

Blackburn Baptist Church Virtual Service, 5 April 2020



Welcome

Welcome to today's Palm Sunday service.

Song: *O God Our Help in Ages Past*

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

Chorus

All glory, laud, and honour
To you, Redeemer, King,
To whom the lips of children
Made sweet hosannas ring.

1. You are the King of Israel
And David's royal son,
Now in the Lord's name coming,
The King and Blessed One.

Chorus

2. The company of angels
Is praising you on high;
And mortals joined with all things
Created make reply.

Chorus

3. The people of the Hebrews
With palms before you went;
Our praise and prayer and anthems
Before you we present.

Chorus

4. To you before your passion
They sang their hymns of praise;
To you, now high exalted,
Our melody we raise.

Chorus

5. As you received their praises,
Accept the prayers we bring,
For you delight in goodness,
O good and gracious King!

Chorus

Birthday Time

(Charlotte was 2 on Sunday – let's wish her 'happy birthday')

1. Happy birthday to you,
Happy birthday to you,
Happy birthday dear Charlotte,
Happy birthday to you.

2. Happy birthday to you,
Only one will not do,

Give your heart to the saviour,
And then you'll have two.

3. Happy birthday to you,
From old friend and new,
May God bless you and keep you,
Happy birthday to you.

All Age Slot

Imagine the following conversation between some stuffed animals!

Eeyore: (sigh) I hate this.

Balcony Bear: What's the matter, Eeyore?

Eeyore: We've been stuck inside all week. I'm so bored, I hate not being able to go outside and play.

Kurby the dog: Woof! I know what you mean! I'm so frustrated I'd almost rather still be at school. At least that way I could see my friends, woof, woof!

Molly the monkey: Yeah! And all this coronavirus stuff is really scary too...

Eeyore: (sigh) I hate this.

Puffer the puffin: Why don't we do something fun together, then, to help us get over the social distancing blues? Squawk!

Sweetiepie the giraffe: Ooh! I know! I have a story I can tell! It even has a donkey in it, for Eeyore!

Eeyore: (sigh) Go on then. Might as well...

Sweetiepie: One day, on their way to Jerusalem, Jesus sent two of his disciples on ahead, with these instructions: "Go to the village nearby, and you will find a donkey tied up with her colt next to her. Untie them and bring them to me. And if anyone says anything, tell them, 'The Master needs them'; and they will let you go at once." This happened so that what the prophet had said might come true: 'Tell the city of Zion, "Look, your king is coming! He is humble and rides on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey"'. So, the disciples went and did what Jesus had told them to do. They brought the donkey and the colt to Jesus, threw their cloaks over them, and Jesus got on. A large crowd of people spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from trees and spread them on the road. The crowd began to walk in front of Jesus, shouting, "Hosanna to David's son! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was abuzz. "Who is this man?" people asked. The crowd answered, "This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth in Galilee."

Molly: That was a great story, Sweetiepie, but I'm not sure what that has to do with being stuck in self-isolation!

Sweetiepie: You'd be surprised! You see, this is a story about King Jesus. Except, Jesus is not like any ordinary King. He doesn't go about dressed in gold, riding a chariot, surrounded by bodyguards; he doesn't isolate himself from his people inside of a grand palace; he's not at all distant, or uncaring. Instead, Jesus is humble, he comes among his people and he cares about every one of them. This is a King who doesn't practice social distancing! And the best thing is, unlike ordinary kings, who can get sick and even die, like the rest of us, King Jesus is God's chosen King, the one who has defeated death and is always there for us. All we have to do is put our trust in him! This story reminds us that even when we're bored or frustrated or scared, that we're not alone, because Jesus is always with us, helping us through!

Eeyore: Thanks, Sweetiepie! That makes me feel a lot better, actually!

Song: *Yet Not I But Through Christ in Me*

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

What gift of grace
Is Jesus my redeemer.
There is no more
For heaven now to give.

He is my joy,
My righteousness and freedom,
My steadfast love,
My deep and boundless peace.

To this I hold:
My hope is only Jesus,
For my life is wholly bound to his.
Oh how strange and divine,
I can sing: all is mine,
Yet not I, but through Christ in me.

The night is dark,
But I am not forsaken,
For by my side,
The Saviour he will stay.
I labour on
In weakness and rejoicing,
For in my need,
His power is displayed

To this I hold:
My Shepherd will defend me,
Through the deepest valley
He will lead.
Oh the night has been won,
And I shall overcome,
Yet not I, but through Christ in me

No fate I dread,
I know I am forgiven
The future sure,
The price it has been paid.
For Jesus bled and suffered

For my pardon.
And he was raised
To overthrow the grave.

To this I hold:
My sin has been defeated.
Jesus now and ever is my plea.
Oh the chains are released
I can sing: I am free,
Yet not I, but through Christ in me.

With every breath
I long to follow Jesus,
For he has said that
He will bring me home.
And day by day
I know he will renew me,
Until I stand with joy
Before the throne.

To this I hold:
My hope is only Jesus
All the glory evermore to him.
When the race is complete
Still my lips shall repeat:
Yet not I, but through Christ in me.

"Yet Not I But Through Christ in Me" words & music by
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Meditation: 'Jesus Calling'

Beryl Fish wanted to share with us something from her daily reading, which is entitled 'Jesus Calling'. Here is what Jesus might be saying to us today:

"When you are weary and everything seems to be going wrong, you can still utter these four words, "I trust you, Jesus." By doing so, you release matters into my control, and you fall back into the security of my everlasting arms. Before you arise from your bed in the morning, I have already arranged the events of your day. Every day provides many opportunities for you to learn my ways and to grow closer to me. Signs of my presence brighten even the dullest day when you have eyes that really see. Search for me as for hidden treasure – I will be found by you." [Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. \(Proverbs 3:5\).](#) [The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms \(Deuteronomy 33:27\).](#)

Bible Reading: John 12: 12-19

The next day the great crowd that had come for the festival heard that Jesus was

on his way to Jerusalem. They took palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the king of Israel!" Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, as it is written: 'Do not be afraid, Daughter Zion; see, your king is coming, seated on a donkey's colt.' At first his disciples did not understand all this. Only after Jesus was glorified did they realise that these things had been written about him and that these things had been done to him. Now the crowd that was with him when he called Lazarus from the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to spread the word. Many people, because they had heard that he had performed this sign, went out to meet him. So the Pharisees said to one another, "See, this is getting us nowhere. Look how the whole world has gone after him!"

Sermon: *On the Way to Jerusalem*

If we want to obtain a good understanding of John's Gospel, we should read it for ourselves. We can be really thankful that it is available to us in our mother tongues, that we are free to read it or have it read to us, that nobody is going to come into our social isolation and prevent us reading it!

The story of the Dutch Christian lady Corrie Ten Boom which was told in the book and the film 'The Hiding Place' is indeed an old story, but it is a truly marvellous and memorable one. Corrie was incarcerated in Ravensbruck towards the end of the Second World War. On one occasion she and fellow prisoners were moved to a different and very large barracks. The dormitories were filthy, the beds were rancid, there was space for masses of prisoners and for countless numbers of fleas. But because of the fleas the rooms were not searched. So they had not had to give up a Bible they had hidden. They were reading in 1 Thessalonians 5 where it says, 'Give thanks in all circumstances.' I think you understand why I use this story as an illustration. What a gift it was for the prisoners to be able to keep and read their hidden Bible. They gave thanks to God.

After John's introduction to the Word made flesh we read of John the Baptist, Jesus' first disciples and then the wedding at Cana, followed swiftly by Jesus clearing the temple, his night-time talk with Nicodemus and the incident with the woman of Samaria. Already we are learning who Jesus is, that some follow Him and that many are simply interested in Him. Then we experience more miracles, further teaching and a dividing cleft between Jesus and the religious leaders of the time. But also many disciples turn back and no longer follow Him.

There is one massive surprise in chapter 6. Many disciples were grumbling about what He was saying and indicating that it was such a hard teaching, that it was hard for anyone to accept. Are we in this category? Are we in this group? Do we grumble inwardly or outwardly about what God is teaching us through His Word? Do we find it hard to accept what Jesus is saying? Would we prefer another 'Jesus', another 'Word of God'? Let me tell this clearly: there is no other. Yet Jesus says in verses 63 and 64 something really astonishing. It is almost frightening. But I don't think it is threatening. He says: "The Spirit gives life; the flesh is nothing. The words I have spoken to you are Spirit and they are life. Yet there are some of you who do not believe."

In chapters 7 and 8 the picture of who Jesus is and who He claims to be is more precisely painted and expanded whilst at the same time the concrete and specific opposition of the religious leaders grows. Jesus has been talking about Himself in response to further criticism of the Jews. "I tell you the truth, before Abraham was even born, I Am!" At this, they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds. Is this the kind of warm response the Creator of the universe expects? Is this the heartfelt thanks that He the Son of God deserves? But wait a minute. How do WE respond to Jesus? Do we really want to know more and more who He is?

The immediate context of the triumphal entry is getting closer. The expectations rise. Jesus heals a man born blind after saying He is the Light of the world. What a claim! And what an incredible way to demonstrate that the claim is true! His support is increasing. But the religious leaders are not amused. Read all about it in chapter 9. Move quickly with me on to chapter 10. "I am the gate of the sheep, I am the good shepherd," says Jesus.

In chapter 11 Lazarus, the brother of Mary, is sick, really sick. Jesus waits two more days before setting out for Bethany where Lazarus is so that by the time He gets there Lazarus has already been in the tomb for four days. Four days. Jesus arrives in Bethany where Lazarus was. Jesus says "I am the Resurrection and the Life. He who believes in me will never die." Then Jesus says to Martha what I am going to say to you now. Do you believe this? I am not asking if you agree with me. I am saying do I, do you, do we believe this, that Jesus is who He says He is, that Jesus is the Resurrection and the Life. Because that is who He is.

It is with this background and in this context that Jesus arrives in Jerusalem. You see that there are really three groups of people involved here. The crowd, the religious leaders and the disciples. Let's look briefly at each of these.

The crowds were intrigued by the things Jesus was saying. There were masses of people there. It says in 12:9 'Meanwhile a large crowd of Jews found out that Jesus was there and came, not only because of him but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead.' Additionally, following the Feasts of Tabernacle and of Pentecost there were hordes of people around attending for the Feast of the Passover. Of course there would have been a lot of pure spectators there. People always go with a crowd.

In 11:56 we read, 'When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, many went up from the country to Jerusalem for their ceremonial cleansing before the Passover. They kept looking for Jesus, and as they stood in the temple courts they asked one another, "What do you think? Isn't he coming to the festival at all?"' They had come up to Jerusalem as required of them as Jews as recorded in Exodus 12. If you have time maybe take a look at that chapter afterwards. The Jews understood the background to what they would be celebrating, they would rehearse the events of Exodus 12, reminding one another of God's Word. They took palm branches, went out to meet Jesus and shouted the words of Psalm 118: 25-26. This was not just any shout of praise. This was from the Hallel (Hebrew: הלל, 'Praise'), a Jewish prayer, a verbatim recitation from Psalms 113–118 which

is recited by observant Jews on Jewish holidays as an act of praise and thanksgiving. Every Jewish boy who goes to Hebrew school and prepares for his Bar Mitzvah learns that off by heart.

The crowd knew who they were waiting for. They had truly great expectations. The Hallel reminded them of the great liberation their forefathers had experienced by being brought out of Egypt. They expected Jesus to liberate them from the Romans. They kept on looking for Jesus, they kept on asking after Jesus and then they couldn't stop praising Jesus. Their minds were set on someone whom they thought would set them free from their Roman masters. They had such great expectations, but they were unprepared and unwilling to accept the message that this man brought. Look at John 12:37. 'Even after Jesus had performed so many signs in their presence, they still would not believe in him.' Is that what we do? Do we continually look for Jesus, ask about Jesus and praise Him? And expect him to do what we think we need?

Let's move on from the crowds to the religious leaders. The religious authorities were very active people. They were very concerned about what was going on. Their power base, which had slowly been eroded since Jesus was born, was shaking at the foundations. So what did they do? They called a committee meeting. They had an agenda with probably just one item on it and no space for any other business. Why? Because some of the Jews had gone to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. So the chief priests and Pharisees called a meeting of the Sanhedrin. They were really frustrated people. "What are we accomplishing?" they asked. "Here is this man performing many signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our temple and our nation."

In Luke 19: 39-40 we see that the Pharisees thought they had a real problem. Some of them had mingled with the crowd. The crowd was shouting out verses from Psalm 118 such that the Pharisees said to Jesus, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples." And Jesus said, "You know, if they keep quiet the stones will cry out." Well that would have really fixed it for the Pharisees if that had happened. They planned not only to kill Jesus, but Lazarus as well. Poor Lazarus. It gives a new meaning to 'double jeopardy' doesn't it? Lazarus has died once; Jesus has resurrected him from the dead and now the religious leaders are planning to kill him. Why? Because as written in verses 17-19: 'Now the crowd that was with him when he called Lazarus from the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to spread the word. Many people, because they had heard that he had performed this sign, went out to meet him. So the Pharisees said to one another, "See, this is getting us nowhere. Look how the whole world has gone after him!"'

The Pharisees were determined to put out the light. Jesus said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life." The darkness of the dead orthodoxy of the religion of their day did not meet the needs and longings of the people. Neither does empty religion have a hope in hell of meeting our needs and longings. But Jesus does. That's why He came. That's why He is knocking at the door of your heart. Maybe you opened

the door once and kept your two metres distance. Maybe you moved closer. Maybe you let Him in some time ago. But maybe you have forgotten that He is there.

Maybe if you haven't already given up following Jesus like the disciples in John 6: 66, where we read, 'From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him', maybe you will now. It is your choice. It is my choice. It is our choice. But Jesus looks at us just like He did then and says, "You do not want to leave too, do you?" Do we now stand with Simon Peter before Jesus and say as he did: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God."

Our agenda is maybe not God's agenda. We are very possibly too big-headed and proud to realise that our understanding is probably not God's understanding. We are really a very long way off that. But our commitment is to Him who gave His life for us. To the One who knew why He had come to Jerusalem.

John says in 12:16, "At first his disciples did not understand all this. Only after Jesus was glorified did they realise that these things had been written about him and that they had done these things to him." In Luke 18:31-34 we read: 'Jesus took the Twelve aside and told them, "We are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled. He will be delivered over to the Gentiles. They will mock him, insult him and spit on him; they will flog him and kill him. On the third day he will rise again." The disciples did not understand any of this. Its meaning was hidden from them, and they did not know what he was talking about.' The two walking on the Emmaus road in Luke 24 showed that they did not understand. They needed their eyes opened. From verse 30 we read: 'When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. They asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?"'

May I ask you a question? Do you know who Jesus is? Do you understand what He has done for you? Open your heart to Him today and He will open your eyes. Give your heart and life to Him and He will be all you need every day you are on this earth and for eternity.

Prayers

Lord God, our Heavenly Father, as we come before you our hearts are full of many things, but we bring our praise to you as we celebrate Palm Sunday, and we remember that you rode into Jerusalem and revealed yourself to many that day. We thank you for your continued presence in our lives and with our church family, united still through modern technology, telephone and post.

We are grateful for so many gifts, and rejoice as we see signs of spring through our windows and the wonder of your creation. At this time of difficulty we thank you for many things - friends and neighbours, those who ring us and cheer us,

our Pastor and Deacons - and for our National Health Service and the skill and commitment of its staff and others who have volunteered to help. We pray too for:

- those with responsibility of different kinds, especially our government
- those who are in war zones and areas of persecution where nobody cares about them, and those with little health provision
- those who are sick and needing ventilators
- those who mourn the loss of loved ones, especially as they cannot be close to their family
- people who have problems even though they are well, who have lost income or businesses
- those in care homes, for good care and freedom from disease
- those coping with educating children at home, working from home or working to look after, nurse or feed and care for the nation.
- the shop workers, postmen, delivery packers, lorry and van drivers, refuse collectors and many more on the front line
- those with personal worries, illnesses or problems which may have to wait to be dealt with
- us all to show the light and tell of the promises of Jesus Christ whenever and wherever we can

We ask all this in Jesus' name as we offer our prayers to you, our Father. Amen

Song: *You Alone Can Rescue*

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

1. Who, oh Lord,
Could save themselves,
Their own soul could heal?
Our shame was deeper
Than the sea -
Your grace is deeper still.

Chorus

You alone can rescue,
You alone can save,
You alone can lift us
From the grave.
You came down to find us,
Led us out of death.
To you alone belongs
The highest praise

2. You, oh Lord, have made a way,
The great divide you heal
For when our hearts
Were far away,
Your love went further still.
Yes, your love goes further still.

Chorus

We lift up our eyes,
Lift up our eyes,
You're the giver of life.

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, evermore. Amen.