



Welcome to Blackburn Baptist Church, on September 3rd 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 Communion service today is being led by Alec, with Kate playing the piano.

Alec welcomed everyone, leading straight into our **Opening hymn**:

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.

God's grace first taught my heart to fear, his grace my fears relieved;
how precious did that grace appear the hour I first believed!

Through every danger, trial and snare I have already come;
his 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;
my shield and stronghold he shall be as long as life endures.

And when this earthly life is past, and mortal cares shall cease,
I shall possess with Christ at last eternal joy and peace.

Jubilate Hymns version of Amazing grace, how sweet the sound John Newton (1725 - 1807) Copyright © Jubilate Hymns Ltd CCL No 5664

The Notices were shared by Tony, reminding all that Thursday Sept 14th will be an Open Day of Prayer, whilst the following Sunday we will hold the **AGM** for Church Members after the service - bring your packed lunch.

As Alec invited all to share in a time of communion, a feast of joy, thanksgiving and forgiveness he began with a time of silence, then prayer, before inviting Kate to play our **Communion hymn**:

Here is bread, here is wine, Christ is with us, He is with us.
Break the bread, drink the wine, Christ is with us here.

Here is grace, here is peace, Christ is with us, He is with us.
Know His grace, find peace, feast on Jesus here.

**In this bread there is healing,
in this cup there's life forever.
In this moment, by the Spirit,
Christ is with us here.**

Here we are, joined in one, Christ is with us, He is with us.

We'll proclaim, 'til he comes, Jesus crucified.

In this bread there is healing...

Author:Graham Kendrick CCLI Song Number 983717 Copyright© 1991 Make Way Music (Admin. by Music Services, Inc.) CCL No 5664

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GgysV3EZKas>

Alec continued reading from Corinthians, the reminder of the words of Christ from the Last Supper.

"The apostle Paul tells us of the institution of the Lord's Supper: For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, 'This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.'

In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood.

Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.'

For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup,

you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." (1 Corinthians 11.23-26)

He then invited Tony to lead a prayer of thanksgiving before Janet and Tony distributed first the bread, to be eaten as we received it, and then the wine, retained to drink together. The music of 'Be still and know that I am Lord' was played quietly.

Alec then shared in prayer before Janet and Tony returned to their seats.

Prayers were led by Jean W.

"Heavenly Father, thank you that once again we are able to meet together to worship you freely and openly. We thank you for all you have done for us over this last week. We thank you for all the graciousness you have shown us and Lord we are sorry for the way we have sometimes behaved by not honouring your name. Please forgive us our sins and thank you that you allow us to start each day with a clean sheet.

Lord we are privileged to live in the wonderful world you created. We watch and marvel as the seasons develop and change. We also marvel at the speed that this happens which seems to be faster and faster as we get older!

Heavenly Father we thank you for our families, for the love we share. We thank you for our friends, and for some who have little or no family, friends are the family we choose for ourselves. But we are grateful for the richness that these relationships bring. The chance to learn from each other, to support each other, to give to each other.

We pray for the troubled areas in the world we pray for the people of Ukraine that they remain safe and we pray for peace in their country. Please Lord guide the leaders to make wise and safe decisions for the soldiers they command, and Lord please may the Russian leader realise the damage not just to Ukraine but to his own people. Please soften his heart and give him a conscience and a willingness to listen to those who might be able to bring about an end to this senseless war. Lord, be with Christians around the world, especially those who are being persecuted, those living in countries where it is illegal to be a Christian,

and give them strength to continue following you and guide them in ways that they can support each other in a safe way.

Be with people of Florida who have been affected by the hurricane this past week, help them to feel your presence as they try to salvage their belongings from flood damaged homes. The world seems to be in such a mess with extreme temperatures causing wild fires and all the devastation that they have brought, then there are hurricanes, bringing different problems. May the world leaders be persuaded to agree to the changes that are needed to help with climate change. Lord, you must despair at the way we have treated your precious world, please be with us as we try to do our bit.

Father we bring the situation of the schools to you. Please be with the teachers and those in charge to quickly find good and appropriate buildings for the children to be able to settle in so the teachers can get on with the task of educating them.

Lord we pray for the Cabinet and Government. We ask that they work to high standards and behave with integrity, that they work to serve the people and not themselves. Help them to understand the needs of the ordinary person and how life is so difficult for so many. Help them to work towards making their lives better.

May our local council here in Blackburn work for the good of all. Guide those who govern the budget that the spending is done fairly and those in greatest need are dealt with fairly.

Father we bring to you our church family. Please be with those who are in hospital or have just been in hospital. May the treatment they have received be effective and help them to get back to being able to do all they could before becoming unwell. Be with their families and those who care for them, giving them patience and strength. We thank you for those new people who have shown interest in the church. Father we ask that they continue to be curious about you, that they feel they are able to come into the church and we ask that we are welcoming as we always try to be, and to be understanding of their perceptions of us and how 'church' works!

Lord be with all the activities as they resume after the summer holidays. May they be aware of your presence when they meet and may they be mindful of you in all they do. Be with the people of this estate, help them to know that they are welcome to come to the church.

Father we thank you for all you do, and all we ask you to do and we ask it in the precious name of your son. Amen"

Alec invited Sheila to come forward to share our Bible reading: Acts 10:1-8

At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion in what was known as the Italian Regiment. He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly. One day at about three in the afternoon he had a vision. He distinctly saw an angel of God, who came to him and said, 'Cornelius!'

Cornelius stared at him in fear. 'What is it, Lord?' he asked.

The angel answered, 'Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God. Now send men to Joppa to bring back a man named Simon who is called Peter. He is staying with Simon the tanner, whose house is by the sea.'

When the angel who spoke to him had gone, Cornelius called two of his servants and a devout

soldier who was one of his attendants. He told them everything that had happened and sent them to Joppa.

Alec invited all to join in song again with Kate playing:

Lord, be my vision, supreme in my heart,
bid every rival give way and depart:
you my best thought in the day or the night,
waking or sleeping, your presence my light.

Lord, be my wisdom and be my true word,
I ever with you and you with me, Lord:
you my great father and I your true child,
once far away, but by love reconciled.

Lord, be my breastplate, my sword for the fight:
be my strong armour, for you are my might;
you are my shelter, and you my high tower
raise me to heaven, O Power of my power.

I need no riches, nor earth's empty praise:
you my inheritance through all my days;
all of your treasure to me you impart.
high King of heaven, the first in my heart

High King of heaven, when battle is done,
grant heaven's joy to me, bright heaven's sun;
Christ of my own heart, whatever befall
still be my vision, O Ruler of all.

Authors: Eleanor Henrietta Hull, Mary Elizabeth Byrne CCLI SONG # 1028365 Copyrights ©1982 The Jubilate Group CCL No 5664

Alec prayed: Loving Heavenly Father, thank you that we have the privilege, as Jean has already prayed, of coming together freely in this place to meet with one another, and to meet with you, our living God. We praise you for who you are and for all you do, and are doing in our lives and in our fellowship, and we pray now as we look at your word from the acts of the apostles, that we will see that it is your acts that really concern us, that you want to tell us about how you act, how you behave, how you decide things and how you carry things out. Please open our hearts to hear the words of the man, speak to me, speak to all of us together, to hear your voice in our hearts, in our lives, for we pray in the name of Jesus and for his sake alone. Amen.

Then gave his Message: "God's way forward"

I would like you to come with me on a journey this morning. A journey during which we see how God acts; how he initiates things; how his plans are put together and how they unfold. It is a remarkable journey.

We begin our journey in Caesarea at the home of a centurion called Cornelius. Caesarea was a new town built by Herod the Great which had become the centre of government for the Roman administration of Judea and Cornelius was a centurion in what was known as the Italian Regiment.

When we meet him we experience a devout, God-fearing man, someone who gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly. He reminds us of someone we have probably already met in our travels through Matthew 8:5-13 or Luke 7:2-10. Incidentally I think that teaches me once again how helpful it can be to read thoroughly through a well-written travel guide before I begin or continue on my journey.

This is what I myself had read before meeting Cornelius. It is written here in my travel guide in Luke 7:2-10. Maybe we would like to read that together?

We are sitting down to a warm and friendly, relaxing and much needed capuccino with Cornelius bearing this in mind when it is clear that there is something very special that he wants to share with us. He looks and sounds excited as he describes what God has been doing recently in his life.

Well we know already that he is a worshipper of God, not just a nominal member of a religious community. But we know also that he had not fully accepted the Jewish religion because he had not been circumcised. We know too that these people like Cornelius were still considered to be unbelievers by the Jews, even though they feared God; and the early church used to share the attitude of other Jews to such God fearers as well.

It took a long time for the church to change. It took a long time for the church to change before it recognised the value of this step of being a God-fearer as a kind of stepping-stone on the way between unbelief on the one hand and giving your life to Jesus Christ in repentance, forgiveness and baptism on the other.

Suddenly Cornelius comes to life again. From what he is about to say I am sure it was neither just the effects of the capuccino; nor even probably the result of feeling the strong sea winds.

It was 3 o'clock in the afternoon one day he said and because this is the hour of prayer in the Temple at Jerusalem I expect I was praying. In any case it was broad daylight and I was really awake and well like I saw this vision. I know you might think this was just my imagination; but it wasn't; it was real!

I had a vision. I distinctly saw an angel of God! It was really scary; I was very frightened. You know I have never experienced anything like this before. But this angel was real; clearly real; definitely real. I wish I had had my mobile with me and I would have filmed it all! But not all films are real and not all real experiences are filmed so there we are!

But the angel like came towards me and I was terrified. Someone to whom I was telling this story afterwards said my response was completely normal, they would have reacted in the same way. Apparently this kind of very normal human response is documented all over the place where these things happen.

Don't you think that we all react to the supernatural like this? We are scared, we are frightened, maybe even terrified; we have never seen this before. But what God does supernaturally is real; it is good; it is remarkable; it is simply amazing. We wouldn't perhaps say this but we might find it really "unbelievable"!

The angel came to him called him by his name and he like stared at him in fear, asking, "What is it Lord?" Just by the way appearances of angels, an angel, an angel of the Lord or the angel of the Lord are really quite frequent in our travel guide. They are very special but not unusual. Because we live not in a world on our own separated from the God who made us. He intervenes in our lives on a daily basis often in dramatic ways. When we speak to Him in Jesus' name he hears us and answers us as he sees fit; sending angels to help us is one of his ways of answering and sometimes he even comes himself.

God calls us by name! He says in Isaiah 43, "I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you."

Isn't that amazing! Isn't that wonderful! In a world where scarcely anybody cares. In a world where people are screaming for answers to the questions that are devouring their hearts and minds. God calls us by name.

God says in Isaiah 65, "Before they call I will answer; while they are still speaking I will hear." Isaiah chapter 65 is such a wonderfully encouraging thing to read after the TV news; indeed any time! Our God is the God who hears and answers prayer.

We are at Cornelius' home and we see that there had been no need for Cornelius to be alarmed or fearful. The angel knew who he was and spoke to him individually and personally and assures him that God had taken note of his prayers and his caring actions.

God responds to our prayers; but the nature of his response, the way in which he is going to respond is not always revealed at once. Cornelius takes another deep breath and says that the angel told him to go to Joppa to bring back a man named Simon who is also called Peter; and the angel had told him exactly where he was. God has a specific plan with specific goals and specific ways of reaching them. His plans and His ways-but always with the resources needed to carry them out in the time-scale he has chosen to work with. Remember our story about the pastors and their plans for their churches from last week?

We thought maybe Cornelius would have set up some kind of committee or working party to examine the possibility and desirability, the realism and the practicality of following out what the angel had said. After all everybody needs to be informed; everybody needs to be consulted; everything has to be done in a proper way doesn't it. But Cornelius decided simply that as a centurion he knew what it meant to be under authority and well like God had spoken to him through an angel so he got on with doing what God had told him to do.

Cornelius said that as soon as the angel who spoke to him had gone he sat down and thought about what he had said. No.

Cornelius said I am not really sure if that is what I want to do. No.

Cornelius said I think I need to integrate everybody in my cohort in this decision. No.

As Sheila has read for us:

"When the angel who spoke to him had gone, Cornelius called two of his servants and a devout soldier who was one of his attendants. He told them everything that had happened and sent them to Joppa. "

Following God's instructions is not in principle an act of autocracy but an act of obedience.

Cornelius may have thought "Here I am Lord, ask somebody else to get Peter." But that would not only not have been a helpful way of thinking and behaving. It would have been disobedient.

God said "Let there be light" and there was light. When God speaks we need to listen and to follow. What we don't understand now, what we don't understand on the earth, we will understand later. God always knows what is best. He knows what he is doing.

Cornelius says to us that he realises he is an outsider. He realises there is so much entrenched prejudice against him and against others like him. But he knows that God had sent an angel to speak to him, an angel who knew him personally and called him by name and gave him a specific job to do. So unhesitatingly he takes steps to fulfil his new role, sending three of his people to Joppa to get Peter.

At this point he has no idea at all what God is doing in all this. He has no idea in his mind or heart what is likely to be the consequence of his obedience. Simply because God has spoken to him he is doing

this. In this he is probably very wise to have chosen two of his servants and one of his soldiers who was a devout man to share the responsibility with.

We may share with others what God instructs us to do. What God says to us will affect everybody with whom we are in contact.

God is telling him to send men to Joppa to get Peter so he does it. Maybe we remember that it was in Joppa that Jonah decided initially not to follow the will of the Lord and headed off on a boat to Tarshish instead of to Nineveh. Cornelius says to us, "I am used to giving commands. So I know I need to follow the commands of my life's captain with obedience. Doing something else is not an option for me or indeed for anybody else."

This true account of God speaking to Cornelius and his obedience to God is like a kind of a commentary on "Let go, let God".

God is at work.

That is incidentally the title of the "Baptists Together" magazine for Summer 2023 which I most sincerely recommend that you look at for yourself. The background to this title is a healing which took place at a pool called Bethesda. The name sounds familiar!

In John 5 we read that Jesus healed someone on the Sabbath day. There was at Bethesda a man who had been an invalid for 38 years. Verses 6-8 read like this:

"Jesus saw him lying there, and he knew that the man had been sick for such a long time; so he asked him, "Do you want to get well?"

The sick man answered, "Sir, I don't have anyone here to put me in the pool when the water is stirred up; while I am trying to get in, somebody else gets there first."

Jesus said to him, "Get up, pick up your mat, and walk."

Because it was forbidden to carry one's mat on the Sabbath day, the Jews, the religious people, not only criticised him, they persecuted him. In his defence Jesus said to them, "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working."

The important point of application in this passage is that God is at work. When God is ready to expand His church, He moves into a situation in His Sovereign way and opens doors. This time God gave a vision and sent an angel. He may use this method at any time, but whatever method He uses, He is in control. No man can limit Him in what He does.

Of course, there is a human side to the story. Cornelius was a pious and a generous man. Moreover, as the story reveals, he was receptive to God and His messenger. His response to God was immediate obedience. This is an excellent example for all of us to follow. Let us not hesitate to do His will!

When God is ready to expand His church, He moves into a situation in His sovereign way and opens doors.

Doors to faith!

We will God willing be continuing our journey on our walk of faith towards the doors being opened to others to join us next week.

Alec prayed: Loving Heavenly Father, thank you for your word, thank you that you spoke to your servant, Cornelius, by name, through an angel, thank you that you gave him a specific job to do, a specific role to carry out. Thank you for his obedience. We pray once again giving you

authority over this church, and our lives, to show us the way ahead. Give us the vision we need, 20 - 20 vision like yours, that we can see the way ahead, the details, the plan you have for us, everything that you have for us. Strengthen us in our most holy faith, lead us on to know more and more of your son, Jesus Christ, that this place may be a place that people say 'here they worship the living God, all mighty, all loving and all powerful; 'May many people come here and experience that and come to know you personally and join your church, in your time and for your glory. For the sake of your name and your honour we pray. Amen

We were invited to sing our Closing (offertory) hymn

To God be the glory, great things he hath done:
so loved he the world that he gave us his son,
who yielded his life an atonement for sin,
and opened the lifegate that all may go in.

Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, let the earth hear his voice!

Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, let the people rejoice!

**O come to the Father, through Jesus the Son,
and give him the glory, great things he hath done.**

Oh, perfect redemption, the purchase of blood,
to ev'ry believer the promise of God.
The vilest offender who truly believes,
that moment from Jesus a pardon receives.

Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, let the earth hear his voice!...

Great things he hath taught us, great things he hath done,
and great our rejoicing through Jesus the Son,
but purer, and higher, and greater will be
our wonder, our transport, when Jesus we see.

Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, let the earth hear his voice!....

Authors: Fanny Jane Crosby, William Howard Doane CCLI SONG # 23426 Copyright: words and music Public domain CCL No 5664

Alec closed with a prayer of thanksgiving, Loving Heavenly Father, we, praise you that you know us by name, you call us by name, we praise you for all you are and all you have done and all you are doing for us and in your church. We bring to you, as we've transferred gifts to you in these past days, asking you to bless them, and to use them, to multiply them for the extension of your kingdom in this place. Speak to the hearts and minds of those who live around this church and in this borough and where we live, and where we work, you are the living God you have all power, without you we can do nothing, but with God nothing is impossible. We praise and thank you for the confidence we have in you, that you will continue to lead us on individually in our families and as a church family. We share in the words of the grace together:

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.