

# KINGTON BAPTIST CHURCH ONLINE NOTICE BOARD – 19

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## ***On the toppling of statues – Daniel 2.31-45 and 3.1ff.***

I suspect we should first consider the *raising* of statues, because that will provide the only adequate explanation for the intense reactions aroused by their desecration. Those intense reactions – either of approval or disapproval – provoked by the destruction of a statue can't be explained simply by the fact that their destruction may be an act of 'lawlessness', 'vandalism' or 'thuggery'. The intense reaction to their destruction or desecration is explained only by taking account of the outrage felt by those who admire the values or achievements a statue represents, symbolises and honours.

The purpose of a statue is to *honour* its subject. I never yet heard of a statue being erected to *denigrate* the memory of the person represented! The sense of outrage felt at the attempt to disfigure the statue in Parliament Square of Sir Winston Churchill was so intense because of the great affection felt for the *man* – not because the statue in itself may be a fine work of art. The outrage reflects the sense that the *man* is considered a person deserving to be *honoured*, not *maligned*.

It may seem remote to us, but originally the purpose in raising a statue was *worship*, in ancient times a statue was always closely linked with *idolatry*. The Ten Commandments don't forbid making statues or sculptures; what is forbidden is 'bowing down to worship' an 'image' or a statue. That was why Aaron made the Golden Calf, and Nebuchadnezzar raised his huge statue on the plain of Dura: '*you must prostrate yourselves and worship the golden statue erected by the King*' (Daniel 3.4) When Paul visited Athens he saw a statue, a sculpture, to 'the unknown God'. He knew this statue wasn't there as a piece of high Greek art. He understood that the statue represented a Person these people worshipped: *I was passing by and ... found an altar with this inscription: TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Now, this One you worship without knowing who He is, I will tell you of.* (Acts 17.23)

Of course we don't *worship* the image of a half-recognised individual on a plinth in the town square! Nor in ancient times did people worship the *statue*. The statue was (and is) a visible symbol of a person or an animal or some such. It was (and is) the *person* who was honoured or worshipped. The

only explanation for erecting a statue of any individual is to *honour* their memory, to recognise and commemorate the contribution they are deemed to have made to society.

But what if the contribution of that individual is inseparable from appalling acts of cruelty, gross injustice, brutal oppression and atrociously violent domination and exploitation? What, in such a case, must matter most to the Christian conscience: the money that individual contributed to civic projects or the countless lives they ruined, abused, exploited and destroyed?

For the Christian conscience the question is never how much money so-and-so gave but what they kept for themselves and how they made it. (Luke 22.3-4; Matthew 19.22; John 2.14-16)

No wonder Moses responded by violently destroying the atrocity of the statue of the Golden Calf, representing the evils of Egypt! (Exodus 32.19-20)

No wonder Daniel and his friends refused to obey Nebuchadnezzar or bow to his statue! (Daniel 3.16-18)

No wonder the statue in Nebuchadnezzar's dream, representing the arch-oppressors and despots of the Old Testament world, was shattered and blown to the four winds by the image of Jesus Christ – *'the stone cut without human-hands'*! (Daniel 2.31-45)

But the 'Living-Stone', Jesus Christ, King of Kings, is concerned with more than toppling statues: in his new Kingdom oppressors and tyrants will be toppled – not just their statues!

*Jesus called his disciples to him and said to them, 'You know that among the Gentiles those they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you. Whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many'.* (Mark 10.42-45)

*He has shown strength with His arm; He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted the lowly.* (Luke 1.51-52)