



Welcome to Blackburn Baptist Church, on October 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 Paul C, and we have a guest speaker, Danny Cliffe. We have been privileged to meet Danny and his family on a number of occasions in the past, and it has always been a joy to see and hear them. We are delighted they have been able to join us here at Bethesda Chapel today. Alec is away at present, walking or climbing up mountains in Majorca with his wife, and others in a time of a christian retreat .

Paul began as he welcomed one and all, giving of course a special introduction to Danny and the family. He showed a photograph on the screen, the road from Jerusalem to Gaza, which we will be hearing about today, but is particularly relevant in the light of recent events. He then led in prayer. He asked that God will speak to us of his faithfulness and truth, that he would inspire us, lead us, direct us and encourage us as we seek to follow him.

Tony was then invited to share our notices, not many this week as it is half term, so the only activity is Ladies afternoon meeting on Tuesday at 2.15. The following Tuesday St Lukes will be hosting a Light and Darkness Party, for Primary School-age children and their parents, from 5.30 till 7pm, to which we are invited. The Baptist Union Consultation Survey forms need to be returned to Jane by next Sunday, and can be placed in a basket at the front of the church.

Paul then introduced our opening songs, today played by Kate and Judith as Trevor is away.

As we are gathered, Jesus is here;
one with each other, Jesus is here;
joined by the Spirit, washed in the blood,
part of the body, the Church of God.

As we are gathered, Jesus is here;
one with each other, Jesus is here.

Author: John Daniels CCLI SONG # 38851 Copyrights© 1979 Authentic Publishing (Admin. by Integrity Music Ltd)Copyright© CCL No 5664

Then shown on the screen:

The splendour of the King, clothed in majesty;
let all the earth rejoice, all the earth rejoice.
He wraps himself in light and darkness tries to hide,
and trembles at his voice, and trembles at his voice.

**How great is our God,
sing with me: how great is our God,
and all will see how great, how great is our God.**

And age to age He stands, and time is in His hands;
beginning and the end, beginning and the end.
The Godhead, Three in One, Father, Spirit, Son,
the Lion and the Lamb, the Lion and the Lamb,
How great is our God...

Name above all names, worthy of all praise; my heart will sing: how great is our God.
Name above all names, worthy of all praise; my heart will sing: how great is our God.
How great is our God....

Authors: Chris Tomlin, Jesse Reeves and Ed Cash, CCLI Song 4348399; Copyright © 2004 worshipstogether.com songs/Six Steps Music/
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Paul then asked Danny, Kath, Sam and Charlie to join him on the platform, so that we could all see and meet them again today. Paul asked the children first to say one thing they would like the church here to know about them, starting with Sam, who said football is very major in their house! Charlie likes playing Fifa on his x-box! (The boys then were allowed to sit down!) Kath was next, saying how difficult it was to choose one thing, which was that in her side of the family there have been major answers to prayer with people turning their hearts to Christ. She emphasised the importance of prayer, a powerful weapon. If we want to see change in any aspect of our lives, it needs prayer. She was then allowed to sit down, leaving Danny, who shared how lovely it is to be with us today. For those who didn't know, Charlie was born with half a heart, and from his birth this church has prayed for Charlie and the family over the years. Today we can see the result of those prayers, both boys are now thriving, they are at St Christophers, and Charlie had his 3rd operation on his heart some years ago now, when Judith was able to visit, and share God's love with them. He has since been diagnosed with Coeliac disease, but again through God's grace is doing well and the family have been and are coping with this. Good is good!

Paul then invited us to sing again, as chosen by Danny:

These are the days of Elijah declaring the word of the Lord,
and these are the days of Your servant Moses, righteousness being restored.
And though these are days of great trial, of famine and darkness and sword,
still, we are the voice in the desert crying "Prepare ye the way of the Lord!"

**Behold, He comes riding on the clouds, shining like the sun at the trumpet call.
Lift your voice, its the year of jubilee, and out of Zion's hill, salvation comes.**

And these are the days of Ezekiel, the dry bones becoming as flesh;
and these are the days of Your servant David, rebuilding a temple of praise.
Oh, these are the days of the harvest, for the fields are as white in Your world,
and we are the labourers in Your vineyard declaring the word of the Lord!

Behold, He comes, riding on the clouds...

There is no God like Jehovah, there is no God like Jehovah,

There is no God like Jehovah, there is no God like Jehovah.... repeat

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Shirley then read: Acts 8: 28-40

"Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, 'Go south to the road - the desert road - that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.' So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch,

an important official in charge of all the treasury of the Kandake (which means 'queen of the Ethiopians'). This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the Book of Isaiah the prophet. The Spirit told Philip, 'Go to that chariot and stay near it.'

Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. 'Do you understand what you are reading?' Philip asked.

'How can I,' he said, 'unless someone explains it to me?' So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

This is the passage of Scripture the eunuch was reading:

'He was led like a sheep to the slaughter,
and as a lamb before its shearer is silent,
so he did not open his mouth.

In his humiliation he was deprived of justice.

Who can speak of his descendants?
For his life was taken from the earth.'

The eunuch asked Philip, 'Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?' Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.

As they travelled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, 'Look, here is water. What can stand in the way of my being baptised?' And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptised him. When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing. Philip, however, appeared at Azotus and travelled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea."

Judith then led our prayers for others (instead of Becky, who wasn't able to be with us today, having had a fall during the week). We remembered Becky, and others we know from this fellowship, and the wider fellowship, who are in need of the touch from God's healing hand at this time.

We prayed:

Heavily Father, we pray for this beautiful and broken world.

You have given us a beautiful and fragile world, filled with colour and variety, a world seasoned with your splendour, yet you also give us the freedom to make your world a wilderness, a place where there is desolation and darkness, a place of ugliness and fear. And that's what we've done again and again. We have disturbed the balance of nature, we have polluted the atmosphere, we have violated our neighbour, so that at the end of the rainbow there are blood and tears, a cross and a tomb.

Dress us in a new robe, rainbow God, a coat of many colours so that the wonderful garden of Eden may not be past history but an urgent goal, and life may be rich again for all your creatures.

And we pray this, Jesus, knowing that you wept over Jerusalem.

Jesus Christ, creator of peace and spring of hope, this day we share your anguish for the cities of the world - still we have not loved the things that make for peace.

We weep for the divided cities: where brother fights with brother, where anger feeds on hatred, where prejudice blinds the eyes of compassion and even religion divides, where children are early taught to hate and old men relish ancient wrongs.

We weep for the cities of oppression: where iron law imprisons freedom, where thought is curbed and conscience stifled, where the questing spirit is called a traitor, where art and civilising truth grow barren and each must think as does his neighbour.
We weep for the cities of poverty: where children live but die too soon, where eager hands can find no work, where hunger rules and aid is short, where mothers clutch uncomprehending young ones and where the little we could do, we fail to do.
We weep for our cities, and for ourselves; we have not learned the things that make for peace. (Silence)

Lord, turn tears to love, and love to work. Turn work to justice, and all that makes for peace.
Amen.

Paul introduced our next song, again played by Kate and Judith:

Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord!
Unnumbered blessings give my spirit voice;
tender to me the promise of his word;
in God my Saviour shall my heart rejoice.

Tell out, my soul, the greatness of his name!
Make known his might, the deeds his arm has done;
his mercy sure, from age to age the same;
his holy name, the Lord, the mighty One.

Tell out, my soul, the greatness of his might!
Powers and dominions lay their glory by;
proud hearts and stubborn wills are put to flight,
the hungry fed, the humble lifted high.

Tell out, my soul, the glories of his word!
Firm is his promise, and his mercy sure.
Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord
to children's children and forever more!

Authors: Timothy Dudley-Smith, Walter Greathouse CCLI SONG # 27051 Copyrights © Words: 1961 Dudley-Smith, Timothy (Admin. by Oxford University Press) Music: Public Domain CCL No 5664

At this point Danny came to share his Message: this is a flavour of it:

He asked where people had first met Jesus - Blackburn, Rumania, Surrey, Nigeria, Burnley - God met us at the time we most needed him.

In the passage we see God moving - the Ethiopian had an enquiring mind, and Philip does as he is told by the spirit of God. We see and hear about an obedient servant and a searching man. Danny goes on to recall that in lockdown, as they lived on an isolated farm, they Did church with his parents. They talked about this passage , and Danny had to explain to the boys what 'it meant to be a eunuch - to the boys' horror! He did though have money and wealth, and was of high standing being in charge of the Queen's treasury. He was reading a scroll - he had a chariot, a detachment of Guards, and was a God fearing man as he had been to Jerusalem to worship, though we did not know if he was Jewish. Philip acts in obedience - he may have recognised that the man was from Ethiopia from the colour of his skin, or a eunuch by his physical appearance, and Philip may have looked rather a disreputable character as he approached - running alongside the chariot, on the dusty road.

When God speaks to us, it will be in line with the Bible, Gods infallible word. Sometimes all it takes is for us to initiate a conversation - we should be prepared to be the good and faithful servant. We should be prepared to give an account of what God is doing in our lives - it may be on the bus, to our neighbour - wherever we are sent and to whomever we meet, but we should do this with gentleness - as Philip knew, tell people the good news.

This passage shows again how God can work - sending the right person to explain the passage in Isaiah that was being read by the most unexpected individual at that time. It is a lightbulb moment for the eunuch, and as he comes to faith in Jesus he asks to be baptised. He "nails his colours to the mast" This is the first recorded account of the gospel going to Africa. Immediately after he has been baptised, the Eunuch goes on his way rejoicing - as did those men on the road to Emmaus,- "did not our hearts burn within us?' You cannot do anything else but joy to be found in your heart when God is working in you and through you.

Danny closed in prayer - Help us to be obedient to your call, let us be your willing servants, and let us find joy in what you have in store for us. Bless us this week, we live expecting your grace and mercy to surround us. Give us wisdom and discernment as we speak your words to the people around us.

We were invited to join in our final offertory Song: the wondrous story Danny had talked about:

I will sing the wondrous story of the Christ who died for me;
how He left the realms of glory for the cross of Calvary.

**Yes, I'll sing the wondrous story of the Christ who died for me,
sing it with the saints in glory gathered by the crystal sea.**

I was lost, but Jesus found me, found the sheep that went astray;
raised me up and gently led me back into the narrow way.

Yes, I'll sing the wondrous story....

Days of darkness still come o'er me, sorrow's path I often tread,
but His presence still is with me; by His guiding hand I'm led.

Yes, I'll sing the wondrous story....

He will keep me till the river rolls its waters at my feet;
then He'll bear me safely over, where the loved ones I shall meet

Yes, I'll sing the wondrous story...

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Paul closed in prayer:

Lord God our Father, we thank you for that wondrous story, We thank you for what we've heard and the way you've led and guided us to this moment in time and through this hour together. We pray that, together with the gifts and offerings that we bring you in monetary terms, we would continue to give you our lives in daily service as we seek to follow you and be your hands, your feet, your mouthpiece in this world where people need a Saviour. Amen.

We joined together saying:

May the Lord bless you and keep you, may the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious unto you, may the Lord lift up the light of his countenance upon you and give you his peace. Amen