



**Welcome to Blackburn Baptist Church, on September 17th 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, with Trevor, Kate, Paul W and Judith accompanying the music.**

**A Welcome was shared by Alec, who after praying in particular for all those in the world who are not able to come freely to worship you, especially those in Pakistan, read from Revelation 3: 7-13.**

**To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write:**

**These are the words of him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David. What he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open. I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. I will make those who are of the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews though they are not, but are liars - I will make them come and fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you. Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come on the whole world to test the inhabitants of the earth.**

**I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown. The one who is victorious I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will they leave it. I will write on them the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on them my new name. Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.**

**Alec then introduced our first hymn, sung to Finlandia:**

**Be still, my soul: the Lord is on thy side; with patience bear thy cross of grief or pain.  
Leave to thy God to order and provide; in ev'ry change he faithful will remain.  
Be still, my soul: thy best, thy heav'nly Friend thru' thorny ways leads to a joyful end.**

**Be still, my soul: Thy God doth undertake to guide the future as he has the past.  
Thy hope, thy confidence let nothing shake; all now mysterious shall be bright at last.  
Be still, my soul: the waves and winds still know his voice who ruled them while he dwelt below.**

**Be still, my soul: the hour is hast'ning on when we shall be forever with the Lord,  
when disappointment, grief, and fear are gone, sorrow forgot, love's purest joys restored.  
Be still, my soul: when change and tears are past, all safe and blessed we shall meet at last.**

**Authors: Text: Katharina von Schlegel, b. 1697; trans. by Jane Borthwick, 1813-1897 Music Jean Sibelius CCLI SONG # 3315316  
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The notices were then given by Tony, who asked that if anyone would like to volunteer to be included on the new rota to inform Jane. He reminded us go the AGM today, and of Harvest next Sunday to be followed by lunch. Ladies Bible Study will recommence this coming Tuesday, meeting for coffee from 10am and starting at 10.45am.

**Alec then invited all to join in a time of Praise and worship, as we sang together:**

Light of the world, You stepped down into darkness, opened my eyes, let me see  
beauty that made this heart adore you, hope of a life spent with you.

**Here I am to worship, here I am to bow down, here I am to say that you're my God.  
You're altogether lovely, altogether worthy, altogether wonderful to me.**

King of all days, so highly exalted, glorious in heaven above;  
humbly you came to the earth you created, all for love's sake became poor.  
**Here I am to worship....**

I'll never know how much it cost to see my sin upon that cross,  
I'll never know how much it cost to see my sin upon that cross,

**Here I am to worship...**

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**We then watched a video of a song entitled "You say" by Lauren Daigle**

I keep fighting voices in my mind that say I'm not enough,  
every single lie that tells me I will never measure up.  
Am I more than just the sum of every high and every low?  
Remind me once again just who I am because I need to know.

**You say I am loved when I can't feel a thing,  
You say I am strong when I think I am weak,  
You say I am held when I am falling short,  
when I don't belong, oh You say I am Yours -  
and I believe (I) oh, I believe (I) what You say of me (I) oh I believe.**

The only thing that matters now is everything You think of me.  
In You I find my worth, in You I find my identity.

**You say I am loved when I can't feel a thing....**

Taking all I have, and now I'm laying it at Your feet,  
You have every failure, God, You have every victory.

**You say I am loved when I can't feel a thing....**

Authors Bebo Norman, Jason Ingram, Lauren Daigle, Mike Donehey, Paul Mabury CCLI SONG # 7071357 Copyrights @2016 Appstreet Music (Admin. by Capitol CMG Publishing)CentricSongs (Admin. by Capitol CMG Publishing) See You At The Pub (Admin. by Capitol CMG Publishing)Fellow Ships Music (Admin. by Essential Music Publishing LLC)Formerly Music (Admin. by Essential Music Publishing LLC)ICM Crescendo Royalty Publishing (Admin. by Essential Music Publishing LLC)So Essential Tunes (Admin. by Essential Music Publishing LLC) CCL No 5664

And finally we sang together:

**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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### **Our Prayers were then led by Becky:**

Dear Heavenly Father,

We are gathered here in our little church once more to join together with you. We want to come before you and spend time with you. We want to thank you for all your love and care this last week. We want to thank you for all the love and care over our loved ones. I'm sure that most of us here this morning will have had certain worries and anxieties this past week over something. One of our family or someone not feeling well or simply having to leave the task undone that we desperately wanted to get done. You are always there for us, Father, either to just listen or to guide us in the right direction. We are so blessed that we can come to you whenever and wherever we may be and that you will always be there for us. Thank you Father in Heaven again.

We also bring before you, dear Father, people we know who do not share a relationship with you as we do. Some are lovely people but stubborn, who think that they are self-sufficient and do not need you in their lives. Others are lonely or frightened people. People who feel very unloved and have little or no confidence in themselves. We have concern for abused women, and abused and neglected children, who do not know how to get out of a desperate relationship. These people and families need you so much dear Lord. Help us to be able to reach out to these people. Give us opportunities, Father, to talk with them, to gain their trust so that they may open up to us. Give each of us the right words to say, words of encouragement just as you would say, let them know that they are not being judged by us, that we only wish to help. It would be so wonderful Father to see our little church here full to bursting, loud singing and laughing happy people, all of us praising you Lord.

There are also in contrast, so many people in this world who continuously sing your praises and know your love. People who live in war-torn countries and blighted countries. People starved of food and water. People who have lost their homes and possessions and have no means of their own to start again. People who have lost loved ones even and have broken hearts. We think of Morocco and the sorrowful earthquake that has just happened recently, How devastating. The same with Ukraine and Libya, all the hardship and heartbreak they have had to face. Most of the people in these troubled countries still give you praise and thank you for the miracle shown to them. We lift up these people to you and thank you for them. We bring them to you in prayer as they start to build up their lives again. Be with them especially Heavenly Father.

As the schools have gone back last week we pray for the young people changing schools from

junior to senior schools. Some will be going to the new school with perhaps half a dozen kids. they went to junior school with, others may be new to the area and school and do not have existing acquaintances from day one. Be with these young ones Lord, help them to make new friends easily. Help them to show respect to the teachers and leaders as well. Then we pray for the little first year classes where everything will be so strange to them. Away from their mummies for long parts of the day. Some of them may be the only child or the eldest and going to big school will be exciting, but also daunting as well.. Help the teaching staff Lord to be patient. We pray for those starting at university and those who are starting their first placement or job. Those who want to make their parents proud and their employers, but are terrified inside. Please be with these young people. Let them feel your presence.

We bring before you Father God, the hundreds of bread earners who are being made redundant on a daily basis. It must be terrifying with all the challenges of economy taking place at the moment to then lose your job at a minutes notice must seem catastrophic. in a lot of families, there is possibly only one wage earner anyway. This can cause such anxieties in young families and depression and hardship. Lead to debt and even worse, we are hearing about a lot of shoplifting lately. Thank you for all the charities and small businesses that do supply clothing and food and necessities on a daily basis, What wonderful hearts these folk have. Help each and everyone of us to do what we can to help others less fortunate than ourselves. Please remind us Lord, even on our worst days, our very worst days, how actually blessed we really are.

Now we we bring before you once again, Heavenly Father, loved ones friends and neighbours, acquaintances and people we don't know who need your healing hand upon them this very day, this very minute even. We pray for those people waiting for hospital appointments, operations, for themselves or their loved ones. We pray for those sick in body and those tormented souls sick in mind. We pray for the lonely and unloved ones. We pray for the weary carers who help to nurse their loved ones, but who are neglecting their own selves. We pray for alcoholics and drug addicts. Please please Father God place your healing hand on these people and let them come to know you, Take away their pain and replace it with friendship and joy.

"What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear,  
. what a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer. "

It is indeed a privilege dear Lord to have you in my life. We will still have challenges to face, disappointments, worries, sicknesses. The blessing is we will have you to share it with, to help us through the frightening times. In Jesus name. Amen.

### **Shirley read for us from Acts 10, beginning at verse 23:**

The next day Peter started out with them, and some of the believers from Joppa went along. The following day he arrived in Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends. As Peter entered the house, Cornelius met him and fell at his feet in reverence. But Peter made him get up. 'Stand up,' he said, 'I am only a man myself.'

While talking with him, Peter went inside and found a large gathering of people. He said to them: 'You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile. But God has shown me that I should not call anyone impure or unclean. So when I was sent for, I came without raising any objection. May I ask why you sent for me?'

Cornelius answered: 'Three days ago I was in my house praying at this hour, at three in the afternoon. Suddenly a man in shining clothes stood before me and said, "Cornelius, God has heard your prayer and remembered your gifts to the poor. Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. He is a guest in the home of Simon the tanner, who lives by the sea." So I sent for you immediately, and it was good of you to come. Now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us.'

Then Peter began to speak: 'I now realise how true it is that God does not show favouritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right. You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, announcing the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. You know what has happened throughout the province of Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached - how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.

### **After a short prayer, Alec gave his Message: Open Doors**

This is the third and possibly final part of our journey narrative; a journey that took us to Caesarea, then to Joppa and today back to Caesarea.

It is a journey with the Lord. It is a journey for our church. It is a wonderful journey with magnificent landscapes portraying the creativity, the graciousness, the mercy, and the loving-kindness of the only living God.

It is a journey forwards for Blackburn. It is a journey of faith. It is a journey on which God makes Himself known again and again through visions, angels, through the Spirit speaking directly to us and through the Word of God Himself.

And He says to us this morning, "You are my servant"; I have chosen you and have not rejected you. So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you;" (Isaiah 41:10).

And He says that because there are probably always times in our lives, even right now, when we are frightened, when we are dismayed and discouraged, when we forget that He is our God yet need His strength and His help.

We are on our journey with Him through the beginnings and the growth of His church over 2000 years ago and now here in Blackburn with Darwen. He is the same God, we have given Him the authority and the Lordship over this church and it is the same journey. The goal is our being transformed into His likeness seeing Him as He is. But this goal is not just for Jews; not just for religious people; not just for anybody in particular: it is for everybody. He gave His life that we might be forgiven and live. He gave us His life that we might share this with all those with whom we come into contact. He gives us the will and the means to do that. He equips us for all that He asks us to do, both individually and as a church. It is a battle that we in Jesus Christ have already won. But it is also an ongoing power struggle in the heavenly places being fought out on the earth in Blackburn.

In our reading we heard from Shirley that arriving with us at last in Caesarea Peter told Cornelius and his friends how he had come without raising any objection when he was sent for. As the Spirit directed, he had acted without misgiving. This was an enormous forward step for the church. The restrictions concerning Gentiles would be overcome. History was in the making!

So do we follow the leading of the Spirit? Or do we hold back and block the Spirit of God? Is it first and foremost our church or is it God's church for God to deal with and use and develop as He chooses? For the good of all, for the good of the community, to the honour of His Name.

Our journey continues in Caesarea as the stage has been set for Peter to address Cornelius, his relatives, and his friends. We join the audience which is prepared and ready for him to deliver a message; by the way you can read it in our travel log in Acts 10:34-43. Cornelius is in awe of him; he perhaps even thought he was like a God and falls at his feet, but Peter tells him to stand up and makes it clear that he himself is a man like everyone else.

Peter begins by saying that "God is not one to show partiality." Jesus Christ died for all men, and the offer of forgiveness for the mess that we have made of our lives is for everybody. There are to be no racial, social, financial, educational, age or any other barriers to being able to come to God in Jesus Christ saying sorry for your sins, being forgiven, receiving new life in Jesus and being baptised. Each human being is a sinner in need of a Saviour. Sadly that is what characterises and unites humanity. But those who have faith in Christ are united in belonging to the kingdom of God, their citizenship is in heaven where they are going.

Then Peter says: "but in every nation or ethnic group (ethne) the man who fears Him and does what is right is acceptable or welcome (dektos) to Him." Although Peter was addressing a specific group, his comments apply to all men everywhere. All who fear God and do what is right are acceptable or welcome.

In an earlier part of our travel guide we find a story about a great banquet. (Luke 14: 16-24). Let's look at this together. Jesus tells the story in response to a man who looks forward to dining in the messianic kingdom and probably presumes that only Jews are invited.

The master of the house is God, and the great banquet is the kingdom, a metaphor that was suggested by the speaker at the table. The invited guests picture the Jewish nation. The kingdom was prepared for them, but when Jesus came preaching that "the kingdom of heaven is near" (Matthew 4:17) He was rejected. John 1:11 reads, "He went to his own people, and his own people didn't accept him."

Many people are invited to come to the banquet.

The excuses for not going to the banquet are honestly really awful. No one buys land without seeing it first, and the same can be said for buying oxen. And what, exactly, would keep a newly married couple from attending a social event? All three excuses in the parable reveal apparent insincerity on the part of those invited. The interpretation is, the reason is, that the Jews of Jesus' day had no valid excuse for turning against the message Jesus gave them; in fact, they had every reason to accept Him as their Messiah.

The invitation is opened up to society's maimed and downtrodden people. Jesus says when you give invite people to a meal invite the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind. These were the types of people that the Pharisees considered "unclean" and under God's curse (cf. John 9:1-2, 34). Jesus, however, taught that the kingdom was open even to those considered "unclean" (cf. Acts 10). His involvement with tax collectors and sinners brought condemnation from the Pharisees, yet it showed the extent of God's grace (Matthew 9:10-11). The fact that the master in the parable sends the servant into the far distance to persuade everyone to come indicates that God's grace extends beyond the Jews "to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). "Rejoice, you nations, with his people." (Romans 15:10).

Jesus our Master is not satisfied with a partially full banquet hall; he wants every place at the table to be filled. MacArthur puts it this way: "God is more willing to save sinners than sinners are to be saved."

Those who ignored the invitation to the banquet chose their own punishment—they miss out. The master respects their choice by making it permanent: Jesus says they will not "taste of his banquet." So

it will be with God's judgment on those who choose to reject Christ: they will have their choice confirmed, and they will never taste the joys of heaven. They will get what they have chosen but lose out on living with Jesus.

As the KJ21 version of Psalm 106:15 reads: "And He gave them their request but sent leanness into their soul." The NIV says: "So he gave them what they asked for but sent a wasting disease among them."

The inclusion of non-Jews fulfils Hosea 2:23, "I will say to those called 'Not my people,' 'You are my people'; and they will say, 'You are my God.'" God is "not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9), and "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (Romans 10:13).

The blessings of the kingdom are available to all who will come to Christ by faith.

We are invited to share Christ's great banquet, not with the many who were invited, not with those we know and like, but rather with those who look like they need a square meal, all the misfits and homeless and down-and-outs you can lay your hands on.

The point is that as the host Jesus is inviting and compelling those who do not fit, those who don't look like us or behave like us, those who are different from us, to come and share in his great banquet.

They are not being invited to come and be waiters at the table, or to do the washing-up in exchange for leftovers. They are not being invited to sit, like dogs under the table, to gather up the crumbs. Rather the outcasts are the very people who are being invited to share in Christ's great banquet, and we serve them.

This is the vision that we need to grasp. This is the vision that we need to realise. This is the vision that we need to work on.

Discovering in detail the vision God has for us requires ears, eyes, hearts, and minds open to what He says to us in and through His Word, open to the needs of the communities in which we live and open to one another as He build us up together as the Body of Christ in this place and fits us together as we share our lives with Him and with one another.

Carrying out the vision God gives to us is not a kind of mission impossible.

He gives us the vision and with it He gives us the will to do it and then he gives us the strength to carry it out.

What do you need to see visions?

What do you need to understand a vision?

You need to be prepared. You need to be ready. You need to be willing. You need to be empowered.

God says: "I have set before you an open door that no-one can shut."

Once we are in, no-one is able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus

There will come a day, a day is coming when the doors will no longer be open. Until then we reach out to the waifs and strays.

"He who has an ear let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches".

\*because God is with us we will live for him

\*because God lives in us we will shine for him

\*because his presence is shining within us, all people will see who he is and many will come to faith and give their lives to him.

Moses said, "Here I am Lord".

Samuel said, "Speak for your servant is listening".

Then the Lord said to Isaiah, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?"

And I said, "Here am I. Send me!"

Go! Not me. Not now, maybe next year. Let me do this first. Doesn't fit into my weekly routine. Probably won't work anyway. I am too old, I am too weak, I have done enough already.

I am saying, "Here am I, Lord. Send me."

It is through us just being His people that we can change the world.

Here we are Lord. Send us!

### **Our Closing (offertory) hymn "He will hold me fast"**

When I fear my faith will fail, Christ will hold me fast;  
When the tempter would prevail, He will hold me fast.  
I could never keep my hold through life's fearful path;  
for my love is often cold; He must hold me fast.

**He will hold me fast, He will hold me fast;  
for my Saviour loves me so, He will hold me fast.**

Those He saves are His delight, Christ will hold me fast;  
precious in His holy sight, He will hold me fast.  
He'll not let my soul be lost; His promises shall last;  
bought by Him at such a cost, He will hold me fast.

**He will hold me fast, He will hold me fast....**

For my life He bled and died, Christ will hold me fast;  
Justice has been satisfied; He will hold me fast.  
raised with Him to endless life, He will hold me fast  
'til our faith is turned to sight when He comes at last!

**He will hold me fast, He will hold me fast....**

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**Alec prayed:** Loving Heavenly Father, we thank you that you are indeed holding us fast and will always hold us fast, help us to hold on to you and win the crown. We thank you for your life within us through your spirit, and in our church through your spirit. Help us to live according to your word. Help us to find the way, help us to go your way. May you enable us, in our weakness you be our strength, in our darkness be our light, in our desperation and difficulty be our hope and our future because you are the living God. We ask you to bless the gifts that we bring today, use these gifts for the extension of your kingdom in Jesus name, Amen.

**And 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.