

Blackburn Baptist Church Virtual Service, 19 April 2020



Welcome

Welcome to today's service, wherever you are. Let us be encouraged by Jesus, our 'Living Hope', as we join in our first song...

Song: *Living Hope*

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

How great the chasm that lay between us
How high the mountain I could not climb
In desperation, I turned to heaven
And spoke your name into the night
Then through the darkness,
Your loving-kindness
Tore through the shadows of my soul
The work is finished, the end is written
Jesus Christ, my living hope
Who could imagine so great a mercy?
What heart could fathom
Such boundless grace?
The God of ages stepped down from glory
To wear my sin and bear my shame
The cross has spoken, I am forgiven
The King of kings calls me his own
Beautiful Saviour, I'm yours forever
Jesus Christ, my living hope

Chorus:

Hallelujah, praise the one who set me free
Hallelujah, death has lost its grip on me
You have broken every chain
There's salvation in your name
Jesus Christ, my living hope

Then came the morning
That sealed the promise
Your buried body began to breathe
Out of the silence, the roaring lion
Declared the grave has no claim on me
Jesus, yours is the victory!

Chorus

Oh God, you are my living hope

"Living Hope" words & music by Brian Johnson & Phil Wickham.
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Meditation

Beryl Fish wanted to share with us again something from her daily reading, called 'Jesus Calling'. It's very relevant to our current situation:

"Trust me, and don't be afraid. Many things feel out of control. Your routines are not running smoothly. You tend to feel more secure when your life is predictable. Let me lead you to the rock that is higher than you and your circumstances. Take refuge in the shelter of my wings where you are absolutely secure. When you are shaken out of your comfortable routines, grip my hand tightly and look for growth opportunities. Instead of bemoaning the loss of your comfort, accept the challenge of something new. I lead you on from glory to glory, making you fit for my kingdom. Say "yes" to the ways I work in your life. Trust me and do not be afraid.

Surely God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid. The Lord, the Lord, is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation. (Isaiah 12:2)

From the ends of the earth I call to you, I call as my heart grows faint; lead me to the rock that is higher than I. For you have been my refuge, a strong tower against the foe. I long to dwell in your tent for ever and take refuge in the shelter of your wings. (Psalm 61:2-4)

Anniversary Thanksgiving

No birthdays to celebrate this week, but there is a special anniversary, nonetheless. It's 40 years to the day since Bethesda Chapel on Shakespeare Way was first opened on 19 April 1980. It replaced an older building on Alice Street. We thank God today for 40 years of faithful witness to him in the area. The opening hymn at the service of dedication on 19 April 1980 was: 'To God Be the Glory'... We can definitely echo that thought!

Song: *Blessed Assurance*

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

Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine
O what a foretaste of glory divine
Heir of salvation, purchase of God
Born of his Spirit, washed in his blood.

Chorus:

This is my story, this is my song
Praising my Saviour all the day long
This is my story, this is my song
Praising my Saviour all the day long.

Perfect submission, perfect delight,
Visions of rapture now burst on my sight;
Angels, descending, bring from above
Echoes of mercy, whispers of love

Chorus

Perfect submission, all is at rest
I in my Saviour am happy and blessed
Watching and waiting, looking above
Filled with his goodness, lost in his love

Chorus

All Age Time

Imagine the following conversation between some stuffed animals!

Sweetiepie the giraffe: Hey guys, I need some advice...

Puffer the puffin: Squawk! Oh no! What's the matter?

Sweetiepie: Well, the other day I was in a really bad mood and had some really mean thoughts about my friends. I didn't actually say anything to them, but I still feel bad about it. What should I do?

Mollie the monkey: Well, you should start off by being honest with your friends and apologising – that never goes far wrong!

Sweetiepie: That sounds like a good idea!

Eeyore the donkey: (sigh) You should probably say sorry to God too – he doesn't like it when we think mean things...

Balcony bear: That's silly, Eeyore! I agree with Molly, you should apologise to your friends, but why bother apologising to God? He forgives us anyway!

Kurby the dog: Woof, woof. I'm not sure that's quite right, Balcony! Listen to this story... After coming to Jerusalem, Jesus went into the Temple. However, instead of finding it a peaceful place of worship, he had to compete with crowds of people changing money and selling doves. Jesus turned over the vendors' stalls saying: "In the scriptures, God says 'My Temple will be called a house of prayer'. But you are making it a hiding place for thieves!" Jesus' words remind us of a time in the Old Testament when the Israelites were doing all sorts of bad things, and God sent word to them through the prophet Jeremiah, saying: "Look,

you put your trust in deceitful words. You lie, steal, hurt, kill and put your trust in other gods. You break all the rules I gave you, to guide you and protect you, instead doing things that I hate! Worst of all, you then come into my Temple and think that you are safe from the consequences of your actions! Do you think my Temple is a hiding place for thieves?" You see, the Israelites in both Jeremiah and Jesus' time did things that broke God's rules and hurt God. They showed that didn't take God very seriously at all! You are right, Balcony, to say that God forgives us when we do things wrong, because Jesus took the punishment for all our bad deeds on the cross. But this doesn't mean that we can take God's forgiveness for granted... quite the opposite! Because we know we didn't deserve this forgiveness, and because we know the price Jesus paid for our forgiveness, we should be grateful to God and take him seriously! Woof!

Balcony: Ah... So we probably *should* apologise to God when we do things wrong, then, even though we are already forgiven... I'm the one who needs to take God more seriously!

Eeyore: Maybe so... (sigh) But how do we do that?

Kurby: Well, Jesus gave us a clue about that in the first half of the story! Do you remember when he said that the Temple was meant to be a house of prayer? The way to show God that you take him seriously is to pray to him! Woof! When you pray, you can tell him the things you've done wrong and ask for his forgiveness. And because God forgives you, you can thank God and praise him!

Sweetiepie: That was really helpful, Kurby. I think both Balcony and I might need to pray today and apologise to God!

Balcony: Yes... should I pray for us?

Sweetiepie: Yes please!

Balcony: Dear Father God, I'm sorry that sometimes we don't take you seriously, and instead do things that hurt you and others – please forgive us when we do this. But most of all, thank you for sending your son Jesus to die on the cross for us, so that even when we do forget to take you seriously, we can always come back and ask you for forgiveness. Amen.

Bible Reading: *Matthew 21:12-22*

Jesus entered the temple courts and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves. "It is written," he said to them, "'My house will be called a house of prayer,' but you are making it 'a den of robbers.'" The blind and the lame came to him at the temple, and he healed them. But when the chief priests and the teachers of the law saw the wonderful things he did and the children shouting in the temple courts, "Hosanna to the Son of David," they were indignant. "Do you hear what these children are saying?" they asked him. "Yes," replied Jesus, "have you never read, "'From the lips of children and infants you, Lord, have called forth your praise'?" And he left them and went out of the city to Bethany, where he spent the night. Early in the morning, as Jesus was on his way back to the city, he was hungry. Seeing a fig tree by the road, he went up to it but found nothing on it except leaves. Then he said to it, "May you never bear fruit

again!” Immediately the tree withered. When the disciples saw this, they were amazed. “How did the fig tree wither so quickly?” they asked. Jesus replied, “Truly I tell you, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only can you do what was done to the fig tree, but also you can say to this mountain, ‘Go, throw yourself into the sea,’ and it will be done. If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer.”

Sermon: *Power in Prayer*

Jesus, who usually walked everywhere he went except when he borrowed a boat, has arrived in Jerusalem on a donkey. He enters the temple area. What does he do? Not that he quietly introduces himself. Oh no! This is dramatic. He cleans it out. He stakes his claim in the central shrine of his people. He arrives, he is angry, he acts and he accuses. The four ‘A’s, we could say.

What was important to Jesus when he arrived at the Temple? That people were able to make a living from the Temple? That people gained financial benefits from their dealings in the Temple? That people could take advantage of religious rules and regulations to reap unfair profits from sales in the Temple? No. Jesus, God’s Son, is interested in the Word of God and in the House of Prayer.

Money changing, fairly carried out, and the sales of sacrificial animals and birds were not the issue. The trouble was that this was going on inside the Temple precincts. The traders had put profit above worship. And were also trading dishonestly as Jesus clearly states in talking of a ‘den of robbers’. Jesus’ actions effectively stopped the trading and brought about the fulfilment of Zechariah’s prophecy in Zechariah 14:21 that a day would come when ‘there shall no longer be a trader in the house of the Lord of hosts’. You see, Jesus knows his Old Testament Scriptures. He is at home with the Old Testament prophets, quoting Isaiah 56:7 and Jeremiah 7:11, even if we may more than occasionally find the Old Testament difficult to follow or to understand. Jesus knows his Old Testament and so can we.

Read Matthew 21:12-13 again. Can you imagine the scene? We can be almost sure that people were reacting in all kinds of ways, saying all sorts of things to and about Jesus. “But Jesus, what about my kids?” “How am I going to support my wife?” “What about our mortgage payments?” “What about my financial security?” “Teacher, we’re not doing anything wrong. Our prices are not extortionate, and, in any case, the people need the doves for their offerings.” “Jesus, you’re a prophet, aren’t you? What we are doing is essential. You don’t need to report it. We are actually playing, a constructive, a necessary and an important role in supporting your cause and upholding your religion.”

Well maybe Jesus is saying, “Listen here. This is not about profit-making and profit margins but about the fulfilment of prophecy. About ‘prophet’ with ‘-et’ and not about ‘profit’ with ‘-it’!” It’s not just a matter of semantics. We’re not playing word games. Jesus says, “My house will be called a house of prayer”.

The Temple was meant as a place of worship. The non-Jews could go no further than the outermost part of the Temple precincts so that, by using the outer court

for trading, if a Gentile, a non-Jew, came into the Temple to pray, the only place that he could do it was in the middle of a busy market place.

What is a church for, if it is not for prayer? In its broader sense, I mean. Prayer and worship. And are we not the church of God, the Body of Christ? Are we praying? Deep down, the traders knew that what they were doing was not right. But there are still some people who are not happy with this. It's strange really, but the people that are not happy with Jesus are the religious leaders and the chief priests. And the situation gets even a bit nastier and more difficult after what is described in verse 14. Because Jesus did some wonderful things at the Temple. Oh yes, he had thrown out the money changers. Oh yes, he had driven out those making money in the Temple grounds. But now he heals people. Well really! When blind and lame people came to Jesus, he healed them.

He didn't give them an appointment. He didn't tell his secretary to give them a time for a video consultation. He didn't say, "Sorry, because of the present broad band of illnesses, I am having to work from home now. Can't heal you at the moment. Wait till the crisis is over." He didn't say he had no time. He didn't think, "What have these people got to offer the Temple, what have they got which we can use." He didn't think, "Well, these types are from badly-educated, lower levels of society; I don't really want THEM to follow me." NO. They could not see. They could not walk. They had come to Jesus. So he healed them.

If someone came to you and said, "Please heal me in Jesus' name", what would YOU do? Read verses 15 and 16 again. "Kids can understand it," says Jesus. "But you can't." And he left them. He leaves the city. He returns for the night to Bethany.

Some years ago our family decided to go to Brittany for a holiday. We enjoyed the beautiful coastal scenery, the beaches, the waves and the rocks. But on the way there and on the way back we had just one small problem. We noticed it first having driven down from our home in the Black Forest to the Rhine valley and to Straßburg because then we travelled through the hilly area of the Vosges. But there was something wrong. We had no power. It took us about 14 hours to complete the 1200km to reach Brittany and, two weeks later, 14 hours to return home. The next day I went to the garage, described the problem and waited for the response. They knew straightaway what the problem was. And, to be honest, so did I. You see, our Volkswagen Sharan had a turbodiesel engine. But the turbo wasn't working. It had no power. So they fixed it. It was a straightforward diagnosis and easily solved. Do you see where I am coming from? Do you see what I am getting at?

On the outside frame of the car it said 'turbo diesel' very clearly in big letters. So big that everybody could see it. Front and back, I think, or maybe on the side. But the turbo had not been working. So we had had to do something about it. Jesus is maybe saying to you and to me that the turbo is not working properly. The power has gone.

If you look at a car with a turbo-diesel engine and it is parked somewhere, you cannot see from the outward appearance whether the motor functions properly

or not. But starting the car makes the problem visible. The car would still start, the vehicle would still move. But in heavy traffic, with the challenge of steep hills and winding roads, it struggles somewhat. So we have to do something about it.

Let's look at what Jesus does. Jesus was up early in the morning. He was on his way back to the city. And he'd probably had no breakfast because there are less than two miles between Bethany and Jerusalem but, in any case, he was hungry. Then he saw a fig tree. He might have thought, "Ah, good. There's my breakfast ready and waiting." Because this fig tree in leaf promised fruit. But it produced none. The leaves advertised that it was bearing fruit, but the advertisement was false. So it was cursed by Jesus.

Jesus' cursing of the fig tree will have had special relevance to the Jews of his day because they viewed themselves as the chosen people. As those to whom God had committed his law. As the servants of God in a way people of no other nation were. But they were not being fruitful. The tree gave every outward sign of bearing fruit but in fact bore none.

If I, if we profess to be God's people but live unfruitful lives this is a solemn warning to us. WE can also make the same mistake as the Jews of Jesus' day by maybe saying, "We are Baptists, we are Brethren. Our church is over 100 years old." Then forgetting to thank the Lord for calling us and equipping us. And producing no fruit.

Maybe the disciples were hungry too. There is no mention of them having gone to Aldi or Lidl for some breakfast rolls. But Matthew does not mention the disciples. Why? Because he concentrates on Jesus and on what Jesus is doing.

"If you have faith and do not doubt" you can move mountains. This is clearly metaphorical. The disciples had already heard about faith that moves mountains. Look at Matthew 17:14-21. Throughout the history of the Christian church, mountainous difficulties have been removed when people have prayed in faith. There are countless examples of this kind of faith both in the Acts of the Apostles and in the church today. I have chosen one from each.

Look with me first at Acts chapter 12. Please read verses 1 to 17 of this chapter. Verse 5 is a key verse. 'So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him.' Look at what God then did. You see God answered their prayers and they were astonished. It was almost as if they did not believe that God would answer their prayers. But he did. 'Before they call, I will answer; while they are still speaking, I will hear.' (Isaiah 65:24).

Some years ago, I went with Sibylle to a meeting about 20 minutes' drive from our house to hear a Chinese Pastor speak. I had already read a book about him and was really looking forward to being there. When we arrived, I saw him sitting inauspiciously in a corner at the back away from everybody else and said to Sibylle, "I'm going over to say hello". She tried to stop me but, well... I greeted the pastor using some of the very few Chinese words I know and he replied. He said just three words, well four characters actually! 耶稣爱你 Yēsū ài nǐ. Do

you know what that means? Oh yes, you do. Jesus loves you! What a way to be greeted! What a way to greet someone you've never seen before.

From a very humble beginning, this Chinese pastor became well-known in China and to the Chinese authorities for his unbroken evangelistic zeal and his unremitting endeavours to communicate the Lordship of Christ to the Chinese people. He was consequently imprisoned many times, the last time in a maximum-security prison in Zengzhou. Many, many people prayed. Through Scripture, through a vision and through the advice of a Christian brother, a fellow prisoner, he knew he was going to be set free. He prayed, "Lord you have showed me that I must try to leave this prison. I will obey you now and will try to escape. But when the guards shoot me, please receive my soul into your heavenly dwelling." He writes of one day on which he says, "At that moment the Holy Spirit spoke to me, "Go now. The God of Peter is your God." I have learned when the Lord tells us to do something there is no time for discussion or rational thinking, regardless of the situation we face. When we are sure God has told us to act, blind obedience is called for. Not to obey God implies that we are wiser than him, and that we know better how to run our lives than he does." And so he became the first person to escape from Zhengzhou Number One Maximum Security prison. The power of prayer at work again moving a mountain.

It is a very simple message. A straightforward message. An uncomplicated message. But a very powerful message. We believe in God, he hears and answers our prayers and even moves mountains. Do you know how much power you need to move a mountain? Even just to build a tunnel through a mountain? I mean a long tunnel, like the new Gotthard tunnel in Switzerland, which took 17 years to build. The Gotthard Base Tunnel, with a length of 57.09 kilometres (35.47 miles) and a total of 151.84 km (94.3 miles) of tunnels, shafts and passages, is the longest railway tunnel in the world, with a geodetic distance of 55.782 kilometres (34.661 miles) between the two portals. It is also the world's longest transit tunnel. And that didn't move all of a mountain, only a tiny little bit of it. Yes, to move mountainous challenges, churches need power. The power of God answering prayer. The unlimited power of a loving and gracious God who can do the impossible. Again and again. Do you believe that?

In Matthew 28:18-19 we read: 'Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations' (in Blackburn). Paul writes in Romans 1:16, 'For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes.' That is our challenge. That is many big mountains that have to be moved. But, you see, Paul uses the word δύναμις (dynamis) for power. Dynamis, dynamite. Just what you need to break down mountains.

We come together for prayer as a church in many ways. Prayer meetings, prayer groups, online prayer gatherings, prayer chains, private prayer arrangements, BBC praying for each other. That is great. For prayer is like the turbo. Prayer is the motor. God hears and answers prayer. He can move mountains. But let us make sure that the outward form and the inner reality always relate the same

message, always tell the same story, that they are consistent with one another. That we are praying, and God is moving mountains.

May this church building in which I am standing now, may the house of God which the members and friends of Blackburn Baptist Church make up as the Body of Christ in this town be truly, in reality, a house of prayer. Nothing more and nothing less.

Song: *It is Well with My Soul*

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

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|--|---|
| When peace like a river, Attendeth my way, When sorrows like sea billows roll Whatever my lot, thou hast taught me to say It is well, it is well, with my soul | Though Satan should buffet, Though trials should come, Let this blest assurance control, That Christ has regarded my helpless estate, And hath shed his own blood for my soul |
|--|---|

Chorus:

It is well
With my soul
It is well, it is well with my soul

Chorus

My sin, oh, the bliss of this glorious thought
My sin, not in part but the whole,
Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more,
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, o my soul

Chorus

Prayers

Let us pray that we will heed today's message and commit ourselves all the more to prayer. Continue to pray, too, for all those impacted in different ways by the current circumstances.

Song: *O Praise the Name (Anástasis)*

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

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|--|--|
| I cast my mind to Calvary Where Jesus bled and died for me I see his wounds, his hands, his feet My Saviour on that cursed tree | And then on the third at break of dawn The Son of heaven rose again O trampled death where is your sting? The angels roar for Christ the King |
|--|--|

His body bound and drenched in tears
They laid him down in Joseph's tomb
The entrance sealed by heavy stone
Messiah still and all alone

Chorus

He shall return in robes of white
The blazing sun shall pierce the night
And I will rise among the saints
My gaze transfixed on Jesus' face

Chorus

O praise the name of the Lord our God
O praise his name forevermore
For endless days we will sing your praise
Oh Lord, oh Lord our God

Chorus

"O Praise the Name (Anástasis)" words & music by Benjamin Hastings, Dean Ussher & Marty Sampson.
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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.