

# Kington Baptist Church

## MESSAGE BOARD – 65

*As Jesus came near Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it, saying, 'If you had only recognized this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from you. Indeed, the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up ramparts around you and surround you, and hem you in on every side. They will crush you to the ground, you and your children within you, and they will not leave within you one stone upon another; because you did not recognize the time of your visitation from God.'* (Luke 19.41-44)

**I**n 70 AD the Romans crushed the city of Jerusalem. The conflict was among the most violent and brutal events in the history of the Roman Empire. The war was recorded by both Jewish and Roman historians of the time. This was the overthrow of Jerusalem Jesus foresaw when he entered Jerusalem for the final time before his crucifixion. The translation we have quoted doesn't do justice to the intensity of Luke's account. To say Jesus 'wept' over the city is a euphemism. What Luke wrote was that Jesus *burst into tears*. Grammatically the term Luke used is described as an 'ingressive aorist active indicative'; it literally means, 'to burst into tears' – and no doubt this would have been agonised, heart-rending and audible weeping.

Now I am making this point for two reasons that are closely related. In the first place, there is nothing in the Jewish or Roman histories of this event that has anything like the response of Jesus to the tragedy that he knew was coming to Jerusalem. Their accounts are factual; they record the horrors of the conflict but say nothing in any way like our Lord's passionate outburst. If we ask why they didn't react as Jesus did, the answer is plain: they didn't care as Jesus did.

The second reason I have drawn attention to this incident is that I have become increasingly disturbed by the way the present pandemic is reported by the BBC and by government spokespeople. And I suspect that I am not alone in this. There is the greatest possible contrast between the way this present tragedy is reported and our Lord's response to human tragedies. He burst into tears. That is how Jesus responds to human tragedies. He weeps. God incarnate weeps.

There is something profoundly inhuman about the way this pandemic is discussed. I'm not singling out the BBC in particular – but that's what I hear most. What we are hearing is the response and attitude of the world. The reporting is mathematical, statistical; it's all graphs and numbers, with little if any sense of humanity. This is absolutely *not* how we should respond to human tragedy, to the deaths of so many souls. All that follows from these statistics is debates over the opinions, projections or 'modelling' of some 'expert' or other.

The focus is on the 'mechanisms' of the *virus* and *vaccines*; any reference to *hope* centres exclusively on science and vaccines. When there is talk of hope it is more wishful thinking and political spin. The realities of the pandemic are muted and the true state of the NHS, for instance, is only exposed to us by the anguished pleading of this or that doctor independently speaking out.

It wasn't always like this in this nation. I've never forgotten the anguished cry of Herbert Morrison, the news reporter, as he witnessed the dreadful conflagration of the Hindenberg airship: 'Oh, the humanity, the humanity!' In 1939 the government Office of Information published a poster, the wording was: '*Put your trust in God, as I do. His Majesty the King*'. In 1940 a second government poster declared: '*O God our Help*'. But now it is different. Can you imagine such posters being issued by our government! Any humanitarian, let alone religious, not to mention distinctively Christian, perspective to the reporting is almost entirely absent. Can you imagine the furore if 'a day of prayer' was even hinted at! Given the ungodliness of our nation, there is, unsurprisingly, absolutely no mention whatsoever of the gospel, of prayer or of God's Word. But it's God's Word we need; it is God's Word that brings hope for those who are dying, whether individually or, as now, by the thousands.

If I'm dying or at risk of dying I don't want to hear theories of a statistician; I want to hear the hope and comfort of the gospel. And if I don't want to hear the gospel of God's grace then I need the prayers of those who do.

Nothing so clearly reveals the spiritual bankruptcy of our nation than this situation to which I have drawn your attention. Jesus burst into tears, because he cares. But also because he saw the dreadful tragedy unfolding of a nation that had enjoyed a wealth of spiritual privileges but rejected their one and only Saviour: '*If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes ... the days will come when your enemies will ... crush you to the ground ... because you did not recognize the time of your visitation from God.*'

I simply ask you to compare the response of our secular nation to this human tragedy, with the response of the Lord Jesus Christ: whether to the individual tragedy of the death of Lazarus – *Jesus wept* (John 11.35); or to the deaths of thousands in the overthrow of Jerusalem – *Jesus burst into tears* (Luke 19.41). Jesus weeps because he loves and he cares. That's how Jesus responds to human tragedy. And thank God he does!

*God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains should be thrown into the depths of the sea.* (Psalm 46.1-2)

*There is no one like the God of Israel, who rides the heavens in majestic glory to help you. The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.* (Deuteronomy 33.26-27)