

**Abbey International Baptist Church, Reading**  
**Worship Service with Baptism 10:30AM 20 July 2025**  
**Selina Chan leading & Jill Bird preaching**  
[www.abbeybaptistchurch.org.uk](http://www.abbeybaptistchurch.org.uk)  
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**THEME: Come close to God, and He will come close to you**

**CALL TO WORSHIP**

Come close to God to feel His love and peace. God is not far away.  
He is near to everyone who looks for Him with an honest heart.  
Let us leave behind our worries and burdens.

Let us turn our eyes to Jesus, who welcomes us with open arms.

**We come to worship with joy, with love, and with hope.**

**Let us draw near to God now, in our songs, our prayers and in our hearts. Amen.**

**Hymn**

In Christ alone my hope is found; He is my light, my strength, my song;  
This cornerstone, this solid ground, Firm through the fiercest drought and storm.  
What heights of love, what depths of peace, When fears are stilled, when strivings cease!  
My comforter, my all in all, Here in the love of Christ I stand.

In Christ alone, Who took on flesh, Fullness of God in helpless babe!  
This gift of love and righteousness, Scorned by the ones He came to save.  
Till on that cross as Jesus died, The wrath of God was satisfied;  
For every sin on Him was laid, Here in the death of Christ I live.

There in the ground His body lay, Light of the world by darkness slain;  
Then bursting forth in glorious day, Up from the grave He rose again!  
And as He stands in victory, Sin's curse has lost its grip on me;  
For I am His and He is mine, Bought with the precious blood of Christ.

No guilt in life, no fear in death, This is the power of Christ in me;  
From life's first cry to final breath, Jesus commands my destiny.  
No power of hell, no scheme of man, Can ever pluck me from His hand;  
Till He returns or calls me home— Here in the power of Christ I'll stand.

STUART TOWNEND & KEITH GETTY COPYRIGHT © 2001 THANKYOU MUSIC

**FAMILY TIME: God is good**

*(An offering will be taken during the following song, then the young people will leave for their groups)*

**BIBLE READING 1: Joshua 24.1 and 14-24**

**BIBLE READING 2: James 4:4-10**

**SERMON Come close to God and he will come close to you**

So we come to a very special day for three of our friends – Linda, Pamela and Alee – and a welcome to their friends and family that have come to support them today.

We are studying the book in the bible we call James, and there is a section which talks about what our friends are doing today – saying a huge YES to God – saying I want you as my KING and to live in your KINGDOM. James is so good at ‘Startling statements’ and we have yet another today.

He says you are an ‘**adulterous people**’. What me! I’m not even married. What me! I’ve never been unfaithful to my wife. What can he mean?

Right through the bible we have the picture of God as the ‘husband’ and his people as his ‘bride.’ He so often says why are you so unfaithful to me? And in James we also come to his second use of the phrase being **double minded** – having two ways of living.

The bible describes two countries or kingdoms we can live in. **The kingdom of the world** where Christians understand that Satan, the devil, rules by trapping people to believe his lies. He says aim for money, success, pleasure and you will be happy – but actually we come under his power. We become addicted to these things, wanting more and more. We are selfish and want them at others expense. As I push up, I push others down. We are actually trapped and blinded to what is going on.

The other kingdom is **God’s Kingdom** – have we ever really had a glimpse of what this could be like. What’s on offer there? The God who made the hugeness of the universe and who made me in the splendour of his likeness, has so much to share with me. His love, his joy, his wisdom, his peace, his faithfulness for the future and after all that eternal life with him in glory. He offers life in all its fullness.

**So I ask you which kingdom are you living in? Have you decided?**

But for most of us **God says you are adulterous, you are double minded**, trying to live in both. Is it a happy place to be ? You are not getting the full benefits of either place. Maybe like coming to the UK and sitting in your apartment and wanting to go home without ever enjoying the UK. You only remember the good things of the place you left. The Israelites wanted to go back to Egypt, why? There were cucumbers there!  
**It says in v 4 you will always be a friend of one kingdom and an enemy of the other.**

Then we get the idea of **God’s jealous longing for us to join his Kingdom**. Doesn’t the faithful wife long for her adulterous husband to return to her – In the same way God reaches out to woo us into his kingdom, pouring grace – undeserved love - out to us when we are still far away.

**Jesus told a wonderful story we call the lost son**. A son leaves home with his share of the Father’s money and enjoys life in the city until it is all spent. Then he has nothing, takes a job looking after pigs and is so hungry. He realises he has made a big mistake and takes himself back home to ask to be just a slave in his Father’s house.

But the Father is eagerly looking out for him, waiting for his return, jealous for him to be back as his son. He gives him fine clothes, his ring and a party to celebrate his homecoming – such is Father God’s love as he welcomes us into his kingdom. Could you be that son today?

## So let's go onto the second half of the passage v 7-10

It tells us what we have to do to fully enter God's kingdom. Four little words - **humble** yourself, **submit**, **resist** and **come** close. This is what our friends today have done as they say their big YES to God in baptism.

**Humble yourself** – Satan's kingdom is full of pride – 'look at me' – look what I'm doing, my money, my control of life. I'm in charge. As I push up, I push others down. Pride demands. Pride says I can do it without God and I deserve all I've got

The humble man says I need help, I need God, I have failings, I come to God with nothing

**Submit** - we all submit or surrender to something or someone. We think we're in charge but actually Satan is. God is waiting for you to come to him like that son returning to his Father. I come with nothing of worth but I believe your arms are there to welcome and take me home. Put up the white flag. Admit we are wrong to try and do life without God. Admit God's kingdom is actually a much better place to live. Say a quiet yes to God.

**Resist** – we need to make a very definite exit from Satan's kingdom. That is part of what we are seeing today as these three go down into the water. They are putting to death the past and their life in Satan's kingdom. They come up into the new Kingdom of God. So how do we resist – we say a very definite and loud NO to Satan – God says then Satan has to flee as Jesus' death on the cross destroyed his power for those who submit to God

**Come close.** This is the final wonderful invitation. We can come close, to know God's very presence with all the benefits of a close walk with him for the rest of our lives.

How does the passage end - yes we may need a clean-up operation – it says when we are that close to God's holiness, we will need to wash our hands from external sins and purify our hearts from internal ones – weep and wail as we realise how these things have made closeness with God impossible. But God offers grace and love to walk this walk.

So where are you at? There are three possibilities you can choose

1. **You have said a big YES to God** and are enjoying living in his Kingdom with all its very rich blessings

2. **You are still living in Satan's Kingdom** but you are challenged to think about the decision

3. **You are adulterous, double minded** – foot in both camps – not really enjoying either.

What did we hear in the first reading from Joshua, that 100% committed friend of God. He said 'How long will you waver between two opinions? As for me and my house we will serve the LORD'

God's promise is there for all of us today – Come close to God and he will come close to you.

Let's pause and pray and then respond in the next hymn.

All to Jesus I surrender  
All to Him I freely give  
I will ever love and trust Him  
In His presence daily live

Chorus I surrender all, I surrender all  
All to You, my blessed Saviour I surrender all

All to Jesus I surrender

Only at Your feet I bow  
Worldly pleasures all forsaken  
Fill me with Your love and power

All to Jesus I surrender  
Burn in me now, sacred flame  
Be my joy and my salvation  
Glory, glory to Your name

*J W Van De Venter*

**TESTIMONIES BY Linda Vanuska, Ali Nasser, Pamela Chambua**

**BAPTISMS We will ask each candidate 'Have you taken Jesus as your Saviour and Lord?  
They reply 'I have' and we say 'Then come and be baptised'**

**As we baptise them we say ' On your confession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and commitment to follow him for the rest of your life, we baptise you in the name of the Father who loves you, the name of the Son Jesus who died for you and the name of the Holy Spirit who fills you with his power. Amen**

**We will sing the following song during the baptisms**

I have decided to follow Jesus, x3  
No turning back, no turning back.

The world behind me, the cross before me, x3  
No turning back, no turning back.

Though none go with me, I still will follow, x3  
No turning back, no turning back.

Will you decide now to follow Jesus? X3  
No turning back, no turning back.

I have decided to follow Jesus, x3  
No turning back, no turning back  
Mission Praise 272L

**When the people being baptised have changed, we will pray for them and new church members**

### **SONG**

I love You, Lord For Your mercy never fails me  
All my days, I've been held in Your hands  
From the moment that I wake up until I lay my head  
Oh, I will sing of the goodness of God

*Because all my life You have been faithful  
And all my life You have been so, so good  
With every breath that I am able,  
Oh, I will sing of the goodness of God*

I love Your voice You have led me through the fire  
In darkest night You are close like no other

I've known You as a Father I've known You as a Friend  
And I have lived in the goodness of God

Your goodness is running after, it's running after me x2  
With my life laid down, I'm surrendered now, I give You everything,  
Your goodness is running after, it's running after me x3  
With my life laid down, I'm surrendered now. I give you everything.  
Your goodness is running after, it's running after me  
KATHRYN SCOTT, Goodness of God lyrics © Bethel Music Publishing

### **PRAYER OF INTERCESSION: Lam & Selina**

Dear Father God,

Thank You for the joyful day we've had today, as our brothers and sisters—Alee, Linda, and Pamela—have received new life through baptism.

**Father, please bless them on their journey of faith as they follow Jesus. And we ask that more hearts may be opened to You, more people may come to know You and be baptised here at Abbey Baptist Church.**

Lord, we look around and see a broken world. Wars and violence continue—especially in Ukraine and Gaza. So many lives are lost, and so much suffering seems without reason.

**But You, Lord, are powerful and righteous. We ask You to bring peace where there is none. Please stop the fighting. Bring comfort to those who grieve, food to the hungry, and healing to the wounded.**

We also bring before You the needs of our own country. The economy is struggling—prices are rising, jobs are uncertain, and more people are facing challenges like crime, mental illness, and addiction.

**Lord, have mercy on us. Give wisdom to our leaders to find sensible and lasting solutions. Care for the poor, the sick, the lonely, and the homeless. Bring hope to those who feel forgotten.**

We cannot ignore the damage being done to Your creation. Climate change is becoming more visible through wildfires, floods, earthquakes, and melting ice. We especially pray for those in Texas, USA, who have lost loved ones because of the recent floods.

**Please stir the hearts of world leaders to take urgent and effective action before it's too late.**

Finally, Lord, in this fast-changing world, where artificial intelligence and technology are developing rapidly, we feel bewildered and lost.

**Lord, help us to stay grounded in our faith. Strengthen us to resist worldly temptations, to live by Your Word, and to dedicate our lives to You. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.**

### **HYMN**

Lord, the light of Your love is shining, in the midst of the darkness shining:  
Jesus, Light of the world, shine upon us; set us free by the truth You now bring us.  
Shine on me, shine on me.

Shine, Jesus, shine, fill this land with the Father's glory;  
Blaze, Spirit, blaze, set our hearts on fire.  
Flow, river, flow, flood the nations with grace and mercy;  
Send forth Your word, Lord, and let there be light.

Lord, I come to Your awesome presence, from the shadows into Your radiance;  
By Your blood, I may enter Your brightness; search me, try me, consume all my darkness.  
Shine on me, shine on me.

As we gaze on Your kingly brightness, so our faces display Your likeness;  
Ever-changing from glory to glory: mirrored here, may our lives tell Your story.  
Shine on me, shine on me.

GRAHAM KENDRICK © 1987 MAKE WAY MUSIC

**BENEDICTION:**

Go now, not as friends of the world, but as beloved children of God.  
Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.  
Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you.  
Humble yourselves before the Lord,  
and trust that He will lift you up in due time.  
In the name of Jesus, Amen.

**THE GRACE:**

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

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**Events to highlight next week:**

**Tuesday 8pm Zoom prayer meeting**

**Wednesday 2pm Last in series on knowing Jesus I am the way the truth and the life**

**And Advance notice**

**Tuesday July 29<sup>th</sup> Zoltan and his family move into the manse**

**Sunday Aug 3<sup>rd</sup> – Zoltan's first Sunday at Abbey**

**And Church lunch Aug 10<sup>th</sup>**



**QR Code for Financial Offering:**