

Wednesday 14 June 2023

Richard Baxter



Richard Baxter was born at Rowton in Shropshire in 1615. Theologically, he was a puritan. In 1633 he entered the court of King James I but was so disgusted with its low moral standards that he returned home to study divinity. He was ordained but he rejected belief in episcopacy in its contemporary English form and became a curate in a poor area of the west Midlands.

Baxter opposed the Civil War and played a prominent part in the recall of King Charles II, but his continuing dissatisfaction with the way episcopacy was practised led him to decline the See of Hereford. This refusal led him to be debarred from further office in the Church, though he continued to contribute to its life as a prolific hymn writer. He died in the year 1691.

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Liturgy and prayers of intercession © 2000 The Archbishops' Council.

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[The liturgy assumes the service is Eucharistic. The prayers of consecration are included at the end.](#)

The hymn can be accessed via a YouTube link. Please click on the links.

To see service transcripts from previous weeks, please visit the page, <http://www.medlockhead.co.uk/resources/index.htm>

Introduction and welcome

HYMN 1 [Take time to be holy](#) (please click on this link to hear the hymn)

The Welcome

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit

All Amen.

The Lord be with you

All And also with you.

The Preparation

**All Almighty God,
to whom all hearts are open,
all desires known,
and from whom no secrets are hidden:
cleanse the thoughts of our hearts
by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit,
that we may perfectly love you,
and worthily magnify your holy name;
through Christ our Lord. Amen.**

Our Lord Jesus Christ said:

The first commandment is this:

‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is the only Lord.

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart,
with all your soul, with all your mind,
and with all your strength.’

And the second is this: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’

There is no other commandment greater than these.

On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

All Amen. Lord, have mercy.

In sorrow for our sins and with faith in his mercy,

let us turn to the Lord,

for with him there is mercy and plenteous redemption.

All Almighty God, our heavenly Father,
we have sinned against you
and against our neighbour
in thought and word and deed,
through negligence, through weakness,
through our own deliberate fault.
We are truly sorry
and repent of all our sins.
For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ,
who died for us,
forgive us all that is past
and grant that we may serve you in newness of life
to the glory of your name. Amen.

Almighty God,
who forgives all who truly repent, have mercy upon you,
pardon and deliver you from all your sins,
confirm and strengthen you in all goodness,
and keep you in life eternal;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All Amen.

The Gloria

This Gloria is sung to the tune of 'Cwm Rhondda'. Click [here](#) for the tune.

All Glory be to God in Heaven,
Songs of joy and peace we bring,
Thankful hearts and voices raising,
To creation's Lord we sing.
Lord we thank you, Lord we praise you,
Glory be to God our King:
Glory be to God our King.

Lamb of God, who on our shoulders,
Bore the load of this world's sin;
Only Son of God the Father,
You have brought us peace within.
Lord, have mercy, Christ have mercy,
Now your glorious reign begin:
Now your glorious reign begin.

**You O Son of God are Holy,
You we praise with one accord.
None in heav'n or earth is like you,
Only you are Christ the Lord.
With the Father and the Spirit,
Ever worshipped and adored:
Ever worshipped and adored.**

The Collect for Richard Baxter

We give you thanks,
most gracious God, for the devoted witness of Richard Baxter,
who out of love for you followed his conscience at cost to himself,
and at all times rejoiced to sing your praises in word and deed;
and we pray that our lives,

like his, may be well-tuned to sing the songs of love,
and all our days be filled with praise of Jesus Christ our Lord;
who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns,
one God, now and for ever.

All Amen.

First reading

A reading from the book of Psalms

- 1 Give ear, O my people, to my teaching;
incline your ears to the words of my mouth.
- 2 I will open my mouth in a parable;
I will utter dark sayings from of old,
- 3 things that we have heard and known,
that our ancestors have told us.
- 4 We will not hide them from their children;
we will tell to the coming generation
the glorious deeds of the Lord, and his might,
and the wonders that he has done.

Psalm 78:1-4

This is the Word of the Lord

All Thanks be to God.

Second reading

A reading from St Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians

Such is the confidence that we have through Christ towards God. Not that we are competent of ourselves to claim anything as coming from us; our competence is from God, who has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not of letter but of spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

Now if the ministry of death, chiselled in letters on stone tablets, came in glory so that the people of Israel could not gaze at Moses' face because of the glory of his face, a glory now set aside, how much more will the ministry of the Spirit come in glory? For if there was glory in the ministry of condemnation, much more does the ministry of justification abound in glory! Indeed, what once had glory has lost its glory because of the greater glory; for if what was set aside came through glory, much more has the permanent come in glory! *2 Corinthians 3:4-11*

This is the Word of the Lord

All Thanks be to God.

**HYMN 2 Take my life and let it be
Take my life and let it be**

(traditional version)
(rock version)

Gospel reading

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Matthew

All Glory to you O Lord.

[Jesus said], 'Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfil. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. *Matthew 5:17-19*

This is the Gospel of the Lord

All Praise to you O Christ.

Sermon

Richard Baxter was famous as a 'Puritan'. It's a word that today sounds old-fashioned and maybe negative, but the Puritan movement dominated the church in much of the western world for centuries.

The word 'Puritan' itself simply means a desire to be pure (in the moral sense), so Puritans sought to live their lives under a strict moral code. Seeking moral perfection is always a laudable ambition and, while it probably won't be described today as 'Puritan', such an attitude is very much alive in some parts of the church.

At its best, Puritanism expressed the desire to behave and *be* the very best person possibly, because God deserves nothing less. At its worst, it became an exercise in self-will, and judgementalism on those who could not be strong enough.

The desire for moral perfection is completely biblical. For example, the refrain, 'Be holy, as I am holy' occurs so often in the Law of Moses that it gave its name to 'The Holiness code'; and, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said 'Be perfect as your Father in Heaven in perfect' (Matthew 5:48). That such passages require us to seek a pure life means that it is achievable, though it will probably be very difficult even for people with an appropriate temperamental aptitude. We therefore need help ... spiritual help.

In today's Gospel passage, Jesus says, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfil". We can rule out one interpretation right away: Jesus is not telling us to ignore either the Law or the Prophets—he says that much explicitly. But, on the other hand, he did not come to simply keep, re-state, or re-establish them either. The word he used signals something much more profound: *he came to fulfil them*.

It becomes very important to understand what it means when we say that Jesus came to 'fulfil' the scriptures. It's not that he delivers various scattered predictions. Rather, it means he is bringing the entirety of the scriptures to their appointed goal or spiritual destination. The Old Testament prophetically anticipated Jesus, and he came to *fulfil* these expectations. This way of looking fits with how Matthew often used the word 'fulfil' (see for example, Matthew 1:22; Matthew 2:15, 17, 23; Matthew 3:15; or Matthew 4:14). Taken together, then, Matthew thinks of the Old Testament as a story awaiting an ending, with Jesus as its completion.

Jesus achieved this fulfilment by inaugurating the long-awaited age which would fulfil all the ancient promises—promises like a true, righteous king who would create a new humanity and promises of a new covenant that brings new hearts for true obedience (think of Jeremiah 31:31–34). This new age of fulfilment dawned when Jesus arrived. Indeed, Jesus announced it just before he commenced the Sermon on the Mount, saying "The kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 4:17).

We no longer live in the old covenant era of anticipation but in the new covenant era of fulfilment.

Read that way, the fulfilment distils down to core of the Good News: Jesus died and took away our sins, and thereby enabled us to be filled with the Holy Spirit. We can start to live Jesus' life because he starts to live in us through his Spirit.

This discussion helps us avoid two extremes when interpreting the Old Testament. We should neither abandon the Old Testament altogether but nor should we seek to follow it apart from its fulfilment in Jesus. Stated a different way, he did not come to start something brand new nor to maintain an incomplete status quo. Instead, Jesus is the king of God's long-anticipated kingdom and in that sense he did not come to abolish the scriptures but to bring them to a glorious fulfilment.

The Creed

Do you believe and trust in God the Father,
the source of all being and life,
the one for whom we exist?

All We believe and trust in him.

Do you believe and trust in God the Son,
who took our human nature,
died for us and rose again?

All We believe and trust in him.

Do you believe and trust in God the Holy Spirit,
who gives life to the people of God
and makes Christ known in the world?

All We believe and trust in him.

This is the faith of the Church.

All This is our faith.

**We believe and trust in one God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
Amen.**

Prayers of intercession

We pray to Jesus who is present with us to eternity.
Jesus, Lord of life,

All in your mercy, hear us.

Jesus, light of the world,
bring the light and peace of your gospel to the nations ...

Jesus, Lord of life,

All in your mercy, hear us.

Jesus, bread of life,
give food to the hungry ...
and nourish us all with your word.

Jesus, Lord of life,

All in your mercy, hear us.

Jesus, our way, our truth, our life,
be with us and all who follow you in the way ...

Deepen our appreciation of your truth
and fill us with your life.

Jesus, Lord of life,

All in your mercy, hear us.

Jesus, Good Shepherd who gave your life for the sheep,
recover the straggler,
bind up the injured,
strengthen the sick
and lead the healthy and strong to new pastures.

Jesus, Lord of life,

All in your mercy, hear us.

Jesus, the resurrection and the life,
we give you thanks for all who have lived and believed in you ...

Raise us with them to eternal life.

Jesus, Lord of life,

All in your mercy, hear us.

accept our prayers, and be with us always.

Amen.

Merciful Father,

All accept these prayers

for the sake of your Son,

our Saviour Jesus Christ.

Amen.

The peace

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly;
teach and admonish one another in all wisdom,
and may the peace of the Lord be always with you.

The peace of the Lord be always with you,
All And also with you.

HYMN 3 Turn your eyes upon Jesus [\(click on this link to hear the hymn\)](#)

The liturgy of the Communion Service appears below

The Dismissal

God grant you grace to be good servants of Christ Jesus,
nourished on the words of the faith
and on the sound teaching that you have followed;
and the blessing of God the Almighty:
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
be with you now and remain with you always.

All Amen.

HYMN 4 Refiner's fire (My heart's one desire is to be holy) [\(click to hear\)](#)

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

All In the name of Christ. Amen.

The Liturgy of the Sacrament

Eucharistic Prayer (prayer E)

The Lord be with you

All and also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

All We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

All It is right to give thanks and praise.

It is truly right and good,
our duty and our salvation,
always and everywhere to give you thanks,
Lord, holy Father, almighty and eternal God,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

For he has named his Church
the salt of the earth and light of the world;
a city set on a hill which cannot be hidden.
Within this faithful company
your servant Richard Baxter became a learned teacher
through the gifts of the Holy Spirit of Christ,
that all might welcome his teaching as your gift,
a beacon on the path of holiness
that leads to eternal life.

As now we celebrate his memory
we join with angels and archangels
and all who have served you on earth
and worship you now in heaven
to raise our voices and proclaim your glory
for ever praising you and saying:

**All Holy, holy, holy Lord,
God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.**

We praise and bless you, loving Father,
through Jesus Christ, our Lord;
and as we obey his command,
send your Holy Spirit,
that broken bread and wine outpoured
may be for us the body and blood of your dear Son.

On the night before he died he had supper with his friends
and, taking bread, he praised you.
He broke the bread, gave it to them and said:
Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you;
do this in remembrance of me.

When supper was ended he took the cup of wine.
Again he praised you, gave it to them and said:
Drink this, all of you;
this is my blood of the new covenant,
which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins.
Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.

So, Father, we remember all that Jesus did,
in him we plead with confidence his sacrifice made once for all upon the cross.

Bringing before you the bread of life and cup of salvation,
we proclaim his death and resurrection
until he comes in glory.

Great is the mystery of faith:

All Christ has died.

Christ is risen.

Christ will come again.

Lord of all life,
help us to work together for that day
when your kingdom comes
and justice and mercy will be seen in all the earth.

Look with favour on your people,
gather us in your loving arms
and bring us with Richard Baxter and all the saints
to feast at your table in heaven.

Through Christ, and with Christ, and in Christ,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
all honour and glory are yours, O loving Father,
for ever and ever.

All Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

As our Saviour taught us, so we pray

**All Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever.
Amen.**

Breaking of the Bread

We break this bread to share in the body of Christ.

**All Though we are many, we are one body,
because we all share in one bread.**

**All Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world,
have mercy on us.**

**Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world,
have mercy on us.**

**Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world,
grant us peace.**

Draw near with faith.

Receive the body of our Lord Jesus Christ

which he gave for you,

and his blood which he shed for you.

Eat and drink in remembrance that he died for you,

and feed on him in your hearts

by faith with thanksgiving.

All **We do not presume
to come to this your table, merciful Lord,
trusting in our own righteousness,
but in your manifold and great mercies.
We are not worthy
so much as to gather up the crumbs under your table.
But you are the same Lord
whose nature is always to have mercy.
Grant us therefore, gracious Lord,
so to eat the flesh of your dear Son Jesus Christ
and to drink his blood,
that our sinful bodies may be made clean by his body
and our souls washed through his most precious blood,
and that we may evermore dwell in him,
and he in us.
Amen.**

Communion is distributed.

Prayer after Communion

God of truth,

whose Wisdom set her table

and invited us to eat the bread and drink the wine of the kingdom:

help us to lay aside all foolishness

and to live and walk in the way of insight,

that we may come with Richard Baxter to the eternal feast of heaven;

through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All **Amen**

All **Almighty God,**
we thank you for feeding us
with the body and blood of your Son Jesus Christ.
Through him we offer you our souls and bodies
to be a living sacrifice.
Send us out in the power of your Spirit
to live and work
to your praise and glory.
Amen.