



Welcome to Blackburn Baptist Church, on June 12th 2022 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 led by Alec, as we begin a new series of studies on Prayer.

Trevor plays the piano as we assemble for worship, reminding us that 'As we are gathered, Jesus is here.'

Alec welcomes everyone, thanking them for their patience and understanding as they entered by the side door this morning, as we had problems with the main shutter door!

He began by reading 3 verses from 2 Chronicles 7: 14

"If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land. Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayers offered in this place. I have chosen and consecrated this temple so that my Name may be there forever. My eyes and my heart will always be there."

He then prayed: Loving Heavenly Father, thank you for who you are, and for all you have done, are doing, and have promised to do for us. Thank you that in you we have a future and a hope, and we thank you this morning that we have the freedom to meet together in this place to which you have called us to worship you, to sing your praise, to ask for your forgiveness and to pray for you to help us on, each day in the future. We ask that you will be with us in Jesus name.

We watched and listened to the notices for this week, including a reminder that next Sunday we have a visit from our BMS Link Missionaries, Brian and Jackie Chilvers.

Alec then introduced our Opening hymn "Christ alone, cornerstone", which was shown on the screen, with Esther leading the singing from the front.

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.

Christ alone, Cornerstone, weak made strong in the Saviour's love
through the storm, He is Lord, Lord of all.

When darkness seems to hide His face
I rest on His unchanging grace;
in every high and stormy gale,
my anchor holds within the veil.
Christ alone, Cornerstone...

When He shall come with trumpet sound
Oh may I then in Him be found;
dressed in His righteousness alone,
faultless stand before the throne.
Christ alone, Cornerstone....

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Our Prayers of thanksgiving and intercession were led by Jane.

“We come before you today, O Lord, with thankful hearts for your daily provision for our needs and for your continuing love towards us, which we do not deserve. We confess that we do not always behave in the way you would want us to; we do not always love our neighbour as ourselves; we often follow our own way rather than seeking and desiring your way. Forgive us, Father, not because we deserve it but because of your Son, Jesus, who willingly died to pay the price for our sins. For his sake, please renew us by your Holy Spirit that our thoughts and words and actions may always be in line with your will and filled with your love.

We thank you that last week we were able to celebrate the Queen’s Platinum Jubilee both here at Bethesda and across the whole country as communities came together as one. We thank you for Queen Elizabeth’s witness to your sustaining power in her life over so many years and pray for her continuing good health. We also pray for all those from the community who came to the party in our carpark and that you would show us other ways in which we can reach out to them with the good news of Jesus. Thank you too for our friends at St. Luke’s, St. Aiden’s and the New Life Church and the way you have brought us together to witness to this community; may your Spirit move through the neighbourhood and draw people to Jesus.

We pray for the wider world, especially those places where there is conflict. We again lift before you the country of Ukraine, with all the destruction and death that we see daily on our television screens. Lord, please hold back the forces of evil and restore hope and peace to that land. We pray too for the families in the USA who are grieving the loss of their children and others in the recent mass shootings. Lord, bring them your comfort and may steps be taken by the authorities to reduce the incidence of gun crime.

We thank you for all those you have called to work across the world in charities, giving care in your name to people in great need. We thank you for Brian and Jackie Chilvers and the work they have been doing in Chad. We ask for protection and enabling for them as they

travel around the UK on home assignment visiting their supporting churches, especially next weekend when they visit us here at Bethesda.

We continue to pray for members of our fellowship with particular needs. They are very dear to us, Lord, but even more dear to you. Some have been suffering for a very long time; please place your healing hand upon them, give them the knowledge that you are there alongside them and bring them your peace.

Father, we thank you for our pastor, Alec and his wife, Sibylle, asking a special blessing for them at this time, and for your guidance for both them and the church as together we seek your vision for the future direction of this fellowship. Lord, we see the needs around us and we believe you are working in the hearts of people in this local area. Give us your heart, Lord, and show us the part you want us to play in fulfilling the plans you have for them and for ourselves.

We ask all our prayers in and through the name of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, Amen”

Alec invited us to join our voices in singing our next hymn, played by Trevor and with Esther again leading our singing. Although we had been introduced to it recently, it is still not very well known to us! We sang slightly amended words today, **“A mighty fortress is our God”**

A mighty fortress is our God, and he shall never fail us.
He is our help against the flood troubles which assail us.
Satan, our ancient foe, he wants to bring us woe.
His skill and power are great, and armed with cruel hate,
on earth he has no equal.

If on our own strength we relied, our striving would be losing,
were not the right Man on our side, the Man of God's own choosing.
You ask who this may be? Christ Jesus, it is he;
The Lord of Hosts his name, from age to age the same;
and he will win the battle.

And though this world, with devils filled, may threaten to undo us,
we will not fear, for God has willed his truth to triumph through us.
The Prince of Darkness grim, we tremble not for him;
his rage we can endure, we know his doom is sure;
one little word shall kill him.

That Word above all earthly powers stands strong and always conquers.
The Spirit and the gifts are ours to help us battle onwards.
Let goods and loved ones go, this mortal life also;
the body they may kill: God's truth is living still;
his kingdom is forever!

Our Bible reading, Nehemiah 1 to 2 verse 8 was read by Colin.

'The words of Nehemiah son of Hakaliah:

In the month of Kislev in the twentieth year, while I was in the citadel of Susa, Hanani, one of my brothers, came from Judah with some other men, and I questioned them about the Jewish remnant that had survived the exile, and also about Jerusalem. They said to me, 'Those who survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire.'

When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven. Then I said:

'Lord, the God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and keep his commandments, let your ear be attentive and your eyes open to hear the prayer your servant is praying before you day and night for your servants, the people of Israel. I confess the sins we Israelites, including myself and my father's family, have committed against you. We have acted very wickedly towards you. We have not obeyed the commands, decrees and laws you gave your servant Moses.

'Remember the instruction you gave your servant Moses, saying, "If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations, but if you return to me and obey my commands, then even if your exiled people are at the farthest horizon, I will gather them from there and bring them to the place I have chosen as a dwelling for my Name."

'They are your servants and your people, whom you redeemed by your great strength and your mighty hand. Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of this your servant and to the prayer of your servants who delight in revering your name. Give your servant success today by granting him favour in the presence of this man.'

I was cupbearer to the king.

In the month of Nisan in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was brought for him, I took the wine and gave it to the king. I had not been sad in his presence before, so the king asked me, 'Why does your face look so sad when you are not ill? This can be nothing but sadness of heart.'

I was very much afraid, but I said to the king, 'May the king live for ever! Why should my face not look sad when the city where my ancestors are buried lies in ruins, and its gates have been destroyed by fire?'

The king said to me, 'What is it you want?'

Then I prayed to the God of heaven, and I answered the king, 'If it pleases the king

and if your servant has found favour in his sight, let him send me to the city in Judah where my ancestors are buried so that I can rebuild it.'

Then the king, with the queen sitting beside him, asked me, 'How long will your journey take, and when will you get back?' It pleased the king to send me; so I set a time.

I also said to him, 'If it pleases the king, may I have letters to the governors of Trans-Euphrates, so that they will provide me safe-conduct until I arrive in Judah? And may I have a letter to Asaph, keeper of the royal park, so he will give me timber to make beams for the gates of the citadel by the temple and for the city wall and for the residence I will occupy?' And because the gracious hand of my God was on me, the king granted my requests. '

After thanking Colin, Alec invited us to join in singing 2 songs, the first, well-known, although with slightly modified words, the second less so. Trevor played for the first whilst the second was shown on the screen. Esther again came to the microphone at the front to help us, especially with the one from Resound worship!

Lord, be my vision, be my guiding star,
nothing is more to me, Lord, than you are.
You my best thought, by day or by night,
waking or sleeping, your presence my light.

Lord, be my wisdom and you my true word,
I ever with you and you with me, Lord:
you my great Father, I your true son,
you in me dwelling, and I with you one..

Lord, be my hand-held, my sword for the fight:
you be my dignity, you my delight;
you my soul's shelter, you my high tower
raise me up heavenward, O Power of my power.

I need no riches, nor man's empty praise:
you're my inheritance now and always;
you and you oinly, first in my mind,
high King of heaven, the treasure I find.

High King of heaven, my victory won,
may I reach heaven's joys, bright heaven's sun;
heart of my heart, whatever befall
still be my vision, O Ruler of all.

The second Song, "Jesus lead us to the Father" by Resound Worship was a recording shown on the screen. It was played some months ago, when we were invited to listen to the simple words and message. The first time through the verses were sung consecutively, the second time as a round, with the ladies continuing to repeat the first verse, and the men the second, whilst Esther sang the third - it sounds complicated but all harmonises beautifully - at least on the recording even if we as a congregation still need more practise!

Jesus, lead us to the Father,
by your Spirit, help us draw near.

As we come with awe and gladness,
help us draw near.

Alleluia, alleluia,
help us draw near.

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https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pUSbgFc_WXw

Alec gave his Message

"Sometimes I pray alone, sometimes I pray with one person or in a group. But whether we pray alone or in a group prayer is not something we do in isolation from everything that we are involved in or connected with. I mean it is not detached from the realities of everyday life. It is in a particular context, the context in which we are living; it takes place in the situation in which we find ourselves.

And so this morning as we begin a five part series on prayer with a look at two of Nehemiah's prayers which are found in the account he himself wrote we ask ourselves first the question, "What was the context in which Nehemiah found himself when he spoke these prayers?"

Nehemiah was cupbearer to the king, essentially a nobody, living and working eight hundred miles from where his heart was in the second half of the fifth century BC. He was in Susa, the capital of the Medo-Persian Empire, a place that was central to the activities of the then-known world. He was in a strategic spot, but he was a long way away from home from where he had just received some terrible, some devastating news. His people the Israelites who had almost always had a kind of sometimes we do and sometimes we don't relationship to God had yet again been given a small chance. But not everybody was really wild about this and even the limited progress they had been able to make in rebuilding the ruins of their religious life was being threatened.

Now this was really on Nehemiah's heart so he made a point of asking a question about it. Let's look at verses 2-3 of chapter 1. Nehemiah's reaction in v. 4 is remarkable.

How does this relate to us here at BBC here in East Lancashire in 2022?

We must always come to the circumstances which confront us—within the church, within our church, within the work to which God has called us together, in the light of the fact of who God is; the merciful, loving, gracious, compassionate, patient and just and holy God. Again and again and again, and again, when the circumstances seem to be near to impossible to circumnavigate or to cope with God chooses and calls a person to lead his people on; a man of integrity, a man of faith and a man of prayer. We see that as I have repeatedly said at recent Thursday evening Fellowship meetings right through the Old Testament, but especially in Exodus and the book of Judges and in the reaction of God's people to God's Word through the prophets. But the whole history of the Christian church reads like this; a kind of press-button faith green for on and go with God and red for off and ignore His commands and do whatever you feel is right.

Do we really have a vision? Yes we do. We are developing our understanding of the vision that God is giving us. But let us not in doing this forget what He has written in His Word, first to obey Him so He can continue leading us. I am sure nobody hearing this message seriously thinks that God will lead us on if we don't first follow what He has already clearly told us.

I am sure some of you will have heard of the church that decided it was going to build a new building. At a full membership meeting they came together and made a fourfold resolution: "One, we will build a new church building. Two, the new building will be on the site of the old building. Three, the material from the old building will be used in the construction of the new building. And four, we will continue to use the old building until the new building is complete."

Actually Nehemiah is not worried about the building at all; and I don't think I am either even though it may be important. He is not looking at the broken walls and the destruction of the gates; he is not even looking at the small number of workers, which is not even mentioned. No. He's really worried, desperately worried, about something or rather someone more important than a few brick walls. He is crying out his heart to God because the glory of God was being dragged in the dust of a Judean hillside and people were looking on that and saying, "So where is your God now?" And that is exactly what men and women are doing here in Blackburn. They are carrying out the building and establishment of all kinds of constructions to the honour of gods who are not gods. They are worshipping a lie; and this is an insult to the one, true and the living God and to His holy Name.

So when we pray "May your Name be kept holy" as our Lord taught us to pray we'd better mean it and aim to bring glory to our God and Father in all we say and do and in what we don't say and don't do.

So you see I was preaching in a big church in Karlsruhe one year in February and I was asked to speak on Ezekiel 36:26. I think you know what that is. It reads: "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh."

What a wonderful promise! But then you see I looked at the context; I mean like really a detailed look; I went back to the beginning of the chapter which in Ezekiel is usually a long way to go back to, (Ezek. 36:22-23)

So when we pray “May your Name be kept holy” as our Lord taught us to pray we`d better mean it and aim to bring glory to our God and Father.

But let`s get back to Nehemiah.

You see it`s really good that we have just celebrated Pentecost here in this very building. Because when we look at Nehemiah we are not seeing the response of a naturally gifted mourner, a kind of rent-a-crowd for sad occasions and sad news. No.

Nehemiah`s response to the disaster that he has just found out about is supernatural; it takes the Spirit of God to create that kind of reaction in the life of a man or a woman. He said when I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven.

Two weeks ago Tom the plumber visited me at the Manse to carry out a routine service on the boiler installed after David left. After some period of time, it can`t have been more than 45 minutes, I remarked to him that if he does this kind of work the whole time every day he will spend longer on his knees each day than I do. Think about it. It is essential to our work to spend time on our knees, at least metaphorically speaking.

Do we sit down and weep, mourn and fast and pray? Or do we just sit down and cry and despair. Yes when we need to grieve, we need to grieve; there is a time and a season for everything under heaven; a time to weep and a time to mourn and we should never forget what we should never forget; the loss, the sadness, the tragedy, the emptiness, the unbelievable loneliness of losing or having lost the ones we love. Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.

But may God also give us tears when we look at the state of our world, the needs of the churches and look deeply and openly into the hearts and lives of those around us. Not that we need a supply of buckets to take away the floods of tears, but the motivation to seek the Lord and to come to Him in prayer knowing that He alone can bring about changes in us and in our situation, in the lives of others and in their situations and in the life of our churches.

For you see prayer is not an option but a privilege; it is not a way of escaping from reality but a coming to terms with the God who is real.

Is prayer a kind of addition to our spiritual diet or is it essential to our spiritual life?

Nehemiah`s fasting and praying were essential to the fulfilment of the vision that God had given him for His people.

Nehemiah says he mourned and fasted and prayed for some days. The time interval between 1:1 and 2: 1 is roughly 3 to 4 months. Yet from 6:15 we read that the construction of the wall was completed in 52 days, less than 2 months. So which part of the work took

longer, was it the work of prayer or the work of construction? As has been well said, prayer is not for the work, it IS the work; the work of looking at and listening to God, of allowing Him to mould our minds and our thinking, of letting Him cleanse our hearts from all evil, from all wrong thoughts and ideas and concepts and plans; to allow Him to remove from our dumb heads and stony hearts the illusion that we are able to decide on these things and to carry out our plans without Him thank you very much and to recognise anew that He has gifted us as individuals and as a church to be built together as His Body, the church on the basis, on the foundation, on the Cornerstone of His Son and His Son's work of buying us back from being dead and lost for ever and making us daily more and more to be like the image of Jesus.

And let me tell you once again it is not primarily or even at all, what WE are doing for God but what HE is doing IN us. In Nehemiah God was working miracle after miracle in changing him, realigning Him with His heart and with His thinking, committing him more and more to an understanding of what He was going to do through him/Him. It probably took him 3-4 months to get where he needed to be to act.

If we look in detail at Nehemiah's prayer as recorded in chapter 1 we will find that the line-up so to speak looks like this. We are looking at the outworking of an acrostic, the one word ACTS; adoration, confession, thanksgiving and supplication; let me translate that: worshipping God saying how good He is, saying sorry for the mess we are in and asking for forgiveness, thanking Him for what He does and asking for help to carry out what He wants to His glory.

God has got Nehemiah to the point where Nehemiah himself is ready and prepared for action and Nehemiah prays finally "Give your servant success today by granting him favour in the presence of this man" for he was cupbearer to the king.

This reminds me again and again of Esther chapters 3 and 4 where high priority emails were sent to all the king's provinces with the order to destroy, kill and annihilate all the Jews—young and old, women and children—on a single day and to plunder their goods and Queen Esther says to her adopted father "Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my attendants will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish."

Like Esther Nehemiah put everything on the line. When he went in with wine to the king, his face clearly revealed his sadness and the perceptive king of course saw it clearly and was worried that the wine might have more than just the normal additives.

"Why does your face look so sad when you're not ill? This can be nothing but sadness of heart." said the king.

Nehemiah's genuine humanity is stretched out for us all to see in his reaction: "I was very much afraid" he writes. But he had prayed for four months and he went for it. He was a humble man prepared by God with a God-given vision with a big risk attached.

Read Nehemiah 2: 3-4

His prayer is not a long, theologically elaborate, well-refined, colourfully expressed masterpiece. It is a cry from his heart. Help he says, which is exactly what God does. Throughout months of praying God has prepared him for this moment and he is given exactly the right words to say in the right order, in the right tone of voice and with the expectation that God is going to answer his prayers.

I think and would hope that each one of us here this morning knows of and has experienced circumstances where we have suddenly been placed in a situation where we are confronted by a desperate need and have cried to the God of heaven who has answered us. Maybe situations in which we too were very afraid, where we did not know how the Lord would be able to help us but we cried out to the God of heaven to help us.

When I was on my way on a very early Saturday morning in winter with my two eldest daughters taking them to the ice stadium, where they were competing, as our car decided to take an off-road detour round a pylon I screamed out to God to help us and He did, enabling me to steer off the road around the object and later back on to the road.

Or on April 6, around 11 am in the morning at a time of year when usually most of the snow and ice has gone but the car on its way to my daughter's hairdresser found the ice in a wooded stretch before a left curve and went straight on into a field after I had cried to God for help then turning the car back across the road and into the field and into a ditch on the other side of the road whilst turning over on its head. On that occasion I woke from my blackout to find the roof above the front passenger seat, front window and passenger front side window completely damaged. The car was a total write-off. But inside minutes a local farmer pulled us out of the ditch with his tractor. Two of my daughters who were travelling with me were both unharmed. Unusually for her on that day Midori had decided not to sit in the front passenger seat. God always knows best. He always hears our cries and answers faithfully according to His Will.

You will have your own stories to tell of the faithfulness of God in answering arrow prayers, sudden cries from the heart for help, support and assistance. Maybe you might like to share them with each other after this gathering this morning.

There are very, very many verses in the Bible where we read of crying to the Lord or calling on the Name of the Lord for help like Nehemiah did and it is not my intention this morning to go through all these with you right now. God's answers to our prayers come before, during and after them, for God is not in any way limited by the time frame in which we are living. In Isaiah 65:24 we read that God says: "I will answer them before they even call to me. While they are still talking about their needs, I will go ahead and answer their prayers!" What a wonderful promise that is!

This has been just the first of five messages in our series on prayer. These are not intended to be theological heavyweight presentations but uncomplicated encouragements to us all to listen to God and speak with Him, to wait on Him, to be willing to obey Him whatever He asks of us as individuals and as a fellowship. May He graciously and mercifully help us through this series to grow closer to Him and in humility deeper in our walk with Him and

bring much fruit in His service, for as our Lord Jesus Himself said, "My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit." (John 15:8)"

Alec concluded his message in prayer: "Loving heavenly Father, thank you for your word. Thank you for your servant Nehemiah, and Esther, Ezekiel, those who knew you and loved you, people who were sometimes very afraid but trusted you. Thank you that they learnt, in humility, to trust in you, to let you renew their minds and open their hearts to the power of your spirit. We pray that you will do the same things for us, that we will be willing to be obedient to what it is that you want us to do. We praise you and thank you as we ask in the name of the powerful, the one and only Lord Jesus Christ. Amen."

Our closing hymn today's led by Trevor and Esther. "Bless the Lord O my soul"

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....

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We brought our service to a close as , together, we said,

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. Benediction

