

## Blackburn Baptist Church Virtual Service, 7 June 2020



### Welcome

Hello and welcome to Blackburn Baptist Church for our 'virtual' service for today.

### Song: *The Old Rugged Cross*

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

On a hill far away  
Stood an old rugged cross  
The emblem of suffering and shame  
And I love that old cross  
Where the dearest and best  
For a world of lost sinners was slain

#### *Chorus:*

So I'll cherish the old rugged cross  
Till my trophies at last I lay down  
And I will cling to the old rugged cross  
And exchange it some day for a crown

Oh the old rugged cross  
So despised by the world  
Has a wondrous attraction for me  
For the dear Lamb of God  
Left his glory above  
To bear it to dark Calvary

#### *Chorus*

In the old rugged cross  
Stained with blood so divine  
A wondrous beauty I see  
For upon that old cross  
Jesus suffered and died  
To pardon and sanctify me

#### *Chorus*

To the old rugged cross I will ever be true  
Its shame and reproach gladly bear  
Then he'll call me someday  
To my home far away  
Where his glory forever I'll share

#### *Chorus*

### Opening Prayer

As we reflect on current world events, let us pray and cry out to God together.

Lord, how long? From the depths of our soul we cry, "How long?" From generation to generation, your children have suffered. "How long?" Our pain is great. God, you are the God of all. From before the beginning of time, you are sovereign God. Your mercy endures from everlasting to everlasting. Show us your hand of mercy at this time, in this generation. Let your power be manifest throughout your earth. Heal your lands, heal all hearts. For it is only you, our God, who can create a new heart and a spirit of love and compassion in those hearts that are as stone. Lord, order our steps. May we all march in one accord. Move through us by your might, for yours is the power and the glory. In our struggle, we will still praise you, we will still lift our hands in prayer towards you. We will do your will, whilst we wait on you. For we know that you are with us in the storm and that healing, peace and joy will come in the morning. Amen.

## **Song: *You Alone Can Rescue***

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

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

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*

"You Alone Can Rescue" words & music by Jonas Myrin & Matt Redman.  
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## **Meditation**

Beryl Fish would like to share with us once more from her reading, 'Jesus Calling'.

"Approach each new day with a desire to find me. Before you get out of bed, I have already been working to prepare the path that will get you through this day. There are hidden treasures strategically placed along the way. Some of the treasures are trials, designed to shake you free from earth-shackles. Others are blessings that reveal my presence: sunshine, flowers, birds, friendships, answered prayer...I am richly present in them. Search for deep treasure as you go through this day. You will find me all along the way."

In his heart a man plans his course, but the LORD determines his steps. (*Proverbs 16:9*)

My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. (*Colossians 2:2,3*)

He will be the sure foundation for your times, a rich store of salvation and wisdom and knowledge; the fear of the LORD is the key to this treasure. (*Isaiah 33:6*)

## **Bible Reading: *Galatians 1:1-10***

Paul, an apostle - sent not from men nor by a man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead - and all the brothers and sisters with me, to the churches in Galatia. Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you to live in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel - which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let them be under God's curse! As we have already said, so now I say again: if anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let them be under God's curse! Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings, or of God? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ.

### **Message: *Message in a Bottle***

Following on from our five-week series on the miracles of Jesus, we begin to look today at Paul's letter to the Galatian churches. Maybe you say "I really liked those messages on the miracles that Jesus did. Healing, driving out demons, bringing people back from the dead. Let's keep looking at Jesus." And then you say, "What? You are going to look at one of Paul's letters? Oh no! I agree with what Jesus says, but Paul, he was crazy, he was extreme, he had such funny ideas. His thoughts and concepts belong buried in the first century. Paul may have had his opinion; but I have mine too."

Well, let me tell you this. Jesus Christ appeared to Paul and appointed him Apostle to the non-Jews. In the Acts of the Apostles we meet Paul for the first time in Acts 8:1, don't we? Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, full of God's grace and power, had been stoned to death and we read Saul was there, giving approval to his death. And a little while later in Acts 9 we read:

Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

Was it Paul's idea to become a disciple of Jesus? No. Was he a self-appointed imposter? No. Was it Paul's idea to be sent by God to the non-Jews? No. Was it Paul's idea to plant churches and write letters to them? No. It was God's idea. He planned it. He carried it out. He blessed it. He met Paul, confronted Paul and spoke with Paul. He told him to get up and go - and Paul did. He said go into the city and Paul went. He said to Paul he would be told what he had to do and that is what happened. This was all God's idea. God's plan. Not Paul's.

Are you and I disagreeing with God's choice of Paul? Do we think he should not have revealed himself to Paul? Do we think God made a mistake? No. Our

God never makes mistakes. So when we read what Paul says, we are reading what God says through him. They are not Paul's own ideas. We read in verse 1: 'Paul, an apostle not from men nor by men, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, the God who raised Jesus from the dead'. The letters of the apostles in the Bible are the Word of God and these letters have apostolic authority. What do I mean by 'apostolic authority'? What is an apostle? What does one of those have to say to me? What are the charismatics, I mean characteristics of an apostle?

In Mark 3 we read, 'Jesus went up into the hills and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him. He appointed twelve – designating them apostles – that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons.' There were many disciples from whom our Lord chose twelve apostles. So what are the characteristics, what are the qualifications of an apostle? Apostles are unique. In what way or ways?

- They were personally chosen
- They had met with Jesus
- They were called and commissioned by Christ himself
- They were inspired by God's Spirit
- They were authorised to teach in his name

We may not exalt our opinions over theirs. We cannot claim that our authority is as great as theirs. There is no apostolic succession. Apostolic authority is divine authority. It is neither human nor ecclesiastical, comes neither from men nor from the church, but from God himself in Jesus Christ. If you are in Darwin or wherever and have a different understanding, don't send me a text message or an email. Ring me up and let's talk about it together.

Paul was not wishing to build up his own circle of hearers, pushing himself into the centre of things; he was not manipulating the situation in his own interest. He was not building up his own fan club. No. In writing this letter to the Galatian churches he knows he has to convince them that what he is writing is from the Lord. So he sets out his credentials clearly and in an appropriate amount of detail right at the beginning of the letter. Because he is writing into a situation where the believers in the churches have started to believe something other than what he taught them. Paul was not appointed by the twelve apostles or by the church at Jerusalem or by the church in Antioch. Not even Ananias or Barnabas acted as mediators to give him this role. Paul's apostolic commission was 100% from God himself through Jesus Christ.

I was very amused to read this week that Heinz has created a 570-piece jigsaw puzzle that is, confusingly, completely red from corner to corner. "Heinz is known for its iconic slow-pouring ketchup. In a period when everyone has a little more time on their hands and puzzle popularity has skyrocketed, we wanted to help pass the time by connecting the two," said David Chalbert, senior brand manager for Heinz Tomato Ketchup. "We're always looking to

deliver fun, contextually relevant ways to give Heinz Tomato Ketchup lovers a smile, and this ridiculously slow, all-red Heinz Tomato Ketchup puzzle felt like the perfect fit.” An apostle is not the one piece in a jigsaw that doesn’t fit in and which makes the whole thing appear imperfect. That sticks out and draws attention to itself. One that develops its own picture which might create a distorted impression of reality. No. Paul is not setting out this letter on his own. He begins: ‘Paul, an apostle and all the brothers with me.’ And then he says whom they are writing to. To the churches in Galatia, that is to say in Asia Minor, in modern day central Turkey.

Paul’s ministry and that of his colleagues had led to many people becoming disciples of Jesus in Antioch of Pisidia, and in Iconium, Lystra and Derbe in Galatia. We see this in Acts 13 and 14. His strategy plan was straightforward. Wherever he went, he visited the Jewish synagogues, gave a word of encouragement and spoke from the scriptures or preached in the city. He was not averse to allowing the Lord to heal through him as we read in Acts 14:8-10 in Lystra. From these ministries, churches had developed. In Acts 14: 21-23 it is recorded that they aimed to set the churches on a secure footing before leaving, strengthening the disciples in Lystra, Iconium and Antioch when they left Derbe, and encouraging them to remain true to the faith.

It is to these churches that we can presume Paul wrote. He begins by reminding them of the central features of the gospel in verses 3-5. We could call it the message in a bottle, in a nutshell. I’ve not brought a nutshell with me but I’ve brought some bottles. The bottle is a symbol of the womb, as it embodies the principles of containing and enclosure. Because of its functional analogy with the ark and the boat, it can be a symbol of salvation.

This first bottle here symbolises the gospel. It contains water, symbolic of purity, life, movement, renewal and transformation. Water is absolutely essential for existence, isn’t it? It cleanses and purifies by washing away impurities. Its power of transition from liquid to solid and vapour also make it special and a symbol of metamorphosis. The gospel is a message of grace and peace. That Christ died for our sins; that Christ died to rescue us from this present evil age; that Christ died according to God’s will. The death of Christ was primarily a sacrifice for sin, the unique sacrifice by which all our wrongdoing may be forgiven. There is nothing at all that we can do to save ourselves. Nothing. The best we can do is like filthy, dirty rags to God. But God has the power to forgive us. Christ rescues us not out of this present evil world, but out of this present evil age, so that having been forgiven, we may live a new life in this world, the life of the age to come. This is for the glory of God says Paul. The gospel is genuine and pure; it renews and transforms our lives. It is absolutely essential for our life. It removes all impurities. It represents change and at the same time security. It is a symbol of life-giving, life-changing and life-transforming power. Of an ongoing dynamic metamorphosis.

I'll come back to the bottles. I have brought several with me today. These symbolise different versions of the truth, whereby there is only one gospel.

Paul's authority and his/the gospel were being attacked by many who had infiltrated the churches in Galatia. More than often, attacks on our authority as believers and on the gospel itself come from inside the church. Basically, the false teachers were saying that faith and grace alone were not enough to save us from death and separation from God. You had to be circumcised as well, they said. You also had to keep the whole law of Moses. In other words, they were saying you must let Moses finish what Christ has begun. You yourself must finish what Christ has done by your obedience to the law. You must add your works to the work of Christ to be saved. You must finish Christ's unfinished work.

I am sure we can just imagine Paul getting texted day and night by members of his churches in Galatia. What a situation for him to be faced with. He will not tolerate these false teachers and their teaching. He accuses them not only of defecting in their theology but of deserting in their experience. He says they are deserting God who called them in grace. Maybe you say, "Why does Paul have a problem here? Didn't he write to the church in Philippi with great clarity in a contrasting manner?" Yes, he did. He wrote:

'It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. The latter do so out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defence of the gospel. The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice.'

The challenge to Paul in the church in Philippi was that the motivation of the teachers was in question. Maybe the expression of the gospel was different. But Christ, not Moses, was being preached. That was not the case in Galatia. Here the very essence of the gospel, its central truth, was not just being questioned and challenged; it was being modified, transformed, perverted, twisted, destroyed. They were trying to add to the purity of the gospel, but their add-ons were unnecessary, false and harmful.

We have to be very careful what we accept and what we don't accept. We need wisdom and discernment to know what the truth is. In Acts 17:10-11, we read: 'As soon as it was night, the believers sent Paul and Silas away to Berea. On arriving there, they went to the Jewish synagogue. Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.' Is that what we do?

The churches of Galatia were being shaken to the core. The false teachers were not only distorting the gospel, they were reversing it, turning it back to front and upside down. The false teachers were troubling the church and changing the gospel. The believers were being agitated, they were being

confused. Paul was astonished. He was very indignant and pronounces a solemn curse. Twice. Paul expresses the clear wish that the false teachers will be judged by God if they preach a gospel contrary to what they had proclaimed, if they preach a gospel contrary to what the Galatian believers had received. This curse is issued deliberately and with conscious responsibility to God. And he includes himself in the curse. He is completely impartial. 'If anyone, if we, if an angel from heaven' should preach a false gospel.

Why is Paul so clear on this? Is he exaggerating? Is he over the top? No. He says this clearly because a false gospel making our works necessary for us to be saved even as a supplement to Christ's work on the cross is derogatory. It makes the cross of Christ redundant, it makes it unnecessary if we are saved by fulfilling the requirements of the law. Christ then died to no purpose. He is not writing about about some trivial, relatively unimportant doctrine. He is writing about something central and fundamental to our faith. He is not saying that the temperature of the water at a service of baptism by immersion must be at least 29°C. He is not saying that the covers of bibles used in church services should be red or have any other specific colour. No! He is talking about things that are very important, central to our biblical faith. He is not talking simply about people holding false views, but about those who teach them and mislead others by their teaching. Paul cared for the souls of men and the glory of God. He was not frightened of calling a spade a spade when it was necessary and helpful to do so. What about us?

Freddie Mercury, lead singer of the group Queen, defied stereotypes and shattered convention to become one of the most loved entertainers of the late twentieth century. The song 'Bohemian Rhapsody', which he wrote himself, is a remarkable composition. Almost six minutes long, it consists of several sections without a chorus: an intro, a ballad segment, an operatic passage, a hard rock part and a reflective coda. The song begins: 'Is this the real life? Is this just fantasy? Caught in a landslide, no escape from reality. I'm easy come, easy go, any way the wind blows, doesn't really matter to me.' The lyrics are very ambiguous, clear and yet unclear, precise and yet imprecise. So much so that as the songwriter said, "I think people should just listen to it, think about it, and then make up their own minds as to what it says to them." Is that how we view the Bible? Is that how we view God's Word? Is that how we treat Paul's letters? Does it really matter how we understand them? Does it really matter how we interpret them? Does it matter how or even whether we apply the teaching in Paul's letters to our own lives and to our life as a church?

I come at last, and finally today, back to the bottles and expect to begin next week at verse 10. The first bottle symbolising the true gospel I showed earlier in my message. Do you remember what it is and what it contains? Here it is again briefly. Now let us look at the others:

- This is the largest, the fullest and the most colourful. Very attractive. Coca-Cola's 'It's the Real Thing' campaign heralded a new direction that



responded to research showing that young people seek the real, the original and the natural as an escape from phoniness. This had nothing, really nothing to do with ideas of authenticity, nothing to do with genuineness. Of course, 'It's the Real Thing' also reaffirmed the importance Coke placed on being recognised as the 'original' cola. Founded in 1886, it was a mere 12 years older than Pepsi, but, for Coke, this would always prove to be a major point of difference. This bottle symbolises giving people what they want to hear. 'It's the real thing, Coke is what the world wants today.' What the world appears to want is not real. Yet it has been deceived into thinking that it is. But reality is what it needs.

- This bottle has the right form and it's full, but it has the wrong label. The bar code is different. This product has a different source. And the contents are different. They are colourful. This is a mixture of water and sweet tasting fruit juice with an apparently very liberal dose of sugar. The label makes it clear that this is a completely different way of understanding God's Word, very attractive, very sweet. Probably easily identifiable as not genuine. The label reads Wonky grapes. Wonky is probably an appropriate description of this gospel. This, by the way, is the real label. The original. You can sellotape it, glue it or affix it however you wish to whatever suits your personal taste. But it won't make those things real.
- The next bottle has the right form and the right label but it's empty. Looks all right from the outside but it has no content. The real gospel is not just something that looks right on the outside but has nothing to it. Friendly church, nice service, pleasant surroundings, good music and no message.
- The next bottle has the right form, the right label and it is full. Completely full. But with the wrong content. Maybe wonderful music and a long sermon but without the central teachings of God's Word.
- The next bottle has the right form, the right label, the right type of contents but it is only half full (or it is half empty). Many central doctrines are adhered to but then half of them are missing.
- Up to now it has been relatively easy or very easy to see where the truth lies. But with the next bottle we really need discernment and understanding. It has the right form, the right label and it is apparently also full with the right contents. Compare this with the original gospel. Is it the same? Definitely looks like it doesn't it? But if we look very carefully there is a difference. There is a small hole in the top. Only a very small one. Microscopic. Almost invisible. And into this bottle someone has injected sodium monofluoroacetate, known as 'compound 1080'. Compound 1080 is odourless, tasteless, colourless, water soluble, and without a proven antidote. The most effective way of destroying the gospel is a mixture of 99.9% truth and 0.1% poisonous lies. That can be deadly. That is deadly.

In humility, may I say that being saved by grace through faith in God is the core of the gospel. This is what we believe. It is unambiguous. It is clear. It is precise.



It is straightforward. If God opens our hearts and minds it is easy to understand, easy to grasp what it means. With God's help, let us never cease to seek after and be obedient to the truth of the gospel. That is the message in a bottle.

### **Song: *Man of Sorrows***

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

'Man of Sorrows', what a name  
For the Son of God who came  
Ruined sinners to reclaim!  
Hallelujah! What a Saviour!

Bearing shame and scoffing rude  
In my place condemned he stood  
Sealed my pardon with his blood  
Hallelujah! What a Saviour!

Guilty, vile, and helpless, we  
Spotless Lamb of God was he

Full atonement! Can it be?  
Hallelujah! What a Saviour!

Lifted up was he to die  
"It is finished!" was his cry  
Now in heaven exalted high  
Hallelujah! What a Saviour!

When he comes, our glorious king  
All his ransomed home to bring  
Then anew this song we'll sing  
Hallelujah! What a Saviour!

### **Prayers for Others**

*Micah 6:8: 'He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.'*

We pray:

- For forgiveness for when we have lacked the humility and compassion that God desires in us, and turned our backs on the needs of others
- For a willingness in us to stand up for truth and justice
- For the family of George Floyd mourning his tragic loss
- That *all* men and women will be respected equally as those made in your image, and that those in authority will pursue this end
- For our own country as lockdown restrictions are eased, that further spread of the coronavirus will be avoided
- For all those still suffering effects of the virus in terms of health or finance
- For our own church fellowship, especially those in hospital, and for our leadership team for wisdom in coming decisions

### **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*

"Man of Sorrows" words & music by Brooke Ligertwood & Matt Crocker  
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## **Blessing**

'May the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you. May the Lord lift up the light of his countenance upon you and give you his peace. Amen.'