

## Blackburn Baptist Church Virtual Service, 14 June 2020



### Welcome

You're very welcome to Blackburn Baptist Church for our 'virtual' service for today.

### Song: *God Moves in a Mysterious Way*

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

God moves in a mysterious way  
His wonders to perform  
He plants his footsteps in the sea  
And rides upon the storm  
Deep in unfathomable mines  
Of never-failing skill  
He treasures up his bright designs  
And works his sovereign will  
Take courage now you fearful saints  
The clouds you so much dread  
Are big with mercy and shall break  
In blessings on your head

*Chorus:*

And I will trust  
The hands that made the starry  
heavens

And I will trust  
The wounds of Calvary  
And I will trust  
And I will not be afraid  
For all his ways are love  
Judge not the Lord by feeble sense  
But trust him for his grace  
Behind a frowning providence  
He hides a smiling face  
His purposes will ripen fast  
Unfolding every hour  
The bud may have a bitter taste  
But sweet will be the flower

*Chorus*

"God Moves in a Mysterious Way" music by Graham Kendrick  
and words by William Cowper and Graham Kendrick.  
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### Opening Prayer

As we gather, we praise you, Lord, for who you are. Thank you that when we gather in your name, you are here. Thank you for the good news of your wonderful rescue plan for us through Jesus. We thank you for this day and your purpose for it. Please refocus our hearts, as your will for our lives does not always reflect our plans. Forgive us and change our hearts to reflect your will. Help us to walk in the plans you've made for our everyday lives, guided by your Holy Spirit. Lift our eyes to seek you first today, and always. Please shift our perspective to see your view of things. Give us renewed strength and godly courage to obey you without questioning. Forgive us for worrying and striving beyond our means. You know what lies ahead - you are our good Father. Though our circumstances may be difficult, you are always our protector and shield. Let your peace be upon us today as we praise you and hear from your Word. Amen.

### Birthdays

It's David's birthday this coming week. Let's join in with our birthday song to wish him well.

Happy birthday to you,  
Happy birthday to you,  
Happy birthday dear David,  
Happy birthday to you.

Happy birthday to you,  
Only one will not do,

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

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

### **Song: *O the Bitter Shame and Sorrow***

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

Oh, the bitter shame and sorrow  
That a time could ever be  
When I let the saviour's pity  
Plead in vain, and proudly answered  
All of self, and none of thee

Yet he found me; I beheld him  
Bleeding on the cursed tree  
Heard Him pray, "Forgive them, Father"  
And my wistful heart said faintly  
Some of self, and some of thee

Day by day his tender mercy  
Healing, helping, full and free  
Sweet and strong, and ah! so patient  
Brought me lower while I whispered  
Less of self, and more of thee

Higher than the highest heavens  
Deeper than the deepest sea  
Lord, thy love at last hath conquered  
Grant me now my heart's petition  
None of self, and all of thee

### **Meditation**

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

"I am creating something new in you: a bubbling spring of joy that spills over into others' lives. Do not mistake this joy for your own or try to take credit for it in any way. Instead, watch in delight as my Spirit flows through you to bless others. Let yourself become a reservoir of the Spirit's fruit. Your part is to live close to me, open to all that I am doing in you. Don't try to control the streaming of my Spirit through you. Just keep focusing on me as we walk through this day together. Enjoy my presence, which permeates you with love, joy and peace."

The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit. (*John 3:8*)

I will guide you in the way of wisdom and lead you along straight paths. When you walk, your steps will not be hampered; when you run, you will not stumble. (*Proverbs 4:11,12*)

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (*Galatians 5:22*)

### **Bible Reading: *Galatians 1:10 - 24***

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. I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel I preached

is not of human origin. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ. For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it. I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers. But when God, who set me apart from my mother's womb and called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, my immediate response was not to consult any human being. I did not go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, but I went into Arabia. Later I returned to Damascus. Then after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Cephas and stayed with him fifteen days. I saw none of the other apostles—only James, the Lord's brother. I assure you before God that what I am writing you is no lie. Then I went to Syria and Cilicia. I was personally unknown to the churches of Judea that are in Christ. They only heard the report: "The man who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy." And they praised God because of me.

### **Message: *But When God***

When I see that Dr Martyn Lloyd Jones took seven sermons lasting around one hour each to complete his exposition of verses 3 to 5 of Galatians chapter 1, I wonder whether I missed something last week in my, by comparison, extremely short message. But I think this gives you the opportunity to listen to his preaching on Galatians in the comfort of your own homes and on your own timescale if you should choose to do so. I don't think you'll be disappointed if you do. But bear in mind that he was speaking in the middle of the last century, so that while the Gospel is the same, and the Word of God is the same, the cultural context in which he preached was very different than it is for us today.

We begin today at verse 10, where I left off prematurely last week by asking ourselves the question, 'Whom am I trying to please?' Now this is a very important question. Because as Paul then says: '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.' Let's confront ourselves with reversing the question and asking, "Are we servants of Christ? Or are we trying to win the approval of those around us. Of other people?" And now we see that, not only is this an important question, it is actually a very difficult one to answer.

What is it that motivates our behaviour? Why do we do what we do? What are our intentions? What are we aiming at in our decision-making processes and in carrying out our decisions? What is our underlying motivation? What are our real goals? Maybe our perception of what we think we are doing and the reality of how we are actually behaving are different from one another. Maybe one

degree different. Maybe poles apart. For Paul it was a challenge to convince his hearers and readers that he was not aiming at pleasing people, but at serving Christ. You see it is an either/or question. We cannot do both.

Put it this way: supposing I say I will preach today exactly what you would like to hear. And then I sit down and think, "Well I am sure a lot of people watching, maybe for the first time, don't want to hear about sin and the judgement of God, separation from God and an eternity in hell. It could be very uncomfortable, maybe more than a little upsetting to hear that, especially on a Sunday, so I won't mention that. But what would really attract people listening is to hear about God, who is a great God and can do anything, promising them they would never get ill, never be unemployed, never have to attend a family funeral, never have relationship difficulties and so on." I think this message might come across in some circles really well. Just imagine if I preached a message that, as a believer, you have freedom to do whatever you want, whenever and wherever you choose. That God never puts any demands on us. Then my rating would go up. And people might say, "Wow, when this crisis is over, I want to visit that church. Blackburn Baptist Church sounds like a really comfortable place to be. Nice message, nice people, nice music, no troubles."

Let me tell you, I would rather have a zero rating and an empty church than not preach the gospel. I am not aiming to please you, I am a servant of God. He is looking after you. My responsibility is following him. This was, kind of, where Paul was too. There is only one gospel, there is only one way to God. The gospel does not change with the passage of time. The gospel of the first century is the gospel of the twenty-first century. It was Paul's responsibility as a servant of Christ to preach this gospel. The gospel of being rescued from sin through grace by faith; and that is my responsibility too.

Whenever anybody begins to bring people into the equation, suggesting that they are perhaps able, through a high standard of morality, through religion of whatever kind, through well-thought-out philosophies or through their apparent respectability, to attain their own salvation, then the gospel of grace has been perverted. At the same time, the true gospel is the gospel of the New Testament, the gospel of the apostles of Jesus Christ. Many preach a very attractive gospel from a position of authority and respect in our churches and in our society. They may be great scholars, magnificent speakers, professors of theology or whatever. But if they preach a corrupted gospel, we should not listen to them, however sweet and attractive and comfortable what they are preaching may appear to be. Whom are we trying to please? Are we servants of Christ?

Our second question this morning concerns the way in which the persecutor of Christians who believed this gospel became the protagonist, the propagator and the preacher of the gospel. How did this happen? Well to look at this, it

might be helpful for us to refer back to the Acts of the Apostles, from 6:6 to 9:32. In particular if we read Acts 26, where Paul speaks before King Agrippa, we gain clear insight into the dramatic change that took place in his life.

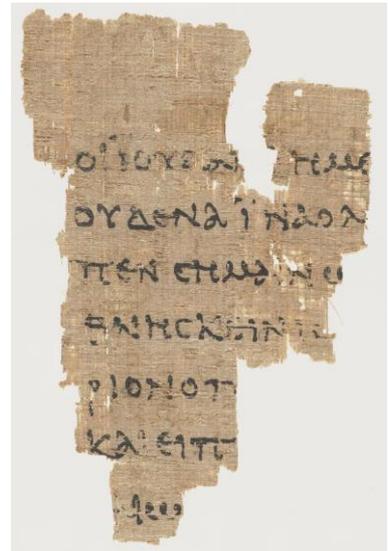
The Paul we meet as Saul before his conversion on the Damascus road was a practicing Jew. In both his persecution of the church and his enthusiasm for the traditions of his fathers, he demonstrated a fanaticism, a commitment, an energy and a drive which was, by all counts, astounding. He would probably have made it to CEO in any company if he had kept going like that. He persecuted the church beyond measure. He went from house to house in Jerusalem, seized any Christians he could find, men and women, and dragged them off to prison. When these Christians were put to death, he cast his vote against them. He was not satisfied with simply persecuting the church; his goal was to destroy it. To wipe it out. To see the complete end of it. To annihilate it.

His fanatical devotion to the traditions of his ancestors extended beyond teaching and observing the laws of Moses to the Halakha, meaning 'the way to walk'. This consists of the practical application of the commandments in the Torah (the Mosaic law), as developed through discussion and debate in the classical rabbinic literature, especially in the Mishnah and the Talmud, and as codified in other documents. These refer to the overall body of rabbinic legal texts and to the overall system of religious laws. Paul had been brought up according to the strictest party of the Jewish religion, namely as a Pharisee (Acts 26:5). That is how he had lived. In verse 14 he writes 'I was outstripping many of my Jewish contemporaries in my boundless devotion to the traditions of my ancestors.' (NEB).

How did this person become a believer? The simple answer is that it was God's doing. Paul had masses of clear information about the gospel, but he rejected the truth. People are not predisposed to accept and obey the truth. You don't have to be the Bishop of Durham to recognise that. Paul was not a hot prospect for the gospel. I think many of us would agree that he was a most unlikely candidate to become a believer, even though it is often those who are most opposed to the gospel, those whose laugh at and mock the gospel, whose very opposition, whose very challenge to us as Christians may open a door to the truth. If such people come through God's mercy to faith, they usually do not make a mockery of it.

Paul became a believer because that was God's plan. Look at the straightforward words which open verse 15. 'But when God...' (NIV). ;But when he...' (RSV). 'But when the one...' (NET). 'But when it pleased God...' (NKJV). 'Even then God had designs on me...' (Message Bible). 'But when it was the good pleasure of God...' (ASV). 'But even before I was born...' (Living Bible). I have just cited many possible translations. But the best translation is, so to speak, not a translation. It is the original Greek. A translation is not even a copy

of the original! The earliest and most famous Greek New Testament manuscript is the Rylands Papyrus P52, currently on display at the John Rylands University Library in Manchester, here in UK. In the original Greek it says, 'But when however it pleased God who selected me from my mother's womb.' There is a link to this [here](#) which you can follow if you like, which gives you an interlinear Greek/English translation of verse 15. Why am I making such a point of this? Why am I stressing the importance of what is in the original? Because I want to show you just how great God's plans are for our lives. Because God wants you and I to see, maybe for the first time, who it is that is behind the making of you and me. And because we desperately need to understand that the Almighty God, the Lord of Creation, has a plan for your life and for my life. That he has had this plan right from the beginning and that he is still working on it.



Paul writes: 'But when however it pleased God who selected me from my mother's womb.' In Psalm 139, verses 13-16 we read: 'For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.' Ephesians 2:10 reads: 'For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.'

God took the initiative in Paul's life. There is no live filmed recording of Paul, then known as Saul, meeting with God on the Damascus road. There were no CCTV cameras in the vicinity. But we have the account of what happened written down for us in Acts 9: '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."

Saul realises that the Lord is speaking to him. How does he know that? And what does Jesus say? Does he say, "Hi Saul. It was getting a bit dark so I thought you could do with some light. Is that OK? Would you be interested in becoming one of my followers? You seem to be really interested in religion. I know you are already very well informed about the Old Testament." No. Jesus does not speak like that to Saul at all. He says, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me. I am Jesus whom you are persecuting." He tells Saul who he is.

He tells Saul what he must do. A bit later he gives him a vision. It is all imperatives; commands, not wishes. Because it is God speaking, not someone holding a kind of religious meeting and talking about the need for tolerance. God set Paul apart before he was born. God called him by his grace. God was pleased to reveal his Son in him. It is all God, nothing of Paul. Paul gets up and goes, that is to say, he is led. He is a changed man.

In his letter to the Philippian church Paul wrote later in Philippians 3: 4b-9: 'If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless. But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ – the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.'

God truly does move in mysterious ways to perform his wonders. This guy was personally unknown to all the churches in Judea which were in Christ. They only heard the report, 'The man who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy.' What a massive, miraculous, mind-boggling change. What an almost unthinkable, almost unbelievable, almost impossible metamorphosis. But that is what happened. Because God wanted it. Because God had planned it before the beginning of the world. Because God decided that it was once again time for him to have the glory.

You know some people admire Paul's massive intellect but find his teaching harsh, dry and complicated; so they reject it. Some people say Paul destroyed the simple Christian teachings of Jesus Christ. But basically the entire theology of Paul is centred on the teachings of Jesus. You know some people say Paul was just an ordinary man, sharing our passions and our tendency to make mistakes, so that his opinions are no better than those of anybody else. But Paul says clearly that his message is the message of Jesus, not that of any man. Some people think Paul just reflected the views of the Christian community of the first century. But Paul says his message is independent of church organisations and church leaders. He says his views come not from the church but from Christ himself.

Let us not compromise the gospel as the Judaisers did. (Judaisers are Christians who teach it is necessary to adopt Jewish customs and practices, especially those found in the Law of Moses, in order to be saved). Let us not desert it as the Galatians were doing. Let us live by this gospel and seek to make it known to others.

## **Song: *What a Beautiful Name***

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

You were the Word at the beginning  
One with God the Lord most high  
Your hidden glory in creation  
Now revealed in you our Christ

What a beautiful name it is  
The name of Jesus Christ my king  
What a beautiful name it is  
Nothing compares to this  
What a beautiful name it is  
The name of Jesus

You didn't want heaven without us  
So, Jesus, you brought heaven down  
My sin was great, your love was greater  
What could separate us now?

What a wonderful name it is  
The name of Jesus Christ my king  
What a wonderful name it is  
Nothing compares to this  
What a wonderful name it is  
The name of Jesus

Death could not hold you,  
The veil tore before you  
You silenced the boast of sin and grave  
The heavens are roaring  
The praise of your glory

For you are raised to life again  
You have no rival, you have no equal  
Now and forever, God, you reign  
Yours is the kingdom, yours is the glory  
Yours is the name above all names

What a powerful name it is  
The name of Jesus Christ my king  
What a powerful name it is  
Nothing can stand against  
What a powerful name it is  
The name of Jesus

You have no rival, you have no equal  
Now and forever, God you reign  
Yours is the kingdom, yours is the glory  
Yours is the name above all names

What a powerful name it is  
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What a powerful name it is  
Nothing can stand against  
What a powerful name it is  
The name of Jesus

"What a Beautiful Name" words & music by Ben Fielding & Brooke Ligertwood.  
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## **Prayers for Others**

Heavenly Father, we thank you for your amazing power and work in our lives and we thank you for your goodness and blessings over us. Thank you for your great love and care and for your sacrifice that we might have freedom and life. Heavenly Father, this last week has seen some frightening scenes in America relating to racism. Black lives matter, but we know that all lives matter to you. Help us to understand the reality of racism and bigotry wherever it exists and to have the courage to challenge it. Through your Holy Spirit, may we be given the grace and power to change within ourselves and also to join with others to do the work of love and justice in the world, to bring racism to an end.

Lord, there is still conflict around the world. Please be with those affected, those who have lost all they possess and have been displaced from, not only their homes, but sometimes their countries too. Some have known only oppression, cruelty and fear and some have only known suffering, hunger and thirst on a daily basis. Bless all those in despair and bring them comfort and peace.

Lord, it can be easy for us to become consumed with the fears that surround us in everyday life. At the moment, we all have concerns about the Coronavirus. Some of us are anxious: can we go out, who can we mix with, where can we go, how can we get our shopping, support our friends, visit the sick, how long is this going to go on, how will the world be when we at last are able to meet up, will we be able to shake hands or hug each other? Lord, please give us the strength to meet the challenges that change so frequently.

Father, we ask you to be with all the staff who are caring for the patients who have needed to be admitted to hospital. Give them the stamina to complete the long shifts, especially dressed in the PPE, and the ability to cope with caring for patients who are dying and then having to speak to families over the phone - a very alien situation. When their shifts are over, let them rest peacefully to recharge their batteries so they can be ready for the next shift. Be with those who have family members in hospital and those who have family members who have died.

Be with the leaders of our country. Give them foresight to act with charity and true concern for the wellbeing of the people they have been elected to serve; give them the wisdom to invest in long term solutions to help prevent a second outbreak. May they know your peace as they work with the experts who are advising them on the best way forward.

Lord, we ask your blessing on our church family. Be with the deacons as they work on our behalf, and with our Pastor Alec and his family back in Germany, and we pray it won't be too long before he will be able to meet up with them. We have members who are on their own: let them feel your presence and your comfort. For those who are ill or unwell, let them feel your healing love.

Forgive us when we don't thank you enough for who we are, for all that you do and all you have given for us. Help us to set our eyes and our hearts on you afresh. Renew our spirits and fill us with your peace and joy. We love you and need you, not just today, but every day.

We ask so much of you, Lord, but we do so safe in the knowledge that with you all things are possible. In Jesus name. Amen

### **Song: *Alas and Did My Saviour Bleed***

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

Alas! and did my saviour bleed  
And did my sovereign die?  
Would he devote that sacred head  
For such a worm as I?

*Chorus:*

At the cross, at the cross  
Where I first saw the light,  
And the burden of my heart rolled away

It was there by faith I received my sight  
And now I am happy all the day!

Was it for crimes that I had done  
He groaned upon the tree?  
Amazing pity! Grace unknown!  
And love beyond degree!

*Chorus*

Well might the sun in darkness hide  
And shut his glories in  
When Christ, the mighty maker died  
For man the creature's sin.

*Chorus*

But drops of grief can ne'er repay  
The debt of love I owe  
Here, Lord, I give my self away  
'Tis all that I can do.

*Chorus*

### **The Grace**

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God our Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all and forever more. Amen