



Welcome to Blackburn Baptist Church, on October 24th 2021 at 10:45, meeting once more at Bethesda Chapel.

The lifting of lockdown restrictions has resulted in the decision to meet in person at Bethesda Chapel once again. As everyone is not yet able to return, we still plan to use our YouTube channel to broadcast a recording of the services, and will continue to provide this written service sheet. We hope and pray that you will find this outline of our service helpful, as we all seek to worship God as a Church family, wherever we are.

Today is Bible Sunday, and our worship is led by Paul C. It begins with a picture on the screen showing Bible Sunday 2021. Tim is playing the piano for us today. Paul welcomes us all to Bethesda Chapel, on the significant day. Paul reminds us that our website includes a link (on the opening page) to a short video asking if the Bible is trustworthy? He also reminds us of our beliefs, the second of which states that we believe God has revealed himself to mankind in the Bible, that the whole bible is inspired by God and is accurate and trustworthy, with authority over everything, a template and guide for our lives.

We stand therefore and sing about it:

Our first hymn today is one we haven't sung for a while, but is probably known to many, both here at Bethesda and at home. Tim plays it on the piano, and if you are at home you may wish to sing it at full volume!

Thou, whose almighty word
chaos and darkness heard,
and took their flight;
hear us, we humbly pray,
and, where the Gospel day
sheds not its glorious ray,
let there be light!

Thou who didst come to bring
on thy redeeming wing
healing and sight,
heal to the sick in mind,
sight to the in-ly blind,
now to all humankind,
let there be light!

Spirit of truth and love,
life-giving holy Dove,
speed forth thy flight!
Move on the waters' face
bearing the gifts of grace,
and, in earth's darkest place,
let there be light!

Holy and blessed Three,
glorious Trinity,
Wisdom, Love, Might;
boundless as ocean's tide,
rolling in fullest pride,
through the world far and wide,
let there be light!

John Marriott
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We now watch a video on the screen at Bethesda, showing some of the work of the Bible Society, before Paul shares the notices for the week. He shares that we are all invited to the coffee morning on Tuesday, (though there will not be guitar tuition this week!), that Ladies are invited to meet on Tuesday afternoon, and that all again are invited to the Fellowship meeting on Thursday evening. There are boxes available for Operation Christmas Child. He then shared the following:

"Most of you will be aware that Peggy Simmen died peacefully last week. A funeral service of thanksgiving for her long life will take place here on Wednesday November 3rd, at 10.45am, after which the family will leave for the Crematorium.

Gillian has asked me to say that those who knew Peggy and will be present at the service, are invited to join the family following this as they meet at the Spread Eagle at Mellor, and you are asked if this is your intention to please sign the list (in the foyer?)..... today! You will appreciate that there are limitations as to how many people are able to be seated at present in the church, but we will use the hall as an overflow area if necessary. We are reminded that there is no obligation to wear black, as we celebrate Peggy's life, and I have also been asked to say that, rather than floral tributes to remember Peggy, donations to her chosen charity would be appreciated. There will be a donation box in church on the day of the service, should you wish to write a good old-fashioned cheque please make this payable to "Globals Charities".

Lets join in prayer particularly for Gillian and Douglas.

Father God, we praise you for Jesus Christ who, for the joy that was and is in the future, went into the darkness of death so that we might continue to hope and rise

above despair. We thank you for his death which has opened up the future for us. Thank you for his living among us now as risen Lord, leading us through death to undying life. Keep convincing us that his resurrection means life to us, and that neither death nor life nor anything at all in all creation can deprive us of the future you are making for us. So as we thank you for the life of Peggy who is now with you in glory we pray for those who mourn for her, who miss her, for all the family particularly Gillian and Douglas. We ask that you will sustain them in the days to come with good memories of the past and radiant hopes for the future. And bring us all at the last to fullness of life with all your Saints in the kingdom of heaven. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Those of us at the chapel are invited to sing together what may be a new song to some - it has quite a straightforward melody and a gentle waltz feel, so that after listening we may then join in with as we feel comfortable:

(It begins with words on the screen: Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path)

Holy words long preserved for our walk in this world,
they resound with God's own heart, oh, let the Ancient words impart.
Words of Life, words of Hope, give us strength, help us cope
in this world, where e'er we roam, ancient words will guide us home.
Ancient words ever true, changing me, and changing you;
we have come with open hearts, oh, let the ancient words impart.

Holy words of our faith, handed down to this age
came to us through sacrifice oh, heed the faithful words of Christ.
Holy words long preserved for our walk in this world,
they resound with God's own heart oh, let the ancient words impart.
Ancient words ever true changing me, and changing you
we have come with open hearts oh, let the ancient words impart.

Songwriters: Deshazo B Lynn
Ancient Words lyrics © Row J Seat 9 Songs, Lehajoes Music, Integrity's Hosanna Music, New Spring Publishing, Inc.
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(<https://youtu.be/SSs7dJLKOkE>)

Paul shares that his text for today will be Isaiah 55, verse 3, as Victor reads our Bible passage for today: Isaiah 55, 1-11

Invitation to the thirsty

'Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters;
and you who have no money, come, buy and eat!
Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost.
Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labour on what does not satisfy?
Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and you will delight in the richest of fare.

Give ear and come to me; listen, that you may live.

I will make an everlasting covenant with you, my faithful love promised to David.

See, I have made him a witness to the peoples, a ruler and commander of the peoples.

Surely you will summon nations you know not, and nations you do not know will come running to you, because of the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has endowed you with splendour.'

Seek the Lord while he may be found; call on him while he is near.

Let the wicked forsake their ways and the unrighteous their thoughts.

Let them turn to the Lord, and he will have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will freely pardon.

'For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,' declares the Lord.

'As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

As the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater,

so is my word that goes out from my mouth: it will not return to me empty but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it."

Thanks be to God for his word.

Our prayers today are led by Hywel:

"O God our Father who made all things and made them well;

We thank you for sleep at night and work by day. We thank you for this world you have made, for night and day, for light and dark, for sunset and for dawn.

We thank you that you have made us as we are. We thank you for hands to work and feet to walk, for eyes to see and ears to hear, for minds to think and plan, for memories to remember and for hearts to love.

We thank you for those today who will bring us your word, for those to whom we can go to for advice, and for those whose wisdom and experience will help us live our lives and help to solve our problems. We thank you for those who every day, through their friendship, give us strength and whose love gives glory to our lives.

Oh God our Father make us more appreciative of others. Help us always to say thanks for all that is done for us and never to take anything for granted, just because it comes to us unfailingly every day. Help us always to be ready to speak a word of praise whenever a word of praise is possible and sometimes even when it is not possible. Help us to be quick to notice things. Help us to be quick to notice when someone is lonely, shy and left out of things. Help us to see people with your eyes.

We ask your blessing on those in pain and distress of the body. We think particularly of those we know and love. We ask a blessing on those who, even though they are tired, cannot sleep, those whose worry has robbed them of rest. Bless those for whom the world seems empty and lonely.

Forgive us for all the wrong things we have done and even those things we find it hard to forgive ourselves for.

Grant us a mind at peace in the love that passes all understanding, a heart content in the love from which nothing can separate us and a life that is lived with Christ in us.

We give you our prayers in and through the love of our Lord and Saviour Jesus.

Amen"

We can sing, or read if we are at home and prefer, another song which is familiar: **Your word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.** (You may prefer Thy!!) Tim plays this for us on the piano again.

Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.

Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.

When I feel afraid, think I've lost my way
still you're there right beside me;
And nothing will I fear as long as you are near -
please be near me to the end.

Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path

Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path

I will not forget Your love for me and yet
my heart forever is wandering;
Jesus be my guide and hold me to your side -
I will love you to the end.

Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path

Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path

Songwriters: Amy Lee Grant / Michael Whitaker Smith
Thy Word lyrics © Universal Music Publishing Group, DistroKid
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Time for Paul to share his message: Our Invitation and Our Call

You might still remember the first moment you experienced something resembling normal this year. What was it? Perhaps it was meeting a friend for coffee, getting on the bus, a shopping trip in town, whatever it was, there was probably the feeling: 'Are we finally coming out of this?'

In the Bible passage we're going to look at today we're going to find people coming out of something too. Isaiah 55 has a message for exiles returning home.

Israel's exile had lasted 70 years. That was 70 years away from any kind of normality; 70 years away from away from home; and worst of all for them, 70 years away from the temple – which represented the presence of God.

Isaiah 55 is written for Israel's return. But what were they feeling? Disappointed? Fearful? Hurt? Perhaps even given up with God? After all, where had he been in the middle of all this?

If this sounds familiar, it's because it's a common human experience. Theologian Andrew Ollerton (known for making complex ideas simple and relevant. He works with the Bible Society and developed 'The Bible Course') says: 'Exile is more than just an event in the Bible. It's a deep metaphor that explains a universal condition that we still experience today'.

So, what are you like coming out of exile? Perhaps you may be just relieved and ready to get on with things again. But if we're honest, we might be feeling disappointed, hurt or full of fear. Perhaps we're feeling like giving up, or already have. Perhaps we're done with God, or questioning where he's been in all of this.

Israel's experience of exile is in some ways like ours – but there is an invitation within the Bible and this passage which, if we respond to it, can change everything.

This is 'The Invitation'

v1 *Come, all you who are thirsty,
come to the waters;
and you who have no money,
come, buy and eat!
Come, buy wine and milk
without money and without cost.*

v2 *Why spend money on what is not bread,
and your labour on what does not satisfy?
Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good,
and you will delight in the richest of fare.*

v3 *Give ear and come to me; listen, that you may live.
I will make an everlasting covenant with you, my faithful love promised to David.*

(Isaiah 55.1–3, NIV)

The invitation is to all who are '**thirsty**'. These are those who thirst for more, for a life without the pains of emptiness, to those who thirst for love – and keep looking in all the wrong places.

They are those who thirst for justice in their own lives and in the life of the world.

Furthermore, it's those who 'have no money' who are invited

to the banquet. In Hebrew thinking this could mean the poor, but also the outsider. It's not just the one who doesn't know when the next

pay cheque is arriving, but it's the one who feels they have nothing to offer; the one who feels they've been forgotten. You don't have to qualify or measure up in some way. This banquet is free.

The invitation is to all those who **labour**. The prophet is in tune with those who are working themselves into the ground without seeing any lasting results. This may be our experience too. If we are working in order to be a success, to

matter, to be liked, **we're invited to stop. The invitation is to life.** Verse 3 says:
*Give ear and come to me; listen, that you may live.
I will make an everlasting covenant with you,
my faithful love promised to David.*

To a people that would have known the Bible story, this would have really hit home. Go back to the beginning of the story. God made a beautiful world and in it a beautiful garden – a place for people to live and work and worship him. There a river flowed, bringing life to all.

Turn the page, and by Genesis 3, we see humans rebelling and turning from God. **This is our human condition – to do away with God.** There is a deep drought within us all and it leaves us in the wilderness. **But God doesn't give up.**

Throughout the biblical story, there are many moments where God continues to rescue and meet his people's needs – often at places of water. God provides at wells (like Jacob), through springs in the desert (like Hagar) or oases in the wilderness (as he did for Israel in the Exodus). **All these stories show us how radically committed God is to his people despite their rebellion.** This is his covenant – his promise. God says: 'Regardless of how you've treated me, I will never forsake you. I am going to love you to the end and bring you back.'

To a people coming out of exile, God says: 'Don't stop believing! My covenant is everlasting'

The invitation is from Jesus. Jesus is God coming good on his word. Jesus is God bringing this water of real life to the world again.

Jesus is God's faithful love and covenant come in skin and flesh.

As Jesus died on the cross he said, 'I am thirsty!'. Of course Jesus was physically thirsty, but he also said this as a symbol of what the cross was achieving.

He thirsted so we don't have to.

He took on our death, so we can have his life.

He was exiled, so we can come home to God.

He was abandoned, so that we can know the love of his adoption into his family.

And in John 7.37 he says: 'Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink'. His promise really is for anyone and everyone.

Some of us might find it hard to accept an invitation like that. We might struggle to think we could be loved. We live in a world of flaky and fragile relationships, where it's easy for us to be cancelled if we do or say one wrong thing, or dropped if we don't make the grade.

We might think that God is the same. 'Will he cancel me?

Will he drop me? Does he realise who he's really inviting?'

But God isn't like that.

v8 *'For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
neither are your ways my ways,'
declares the Lord.*

v9 *'As the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts.'*

(Isaiah 55.8–9, NIV)

In these verses he is saying, I don't respond like you do. My love is not like your love. I am not like the other people in your life. ***I cannot go back on my word.*** You simply don't have a way of measuring or even understanding the sheer depth and width and height of my love.

A love like this means we can come out of exile –despite all the uncertainty we face – secure in the knowledge that we are loved. We can stop trying to fill our emptiness, trying to prove ourselves and endlessly labouring. We can rest, in the knowledge that we will always be loved. **This is the invitation.**

God calls us

But God never ***invites in*** without ***calling out***. The very invitation we enter into becomes our call.

This is a pattern we see throughout the whole Bible. God tells **Abraham** that he would bless him, and that ***he should go and be a blessing to others.***

He reveals himself to **Moses** in the burning bush, ***then tells him to go to Pharaoh.*** And Jesus said,

'As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.'

(John 20.21, NIV)

So, what is our call?

v5 *Surely you will summon nations you know not, and nations you do not know will come running to you, because of the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has endowed you with splendour."*

v6 *Seek the Lord while he may be found; call on him while he is near.*

v7 *Let the wicked forsake their ways and the unrighteous their thoughts.*

Let them turn to the Lord, and he will have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will freely pardon.

(Isaiah 55.5–7, NIV)

Israel's call was to go to the nations that did not know God and call on them to turn and run to him so that they too might live. We've been called to invite others to what we ourselves were invited into.

And as we come out of our exile, the invitation has never been more needed or more relevant. After all, this was a people returning from exile. They were battered, bruised, and filled with doubt and fear – surely not a people fit for sending!

But the call of God doesn't wait for those who are already strong, capable and confident. ***It comes to us in our weakness, and in our doubt and fear.*** And if we're sensing that we're not ready – not good enough for sending – God has us right where he wants us, where he can give us his own courage.

v10 *as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater,*

v11 *so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.*

(Isaiah 55.10–11, NIV)

The promises of God are as sure and certain as the rain that falls from the sky. Just as it brings new life and growth, **so will the word of God.**

This is what God says to a fearful Israel coming out of exile, **and he says the same to us today: 'My word will not fail. Take heart.'**

This is a promise we need to hear, because fear plays such a massive role in our lives and we're so easily discouraged by our own fearfulness, whatever shape or form that might take.

You might have dreamed a dream, or felt a conviction that you could make a difference, only to be prevented by apprehension and fear. **Fear is natural.**

Courage, though, is a choice – and the world needs a courageous Church. Courage doesn't deny fear, but it says that fear isn't the only thing there – **there is something greater.** The people returning from exile need to hear that God's word will not return to him empty.

Imagine if we as the Church refused to let our apprehensions and fear have the last word.

Imagine what would happen in our communities and in our world if we really had this sort of faith in **God's unfailing word**, and if we really were **willing to accept God's call on our lives.**

In closing

Ephesians 2.10 says, 'For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do'.

Just like the unique face or touch ID that allows you into your phone or PC, God has uniquely shaped and wired you, your experiences, your language, your background, to make you the key to touching and transforming other people's lives.

As the American theologian Tim Keller (show book - 'New York Times bestselling author) says: 'There are some needs only you can see. There are some hands only you can hold. There are some people only you can reach'.

So have you responded to the invitation? If not, will you respond to God's invitation?

May God give you and I courage as the invitation we've accepted becomes more and more our calling and service.

As we bring our time together to a close, **we lift our voices in song once more**, this time to a video on the screen, a song we have sung in the past but perhaps less familiar than some; it was written by Stuart Townend and Keith Getty, and Kristyn sings the version we are watching today: **From the breaking of the dawn.** This version has an Irish lilt to it, with a fiddle and pipe accompaniment.

From the breaking of the dawn to the setting of the sun,
I will stand on every promise of Your word.
Words of power, strong to save, that will never pass away,
I will stand on every promise of Your word.

For Your covenant is sure, and on this I am secure,
I can stand on every promise of Your word.

When I stumble and I sin, condemnation pressing in,
I will stand on every promise of Your word.
You are faithful to forgive, that in freedom I might live,
so I stand on every promise of Your word.
Guilt to innocence restored: You remember sins no more!
So I'll stand on every promise of Your word.

When I'm faced with anguished choice, I will listen for Your voice,
and I'll stand on every promise of Your word.
Through this dark and troubled land You will guide me with your hand
as I stand on every promise of Your word.
And you've promised to complete every work begun in me,
so I'll stand on every promise of Your word.

Hope that lifts me from despair, love that casts out every fear,
as I stand on every promise of Your word.
Not forsaken, not alone, for the Comforter has come,
and I stand on every promise of Your word.
Grace sufficient, grace for me, grace for all who will believe,
we will stand on every promise of Your word.

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(<https://youtu.be/ODpSIIiWkEM>)

We close with a blessing:

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

....and then join together in saying:

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.