinking sand, all other ground is sinking sand.

When weary in this earthly place I rest on his unchanging grace;
in every high and stormy gale, my anchor holds and will not fail.
On Christ the solid rock, I stand,
all other ground is sinking sand, all other ground is sinking sand.

His vow, his covenant and blood are my defence against the flood.
When earthly hopes are swept away he will uphold me on that day.
On Christ the solid rock, I stand,
all other ground is sinking sand, all other ground is sinking sand.

When the last trumpet's voice shall sound oh may I then in Him be found;
clothed in His righteousness alone, faultless to stand before his throne.
On Christ the solid rock, I stand,
all other ground is sinking sand, all other ground is sinking sand.

Author:: Edward Mote,) CCLI SONG # 2836463 Copyright ©1982 The Jubilate Group CCL No 5664

Shirley reads for us: 1 Corinthians, chapter 3. The Church and Its Leaders

Brothers and sisters, I could not address you as people who live by the Spirit but as people who are still worldly—mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarrelling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere humans? For when one says, "I follow Paul," and another, "I follow Apollos," are you not mere human beings?

What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to each his task. I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and they will each be rewarded according to their own labor. For we are co-workers in God's service; you are God's field, God's building.

By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as a wise builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should build with care. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person's work. If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved—even though only as one escaping through the flames.

Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person; for God's temple is sacred, and you together are that temple.

Do not deceive yourselves. If any of you think you are wise by the standards of this age, you should become "fools" so that you may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's sight. As it is written: "He catches the wise in their craftiness"; and again, "The Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are futile." So then, no more boasting about human leaders! All things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours, and you are of Christ, and Christ is of God.

Alec then read some letters written by the children who attend Orbit, some of which included pictures they had drawn! They enjoyed using our building and wanted to say thank you.

We join in watching a video of a song new to some, based on Psalm 150:

You made the starry hosts, you traced the mountain peaks,
you paint the evening sky with wonders.
The earth, it is your throne from desert to the sea;
all nature testifies Your splendour

CHORUS

Praise the Lord, praise the Lord! Sing His greatness all creation.
Praise the Lord, raise your voice,
you heights and all you depths; from furthest east to west, let everything that has breath
praise the Lord.

You reached into the dust in love, your Spirit breathed,
you formed us in your very likeness
to know your wondrous works, to tell your mighty deeds
to join the everlasting chorus.

Praise the Lord, praise the Lord...

Let symphonies resound, let drums and choirs ring out
all heaven hear the sound of worship.
Let every nation bring its honours to the King - a roar of harmonies
eternal.

FINAL CHORUS

Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord! Sing His greatness all creation.
Praise the Lord, raise your voice
you heights and all you depths; from furthest east to west;
you distant burning stars; all creatures near and far;
from sky to sea to shore sing out forevermore, let everything that has breath
praise the Lord

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Alec gave a presentation on behalf of the Leprosy Mission (having first needed to sort out some microphone challenges!) It was accompanied by various pictures on the screen, but you will have to use your imagination for some of them!!

'Flourish' sermon (WLS 2023)

DIVISION. There is one matter that truly sees the nation divided. It has existed since 2700 BC and over 100 million cups of it are consumed every day in the UK.

SLIDE of a Teacup

Yes, that right – It's tea! But do you put the milk in first or last? 20% of the population believe the milk goes in first and the other 80% put it in last.

SLIDE: Bangladesh tea gardens

Regardless of how it is made, tea is a much-loved drink in the UK. The tea comes from beautiful, lush gardens like this one in Bangladesh. But in these tea gardens there is a big problem. Over 600,000 people live and work here and almost every family is affected by leprosy. Here, Leprosy rates are 20-30 times higher than the global average. If leprosy isn't stopped now, it will have devastating consequences not only for the people working in the tea gardens, but for the whole of Bangladesh.

Like tea, leprosy brings division too. It sees people isolated and facing discrimination. In fear of the disease, people are separated from their communities.

A different kind of division is at the heart of our passage today. We are going to explore it with three points: don't divide over leaders, trust God who gives growth, and plant and water the seeds.

SLIDE: Peter Hu?

Some of you may know Peter Waddup, our CEO at The Leprosy Mission. But Who is Peter? Peter Who? Here is a picture taken outside a restaurant in Kolkata in India a few months ago, which as you can see says 'Peter Hu?'. Peter is a great leader, and he has a huge heart for people affected by leprosy, but ultimately, he is just a man placed in the role of CEO. He is a servant of Christ, doing God's work. He is not the one that has grown The Leprosy Mission from Wellesley Bailey's (the founder) initial work. It is God that has blessed the work of his servant and provided growth.

SLIDE: 1 Corinthians 3:3-5

As we see from our reading, the apostle Paul says a similar thing in his letter to Corinth in a stronger way! Rather than 'Peter who?' Paul says, 'What is Paul?' Verse 5 says "What after all is Apollos? And what is Paul?". Rather than asking, 'Who is Paul or Apollos?', he uses the word "What" to give a stronger meaning. It is actually rather rude and demeaning. The Greek translation means 'What thing is Paul?'

SLIDE: Don't divide over leaders

In Paul's letter to the early church of Corinth, he is reminding them of the dangers of elevating church leaders. That's why he says, 'What is Paul?'. The church in was a Corinth young and full of enthusiasm, particularly for spiritual gifts. But it had many problems such as division over leaders. Paul laid the foundations of this church, but then moved Ephesus for another mission trip. He kept in contact with the church by letter. But they began to argue amongst themselves about "who they followed" as if their church leaders were in competition. It would be like you or me saying "Oh it was Nicky Gumbell/Billy Graham/*this particular minister* that led me to Christ. He is the one I put my trust in". I am sure Paul and Apollos were great leaders and had a passion for sharing God's word, but we are reminded that they are simply servants of Christ. "Only servants whom you came to believe" (v5). Although they are bringing the message of the Gospel, they are only men. They are not in competition because we all follow Christ, not human leaders.

We might prefer certain leaders or teachers in our churches, those whose personalities or styles resonate with us. But sometimes we risk elevating human leaders. If we put our trust in these people, however godly they are, they will eventually let us down. They are only human: they will make mistakes. Yes, we submit to our leaders because God has placed them in our lives, but we must not put them on a pedestal. We mustn't focus on the gifted individual but instead focus the

gift giver, God himself. Jesus is the perfect leader. He is faultless and he will not let us down. Let's not divide over human leaders and make sure our faith rests on Jesus.

SLIDE: Trust God who give growth

Each summer my family runs an annual sunflower competition. We are a highly competitive family that takes it rather seriously. The pride of winning is not to be underestimated! Each family member is given a seed and it is up to them to tend to the sunflower. Each seed is planted in the same garden with the same conditions. Yes, some of us may take better care of it than others, but it is not always the person who has given their seed the most love that will win. We do our best to nurture the plant, but we can't physically grow the seed.

SLIDE: 1 Corinthians 3:6-7

Similarly, we cannot force spiritual growth. Verse 7 says ... "neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow."

Yes, Paul planted the seed. He introduced the Christians in Corinth to the Good News of Jesus. Then Apollos watered the seed by discipling them to become more like Jesus. But Paul and Apollos were powerless to control what was going on in people's hearts. They did not die on the cross for the people in Corinth, or for us. They were unable to forgive people for their sins. Jesus paid the ultimate price for our sins. He died on the cross so we may have eternal life. There would have been no spiritual life in Corinth if God had not been at work. There may have been a building and people meeting together, but no spiritual growth. Only God gives growth.

SLIDE: Wellesley and Alice Bailey

We've seen God bringing growth in amazing ways at The Leprosy Mission, such as through prayer. It's how we began. This is Wellesley and Alice Bailey the founders of The Leprosy Mission. Wellesley wasn't a follower of Jesus when he first met his wife, Alice. She prayed day and night that he would know Jesus. Wellesley was ready to sail to Australia to chase his dream, but he couldn't leave the port because of fog. He went into a local church. Here, he heard the words of Isaiah 42 where the Lord says he will lead us and make darkness into light. Wellesley became a Christian and ended up working with people affected by leprosy.

The couple knew that it was not up to them. It was God's provision that grew Wellesley's faith and his heart to help those affected by leprosy. Wellesley himself said that the Leprosy Mission is "born and cradled in prayer". It was God all the way along, not them. In our lives we should keep praying and keep trusting in the Lord to provide growth. We can't change people's hearts. Only the Spirit can. It doesn't matter if you don't feel eloquent, or if you don't have the perfect words. We pray for opportunities to speak for Jesus and entrust the rest to God. Perhaps you can think of someone you love that doesn't yet know Jesus. Keep on praying and trusting in God who gives growth.

SLIDE: 1 Corinthians 3:8-9

God gives growth through his Spirit working in our hearts. But we still play our part, planting and watering the seeds, working together to build God's kingdom here. God's people were not supposed to idolise Paul and Apollos, but they still had a role in building God's kingdom. Verse 8 says... "For we are co-workers in God's service; you are God's field, God's building". We are united in Christ, not divided and not in competition, but co-workers working together for God's glory.

SLIDE: Plant and water the seed

In his Gospel, John records that a little boy offered up his five loaves of bread and two fish to Jesus to feed the 5,000. The little boy trusted that if he gave what he had God would provide the growth. Jesus chose to ask the people if they had anything to give. He could have clicked his fingers and provided for everyone on that mount. Instead, he chose to partner with the little boy.

Jesus is gracious enough to invite you into his story, to bring all you have, your gifts and talents to him, however small they feel. God wants each of us to flourish and that means to realise the true potential that he has given us. He wants us to partner with him to bring change meaning that we are choosing to patiently water the seeds.

Perhaps you're sitting here thinking "I don't have anything to bring to Jesus. I can't run a church or lead a Bible study". But if you can invite someone to a service, you're no less valuable to God than the one who leads the service. If you can simply provide a lift to church for someone, that's wonderful. We can all be a part of God's work to bring lasting change.

We are simply called to play our part however big or small. God didn't need us, but he chose us to be united in His mission. His mission to share his love with people affected by leprosy in the tea gardens. He chose you and me to play our part in helping people just like Aloka to flourish. Without you, her story would have been very different.

SLIDE: Aloka and Grandson

Aloka has been a tea-picker in Sylhet, Bangladesh since she was a teenager. She is a committed tea picker, working long hours. As a mother of four and grandmother of three, she takes great pride in providing for her family. Without the income from Aloka's job her family would struggle to survive.

A couple of years ago, Aloka noticed a discoloured skin patch on her left hand. Over time she started to lose the strength in her hand, and she had trouble straightening her stiffened fingers. Picking tea leaves became very difficult. A Leprosy Mission community worker visited Aloka's village and diagnosed her with leprosy. She was given the cure to stop the disease attacking her body further.

She says: "When I first heard the word 'leprosy' I was so frightened. If The Leprosy Mission was not here to help me, I am sure I would die."

For Aloka, the cure came too late to prevent damage to her hands. She will have to live the rest of her life without feeling in her left hand. This is heart-breaking for Aloka as grasping the tea leaves with her left hand is impossible. Purely relying on her right-hand means, she can pick less and ultimately, she will earn less.

Aloka still needs medical care to stop her fingers from clawing even more. She knows if more time had passed without a diagnosis, her situation would be a lot worse. Leprosy may have prevented her from working at all. If this was the case Aloka said "There would be no point in me living anymore." Imagine your livelihood being taken away from you, not being able to provide for those you love the most. The scariest thought for Aloka was not being able to pick up her grandson anymore.

Finding people with the early signs of leprosy as soon as possible is so vital. The quicker the cure is given, the less likely someone like Aloka will have lasting damage. Don't you long for people affected by leprosy to flourish?

(We were then invited to watch a film in which Aloka tells her story, hearing how your kind prayers and gifts will cure people affected by leprosy like Aloka.)

SLIDE: Giving regularly

Today you can bring flourishing to people like Aloka. Will you join me in praying regularly that people affected by leprosy will flourish in Jesus' name? Please take a prayer diary away with you from the back of the church to guide your prayers.

Please give what you can today. For £10 a month, the price of a coffee and a cake out for two, you can provide life-changing reconstructive surgery to someone like Aloka.

Today you can cure someone of leprosy by giving a gift of £24 using the envelopes available. A gift of £111 provides a pop-up clinic in a tea garden to find more people affected by leprosy like Aloka. Perhaps you could join with a friend and give that together.

You can twin your church with a tea garden for £7,055, which will enable health workers to find and cure people with leprosy.

One last thing: as you have your next cup of tea, please will you remember the people affected by leprosy that you have provided a new hope for?

SLIDE: Thank you

Thank you for your kindness. Together, we can create a future where leprosy has no hold over communities in Bangladesh. A future where people will truly flourish. May God bless you.

We thank God that The Leprosy Mission has been able to find so many new people affected by leprosy and bring them the cure

We pray for Aloka, that she would get the medical care she needs for her left hand, and would be able to provide for her family

We pray that the Leprosy Mission would find and cure many people with leprosy in the tea gardens in 2023.

Alec encourages the whole church to pray together in a prayer prepared by the Leprosy Mission and shown on the screen:

Almighty Father, the giver of life and health, look mercifully on those who suffer from leprosy. Stretch out your hand to touch and heal them as Jesus did during his earthly life. Grant wisdom and insight to those who are seeking the prevention and cure of the disease; give skill and sympathy to those who minister to the patients; reunite the separated with their families and friends; and inspire your people with the task set before The Leprosy Mission, that it may never lack either the staff or the means to carry on its healing work, in accordance with your will, and to the glory of your holy name. We ask this for the sake of Jesus Christ your Son, our Lord. Amen.

Alec reads: Isaiah 45, 5-13

I am the Lord, and there is no other; apart from me there is no God.
I will strengthen you, though you have not acknowledged me,
so that from the rising of the sun to the place of its setting

people may know there is none besides me.

I am the Lord, and there is no other. I form the light and create darkness,
bring prosperity and create disaster; I, the Lord, do all these things.

I

"You heavens above, rain down my righteousness; let the clouds shower it down.
Let the earth open wide, let salvation spring up, let righteousness flourish with it;
I, the Lord, have created it.

"Woe to those who quarrel with their Maker, those who are nothing but potsherds
among the potsherds on the ground.

Does the clay say to the potter, 'What are you making?'

Does your work say, 'The potter has no hands?'

Woe to the one who says to a father, 'What have you begotten?'

or to a mother, 'What have you brought to birth?'

"This is what the Lord says— the Holy One of Israel, and its Maker:

Concerning things to come, do you question me about my children, or give me orders about
the work of my hands?

It is I who made the earth and created mankind on it.

My own hands stretched out the heavens; I marshalled their starry hosts.

I will raise up Cyrus in my righteousness: I will make all his ways straight.

He will rebuild my city and set my exiles free,

but not for a price or reward, says the Lord Almighty."

We sing again, this time accompanied by Joy:

In Christ alone my hope is found, He is my light, my strength, my song;

this Cornerstone, this solid Ground, firm through the fiercest drought and storm.

What heights of love, what depths of peace, when fears are stilled, when strivings cease!

My Comforter, my All in All, here in the love of Christ I stand.

In Christ alone! - who took on flesh, fullness of God in helpless babe.

This gift of love and righteousness, scorned by the ones He came to save:

till on that cross as Jesus died, the wrath of God was satisfied -

for every sin on Him was laid; here in the death of Christ I live.

There in the ground His body lay, light of the world by darkness slain;

then bursting forth in glorious day up from the grave He rose again!

And as He stands in victory sin's curse has lost its grip on me,

for I am His and He is mine - bought with the precious blood of Christ.

No guilt in life, no fear in death, this is the power of Christ in me;

from life's first cry to final breath, Jesus commands my destiny.

No power of hell, no scheme of man, can ever pluck me from His hand:

till He returns or calls me home, here in the power of Christ I'll stand.

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At this point, we were to have had a time of testimony from Nadja, from New Life International Church, Karen interpreting for her, but she's unwell so could not be with us

today. This was replaced by prayers for Nadja and Nikolai and their family, for Karen and for the two pastors of NLCI Andrej and Juri and their wives, Iryna and Irina.

Time to sing again, watching a video shown on the screen. "He will hold me fast", sung in Ukrainian, Russian and English. (Unfortunately this has led to the recording of the service being blocked in Russia and Belarus)

It begins and ends with a quiet violin and piano duet, *Be still my soul* (Finlandia)

When I fear my faith will fail, Christ will hold me fast;
When the tempter would prevail, He will hold me fast.
I could never keep my hold through life's fearful path;
for my love is often cold; He must hold me fast.
 He will hold me fast, He will hold me fast;
 for my Saviour loves me so, He will hold me fast.

Those He saves are His delight, Christ will hold me fast;
precious in His holy sight, He will hold me fast.
He'll not let my soul be lost; His promises shall last;
bought by Him at such a cost, He will hold me fast.
 He will hold me fast, He will hold me fast....

For my life He bled and died, Christ will hold me fast;
Justice has been satisfied; He will hold me fast.
raised with Him to endless life, He will hold me fast
'til our faith is turned to sight when He comes at last!
 He will hold me fast, He will hold me fast....

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Jean leads our prayers of intercession:

"Let's Pray

Lord, thank you for last night's sleep and that we have woken up this morning and are able to meet together today. Thank you for today and help us to not waste any of it.

Thank you for the gifts you have given us and help us to use them to further your Kingdom here on earth

- Eyes to see and perceive
- Ears to hear and listen
- Hands to work and create
- Minds to think and innovate
- Memories to remember and learn from
- Hearts to love and worship

Lord, we confess that we have not always followed your words.
There have been moments when we chose other options...

We chose to join in the gossip and not to speak out on behalf of the misunderstood.
We chose to take sides with the strong, because we feared the consequences of being weak.
We fired back a text in anger,
We hit 'send' on an email in the heat of the moment,
We allowed pride to get the better of us.
We ask for your forgiveness and mercy, Lord. We thank you that you do not treat us as our sins deserve, and Your love and Your word permit a new start.

Father you gave us a wonderful world and because of mans greed and need to assert their power there are many conflicts around the world, As a result there are many innocent people caught in the crossfire, losing their homes, being dreadfully wounded and even losing their lives. Please be with these people let them know your love and Grace and please work in the hearts and minds of the aggressors and get them to see the dreadful needless destruction they are causing.

God, you hear the cries of all who are in trouble or distress; accept our prayers for those whose lives are being affected by global warming and climate change throughout the world: strengthen them and grant them perseverance and courage to face the future.

Be with our government Lord and guide them to make wise decisions, to be understanding of the frustrations of people who work full time and still struggle to meet all their obligations for their families.

Father please guide the leaders of our town, help them to show integrity and empathy to the people they serve.

Lord we pray for our church family who are in trouble and fear today:

- For those who are sad because someone they have loved has died
- For those who are anxious because someone is ill or in pain
- For those who are lonely because someone they love is not there for them.

Lord, bless those who are tired because they have too much to do,

those who are struggling with finance or are facing the prospect of unemployment

Lord, surround those in need with your wisdom, your spirit, your healing and your life-giving peace.

Father we have been thinking about the Leprosy Mission, grant wisdom and insight to those who are seeking the prevention and cure of the disease; give skill and sympathy to those who minister to the patients and reunite the separated with their families and friends.

There has been a cure for **leprosy** since the 1980s and in the past 20 years, 16 million people have been cured of this disease. We give thanks that multidrug therapy is provided free of charge and for the generous support of everyone who gives gifts to ensure that it reaches those in need.

As we move on from this place, may others see a difference in us,

May we surprise others with the gift of forgiveness and our capacity to move on and make fresh starts.

Lord God, thank you for your abundant love and care for us. Thank you for forgiving our sins,

even for the sins we do not realize we commit. Lord, please fill us with your wisdom and your compassion for others. May you bless us with your never-ending love. Accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen."

Before our final hymn today, Alec shared that there were information leaflets available, outlining the work of the Leprosy Mission. **Our last hymn (during which an offering was taken, including for the work of the Leprosy Mission in the available special envelopes) was shown on the screen.**

Oh for a thousand tongues to sing
my great Redeemer's praise,
my great Redeemer's praise,
the glories of my God and King,
the triumphs of His grace. (The triumphs of his grace x3.)

Jesus! the name that charms our fears
that bids our sorrows cease,
that bids our sorrows cease;
'tis music in the sinner's ears
'tis life and health and peace...

He speaks, and listening to his voice
new life the dead receive,
new life the dead receive.
The mournful, broken hearts rejoice,
the humble poor believe....

Hear him, ye deaf; his praise, ye dumb
your loosened tongues employ,
your loosened tongues employ;
ye blind, behold your Saviour come,
and leap, ye lame, for joy....

My gracious Master and my God
assist me to proclaim,
assist me to proclaim;
to spread through all the earth abroad
the honours of Thy name.....

Words by Charles Wesley (1739), music T Jarman.
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https://youtu.be/CFJvBwgmK_c

We closed our service as we said together:

Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to make you stand in the presence of his glory blameless with great joy, to the only God our Saviour, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time, now and forever, and now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us evermore. Amen.

