

Blackburn Baptist Church Virtual Service, 26 July 2020



Welcome

Welcome to Blackburn Baptist Church this Sunday. Wherever you are, you are very welcome. We pray that you may know God's leading as we praise him, hear from his word and pray together.

Song: *I Have Decided to Follow Jesus*

(If you're online, click [here](#) to listen, or just read the words)

I have decided to follow Jesus
I have decided to follow Jesus
I have decided to follow Jesus
No turning back, no turning back

Though none go with me, yet will I follow
Though none go with me, yet will I follow
Though none go with me, yet will I follow
No turning back, no turning back

My cross I'll carry, till I see Jesus
My cross I'll carry till I see Jesus
My cross I'll carry till I see Jesus
No turning back, No turning back.

The world behind me, the cross before me
The world behind me, the cross before me
The world behind me, the cross before me
No turning back, no turning back

"I Have Decided to Follow Jesus" music by Jeffrey Rickard
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Opening Prayer

Lord, we thank you so much today for what Jesus has done for us. He was prepared to humble himself, even to that terrible death on the cross, so that we could be made right with you. We are amazed once more by the depths of his love towards us undeserving people. Thank you too that you raised Jesus from the dead, that he is alive today and strengthens and enables us to follow him through his Holy Spirit's work in our lives. Lord, please keep Jesus' sacrifice always before us when we are tempted to turn back. Amen.

Meditation

Beryl Fish would like to share with once again from the 'Jesus Calling' readings.

"Let me show you my way for this day. I guide you continually so you can relax and enjoy my presence in the present. Living well is both a discipline and an art. Concentrate on staying close to me, the divine artist. Discipline your thoughts to trust me as I work my ways in your life. Pray about everything: then leave outcomes up to me. Do not fear my will, for through it I accomplish what is best for you. Take a deep breath and dive into the depths of absolute trust in me. Underneath are the everlasting arms!"

Listen to my cry for help, my King and my God, for to you I pray. In the morning, O LORD, you hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before you and wait in expectation. (*Psalm 5:2-3*)

Trust in the LORD for ever, for the LORD, the LORD, is the rock eternal. (*Isaiah 24:4*)

The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms. He will drive out your enemy before you, saying "Destroy him!". (*Deuteronomy 33:27*)

Song: *Christ is Enough*

(If you're online, click [here](#) to listen, or just read the words)

Christ is my reward
And all of my devotion
Now there's nothing in this world
That could ever satisfy
Through every trial
My soul will sing
No turning back
I've been set free

Chorus:

Christ is enough for me
Christ is enough for me
Everything I need is in you
Everything I need

Christ my all in all
The joy of my salvation
And this hope will never fail
Heaven is our home

Through every storm
My soul will sing
Jesus is here
To God be the glory

Chorus

I have decided to follow Jesus
No turning back
No turning back
The cross before me
The world behind me
No turning back
No turning back

Chorus

"Christ is Enough" words and music by Jonas Myrin and Reuben Morgan
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Prayers

Even though we may be by ourselves, we are not alone, because we are united with one another through the love and saving grace of Jesus our Lord. So let us pray together. O Lord, our heavenly Father, we give you thanks that we can come together to worship you, safe in the knowledge that you hear our prayers.

Help us today to think of the feelings of others as much as we think of our own. Help us not to do things that hurt others. If there are things that we know would please you, help us to go out of our way to do them. Help us to think before we speak, so that we do not thoughtlessly hurt or embarrass others. If we have to differ with anyone, help us to do so with courtesy and without losing our temper. If we have to find fault with anyone, help us to do it with kindness. If anyone has to find fault with us, help us to accept it with good grace. Help us all to treat others as we would wish to be treated.

We thank you for all who are thinking of and praying for us and our families. Bless those who have no-one to remember them or pray for them. We think of the aged, the lonely, the friendless and those who have no one to love.

Bless those who specially need our prayers and remembrance. We think of Nigel Atherton, who died earlier this week – be with his son John and the rest of the family at this time, that they may know your love and your care. Bless those who are ill or in pain, especially those in our congregation. We ask you to be with all who are suffering from or recovering from COVID-19. Let them know your presence and care.

Grant us a grateful heart for all your gifts, a contrite heart for all our sins and a heart of peace because it rests in you. Hear our prayers, Lord. Amen.

Song: *This I Believe (The Creed)*

(If you're online, click [here](#) to listen, or just read the words)

Our Father everlasting
The all-creating one
God Almighty
Through your Holy Spirit
Conceiving Christ the Son
Jesus our Saviour

Chorus:

I believe in God our Father
I believe in Christ the Son
I believe in the Holy Spirit
Our God is three in one
I believe in the resurrection
That we will rise again
For I believe in the name of Jesus

Our judge and our defender
Suffered and crucified
Forgiveness is in you
Descended into darkness
You rose in glorious life
Forever seated high

Chorus

I believe in you
I believe you rose again
I believe that Jesus Christ is Lord
I believe
And I believe in you
I believe you rose again
I believe that Jesus Christ is Lord

Chorus

We believe in love, Jesus
I believe in life eternal
I believe in the virgin birth
I believe in the saints' communion
And in your holy Church
I believe in the resurrection
When Jesus comes again
For I believe, in the name of Jesus

Chorus

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Bible Reading: *Galatians 4:8 - 31*

Formerly, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those who by nature are not gods. But now that you know God - or rather are known by God - how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable forces? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again? You are observing special days and months and seasons and years! I fear for you, that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you. I plead with you, brothers and sisters, become like me, for I became like you. You did me no wrong. As you know, it was because of an illness that I first preached the gospel to you, and even though my illness was a trial to you, you did not treat me with contempt or scorn. Instead, you welcomed me as if I were an angel of God, as if I were Christ Jesus himself. Where, then, is your blessing of me now? I can testify that, if you could have done so, you would have torn out your eyes and given them to me. Have I now become your enemy by telling you the truth? Those people are zealous to win you over, but for no good. What they want is to alienate you from us, so that you may have zeal for them. It is fine to be zealous, provided the purpose is good, and to be so always, not just when I am with you. My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you, how I wish I could be with you now and change my tone, because I am perplexed about you!

Tell me, you who want to be under the law, are you not aware of what the law says? For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the slave woman and the other by the free woman. His son by the slave woman was born according to the flesh, but

his son by the free woman was born as the result of a divine promise. These things are being taken figuratively: The women represent two covenants. One covenant is from Mount Sinai and bears children who are to be slaves: This is Hagar. Now Hagar stands for Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present city of Jerusalem, because she is in slavery with her children. But the Jerusalem that is above is free, and she is our mother. For it is written: 'Be glad, barren woman, you who never bore a child; shout for joy and cry aloud, you who were never in labour; because more are the children of the desolate woman than of her who has a husband.' Now you, brothers and sisters, like Isaac, are children of promise. At that time the son born according to the flesh persecuted the son born by the power of the Spirit. It is the same now. But what does Scripture say? 'Get rid of the slave woman and her son, for the slave woman's son will never share in the inheritance with the free woman's son.' Therefore, brothers and sisters, we are not children of the slave woman, but of the free woman.

Message: *No Turning Back*

In this age of GPS, in the world of Satnavs we can still learn a lot from uncomplicated, straightforward, basic, simple, street road signs. I am sure we are all familiar with the road sign, 'No turning back beyond this point'. Look with me at verses 8-10 of Galatians 4.

Maybe you think you know God; perhaps you may know a lot about God, you may have all kinds of interesting conceptions concerning God, you may possibly be interested in God but do you really know God in Jesus Christ? There was a time for each one of us when we did not know God. When we were slaves to the basic principles, slaves to the elemental spirits of the universe, slaves to those who by nature are not gods.

What are these basic principles, what are these elemental spirits of the universe that Paul is talking about here? Sun worship in various forms? Stonehenge is a monument built on the alignment of the midsummer sunrise and the midwinter sunset. Stonehenge was being used as a place of sun worship before the stones were erected. Maybe you might say it is not possible to be a sun worshipper and at the same time live in Blackburn! Moon worship, adoration of the moon, a deity in the moon, or a personification or symbol of the moon? After all the 'sacredness' of the moon has been connected with the basic rhythms of life and the universe. Do the stars have an influence upon our lives? Does the cosmos indeed determine an individual's life and destiny? Many consult horoscopes in order to learn their chances of success betting on horse races, in business or love relationships, in politics or even in science. Can the contemplation of the stars and the cosmos, even today in the twenty-first century, help us to find the secrets of existence and the meaning of life, and tell us if there is a life after this life? 'I Am Kloot', the Manchester group formed in 1999, wrote and recorded 'Northern Skies' in which they sing:

Above there are no stars tonight just northern skies
Reflected light upon your face
People think stars rule our lives
Some people they think otherwise
They can be replaced
Above there are no stars tonight, just northern skies

Reflected light and fields of snow
Some people think stars rule our lives
Some people they think otherwise
What does anybody know?

Do you look to the stars for guidance in your life? How about basic esoteric principles? Do you follow them? Amiability is the essence of success. Working pleasantly is the mother of health. Strenuous effort and diligence conquer adverse circumstances. Simplicity, fortitude, and manliness are the keys to joy and gladness; and service to humanity is the fountain of mutual existence and common prosperity. Is that where you came from before you got to know God? Or is this where you are now?

The Jews thought that the basic principles of the law that were a bondage to them could give them the liberty, could give them the freedom they desired. Donald Guthrie wrote that the whole non-Christian world lives under the slavery of powers that are so great, that they are utterly and completely beyond human control. These powers for the Jews were expressed in the law, where they sought acceptance from God. In verse 8 we read, 'you have been in bondage to beings that by nature are no gods', that is to say, demons or evil spirits. If we are believers, we were slaves. Then Christ saved us. Surely we don't want to return to being slaves?

In Beverley, the East Yorkshire company 'Raymac Signs' sells 'No Turning' signs for £5.64 each, claiming that these signs can be used in a wide variety of situations and are fully waterproof to allow them to be displayed outside. So how about this suggestion? Put this sign metaphorically speaking on the inside of your front door. When you leave home you are not going to depart from the faith.

During our interview Take 3 for 'Galligreaves Live', Ellie said, "I find living a Christian life at university somewhat harder than here in Blackburn. It is more of an active choice I have to make when I introduce myself. So I chose to be baptised in Cambridge to show my commitment, to make it clear to people where I stand." Do we do that? Or do we speak and behave on different days and in different places and on different occasions sometimes as if Jesus is our Lord and sometimes as if he isn't?

When we go out of our comfort zone, when we leave the hopefully relaxed atmosphere of our living accommodation, when we depart from the safety of our fellowship meeting with other believers where are we? Are we on the road with Jesus? Or are we following other ideas? Through Christ we have been set free. In Christ we are free. Do we want to return to being slaves? NO!

In Joshua 1:1 we read 'Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go.' The same is written in Isaiah 30:21: 'Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, "This is the way; walk in it."'

Leamington Road Baptist Church was first opened in May 1895, one year after Blackburn Golf Club. I normally walk most every day on a footpath through the golf course on my way to church and occasionally talk with the players. Supposing we started our round at the clubhouse, walk to the first tee, survive the first hole and walk

to the second tee, and seeing the footpath to the left and to the right directly in front of the second tee decide to give up and wander off in that direction. To where we came from. After completing one hole. But you see, that is what many people do. They give their life to the Lord, they receive his forgiveness, they start walking and living with him and then wander off. They turn back from following Christ. After just a short period of time they give up the freedom that Christ gave them. And then sometimes I see players making their approach shots to the seventeenth green. And eventually holing out. Supposing they decided instead of going to the eighteenth tee, completing the round and entering the clubhouse that is prepared and waiting for them, supposing they decided to wander off right or left on the footpath. That would not be expected of them would it? Are some of us a bit like that? We have lived many years, in many cases decades with the Lord and have almost reached the goal. And now we are uncertain and wander off the right path. May I ask you this question? Do you really want to give up your freedom in Christ and return to being a slave to your own thoughts, to your own emotions and to your own ideas?

The Christian life is the life of sons and daughters; it is not the life of slaves. Has our religion degenerated into an external formalism? Have we lost the richness of inward reality? Are we just fulfilling laws and regulations? Observing days and months and seasons and years? Let us return to the Lord. Let us remember our relationship with him. Let us enjoy free and unhindered the privileges of listening to and speaking with him. It is freedom, not bondage. The way to live the Christian life is to remember who and what we are. To let God's Word keep telling us who and what we are as Christians. We must keep reminding ourselves what we have and what we are in Christ. By the grace of God we need to decide to remember what once we were and never to return to it; to remember what God has made us and pattern our lives upon it, conform our lives to it.

Reaching chapter 4 verse 11 we get a big surprise. Paul, whom we have probably placed in the file labelled hard-thinking, clearly and directly-speaking, forcefully behaving theological academics shows us very different aspects of his personality and character. And how! Here Paul appeals to the Galatians with deep feeling and intense tenderness. In verse 11 he speaks of fears that he may have laboured in vain. That his past efforts have produced a permanent negative result, even though he was reluctant to believe that this was the case as we see in Galatians 3:4. Paul the apostle, the theologian, the defender of the faith is now seen to be Paul the man, the pastor, the shepherd of men, the lover of souls.

In verse 12 he writes, 'I plead with you brothers.' There is no doubt about Paul's feelings about the defection or desertion of the Galatians. We see the pastoral heart of the apostle, real, authentic, genuine. His strongly-felt desire is to be warm-hearted towards them. It is not a matter of appearances. It is not a question of an external outward form but of an inner reality. He wants them to be a Christian like he is. He puts himself in their place and identifies with them. And they had identified with him; they had done him no wrong.

What really stands out to us in relation to Paul? His physical appearance and well-being would not have made it to an Instagram post demonstrating strength and vitality, power and durability. He had probably caught malaria in the mosquito-infected swamps of the coastal region. He arrived in Galatia plagued by a fever. This

seems to have affected his eyesight and his appearance. In any event Paul writes, 'you resisted any temptation to show scorn or disgust at the state of my poor body'.

What stands out in Paul? His height and general physical appearance, his clear and strong voice, his wide-ranging gifts, his ability to preach without notes, his helpful mannerisms? Or his faithfulness to God, his godliness and endurance in fulfilling his God-given ministry? He was not someone who would stand out. He was not someone who would push himself forward. But he was strong and enduring in the faith that had been given to him and which he had taken on board. He was and remained loyal to the truth of the Bible. Later in his life he wrote from prison to the Philippian Christians and said: 'Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: forgetting what is behind and straining towards what is ahead, I press on towards the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenwards in Christ Jesus.' Isn't that what we should aiming for?

Paul has the best interests of the people at heart. A very strong characteristic of his ministry is his longing to see Christ formed in his people. He knew that the effectiveness of his pastoral ministry would be assessed and judged on the basis of what would happen when he left. He hints at that in verse 18, where he writes 'not just when I am with you'. But what a difference to the false teachers who did all they could to win the Galatians over: but for no good. They were zealous, they were enthusiastic, they were offering this and that. But they were only interested in their own reputations, in their own bank accounts and in their own popularity. In contrast, Paul was like a mother to God's people as he says in verses 19 and 20. His concern for those he led to faith put the attitude of the Judaisers to shame.

This is a challenge to me. I am not going to dwell on whether or not or to what extent or in what ways I may be theologically-speaking an evangelical reformed charismatic preacher or not or whatever. That may or may not be very interesting to discuss. But what really matters is this: When I preach, do I preach Jesus, God's Son? And in my life, do I live this same Jesus? The challenge for all of us is this: are we just testing the water to see if the teaching is warm enough but not too hot, if there is enough salt in it, if it tastes good, if it suits our personal preferences, if it is to our liking, if it is not too challenging or even threatening? Or do we all listen to see and to hear God in Jesus Christ. Speaking to us, living in us, moving our hearts and minds to adore and obey him?

Let us please not depend on externals. What a preacher looks like, how long he speaks for, the language he uses, where he stands and so on may be important things. But they are in no way central. Let us look at God's Son Jesus Christ and be filled with wonder and awe. He is our Lord. He is our hope and salvation.

Finally and briefly let's look at the last episode in this chapter which is concerned with Hagar and Sarah. This is probably the most difficult passage in Galatians because it both presupposes a knowledge of the Old Testament which few people today possess and it is a masterpiece of allegorical and technical writing on the part of Paul. It is in three parts. Firstly, Paul reminds his readers that Abraham had two sons, Ishmael, the son of a slave, and Isaac, the son of a free woman. He argues secondly that these two sons with their mothers represent two religions: a religion of bondage which is Judaism and a religion of freedom which is Christianity. Thirdly, he says that if we are Christians we are not slaves like Ishmael but free like Isaac. In verses 28-

31 we see that if we are Christians we are children of promise. As such we will be persecuted and receive an inheritance as sons. It is really as difficult and as straightforward as that! We will be persecuted and our inheritance is sure. Peter expressed it like this:

‘Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God’s power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith – of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire – may result in praise, glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed. Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.’

Song: *Man of Sorrows*

(If you’re online, click [here](#) to listen, or just read the words)

Man of sorrows, Lamb of God
By his own betrayed
The sin of man and wrath of God
Has been on Jesus laid

Silent as he stood accused
Beaten mocked and scorned
Bowing to the Father's will
He took a crown of thorns

Chorus:

Oh that rugged cross, my salvation
Where your love poured out over me
Now my soul cries out
Hallelujah, praise and honour unto thee

Sent of heaven God's own Son
To purchase and redeem
And reconcile the very ones
Who nailed him to that tree

Chorus

Now my debt is paid~
It is paid in full
By the precious blood
That my Jesus spilled

Now the curse of sin
Has no hold on me
Whom the Son sets free
Oh is free indeed

Chorus

See the stone is rolled away
Behold the empty tomb
Hallelujah God be praised
He's risen from the grave

Chorus

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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, now and for evermore.