



Welcome to Blackburn Baptist Church, on June 11th 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, (continuing with Faith in Action), who began by welcoming everyone to Bethesda on this warm and sunny morning, reminding us that where 2 or 3 are gathered together,(as Trevor had played before the service) Jesus is here. He then introduced our **Opening hymn, played by Trevor, Kate, Paul and Judith:**

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 breaks the power of cancelled sin,
he sets the prisoner free, he sets the prisoner free,
his blood can make the foulest clean
his blood availed for me.....

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.....

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Notices were shared by Tony: Ladies Bible Study on Tuesday morning, Tiddlywinks on Wednesday, and Thursday at 2pm we will be starting Baptismal classes - see Tony for more information. Alec and Jane (not Janet!) will be attending the Baptist Assembly next weekend.

Alec then shared news of Prem (who has been attending recently) and his wife Anju, who plan to move to Blackburn with other members of their family in the future. Alec and the Deacons had met with the leaders of Crossgates on Thursday, and news of this meeting will be shared over lunch on July 2nd, after a dedication service for baby Daisy with her parents Paula and Tim. The following week, July 9th, we hope to have a Baptismal service which will include Communion.

Alec then introduced a time of Praise and worship, beginning with "The Lord is my salvation" played by our musicians.

The grace of God has reached for me, and pulled me from the raging sea;
and I am safe on this solid ground, the Lord is my salvation.

I will not fear when darkness falls; his strength will help me scale these walls;
I'll see the dawn of the rising sun, the Lord is my salvation.

**Who is like the Lord our God? Strong to save, faithful in love.
My debt is paid and the vict'ry won, the Lord is my salvation.**

My hope is hidden in the Lord; he flow'rs each promise of His Word,
when winter fades I know spring will come, the Lord is my salvation.

In times of waiting, times of need, when I know loss, when I am weak,
I know His grace will renew these days, the Lord is my salvation.

Who is like the Lord our God?...

And when I reach my final day he will not leave me in the grave,
but I will rise, he will call me home, the Lord is my salvation.

Who is like the Lord our God?...

Glory be to God the Father, glory be to God the Son, glory be to God the Spirit;
The Lord is our salvation.

Who is like the Lord our God?...

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We continued with "Waymaker", shown on the screen,

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.

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1fme-y34TjI>

And finally, "There is hope", again played by our musicians:

There is hope in grace unceasing, You withhold your wrath from me,
poured it out upon my Saviour on the cross of Calvary.

There is hope now for the hopeless, there is victory all can know
for the tomb lies bare and broken and death's pow'r is overthrown:

**Jesus Christ my hope forever, hope unlike the world can bring;
Your steadfast love beyond all measure, there is hope in Christ my king.**

There is hope for sons and daughters who have wandered on their own,
hear the songs of joy from heaven as the lost are welcomed home.

Jesus Christ my hope forever....

Hallelujah, Hope of heaven, precious treasure of my life,
all my joy is in your presence, I am yours and you are mine.

I will wait until I see him though the twilight turns to night
for my hope is not defeated it will greet His dawning light.

Jesus Christ my hope forever....

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Our Bible reading: James 5:13-20 was read by Shirley:

Is anyone among you in trouble? Let them pray. Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praise. Is anyone among you ill? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up. If they have sinned, they will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.

Elijah was a human being, even as we are. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops.

My brothers and sisters, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring that person back, remember this: whoever turns a sinner from the error of their way will save them from death and cover over a multitude of sins.

Our Prayers were led by Jane:

Our Father in heaven, together we bring our prayers to You today in the knowledge that You are listening and are eager to grant our requests if they are in line with Your will. You are such a great God, the Creator of the universe and everything in it and yet You pay attention to the thoughts, desires and prayers of all your people, even though we are flawed human beings who constantly neglect to pay You the honour, praise and obedience that you deserve. We ask for Your forgiveness, Lord, trusting in your mercy and grace and your redeeming love shown through Jesus's death on the cross, as he took the punishment for our sins. Thank you that, through the gift of your Holy Spirit, we can be renewed and strengthened day by day, to be changed to become ever more like Him.

Lord, we thank you for Your beautiful world and the wonderful weather we have been enjoying. Yet, due to mankind's selfishness and self-seeking, that world is now marred as we are seeing the effects of global warming. We pray for all those in North America who are suffering the effects of forest wildfires; we ask that You would help them and send rain to dampen the flames.

We again remember Ukraine: we are horrified at the latest devastating blow that the country has suffered due to the destroyed dam. People have lost their lives; thousands have lost their homes and many animals have drowned. Oh, Lord, we earnestly plead that somehow this war may come to an end. Please change the hearts of those who are bent on causing death and destruction and bring comfort and relief to those who are in desperate need. We pray that the international community may remain united in their support for Ukraine. We pray that many there would come to know the love and comfort that only Jesus can truly give.

Father, we bring before You our own country which is so much in need of a revival led by Your Spirit across the land. Turn the hearts of the people back to You and raise up men and women, young and old, who will be unafraid to declare your truths and honour the name of Jesus. We pray for our government and all politicians; we pray for our church leaders in all denominations. By your Spirit change people's hearts and minds and, Father, please start with us; make us willing to be transformed into the people You want us to be, enabling us to reach out to our friends and neighbours.

We continue to pray for our friends and family members who are unwell at this time and for those who are caring for them. We pray for those in hospital or in care homes and lift before you the doctors, nurses, other medical practitioners and carers who work long hours in very difficult circumstances.

Finally, Lord, we pray for our church and for this area of Galligreaves and Bank Top. You know how weak we are Lord but, in our weakness, Your strength is made perfect. We wait for You; show us what You are already doing and how we can join in; as Your body in this place, make us open and welcoming to all who come through the door, we pray. We thank You for the new people you have brought to us recently and pray you would help us to get to know each other quickly. Your Word urges us to pray constantly; our prayer cards say, 'Prayer is like the air we breathe; wherever we are, we breathe'. Lord, give us the hearts and will to pray to You at all times and in all places, that we might know Your mind and will for Your body in this place.

We bring all our prayers to You in the precious name of Jesus, Amen.

After a short prayer: "Loving Heavenly Father, I'm just an instrument. May the words I say be the words that you are saying and not mine, May I and everyone here today expect and know that you are here and you are speaking to us. Speak clearly we pray and may we be willing to follow what you are saying to us in Jesus name, Amen," **Alec shared his Message: Prayer and Transforming Lives**

The passage Shirley has read to us this morning is awesome; it is truly amazing. James, the brother of the resurrected Jesus, a believer in and disciple of Jesus, a man with under God many, many years of pastoral experience and the first Bishop of Jerusalem, someone who has known and talked about and lived with and experienced life with King Jesus is not talking about religious symbols and church buildings and synods and ecclesiastical meetings. He is talking to and about everyday people, our everyday lives and our everyday challenges in the places where we live and work and about how our faith and life in Jesus impacts on those places and people. Did you notice I didn't say how places and people impact on our faith and life in Jesus, but how our life and faith in Jesus impacts on places and people.

It is the very presence of the one and only living God who impacts on the area in which our church life takes place and not the area which impacts on our church life. It is the wonderful presence of the true God who transforms the situations in which we live and work, that here in Galligreaves, Bank Top and Wensleyfold people can feel, people can see, people can hear and hear about the dynamic presence of the living God. How did the Lord lead us to pray on Good Friday 2022 on Hancock Street at the close of the march of witness in which we shared together united with two other local churches? That God would be so present and work in this area that people in Blackburn would say that is Galligreaves, that is the area where the people praise and worship the living God. That is the place where the presence of God is seen and known. He is transforming our area through prayer. He is present here in and through our prayers. Where God's people are united the Lord commands the blessing, life forevermore.

What did we sing earlier? We sang "You are here, moving in our midst; you are here, working in this place; you are here turning lives around; you are here, healing every heart." "Even when I don't see it you are working; even when I don't feel it you are working. You never stop working." "You are Waymaker, miracle worker, promise keeper, light in the darkness. That is who you are and we worship you." He is present here and we need to practice our awareness of His presence wherever we are. Let us pray that the people of this area will become aware of the reality of the presence of God here in this place and in this area and wherever we are. May the people living in this area realise that God's power is stronger than all the weak and vain efforts of those spiritual forces against Him; for we fight not against flesh and blood but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Here in Blackburn with Darwen we need to be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power and put on the whole armour of God. May we pray that through God giving dreams and visions as He so often particularly does to those with a non-western background and through other demonstrations of His power many will grasp the reality of who Jesus is, their need of a Saviour and God's provision for their forgiveness through the Cross.

James is talking about us; about the people that God made and our life situations and our needs. He is talking about our relationships to God and with one another.

You see if we have a heart for God which I believe we do, and are allowing God at the same time to recreate His heart in us; the heart of God which longs for men and women to come back to Him their Maker and Sustainer as Saviour and Lord and to experience new life in the Risen Lord Jesus, a heart which yearns after us, follows us, pursues us, which basically never gives up on us and does all it takes to persevere with us. If our heart is filled continually with the Holy Spirit of God, if our hearts are overflowing with the love of God for us and for all others with whom we meet and engage how can we but share who He is and the message of forgiveness through His death on the Cross and new life through His resurrection from the dead and appeal to people through our ongoing transformed

changed lives and clear, pure words their need to seek and receive forgiveness from God, to turn away from the mess they have made of their lives, to believe and be baptised.

So James talks to real people: Those who are in trouble, those who are happy, those who are sick, those who have done wrong, those who need to sort things out where relationships or situations or I don't know what have gone visibly or invisibly wrong, where relationships are bungled up or loused up, where wounds and hurts have been caused but never treated and appear incapable of being healed. Into these situations comes God. He says is anyone of you in trouble? And of course we all say, no we are fine thank you! Is anyone happy? And of course we say, well as good as might be expected! Is any one of you sick? Well we might then start to say how unfair it is of God not to look after us and prevent us getting ill or point out that being able to obtain a medical appointment is about as easy as beating Manchester City with a 10 man amateur team and that the A and E waiting times are this and that and so on. Has any one of us done wrong? Well of course that doesn't apply to any of us does it; I mean there is no-one who is going to get excited about admitting that they may have done something wrong is there?

Yes these are the challenges real people face, the challenges that we face and the challenges that the people with whom we engage or might engage face. So God says. Listen. This is how it works. Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise. Is any one of you sick? Now before we look together at God's approach here from James I want to make very clear that in a life emergency situation ringing the emergency services is clearly the best way to go. But we can ask others to pray in faith that God will heal us and help us.

So just over a week ago our church prayer chain prayed for a lady who was about to have a foot operation; In God's mercy our prayers for this lady were answered and amazingly she has had very little of the expected pain and is healing well.

One of the couples we prayed for at the close of the communion service last week has experienced God's grace to them in the past week.

And we will continue to pray for this couple and many others in the fellowship who are unwell at this time knowing that God hears and answers the prayers of humble, forgiven servants as they plead with Him. Before we call, God answers.

The key point of these verses from James that Shirley read to us **IS PRAYER**. Verses 13-18 each refer to prayer. Our church slogan is "Prayer is like the air we breathe; wherever we are we breathe." Why do we breathe? To live! Why do we pray? To live!" We are dependent on the breath of God to live!

In Genesis 2:7 we read: "And the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being."

What do we do when trouble comes our way? Are we disappointed, despairing, grumbling, complaining, and indulging in self-pity?

Genuine faith does not collapse when it is tested. We pray. God is at work. He has a particular purpose in mind. He has a specific goal or series of goals in every life situation into which he leads us. Our job is to trust and obey Him. But we are not alone in this, we belong to the family of God.

Here in the west we specialise if I may put it that way in compartmentalised, individualistic thinking and behaviour. We are kind of like in the middle of everything, the centre of our own interest, our own time, our own energy.

When we learn the English language we learn I am, you are, he is as our starting position so to speak. First I, then you, then he; but in the Hebrew language which is the language in which the Old Testament is written the order is different; the order is completely reversed; first He, then you, then I.

Our western society is largely individualistic. Me first, me second and me third.

We tend to compartmentalise everything, keeping God and others at a safe distance. We tend to individualise just about everything.

But the body of Christ is not like that. Or is it? 12 days ago I was sitting in the office space available to me here at BBC preparing the running order for the gathering on the following Sunday, that was last Sunday by the way, and although I deliberately made sure that I wasn't able to hear what was being said I could clearly recognise that the ladies at the ladies morning bible study were frequently laughing and appearing to be really enjoying talking about their faith in God together. I can thoroughly recommend to you to join that group. Afterwards I commented on this and found out that they were looking at the question of which part of the body they were, feet, hands, ears, eyes or whatever as Paul writes in 1 Cor. 12: "The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; there are many parts but one body."

Here in this church God is first, others are second and we are at the bottom of the pile, secure in the love of Jesus. This means for me that I am your servant for Christ's sake, and that is what it means for each one of us in respect of each other. We are all servants of the living God and of one another. As Paul writes we are to do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but rather in humility to value others above ourselves, not looking to our own interests but each of us is to look to the interests of the others. (Phil 2:3-4)

And one way in which this expresses itself says James is that we confess our sins to each other and pray to the living God for each other so that we may be healed.

We see this in verses 15 and 16.

There is a really wonderful little cameo of a story written in Matthew 9:1-8 Read.

Read verses 1-2a "crossed over and came to Blackburn with Darwen"

This is where God in Jesus Christ is now.

When Jesus saw the money they had available he healed the paralytic. No, it doesn't say that does it.

When Jesus looked at and checked out the documents they had brought with them to show their professional and theological competence he upstaged them and healed the paralytic.

No. He wasn't an actor; He wasn't concerned about His own reputation; He wasn't pretending to be somebody He wasn't. He didn't need to pretend to be anybody other than the person He was. He was and is and always will be genuine and authentic; genuine; real. He is who He says He is. He said "I am the Bread of Life" and fed over 5,000 people after He had blessed just five loaves and two fishes. He said, "I am the Light of the World" and gave healed Bartimaeus the blind man. He said "I am the Resurrection and the Life" and brought Lazarus, a man who had been dead for three days back to life.

When Jesus saw their faith he healed the paralytic.

It doesn't say that either does it!

This faith was shared by the paralytic.

Read verse 2.

"This fellow is blaspheming," they said because only God can forgive sins.

But Jesus knew their thoughts.

"Which is easier: to say, "Your sins are forgiven," or to say, "Get up and walk"?"

Being healed and being forgiven; living out healed lives and saved lives. Lives transformed by God through prayer.

The presence of God, the voice of God, the power of God, the authority of God, the grace, the love, the mercy and the compassion of God heal us and transform our lives. But the greatest transformation comes through His forgiveness of sins setting us free from death and opening the way for new life through His only Son Jesus, who died to pay the penalty for the mess we make of our lives when we deliberately live without reference to Him who raised Him from the dead.

When we see this we, like the crowd in verse 8, are filled with a genuine sense of awe and we praise God. That is why we came this morning isn't it; to praise the living God together. Then at the end of James 5 verse 16 we read: "The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective." We need to be righteous; we need to be right with God, to pray powerfully and effectively.

In the Old Testament we can read the story of Elijah, a human being just like we are. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for 3 1/2 years. He prayed fervently. He was not a kind of unreal fantasy superman who was able to bring about a drought of this magnitude. He was a human being just like us praying in harmony with God's Will which meant in this specific instance God disciplining His nation, a nation which had decided to go their own way and to wander off from following Him. You might perhaps like to read about this in the coming days. You will find it in 1 Kings 17:1 and 18:41-45.

Do we pray in harmony with the Will of God? Do we know the Will of God for the people of this area? Do we have the heart of God to pray for them to come to Him and to engage with them, maybe when this building is open more frequently as an ongoing drop-in allowing everybody in to engage with each other and with us and even more importantly with the Lord Jesus Himself?

Elijah prayed again and it rained and the land was fruitful. He was a human being just like us. Do we pray like that? I quoted examples from a walk in Exmoor and the Coronation Event at BBC where people had prayed asking God to stop the rain or prevent it in very particular places and that is how God had answered in both situations.

The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. In this area that is what it needs to be to reach those who are broken-hearted; to those who live in broken homes; to those who are struggling with alcohol abuse and drug abuse, to those who are living so-called respectable lives but are struggling with deep depression and ongoing anxieties in the face of an apparently meaningless or purposeless daily existence.

To reach these people we need to give of our time and resources as a church, to fast and to pray. We need to pray to the Lord to send the workers needed and we need to be available to Him and to them. In the mystery of God's purposes our prayers transform lives. In the mystery of God's purposes fasting changes lives and human situations.

Maybe we don't find it easy to pray; I certainly don't always find it without its challenges. But when God answers prayers we are encouraged. Prayer is one of God's ways of teaching us dependence on Him. To Him be glory and honour, dominion and power, now and forever. Amen.

Alec invited us to share a time of silence, before we joined together in our Closing (offertory) hymn:

What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear!
What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer!
O what peace we often forfeit, O what needless pain we bear,
all because we do not carry everything to God in prayer!

Have we trials and temptations? Is there trouble anywhere?
We should never be discouraged; take it to the Lord in prayer!
Can we find a friend so faithful who will all our sorrows share?
Jesus knows our every weakness; take it to the Lord in prayer!

Are we weak and heavy laden, cumbered with a load of care?
Precious Saviour, still our refuge— take it to the Lord in prayer!
Do your friends despise, forsake you? Take it to the Lord in prayer!
In his arms he'll take and shield you; you will find a solace there.

Author: Charles Crozat Converse, Joseph Medlicott Scriven CCLI SONG # 27714J Public domain, CCL No 5664

After a prayer of thanksgiving, "Loving Heavenly Father, thank you for all the good gifts that you give us. Thank you that you gave your life for us on the cross. Thank you that you live for us each day and that you encourage us and empower us to live for you. Please accept these humble gifts offered to you from our hearts. We ask you to bless them and multiply them for the extension of your kingdom in this place and elsewhere. In Jesus name, Amen."
Alec invited us to join together in the words of the Blessing, shown on the screen:

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 peace. Amen