

# 22<sup>nd</sup> February, 2026



## The paper-version Service



**To Begin:** Find a Bible and a comfortable place. If safe, light a candle and read prayerfully through the service. If you have access to worship music, choose a song and listen to it as you begin or read, or even sing, the song from this Sunday's Service.

**Opening Prayer:** 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.**

### **Hymn:**

Before the throne of God above  
I have a strong and perfect plea:  
A great High Priest whose name is Love,  
Who ever lives and pleads for me.  
My name is graven on his hands,  
My name is written on his heart.  
I know that while in Heav'n he stands  
No tongue can bid me thence depart,  
No tongue can bid me thence depart.

When Satan tempts me to despair  
And tells me of the guilt within,  
Upward I look and see him there,  
Who made an end of all my sin.

Because the sinless Savior died,  
My sinful soul is counted free,  
For God the just is satisfied  
To look on him and pardon me,  
To look on him and pardon me.

Behold him there, the risen Lamb,  
My perfect, spotless righteousness,  
The great unchangeable I AM,  
The King of glory and of grace.  
One with himself I cannot die;  
My soul is purchased by his blood.  
My life is hid with Christ on high,  
With Christ, my Saviour and my God,  
With Christ, my Saviour and my God.

## **The Sermon by Rev Howard Wright**

### **Read Revelation 15:1-8, chapter 16; & Matthew 23:37-39 The King's Wrath**

So far we've seen how God knows us and loves us, but that before we reach Heaven there will be tough moments. In chapter 4, with John, we are invited to, come and see what's really going on.

We are reassured to see that God is on the throne and everything is under his control, and that love, truth, and justice will prevail. We witness a series of scenes which give us a heavenly and eternal perspective on the past, the present, with its struggles of creation in general and humanity in particular, and we glimpse the future and the destiny of the Earth and all people.

Last week we were reassured again that we are named, known, not forgotten, and as was clear in the letters, we are called to be fully human. We were made to be God's children, delighting in his company, reflecting his likeness, and giving him glory. The alternative to being God's children is our dehumanisation. We become like animals, we become beastly as we seek after selfish gain, creating our own values, and worshipping our own ideas. The 'mark' and 'number of the beast', 666, symbolises our failure, as three times we fall short of the perfect and holy (symbolised by 7) that we're invited into.

The world has not lived as the Kingdom of God, we have formed our own empires and societies, based on our own selfish and godless values and aspirations. The empires we have created are symbolised here in Revelation as Babylon, the unholy city and empire, the exact opposite of the New Jerusalem, symbol of the dwelling place of God.

Time and again God sends his messengers, today the church, to proclaim his message of Good News: seek God and give him glory. But each time the world rejects this message and God.

In today's scene (Revelation 15& 16) we have the 7 bowls of plagues. These re-tell what we've seen already with the seals and the trumpets, but as the trumpets expanded the message of the seals, so the symbolic bowls give us further insight.

Firstly, one of the living creatures distributes the bowls of God's justice. It is creation that has suffered, and continues to suffer for our sin, that delivers the justice.

Notice that the seven plagues revealed are what Israel called down upon her enemies (see Psalm 79:12), and which were suffered by Egypt, but which God warns will fall upon us for our unfaithfulness (see Leviticus 26:14-35, and see also Hebrews 10:31 and Luke 12:4-5).

Secondly there is an increase in severity. Will things get worse as we near the time of Christ's return? Well, things are not getting any better, and with more than

8 billion now on the planet any catastrophe affects far more people. Looking back through history, we can see that there have been truly terrible things suffered and that despite our claims of progress, we continue to behave like beasts toward each other. And we must pray for God's mercy and that his Kingdom would come and his will be done.

Thirdly, God is presented as very present, as real, as solid and, as absolute. But we, and all our earthly securities in contrast are presented as like flowers of the field, the wind goes over them, and they are gone (See Psalm 103:15-16). Our desire for permanence, for eternal life, and solidity, is only made possible in the majestic eternal God, we have nothing solid of ourselves.

Fourthly, this is no longer a warning and partial, but punishment and complete. Those being punished continue to rebel against God, not complain of their suffering or claiming that they're being treated in anyway unjustly: Read Revelation 16:9-11. The devil and world recognising that they can't deceive or defeat God, bring forwards their own destruction – gathering their force at Armageddon, a recognisable and potent, but somewhat over dramatized symbol of the end of the age.

Fifthly, this is the 'Last' and *the 'End.'* *'It is done!'* says 16:17 and we read of the final shaking of the earth – see Hebrews 12:26-27, (which quotes Haggai 2:6). This end, the last, declared in 15:1. Last = *'teleo'*, which is defined as, *'to bring to an end, complete, finish, fulfil, or accomplish. It signifies not just ending, but fully executing a task, discharging a debt, or achieving a goal.'* (Google) And, it is the same root word for Jesus' words, 'It is finished'. In suffering and enduring our punishment Christ hung upon a cross, and in doing so defeated our suffering and took our punishment. It was finished then upon the cross, but God is waiting patiently, longing for people to turn to him and receive forgiveness and healing. And, so, the final act is to come – and while we wait there is suffering but, the children of God and his glory will be revealed.

Sixthly, the end will come and judgement is real. Jesus himself spoke of judgement with 22 references across the Gospels. But:

- Jesus and his people will not be shaken, (read Revelation 16:15) and so, stand secure in Christ. Don't fear the rumours of wars, etc, that Jesus himself spoke of: Matthew 24, Luke 12 & 21, Mark 13.
- Invest in the right areas – see Matthew 6:19-34, especially verse 33)
- Endure suffering knowing that God has got this and walks with us through it.
- And, make disciples – the time is short – see Matthew 28:19-20.

To finish, read 2 Peter 3:10-13.

**1st Sunday of Lent:** *Almighty God, whose Son Jesus Christ fasted forty days in the wilderness, and was tempted as we are, yet without sin: give us grace to discipline ourselves in obedience to your Spirit; and, as you know our weakness, so may we know your power to save; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.*

**The Lord's Prayer:** *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 forever. Amen.*

**Blessing** to be declared over yourselves, St Andrews and The Good Shepherd, the communities around us and our whole nation. 'The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face towards you and give you peace.' (Numbers 6:24-26 NIV).

#### **At the Church of the Good Shepherd:**

- Tea and Chat and Bowls: March 18<sup>th</sup> at 2pm in Church Hall & Church.
- Coffee and Questions: February 25<sup>th</sup> and March 25<sup>th</sup> at 10.30am in Church Hall.
- The Community Cupboard, 2:45pm every Thursday in Church.

#### **For Further information:**

This paper and all parish details are on the website at <https://www.pariahofmedsteadandfourmarks.co.uk>