

## Blackburn Baptist Church Virtual Service, 5 July 2020



### Welcome

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

### Song: *Crown Him with Many Crowns*

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

Crown him with many crowns  
The Lamb upon his throne  
Hark! how the heavenly anthem drowns  
All music but its own!  
Awake, my soul, and sing  
Of him who died for thee  
And hail him as thy matchless King  
Through all eternity

Crown him the Lord of life  
Who triumphed o'er the grave  
And rose victorious in the strife  
For those he came to save  
His glories now we sing  
Who died and rose on high  
Who died eternal life to bring  
And lives that death may die

Crown him the Lord of peace  
His kingdom is at hand  
From pole to pole let warfare cease  
And Christ rule every land  
A city stands on high  
His glory it displays  
And there the nations 'Holy' cry  
In joyful hymns of praise

Crown him the Lord of years  
The potentate of time  
Creator of the rolling spheres  
In majesty sublime  
All hail, redeemer, hail!  
For you have died for me  
Thy praise shall never, never fail  
Throughout eternity

### Opening Prayer

Dear Lord, thank you that there are so many reasons for us to praise you this day, so many truths about you that we can cling to and celebrate, even if we feel down or are in the midst of difficult and trying situations. Lord, it is good to lift our eyes and remember who you are. You existed before the world began and will continue to exist forever, long after our fragile earth has disappeared, so we know you will always be there for us. You created the world we live in with all its beauty, complexity and wonder, a world we have maybe enjoyed all the more because of lockdown. You became like us, so know what it feels like to know sorrow, stress and anxiety, so we know we can talk to you about anything and find a sympathetic ear. You are our rightful King and we turned against you but, instead of washing your hands of us, you died in our stead to pay for our sin and give us a way back to you – we praise you for the way you love us so absolutely and so unconditionally no matter what. You defeated death and rose again, so we no longer need to fear death as the end. You reign in Heaven right now and our world is yours to rule and shape, so we know that there are no prayers of ours that you are not capable of answering. May our words and deeds acknowledge you as our King and bring praise and glory to your name, O Lord, our King by right and by choice, for there is no one like our God. May you open our eyes to the unchangeable greatness of who you are and may this vision of who you are encourage, inspire and bring us comfort for, if you are by our side, then we are blessed indeed. Amen.

## Birthdays

It's Allan and Esther's birthdays this coming week. Let's join in with our birthday song to wish them well.

Happy birthday to you	Give your heart to the saviour
Happy birthday to you	And then you'll have two
Happy birthday dear Esther and Allan	Happy birthday to you
Happy birthday to you	From old friend and new
Happy birthday to you	May God bless you and keep you
Only one will not do	Happy birthday to you

## All Age Talk: *Perseverance*

We need to persevere, even when things are difficult, like they might be for many of us at the moment. The following poem called 'The Race', by Dr Dee Groberg, reminds us, that, as Christians, we have a Heavenly Father who gives us the strength to keep going, even when things are hard, or even when we feel like we've failed.

Whenever I start to hang my head in front of failure's face  
My downward fall is broken by the memory of a race  
A children's race, young boys, young men; how I remember well  
Excitement sure, but also fear, it wasn't hard to tell.  
They all lined up so full of hope, each thought to win that race  
Or tie for first, or if not that, at least take second place  
Their parents watched from off the side, each cheering for their son  
And each boy hoped to show his folks that he would be the one

The whistle blew and off they flew, like chariots of fire  
To win, to be the hero there, was each young boy's desire  
One boy in particular, whose Dad was in the crowd  
Was running in the lead and thought, "My Dad will be so proud"  
But as he speeded down the field and crossed a shallow dip  
The little boy who thought he'd win, lost his step and slipped  
Trying hard to catch himself, his arms flew every place  
And midst the laughter of the crowd he fell flat on his face  
As he fell, his hope fell too; he couldn't win it now  
Humiliated, he just wished to disappear somehow

But, as he fell, his Dad stood up and showed his anxious face  
Which to the boy so clearly said, "Get up and win that race!"  
He quickly rose, no damage done, behind a bit that's all  
And ran with all his mind and might to make up for his fall  
So anxious to restore himself, to catch up and to win  
His mind went faster than his legs. He slipped and fell again  
He wished that he had quit before with only one disgrace  
"I'm hopeless as a runner now, I shouldn't try to race."

But through the laughing crowd he searched and found his father's face  
With a steady look that said again, "Get up and win that race!"  
So he jumped up to try again, ten yards behind the last

"If I'm to gain those yards," he thought, "I've got to run real fast!"  
Exceeding everything he had, he regained eight, then ten  
But trying hard to catch the lead, he slipped and fell again  
Defeat! He lay there silently. A tear dropped from his eye  
"There's no sense running anymore! Three strikes, I'm out! Why try?  
I've lost, so what's the use?" he thought. "I'll live with my disgrace."  
But then he thought about his Dad, who soon he'd have to face.

"Get up," an echo sounded low, "you haven't lost at all  
For all you have to do to win is rise each time you fall  
Get up!" the echo urged him on, "Get up and take your place!  
You were not meant for failure here! Get up and win that race!"  
So up he rose to run once more, refusing to forfeit  
And he resolved that win or lose, at least he wouldn't quit.  
So far behind the others now, the most he'd ever been  
Still he gave it all he had and ran like he could win  
Three times he'd fallen stumbling, three times he rose again  
Too far behind to hope to win, he still ran to the end

They cheered another boy who crossed the line and won first place  
Head high and proud and happy - no falling, no disgrace  
But, when the fallen youngster crossed the line, in last place  
The crowd gave him a greater cheer for finishing the race  
And even though he came in last with head bowed low, unproud  
You would have thought he'd won the race, to listen to the crowd  
And to his Dad he sadly said, "I didn't do so well"  
"To me, you won," his father said, "you rose each time you fell"

And now when things seem dark and bleak and difficult to face  
The memory of that little boy helps me in my own race  
For all of life is like that race, with ups and downs and all  
And all you have to do to win is rise each time you fall  
And when depression and despair shout loudly in my face  
Another voice within me says, "Get up and win that race!"

### **Song: *Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus***

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

Turn your eyes upon Jesus  
Look full in his wonderful face  
And the things of earth  
Will grow strangely dim  
In the light of his glory and grace

## **Bible Readings:**

### ***John 15:5-8***

"I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples!"

### ***1 Corinthians 3:11-15***

For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person's work. If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved - even though only as one escaping through the flames.

### ***1 Corinthians 9:24-27***

Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air. No, I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.

## **Message: Crowns**

### ***Introduction***

If you've been with us in our services over the last few weeks, you'll know that we've been looking at Paul's letter to the churches in Galatia. We're taking a one week pause from that this week to turn to a topic suggested by one of our church members - which is the 'crowns' mentioned in the New Testament as awards for faithful service. But before we get to that, we really need to do a bit of groundwork - and we're going to be looking at quite a few Bible passages today as we do that.

Having said we're breaking off from Galatians, we're not really, because the starting point for our talk today is exactly what we have been thinking about for the last few weeks - the good news, the Gospel - which is that to be made right with God, we must completely and solely rely on the finished work of Jesus Christ, in his death on the cross and his resurrection. This work is complete and sufficient and there's nothing at all that we can add to it. All we can do is accept this gift of God's grace through faith, and we receive forgiveness, and it's as if our past and its consequences is erased - the Bible calls it becoming 'a new creation'. When this happens, the amazing truth, that we read about last week, is that Christ himself comes to live within us through his Holy Spirit. This is what becoming a Christian means - and it's just amazing - and if you haven't experienced it for yourself, what are you waiting for?

But the next question that you may ask yourself is, “If I am a new creation, if Jesus Christ is living in me, if I am a Christian, what should my life now look like? Surely it shouldn’t be the same as before?” And you’d be right, and the Bible has a lot to say about how our lives as Christians should be. The Bible is very helpful in giving us some word pictures to help us understand this – and we’re going to look briefly now at three of them, which were in the verses which Ellie and Esther read for us.

### ***Pictures of the Christian’s New Life***

The first picture of the Christian life is that of a fruit tree, or vine, that we saw in John chapter 15. Jesus is speaking to his followers and he says, “I am the vine, you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.” The basis of entering into the Christian life is through faith in the grace of God in the work of Jesus, and this passage tells us that the way we progress in the Christian life is exactly the same. Just like the branch of a vine draws all its nourishment and strength through the vine, and has no life without it, so our ongoing lives as Christians require us to rely on the help and strengthening of Jesus as we stay connected to him. Without that, our lives will be fruitless – “Apart from me, you can do nothing,” says Jesus. But, with him working in us and through us, we should expect to have lives that are fruitful – “This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples”.

The second picture of the Christian life is that of a building being built up on its foundations, which we read about in 1 Corinthians 3. Again, the message is the same – Paul says that ‘there can be no other foundation for the Christian life than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ’. Everything starts there. A building cannot be built without a foundation, and, without the work of Jesus, there is no building of a Christian life. But then, Paul compares the things we do in life to choices of building materials that we place on this foundation (verse 12) – the quality of which will ultimately be tested, as if by fire – and it’s clear that some of life’s building materials will survive this test (gold, silver, well-cut stones) and others not (wood, hay, straw). So which of the things that we do are which? Well, we get some pointers to that elsewhere in the New Testament. The good things we should be doing are:

- **The things we do at his prompting:** Ephesians 2 verse 10 says that ‘we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do’. So the things we should be doing are those things which God has prepared for us and prompted us to by the clear instructions in his Word. These could be seemingly very mundane things. For example, we might work in a shop and read in Colossians 3:23, ‘Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men’, and we might resolve to be the very best shop assistant that we can be for Jesus. Or we might be a parent or grandparent and read the instruction in Ephesians 6 verse 4 to bring up children in the training and instruction of the Lord, so we might decide to read the Bible regularly with our children or grandchildren.
- **The things we do in his strength:** Philippians 4 verse 13 says ‘I can do everything through him who gives me strength’ – we shouldn’t be looking anywhere else for the power we need – and it’s when we recognise our own inadequacy and weakness and rely on the Holy Spirit’s enabling that we succeed.

- **The things we do for his glory, to please and thank him:** God has done so much for us in Jesus that it's only right that we should want to live our lives to thank and please him. Ephesians 5 verse 10 says simply 'Find out what pleases the Lord' – that should be our sole motivation.

So the gold, silver and well-dressed stones of our lives, the things that will have lasting significance, are the things, however seemingly small, that we do at Jesus' prompting, in his strength and for his glory and pleasure. In contrast, the things that we do at our own instigation, or relying on ourselves, or because we want to somehow earn God's favour and make ourselves look good, those things are the wood, hay and straw of our lives, even if they seem impressive or super-spiritual in the eyes of others. They're not going to last beyond the here and now.

The third picture of the Christian life is that of an athlete in a race, which we read in 1 Corinthians 9. Paul's readers would have been familiar with the idea of the Olympic athlete competing in a race. But an athlete could not even compete in the games unless they were a Greek citizen – that was the qualifying mark. In the same way, without trusting in the finished work of Jesus, we don't even qualify for the race of the Christian life – all these pictures are consistent. But in verse 25, Paul notes that the Olympic athlete would not be content just with having qualified – 'Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training'. They would train seriously and with dedication so as to compete for the prize. This was true even though their prize was one that would wither and fade away after a few days. How much more, says Paul, should we take the race of the Christian life seriously, when our goal is something that will never fade away?

### ***A Spiritual MOT***

It's useful for the well-being of our cars and our safety on the road that we have an MOT test to check our vehicles' roadworthiness regularly. I think it's useful too, to give ourselves a kind 'spiritual MOT' from time to time. Reflecting on the pictures of the Christian life that we've just looked at, we might ask ourselves these 'MOT' questions:

- **M: Motive:** What is my motive in what I do in my Christian life? Am I somehow trying to earn God's favour (as if I could)? Or is my only motivation to find out what pleases him, in gratitude for what he's already done for me, surrendering my selfish will up to his, recognising that he knows, as my loving heavenly father, what's best for me?
- **O: Outlook:** What is my outlook on life? Is it focused just on the short-term, the here and now? Or do I have a focus on what's lasting and eternal? In all of the pictures we've looked at, the need was to turn our eyes upon Jesus, who is the starting point and ongoing source for all that we do, and also to look ahead to the long-term, lasting implications of our actions now for the life to come.
- **T: Tenacity:** How do I seek to keep going with tenacity in the Christian life? Am I being tempted to rely on my own resources? Or am I clinging tenaciously to the Lord and relying only on his day to day strength and enabling to lead me along?

## Gaining Crowns

If we've taken on board the lessons that we have just considered regarding the Christian life, and 'passed our MOT', so to speak, then it's useful and encouraging for us to know that the New Testament teaches that there are awards that we can win that acknowledge the faithful service we have done, with the right motivation, in God's strength. These awards are described as 'crowns' and they help us to keep our vision future-focused. We've only time to look at them briefly today, but I would encourage you to read about them more for yourself.

We need to know first that there are two words in the Greek New Testament that are both usually translated 'crown' in our English versions of the Bible, so we may not see the difference, but there really is a big difference in the meanings:

- The first word is '**diadema**' (from which we get the English word 'diadem'): This is a crown which the wearer wears only by right of their position – a bit like the Queen's Coronation crown. It's a symbol of their power and authority to rule. This word is only used in the book of Revelation.
- The second word is '**stephanos**' (from which our name 'Stephen' comes): This is the kind of crown, a sort of plaited wreath of leaves, that was awarded in honour or recognition of sporting achievement, or perhaps distinguished military service. This is the more frequently used word in the New Testament, and it's this type of 'award' crown that we are focusing on here.

By most counts, there are five types of 'stephanos' crown mentioned in the Bible that, as Christians, we may hope to be awarded for our faithful service to the Lord:

- **The Crown of Victory:** This is the crown that we have already seen from our passage about the athlete in 1 Corinthians 9 verse 25 (but Paul also talks about very similar ideas of a prize in Philippians 3 verses 12 to 14). As we've seen, it's an award for those who persevere in the Christian life, having the self-control, like an athlete, to be serious and disciplined in their approach to training, developing good habits and avoiding the bad influences which would hinder them, looking ahead to the prize. It's only the work and power of the Holy Spirit in our lives that can enable us to persevere in this way, since self-control is the fruit of the Spirit – and only the love and kindness of our heavenly Father that can encourage us to get up and keep going again when we fall and fail, as we inevitably will. So the credit goes to him. All of us can aspire to gain this crown.
- **The Crown of People:** The apostle Paul seemed to be at his happiest when he reflected on those whom with God's help, he had led to know Jesus. In Philippians 4 verse 1, he describes the believers at Philippi as his 'joy and crown' and, similarly, in writing to the church at Thessalonica, he says, in chapter 2 verses 19 and 20 of his first letter to them, 'For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you? Indeed, you are our glory and joy.' We might wonder how this could be, when, so many of the Christians in the churches he wrote to seemed to cause him such problems! However, Paul was able to see them not just as they were now, but as they would finally be, perfected in God's presence. What a joy it will be for any of us to meet in heaven those whom God has given us the privilege of telling about Jesus - as the ambassadors for him that we are called to be (2

Corinthians 5 verse 20). Again, it's only the power of the Holy Spirit working through us and in the lives of other people that can open their eyes to the truth about Jesus – so, again, the credit goes to him.

- **The Crown of Righteousness:** In writing his second letter to Timothy, Paul says in chapter 4 verse 8 that he is looking forward to receiving the 'crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day – and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing'. Are you looking forward with longing to Jesus' promised return? If you are, it's a sign that you are fully trusting in what Jesus has done for you and in his righteousness alone, which God has already credited to you. You know that, in practical terms of your day to day behaviour, you still fall far short, so you're longing for that day when God will finally perfect you and you will no longer have to struggle with sin. Once more, if we're in the position to be awarded this crown, it's the Holy Spirit who inspires us to trust in the promises of God's word about Jesus' return and our future destiny – so all the credit goes to him.
- **The Crown of Life:** James wrote in his letter to Christians who were often having a really hard time on account of their faith in Jesus. He encouraged them, seemingly counter to expectations, to actually rejoice in their trials and sufferings for Christ, because God was in fact using these to teach them and grow good character in them. And he encouraged them further, in verse 12 of chapter 1 of his letter, that a 'crown of life' was promised to those who persevered even under these pressures. It's only God's Spirit who gives us the grace to be able to do this and who provides the counter-intuitive strength for us even in our moments of trial and weakness, and who enables to take the long view that these things are, as Paul puts it in 2 Corinthians 4 verse 17, only 'light and momentary troubles' compared to what God has ultimately prepared for us. This crown is also spoken of in the book of Revelation, chapter 2 verse 10, where Jesus writes to the suffering church of Smyrna.
- **The Crown of Glory:** In writing his first letter, the apostle Peter has instructions for the overseers or shepherds (pastors) of the church flock, and he says in chapter 5 verse 4 that when Jesus, the Chief Shepherd, he will award a 'crown of glory' to those who have been faithful in caring for his church in this service, doing it not because of a desire to lord it over others, but doing it willingly, out of a true servant heart. It is a glorious thing when pastors give of themselves in this way, out of love for others and a Holy-Spirit inspired desire to please the Lord. Warren Wiersbe, an American pastor and Bible teacher, who died quite recently, once spoke to a visitor at the end of a service who said, "It must be hard for you to keep all these people happy." Pastor Wiersbe replied, "I don't even try to keep them happy. I try to please the Lord and let him take care of the rest."

### ***Summary and Postscript***

There's no way of salvation, no route into the Christian life and God's blessing, other than our placing our faith in the grace of God through the completed work of Jesus. Likewise, there is no way to continue in the Christian life other than by the same means, trusting in God to work in us and through us by his grace and strength.

We receive that strength, as branches joined to Jesus, the vine. With his help and at his prompting, we seek to build on him as our foundation by simply being obedient to the things he calls us to do, looking ahead and persevering in the race with his strength, because we want to bring him glory and express our gratitude to him for all he has done for us.

In doing that, we can legitimately aspire to win some of the crowns that God has promised to his faithful servants. It's interesting to see that, in Revelation 4, the 24 elders pictured in heaven, as representatives of God's people, have 'stephanos' crowns, which they are wearing, but in verse 10, they lay their crowns before the throne of God. Surely that's right, and it brings us back to where we came in our service today, singing 'Crown Him with Many Crowns'. What a privilege and joy it would be to place our crowns at the feet of Jesus – only he is worthy. He's the one we owe it all to. He's the one who has qualified us to take part in the race. He is the one who gives us the strength to run, and any success we have is his success!

### **Song: *I Want to Walk with Jesus Christ***

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

I want to walk with Jesus Christ  
All the days I live of this life on earth  
To give to him complete control  
Of body and of soul

#### *Chorus:*

Follow him, follow him  
Yield your life to him  
He has conquered death  
He is King of kings  
Accept the joy which he gives to those  
Who yield their lives to him.

I want to learn to speak to him  
To pray to him, confess my sin  
To open my life and let him in  
For joy will then be mine

#### *Chorus*

I want to learn to speak of him  
My life must show that he lives in me

My deeds, my thoughts  
My words must speak  
All of his love for me

#### *Chorus*

I want to learn to read his word  
For this is how I know the way  
To live my life as pleases him  
In holiness and joy

#### *Chorus*

O Holy Spirit of the Lord  
Enter now into this heart of mine  
Take full control of my selfish will  
And make me wholly thine!

#### *Chorus*

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### **Prayers for Others**

Let's bring our prayers to the Lord this morning with thanks that he is a listening God who delights to answer prayers. Let us pray for:

- our leaders, at a local and national level, to have the wisdom to make the right decisions to ease lockdown
- our NHS and social care staff, as they continue to work hard to care for those with COVID-19

- scientists around the world, that they might develop effective treatments and a vaccine to help combat the effects of the virus
- people to be sensible, as lockdown is eased, and to still act with caution and consideration
- those who are anxious about coming out of isolation, that God would give them peace
- areas of the country, like Leicester, still experiencing higher levels of infection, that God would graciously intervene and turn the tide
- parts of the world where the pandemic is still rife, that God would be at work to bring it under control
- those in our fellowship and known to us who are ill, awaiting hospital appointments or treatment, those who are feeling down or who are lonely that they would know that God is their shield and protector, their ever-present help in times of trouble
- Galligreaves, the area round our church, that God would bless and help all those who live there and that he would draw them to himself

We thank God for the privilege of being able to share in his work in this world through prayer and ask that he will hear and answer our prayers in the name of Jesus. Amen.

### **Song: *Sovereign Over Us***

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

There is strength within the sorrow  
 There is beauty in our tears  
 And you meet us in our mourning  
 With a love that casts out fear

You are working in our waiting  
 You're sanctifying us  
 When beyond our understanding  
 You're teaching us to trust

*Chorus:*

Your plans are still to prosper  
 You have not forgotten us  
 You're with us in the fire and the flood  
 You're faithful forever, perfect in love  
 You are sovereign over us

You are wisdom unimagined  
 Who could understand your ways?  
 Reigning high above the heavens  
 Reaching down in endless grace

You're the lifter of the lowly  
 Compassionate and kind  
 You surround and you uphold me  
 And your promises are my delight

*Chorus*

Even what the enemy means for evil  
 You turn it for our good  
 You turn it for our good  
 And for your glory

Even in the valley, you are faithful  
 You're working for our good  
 You're working for our good  
 And for your glory

*Chorus*

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### **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