



Welcome to Blackburn Baptist Church, on September 5th 2021 at 10:45, meeting in person once more at Bethesda Chapel.

However, as not everyone as yet feels able to join us in person, we still plan to use our YouTube channel to broadcast the services, and will continue to provide this written service sheet for those unable to attend Bethesda. 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.

(Unfortunately we were not able to record this weeks service, and as we were not present, I cannot include all Colin's little comments and asides - and football references - but trust that you will still be in God's presence as you read these notes)

Our service begins with Colin welcoming us both to Bethesda and into God's presence, as he introduces our theme for the next weeks, Encounters with Jesus.

We lift our voices in song as we sing together Jesus is King, accompanied by Joy playing the piano.

Jesus is king and I will extol him,
give Him the glory, and honour His name.
He reigns on high, enthroned in the heavens,
Word of the Father, exalted for us.

We have a hope that is steadfast and certain,
gone through the curtain and touching the throne.
We have a Priest who is there interceding,
pouring His grace on our lives day by day.

We come to Him, our Priest and Apostle,
clothed in His glory and bearing His name;
laying our lives with gladness before Him,
filled with His Spirit, we worship the King.

O Holy One, our hearts do adore You,
thrilled with Your goodness we give You our praise.
Angels in light with worship surround Him,
Jesus, our Saviour, forever the same .

Words and music Wendy Churchill
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Colin leads us in prayer:

“Hosanna to the king of Glory. We sing your praises and we glorify your name this morning. We gather in your presence and bow before you, because your sovereignty knows no bounds or limitations and your love for every one of us is beyond measure. We gladly surrender our lives to you in worship and praise. We thank you for the blessings of this past week. But more than this, we thank you for Jesus, for his death on the cross and for such great salvation that we have him. Help us to learn more this day of your greatness and glory. We pray that your gracious Holy Spirit will move freely amongst us. Come dwell in each of our hearts. Equip us, challenge us, comfort us, teach us. Inspire us as we learn more about your majestic ways. And yet as we gather we are mindful of those who are not with us today - For those who are sick we ask for healing, and for those away from us we ask for your blessing to be on them. We ask all this in the wonderful name and for the sake of Jesus. Amen.”

We join together in saying the Lord’s prayer:

Our Father.

who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever.

Amen.

Colin then shares the notices for this coming week, reminding us that refreshments will be served after this service; that we are invited to Bethesda for the Coffee Morning on Tuesday; there is a Church Members Meeting on Tuesday evening, and the Fellowship Meeting on Thursday evening at 7.30pm.

Colin then leads us as we share Communion together:

We come to the Lord’s supper together as children of our Saviour God, the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus makes the guest list, not us, and he invites us to this feast of love. We come humbly, knowing that we have not earned our way here, through our own efforts or merits, but because Jesus first loved us and gave himself for us. Our global Church family, the Household of faith, is chosen by the Lord, is gathered from north and south, west and east, and includes everyone, even the lowest and the least. Jesus, when he was resurrected from the dead, revealed himself to his disciples in the breaking of bread around a table. May we see through the Spirit of the Living

God have a fresh vision of our Risen and Exalted Saviour this morning as we come to the Lord's Supper.

Let's pray: God of mercy, we acknowledge are many failings before you. We confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole hearts, and we have not loved our neighbours as ourselves. We are truly sorry for our sins, and we humbly repent. For the sake of Your Son Jesus Christ, we pray for your forgiveness, that we may delight in Your will, and walk in Your ways, to the glory of Your Name. God of grace, give us repentant hearts, forgiving hearts, clean hearts, hearts that are willing to love and be loved, for the sake of Jesus. Amen.

On the night he was betrayed,
the night before he was crucified,
Jesus gathered with his friends for a meal.
He took the bread, and after giving thanks to God,
he broke it, saying,
'This is my body, which is given for you.
Do this in remembrance of me.' [break the bread]

Please pray with me:

Jesus, as we take this bread, let it be a sign of all that you did for us, and who you are for us. Thank you that you are indeed the bread of life and that we have partaken of your boundless grace.

[the bread is broken and distributed and eaten]

After sharing the bread, [hold up the cup]
Jesus took a cup of wine, and gave it to them to drink, saying,
"Drink this, all of you;
this is my blood of the new covenant
which is shed for you and for many
for the forgiveness of sins.
Whenever you drink it, remember me."

Let's pray: Jesus, as we drink of this wine,
let it be a sign for us of all you did for us,
and who you are for us.

Thank you that you bring us a peace that passes all understanding. Amen.

[When you receive your cup please wait until everyone has received theirs, so that we drink together as a sign of our oneness together in Christ]

Let us pray together:

Jesus,

through your death and resurrection you reconciled the world to God, and through your example you have shown us a way to peace. Give us strength as the people of God to be channels of peace in the world, speaking your peace, living your peace, and always longing for that moment of eternal peace when we shall see you again. We remember that this feast is also a sign that you will return to take up your rightful place over this world as King of kings and Lord of lords. We rest in the full assurance of this blessed hope. Amen.

Colin leads us in our prayers of intercession:

For our prayers this morning, I will say the words ‘Lord, in your mercy’ at the end of each part and I would like us all, if we are able, to give the response ‘Hear our prayer,’ so that we are all engaged in the act of praying for ourselves, our fellowship here at Bethesda Chapel, and for our troubled world in general.

So let us pray....

Our heavenly Father, hallowed is your name, help us to honour your holy name in our lives, in what we say and what we do. May we never use your beautiful name in a malicious way, in the act of cursing others, even though the people around us may use it in this way. Forgive us for treating it at times in a casual and trivial fashion. Help us to use your name as a means of blessing for others.

Lord in your mercy...Hear our prayer

Father, we are grateful that in Jesus, ‘we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathise with our weaknesses, but was in all parts tempted as we are, yet without sin.’ Your Word exhorts us: ‘Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.’ So, may your gracious presence and the assurance of your forgiveness surround us this and every day, so that obedience to your word may become a joy and not a burden, a blessing and not a curse. May the breadth, height and depth of your love motivate and inspire us, even today, to become more fully your people, servants and messengers of the kingdom, those who are known, not for following the ways of the world with its selfishness and spite, but by obedience to your gracious goodwill. We look to you for this, O God, because on our own, we are tempted to be the opposite. Empower us with your Spirit, we pray in Jesus’ name.

Lord in your mercy...Hear our prayer

We pray for the people of our fellowship at this time: those who are ill and suffering from physical ailments; those who have loved ones suffering from serious illnesses; those who are recovering from hospital treatment and those waiting to go into hospital; those who are grieving the loss of their loved ones; those who are feeling the burden of the years and those being looked after in care homes. We know that you are a God who cares for every one of your children, who knows us through and through, better even than we know ourselves. We pray that you will grant our brothers and sisters a double portion of blessing at this time, so that they may know they are not forgotten but are surrounded at all times by the everlasting arms of your bountiful love and mercy

Lord in your mercy...Hear our prayer

We pray for our country at this time, and in particular for our schools as students return to their studies after the summer holidays, still with the virus causing some concern. Many of these students of all ages, when interviewed on TV have expressed a yearning for a return to normality, so that they can pursue their programmes of learning uninterrupted by isolation and closures, so that they do not become a lost generation. No doubt, some of these are our children, grandchildren and even great grandchildren, and we care deeply for what happens to them and for what their futures hold.

Lord in your mercy...Hear our prayer.

We pray for our world, which is so troubled at this time by wars and natural disasters, whether it is the continuing conflict in Afghanistan, or the storms and flooding in Haiti and parts of America. We pray that you will assuage the rage in human hearts and natural processes in these regions so that people can live their lives free from tragedy and heartache. We especially pray for your servants in these areas as they seek to live and testify for you. For Afghan Christians who face a terrifying future under the Taliban, we pray that you will give them the power to persevere and the strength to reach out to others in their communities with the good-news of Jesus without the fear of persecution or violence. We thank you for the good-news we have received from Chad, from our BMS World Mission partners, Brian and Jackie Chilvers, that they have now completed a few months of uninterrupted work helping to provide a medical service for people who are desperately in need of the most basic of provisions. Grant them the patience, warmth and diligence when giving care to parents and their children who are suffering the terrible effects of malnutrition and disease.

Lord in your mercy... Hear our prayer

All this we ask for the sake of your Son, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

We can join in song again as we watch, listen or read the words to **Bless the Lord O My soul**, written by Matt Redman.

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....

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...

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.
(Forevermore)
Bless the Lord oh my soul....

Words and Music Matt Redman
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Shirley reads our Bible passages for today, John 4, 1-26, 39-42, **The woman of Samaria.**

Now Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that he was gaining and baptising more disciples than John - although in fact it was not Jesus who baptised, but his disciples. So he left Judea and went back once more to Galilee.

Now he had to go through Samaria. So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon. When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, 'Will you give me a drink?' (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.)

The Samaritan woman said to him, 'You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?' (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.)

Jesus answered her, 'If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.' 'Sir,' the woman said, 'you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get

this living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his livestock?

Jesus answered, 'Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.'

The woman said to him, 'Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water.'

He told her, 'Go, call your husband and come back.'

'I have no husband,' she replied.

Jesus said to her, 'You are right when you say you have no husband. The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true.'

'Sir,' the woman said, 'I can see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshipped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.'

'Woman,' Jesus replied, 'believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshippers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshippers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.'

The woman said, 'I know that Messiah' (called Christ) 'is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us.'

Then Jesus declared, 'I, the one speaking to you - I am he.'

Many Samaritans believe

Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, 'He told me everything I've ever done.' So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days. And because of his words many more became believers.

They said to the woman, 'We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Saviour of the world.'

Colin then shares his message, emphasising the theme of Encounters with Jesus - or meeting Jesus.

"Whosoever will may come!"

John 3:16 tells us that God loved the world so much that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believes in him will not perish but have everlasting life. This is the essence of the gospel or good-news of Jesus Christ in its simplest and most direct form: that God offers you and me eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ.

What I would like to concentrate on is that wonderful word 'whosoever'. You see, the world at large has always been plagued with barriers and injustices of all kinds – barriers of age, ability, race, nationality, wealth, gender, education, job, class, etc – and the list goes on; it's

almost endless. Including some and excluding others seems so often to be the name of the game.

But unlike the human world, the world of the gospel is one of 'whosoever', because the message of Jesus is open to all people, regardless of their background or ability. In his letters, the Apostle Paul tells Christians that there is neither Jew nor Gentile, male nor female, slave nor free in the kingdom of Christ. In other words, the barriers associated with race, gender and class that still plague our world today, nearly 2000 years since Paul penned those words, have no place in God's kingdom. Salvation is open to all, because Christ is the Lord of all. Sadly, the Church so often fails to live up to this principle. It always grieves me when I see in history textbooks photos from last century showing American churches with 'For Whites Only' and 'For Blacks Only' notices on their doors. That is why gospel preachers were at the forefront of the move to end slavery and racial segregation in the US. For the gospel of Jesus Christ recognises no social barriers. It is for the 'whosoever' – you and me, regardless of who we are or what we have achieved! That is truly good-news!

That the gospel is **for all**, without exception, is the clear point of the story we have read from John's Gospel about a woman of Samaria. I have a few short points to share with you this morning to leave you in no doubt about the whosoever power of the gospel of Christ – truly a message of peace and reconciliation, of love and forgiveness, and of eternal life.

HER STATUS

Notice first of all that the woman in our story was a nameless Samaritan. The significance here is that the Samaritans were a despised, minority people in that region. They were the remnant of the ancient northern kingdom of Israel, based around the capital of Samaria. Here comes a bit of history, but don't switch off. You see, Israel and Judah (from which we get the term Jew) had separated after the reign of King Solomon, following an enormous quarrel and a war. Two hundred years later, the Assyrians conquered Israel in the 8th century BC, whereas Judah, with its capital of Jerusalem, remained unconquered for another century until the Babylonians came along. So the Samaritans and the Jews were racial and religious cousins but for historical reasons hated each other. This loathing meant that the Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans, whom they regarded as outcasts, and were reluctant to enter their towns and cities *en route* from Judah to the Judean province of Galilee. In the days of Jesus, the Samaria was a small area sandwiched between the Jewish regions.

Added to her Samaritan status was the obvious fact that she was a woman, with no rights in the Roman world independent of male relatives and relationships. She also, I guess, had a shameful secret, which made her come to the well on her own at the hottest time of the day, when no-one from the village would have been around. Whether she was a prostitute or not, we don't know, but certainly she had a chequered personal life and didn't want to be seen or engage with other women. And certainly no self-respecting holy person would 'touch her with a barge pole', as we would say in Blackburn.

HER SURPRISE

Our woman lived in or around the Samaritan village of Sychar or Shechem and was going about her daily household chores noon, collecting water from the local well. But this was no ordinary well, for this was Jacob's Well. Jacob had been one of the great patriarchs of the people – the son of Isaac and the grandson of Abraham. It was Jacob whose name was changed by God to Israel, meaning 'Prince of God'. The Israelites, or descendants of Jacob, were God's Chosen People, and both the Jews and the Samaritans believed that they were the true heirs of the promises that God had made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob two thousand years before. Ownership of the well was a sign to the Samaritans that they occupied a favoured position before God. Thus, her life was ruled by religious custom and tradition, as well as social segregation.

And so, this was just another ordinary day, with no special prospects in view; only the mundane domestic jobs. Let me ask you a question at this point: what is the main reason why you are here this morning? Are you here out of some religious observance tradition, inherited from your childhood? Is this one of your many chores for the week? It's Sunday; it's church day. Or are you here out of a deep spiritual need and hunger, for where two or three are gathered together in the name of Jesus, he has promised to be present in Spirit and present to bless.

What our woman wasn't prepared for was a personal audience with the Mighty One of Jacob, the Son of God. And much to her utter amazement, Jesus started a conversation with her by asking her for a drink of water. By doing this he broke three Jewish customs: he spoke with a Samaritan, a woman, and shared her water container, thus making himself, as a Rabbi, ritually unclean. You see, social barriers and divisions meant nothing to Jesus. You may be feeling unimportant this morning, but God is interested in you as a person in your own right, regardless of your past and social baggage, and is here to bless you with the living waters, eternal life, the life of the Spirit. Jesus is present here in Spirit, because he is the living Lord Jesus, the Risen Christ. So through the gospel, Christ initiates divine conversation and friendship with you and desires you to respond to his message of hope and salvation and to accept in faith his free gift of eternal life.

HER SPECULATION

She clearly had no idea who this man was? *'If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, "Give me a drink," you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water'*. What is interesting about this encounter is that her perception of whom he was changed dramatically throughout the conversation. Initially, she thought he was simply a GOOD MAN: *'How is it that you, being a Jew, ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?'* Her estimation then changed to Jesus being a GREAT MAN: *'Are you greater than our father Jacob?'* And when he tells her about her shameful life to date, she concedes that he must be a GODLY MAN, a Prophet. But it wasn't until she understood his true status as the GOD-MAN, the Messiah or Christ that she was able to see in Jesus her only hope of salvation. *'I know that the Messiah is coming. When he comes, he will tell us all things. Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am he".'* He had come to be the Saviour of the whole world, and not merely the Jewish people.

On another occasion, half way through his ministry, when Jesus was with his disciples, he asked them: *'Who do men say that I am?'* They replied that many thought he was a prophet and even the prophet of the End time. But then he made the question personal to them: *'Who do you say I am?'* Simon Peter was the first to speak up: *'You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.'*

What is your view of Jesus? What do you think about the Man of Nazareth? You see, believing he was a good man, a great man, or a godly man, does not set him apart from other great men of history, and therefore accepting any of these need not impinge in any way on your life. But the moment you accept the claim of the Bible, God's Word, that Jesus was God in human form and that he died on a cross for the sin of the world, then you have to take seriously the claims of the gospel regarding the purpose of his coming, to be the Saviour of the world, for the name 'Jesus' in Hebrew means 'God saves'. And if there was any other way to be saved from a lost eternity, then Jesus died for nothing. He alone could say: *'I am the Way, the Truth and the Life; No one comes to the Father but by me.'* He is the only mediator between God and humankind and therefore between God and me and God and you.

HER SALVATION

To stand before Jesus is to stand before God. He knows the secrets of your life and heart, like he knew those of the woman: the fact that she had had five husbands, or sexual partners, and was currently in another relationship. We cannot hide our sins from him, no matter how hard we try. Nor can we do anything in and of ourselves to change our fallen predicament. Humanly speaking we can try our best to live a good life and that might be enough to please our fellow human beings. But this is not enough to please our righteous and holy God. We cannot, for example, merit eternal life or earn our way to heaven. Going to church, or even reading the Bible, is not enough. The Bible does indeed tell us the way of salvation but we must accept this message for ourselves if it is to have any life-transforming impact on our lives. Only through the healing ministry of Christ and what he accomplished on the cross on our behalf can we enter into the eternal blessings of God. In other words, God's gift of salvation is through faith in Christ.

HER STORY AND SONG

She was so overwhelmed by the forgiveness and freedom she felt that she left her water pots beside the well and went into the city and started gossiping the gospel. Notice it was a woman who first evangelised a gentile nation! She told everyone she had met the Saviour and her life had been transformed. She now had peace and freedom from a life that she clearly despised. And as result of her testimony, many of these Samaritans came to know the living Lord Jesus Christ for themselves. You see, faith in Christ is always a life-changing experience. Do you know this Jesus Christ? Have you experienced for yourself the deliverance that Jesus can bring into a person's life? Have you got the Spirit of the Risen Christ living within you? We don't know what the future holds for us, but we can know that whatever happens to us we can live in the total assurance and peace that when we die we will go to be with Christ forever in a state of utter exaltation. Amen.

We bring our time together to a close as we sing: I heard the voice of Jesus say

I heard the voice of Jesus say,
"Come unto me and rest.
Lay down, O weary one,
lay down your head upon my breast."
I came to Jesus as I was,
so weary, worn, and sad.
I found in him a resting place,
and he has made me glad.

I heard the voice of Jesus say,
"Behold, I freely give
the living water, thirsty one;
stoop down and drink and live."
I came to Jesus, and I drank
of that life-giving stream.
My thirst was quenched, my soul revived,
and now I live in him.

I heard the voice of Jesus say,
"I am the dawning light.
Look unto me, your morn shall rise,
and all your day be bright."
I looked to Jesus, and I found
in him my star, my sun,
and in that light of life I'll walk
till trav'ling days are done.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QyYggOUkv2g>

(This gives you a link to Christ Church, Bath, who recorded this traditional version of the hymn via zoom, earlier this year, with an organ accompaniment)

Words Horatio Bonar,
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We join together in saying the Grace:

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.