



Welcome to Blackburn Baptist Church, on November 26th 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 begins with a **Welcome: saying** "Good morning everybody, and a very warm welcome to each of you and to all of us here. We come together in the presence of the living God, Hallelujah. We have this freedom in this country still to meet together, we do not fear being attacked on the way here or being interrupted by people coming in and stopping our service of worship this is a privilege that we have and we shouldn't forget it and be thankful to God for it, and be thankful to God is the theme of our service this morning, if you've been listening to some of the songs that Trevor and the group have been playing you will have heard I think the theme of thankfulness to God coming through. Our opening bible reading this morning is just one verse, a very well known verse that means a lot to very many of us, and I thought you might like to read this together ; "but we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all surpassing power is from God and not from us." That's true isn't it, that we have this treasure in jars of clay so we can see that the all-surpassing power, the power that in on the earth and under the earth is not from us but its from God, and whether standing here and attempting to lead this service today or playing the piano or instruments or leading in whatever kinds of way in worship, being here and worshipping, the power is not from us but in us through Christ who lives in us and we are thankful to him. It is not me, not I , but through Christ in me, and that is our first hymn this morning.

We stood to sing our Opening hymn:

What gift of grace is Jesus my redeemer; there is no more for heaven now to give;
He is my joy, my righteousness, and freedom,
my steadfast love, my deep and boundless peace.

To this I hold, my hope is only Jesus, for my life is wholly bound to His;
Oh how strange and divine, I can sing: all is mine, yet not I, but through Christ in me.

The night is dark but I am not forsaken, for by my side, the Saviour He will stay;
I labour on in weakness and rejoicing, for in my need, His power is displayed.

To this I hold, my Shepherd will defend me, through the deepest valley He will lead;
oh the night has been won, and I shall overcome, yet not I, but through Christ in me.

No fate I dread, I know I am forgiven, the future sure, the price it has been paid,
for Jesus bled and suffered for my pardon, and He was raised to overthrow the grave.

To this I hold, my sin has been defeated, Jesus now and ever is my plea;
oh the chains are released, I can sing: I am free, yet not I, but through Christ in me.

With every breath I long to follow Jesus for He has said that He will bring me home,
and day by day I know He will renew me until I stand with joy before the throne.

To this I hold, my hope is only Jesus, all the glory evermore to Him;

when the race is complete, still my lips shall repeat yet not I, but through Christ in me.

Authors Jonny Robinson, Michael Farren, Rich Thompson CCLI SONG # 7121852 Copyrights ©2018 CityAlight Music (Admin. by Integrity Music Ltd) Farren Love And War Publishing (Admin. by Integrity Music Ltd) Integrity's Alleluia! Music (Admin. by Integrity Music Ltd) Words Jonny Robinson, Rich Thompson, Michael Warren CCL no 5664

Notices were shared by Tony: Alec travels to India this week, all were encouraged to take a copy of his prayer list. Colin will be returning to lead our next 2 services, note that next Sunday the service will be an hour later than usual as the roads will be closed for the Blackburn run! Our weekly activities run as normal. We are asked to sign up for the Christmas party on Dec 16th, more information will be shared later.

We were then invited to join in some Praise songs:

Abba Father, let me be Yours and Yours alone.

May my will forever be ever more Your own.

Never let my heart grow cold, never let me go.

Abba Father, let me be Yours and Yours alone

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All hail, king Jesus! all hail, Immanuel!

King of kings, Lord of lords, bright Morning Star.

And throughout eternity I'll sing your praises,

and I'll reign with you throughout eternity.

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Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me!

I once was lost, but now am found, was blind, but now I see.

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, and grace my fears relieved;

how precious did that grace appear the hour I first believed!

Through many dangers, toils and snares I have already come:

'tis grace has brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home.

The Lord has promised good to me, his word my hope secures;

he will my shield and portion be as long as life endures.

When we've been there ten thousand years, bright shining as the sun,

we've no less days to sing God's praise, than when we've first begun.

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Our prayers were led by Carol Berry, Graham's sister who has moved back to Blackburn, and was accepted into membership at our last church meeting, transferring from Chesterfield Baptist Church. She will be formally welcomed at the January Communion Service.

"Good morning everybody. All hail, King Jesus! All hail, Immanuel! King of kings, Lord of lords, bright Morning Star. This is the God we are here to praise. This is the God we are here to lift our hearts to this morning. Shall we pray:

The writer to the Hebrews reminds us that we have a High Priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the son of God, who is able to understand our struggles and our joys, our sadnesses, our weaknesses and our strengths, so that we can then approach the throne of grace with confidence, knowing that he hears us, and he will work all things together for our good.

We come not because of who we are or what we have done, but purely because of Jesus, his sacrifice at Calvary and his resurrection. How we thank you Father God for all that you are. Thank you for what you have done in each of our lives, for your great grace and mercy, and your faithfulness when we are so often unfaithful. We acknowledge that you are God and there is no-one else like you. We praise you that you hold all things together by the power of your word, that this world keeps turning in its place because you have made it to. We praise you for your heart of love which goes beyond anything we could ever ask or think or imagine. We thank you you do not treat us as our sin deserves and are willing that none should perish but should know life in Jesus.

So we pray for this dark and hurting world, rocked as it is by war, hatred and injustice. Jesus, you are the light of the world. Let your light shine and pierce the darkness. Raise up your church to be the salt and the light you always wanted us to be. Help us to co-operate with you, to bring wholeness and healing to lost and broken lives, here in Galligreaves, and Blackburn and throughout this nation. Restore the honour of your name in the hearts and minds of all people in our cities, towns and communities.

We give you thanks for the time of peace in Gaza and Israel, and the release of some hostages . We pray for continued peace, and that all of the hostages may be released. You have told us to pray for the peace of Jerusalem and its people, but we also pray that through this crisis you would take hearts of stone and turn them into hearts of flesh as you have promised, so that many will come to know you, Jesus, as Messiah. We pray for all messianic Jews and Christians in Gaza, that you will sustain them and give them courage and boldness to speak out for you.

We pray for all who are suffering, for those seriously ill following the attack in Dublin, we pray for healing, justice and peace. For all who are struggling with the cost of living, loneliness, ill health and family problems. Lord, would you be the all-sufficient God, whatever the need. We take a few moments of silence to lift our own prayers to Jesus, whether that be family friends or the wider world.

We pray for this fellowship, for our Pastor Alec, for the Diaconate and for ourselves. We pray for unity, a willingness to support and encourage each other, and fresh vision for our community. Break our hearts, Lord for what breaks yours. We pray that you would work in us and through us for what is good and pleasing in your sight, that we would guard our hearts, keep our eyes fixed on you and allow you to be Lord of our lives until we all reach unity in faith and knowledge of the son of God and become mature, attaining into the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Jesus we thank you that you have heard our prayers. We thank you that your arm is not too short to save or to work in all the situations we have brought before you. We thank you for the hope that we have in you. We thank you that this world is not the end. We thank you that you have promised that your glory will fill this earth as the waters cover the sea. Even so, come, Lord Jesus. Amen."

Our Bible reading today, Colossians 1 3-20, was read by Graham:

"We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all God's people -the faith and love that spring from the hope stored up for you in heaven and about which you have already heard in the true message of the gospel that has come to you. In the same way, the gospel is bearing fruit and growing throughout the whole world - just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and truly understood God's grace. You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf, and who also told us of your love in the Spirit.

For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light. For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

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

Alec shared his Message "We always thank God"

'Paul is writing to believers in Colossae who have come to faith in Christ as a result of the ministry of a man called Epaphras, whom Paul mentions in 1:7. This fellow servant, this faithful minister of Jesus, has apparently been the one who has established the church here in Colossae. And now as Paul writes to the church, he says that because of all that Jesus has become to them, of all the things that should identify them, one of the key characteristics of the Christian, what should really stand out in their lives, is that they have a grateful heart; and so he anticipates here what comes later in 2:7, that when people come into contact with the Colossian Christians, what they will see is, in part at least, thankfulness. So that when people today come into contact with the BBC believers, that is what they should see, at least in part.

And the picture is clear concerning our character. We have said this many times; if we are filled with bitterness, if we are filled with ingratitude, that is to say if we do not have thankful hearts, if we are filled with envy and with jealousy, then it won't take much of a contact with us before what is inside of us comes out. And so, says Paul, "I want to ensure that you folks are marked by this thankfulness." He actually mentions it again and again: in 1:12, "giving thanks to the Father"; in 2:7; then in 3:15, he ends with the phrase, "be thankful"; 3:16, singing "with gratitude in your hearts to God"; 3:17, "giving thanks to God the Father through him"; in chapter 4:2, "devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and (being) thankful." And in all of this, the overflow, the overflow of these Colossian Christians is to be marked by this thankful heart.

The word that he uses for overflowing is a fairly common word, and Paul uses it quite often. It's a word that you find, for example, in 1 Corinthians 15:58 where he says that he wants them in light of all that Jesus is to them by way of the resurrection to be abounding, to be active in the work of the Lord. He has been talking to the church about the centrality and the importance of the resurrection of Jesus, that Jesus didn't just die but that God the Father raised him from the dead and Jesus lives. He says if there were no resurrection there would be no life for us in Jesus.

It's the word that is used in Colossians 2:7 for overflowing.

It's the word that is used in 2 Corinthians 4:15, where he speaks about the grace of God overflowing in them and through them to the glory of God.

And interestingly, it is the word that is used in John 10:10, where Jesus says, I have come that you "might have life and that you might have it more abundantly". In the New International version it reads: "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." The Contemporary English Version says: "I came so everyone would have life, and have it fully."

So, let us be clear. The Christians in Colossae are to be overflowing with thankfulness. Why are they to be overflowing with thankfulness?

as a result of their upbringing?

as a result of their race or colour or nationality?

as a result of their social status and financial position?

as a result of their religiosity)

as a result of their church membership?

No. None of these things!

They are to be overflowing with thankfulness as a result of being united with Christ.

Well that's good for a start isn't it. Because if it depended on one of the other things I have listed up or on things similar to those, most human beings on the planet that God created and sustains wouldn't have a chance of being thankful. Thankfulness doesn't depend on those things but on being in Christ. Have we got it?

I think we should make it really crystal clear. Do we want to see this truth? Do we want to come to terms with this and accept it?

What is the basis, what is the foundation, what is the keystone, the key element in this thankfulness? Where does it come from?

Paul says, "Just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord" (2:6). In 1:6 he says this gospel "has come to you," and as a result of it coming to you, it has borne fruit within you, and this is ever since you heard it and we understood God's grace in all its truth.

Are we growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ as Peter urges us to do in 2 Peter 3:18? Here it is again so we grasp it fully and don't forget it! It's really important!

"But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." To what purpose? With what goal? With what intent? Why should we grow like this? It is for the "glory of God both now and to the day of eternity. Amen."

Are we living fruitful lives? Are we living lives that overflow in and with thankfulness? Challenging isn't it.

Paul is describing here in the letter to the believers in Colossae the conversion of the believers in Colossae. He's not describing a shift from irreligious to religious, but a far more fundamental change than that. Here were these individuals whose lives were going in a certain direction.

Epaphras had come and had begun to tell them about Jesus of Nazareth:

- that he was the one who fulfilled all of the prophecies of the Old Testament;
- that he was despised and rejected by people and he hung upon a cross;
- that there on that cross, he was bearing the sacrifice of my and our sin;
- and that if men and women would turn to him in repentance and in faith, then they would know peace with God and the reality of God's power at work in their lives.

As a result and through the grace and mercy of God, many, many people in the Colossian valley turned in faith to Jesus, and having understood this story what did they do?

- they stopped reading the script because they now thought they knew it?
- they stopped meeting with other believers because they wanted to get on with their own lives again?
- they stopped talking about Jesus as Saviour as Lord because they wanted to appear tolerant and didn't want to interfere in and with the lives of others?

NO!! Having understood the plot, having grasped the storyline they went on to live in the light of it! Their lives showed that Jesus is alive! DO our lives show that?

I wonder this morning, have we grasped this story? Do we realise that the good news of the gospel is the news of the fact that Jesus of Nazareth has come on our behalf, that he has lived the kind of life that we should live, but can't, and that he has paid fully the penalty that we deserve for the life we do live, but shouldn't, so that all of our confidence in the face of life and all of its challenges, in the prospect of death and all of its solemnity is to be found in the Lord Jesus Christ?

Prior to this experience, prior to this encounter, prior to meeting Jesus, these individuals were "alienated from God," and they were "enemies in (their) minds because of (their) evil behaviour." That's a kind of nightmare triangle isn't it?!

Do you really still think that men and women are basically good-natured? If we are honest, we know that our own hearts are out of control and we're turned in upon ourselves and we prefer ourselves before we prefer others, and so on. And we sometimes think that if we were a little more educated, we would have fixed it, but we're fairly bright and we haven't. We thought that perhaps if socially things were different around us, then that would have taken care of it; but socially things are really not bad even when they are bad, and we're still a mess.

And every so often, if someone turns us to the Bible, we discover this ugly truth about ourselves, but it is actually in some measure liberating to realise, "Oh, I get it now. The reason that I feel alienated from people around me, the real reason that I feel alienated from myself sometimes when I am alone, is because the Bible says that I am alienated from God, that God made me for himself, for a relationship with him. I am alienated from him. My mind is turned away from him. I don't think of him. I don't love him. I don't look for him. And frankly, my behaviour isn't up to much either." This realisation sets us free from the fear of life and the fear of death. It sets us free from the mess we have made of our lives and the law of sin and death. God becomes real to us; really there and really present with us.

Without this realisation, without this insight, without this understanding we actually have a four-sided problem or a problem on four levels. We are alienated from God, alienated from our environment, alienated from our fellow human beings and alienated from ourselves. But the key issue is, the one thing that needs to be sorted first is our relationship with God. He is our Creator; he made us, our fellow men and our environment and we are not going to sort this one out without letting Him sort us first.

But he says the good news is that's what we used to be. We were alienated, but now we have been brought together in harmony, aligned with God, conformed to the Will of God. He says, we lived in a

dark place, and now we have been brought into the light. He says, we were trapped, and now we have been set free. He says, we were dead and now we have been made alive with Christ.

I hope we understand this, because this is clearly not simply the description of those who have decided to re-organise, to re-create, to become better people whatever that may mean. "I'm making a change. It's wonderful. I'm going to be more thankful next year than I was this year."

Good! There's nothing wrong with that at all. But the description is not of individuals who decided to rebuild their lives, it is a description of those whose lives have been revolutionised by the saving grace of God, that they were once a certain way, and now they have been made another way. That's what it means to be a Christian. That's what it means to be converted. That's what it means to know God according to the Word of God, the Bible. It means seeing the reality of God in Jesus Christ, seeing that we have made a mess of our lives by leaving God out of the decision-making processes and recognising not only our need of forgiveness but of saying sorry to God turning 180 degrees around in the cul-de-sac of our lonely lives and coming back to him. Seek the Lord while He may be found, turn towards Him while He is near. Is He speaking to you this morning? Are you listening to Him? Do you have ears to hear?

Thankfulness is the song of the Christian.

You see, ingratitude is one of the great marks of the unbeliever. When Paul writes in Romans chapter 1, he says that these people were ungrateful, that although they knew God, they neither gave thanks to him nor glorified him, but they worshipped the creature rather than the creator, (Romans 1:21, 25).

When Paul writes his final letter to Timothy he says in 2 Timothy 3, people will be lovers of money, they will be lovers of themselves, they will be ungrateful, inhospitable, and so on, but ingratitude is in the heart of it.

And one of the real indications that a person's life has been touched and changed by Jesus is that we overflow with thankfulness. We're just thankful!

You see, thankfulness is the song of the Christian. Bitterness, complaining, anger, victimisation, these are all part of the non-believers' lifestyle. And in Jesus, says Paul to these Colossian Christians, you don't live like that anymore.

When we heard God's grace in all its truth, when we turned to him in repentance and in faith, he forgave all of our sins and he came to live inside of us. He indwells us. We are the dwelling place of God. Christ in us the hope of glory. Therefore, it does not fit for those of us who have been united with Jesus to go around behaving like we did before we gave our lives back to God in Jesus Christ in repentance and forgiveness.

So, I want us to be very, very clear about this: that God's call to the believer, is on the basis of our union with Christ, of our being IN Christ.

Paul says:

since we heard God's grace in all its truth,
since we were brought into harmony with God although previously alienated,
since we once lived in darkness and now live in light,
since we were once trapped and have now been set free,
since we were once dead and we've now been made alive,
the dynamic for the gratitude that flows from us is the dynamic of the gospel itself", so that
"purposeful, perpetual thanks to God is absolutely central to our Christian lives and character".

Amen'

Alec invited all to join in our Closing (Offering) hymn:

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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Alec led a Closing prayer:

'Hallelujah! We praise God Father that we stand here, in you, in your name we came together and you are present with us. One day you will come again, please come soon Lord Jesus. We thank you for your presence with us, also as we go from this place may we be going in grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. May we be fruitful in our life and work and ministry each one of us as servants of the living God. We thank you for all you give to us, we pray that you will use the gifts we have digitally and physically brought to you for the extension of your kingdom and we pray once again cos we are not going to give up. We are dependent on you to change the hearts and minds, to open the ears and the eyes of the people not just in Galligreaves but in this town and in this borough but in this land because you are the living God and even if we are the last people here we ask you to speak before it's too late. We want you to come again soon but we know the only reason why you are waiting is so that many many people, many more people, millions of people can like those 200 in Gaza that we have heard about, come to know that you are the living God. Open the hearts and minds of people in this borough we pray, in Jesus name. Amen'