

KINGTON BAPTIST CHURCH ONLINE NOTICE BOARD - 16

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‘... but you refuse to come to me to have life.’ (John 5.40)

Maybe we’ve heard more than enough about coronavirus, but I suspect we’ve not heard a great deal about it from a Christian and biblical perspective. Perhaps we didn’t think there was a Christian way of looking at it. But the key truths of the Bible touch on every part of life.

The scope and impact of coronavirus is so profound that it’s impossible to grasp its full spiritual message and meaning – to take in all God is saying to the world and to us individually through this. But some truths are clear – and we have their light to guide our thoughts and responses.

It’s said the first casualty of war is **truth – truth** is also the first casualty in a national crisis. Not everything said about this crisis is true; and much that is true we are not told and will not be told. Endlessly repeated clichés – the ‘default’ for official responses – are no substitute for frank truthfulness. Nor are misinformation and misleading claims – the UK death total is a matter for shame, not one to be ‘proud of’.

Beyond that the crisis shows **we do not know what tomorrow will bring.** Harold Wilson famously said ‘a week is a long time in politics’. The Apostle James tells us a day is a long time in a person’s life: *Be real, you say, ‘Today or tomorrow we’ll go to this or that town, spend a year there, trade and make money.’ But you don’t even know what will happen tomorrow! What is your life? Life is merely a mist; it appears for such a short time and then vanishes. What you should say is, ‘If the Lord wishes, we will live and do this or that.’ But instead you arrogantly boast – and such boasting is evil.* (James 13.16)

Not knowing what tomorrow will bring affects how the country and the world attempt to recover from this crisis. The fact the future cannot be foreseen makes all ‘models’ and predictions misleading and unreliable – coronavirus has surely shown us that! Some future events may be anticipated, they may be *foreseen* – floods, drought, rising unemployment, financial collapse, increased homelessness, a second coronavirus spike, cyber attacks and so on – these things *may* happen. We could say: the ‘foreseen’ *may* happen; the unforeseeable **will** happen! The unforeseeable **will** happen because we **do not know** what tomorrow will bring – the future **is** unforeseeable.

A second truth has also become clear: no matter how often God warns us to prepare for the future, **the world always has and always will ignore his warnings**. As James says, the world arrogantly boasts it can control the future and protect itself for the future, even though we don't know what tomorrow will bring! The world ignores warnings of future disaster, of storms that will overwhelm the world's preparations and swamp its self-security. It was claimed the years of austerity, with the chaos and distress they brought to so many, would free future generations from crippling debt. But in an instant coronavirus virus brought that hope crashing down. Instead lockdown has resulted not only in colossal national debt but steep increases in domestic abuse, mental health problems, homelessness, unemployment, and 'premature' deaths. It is right to prepare for the future – but we are to prepare in-line with God's will and ways: *God has told you what is good; and what is it that the LORD requires of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?* (Micah 6.8) Had we prepared like *that*, the house, built on the Rock, would have stood, despite the storm!

This takes us to a third truth that's become painfully obvious: **the world is never prepared for what tomorrow brings**. Despite not knowing what tomorrow will bring, the world, in its arrogant self-belief (as James says), attempts to appear invincible. It boasts it can 'model' the future and can *control* the future. The current lockdown slogan aims to '*control* the virus' – a bold claim! We're told policies 'follow the science'. 'The science' produces forecasts, predictions and 'models' developed by 'experts' – who spend today revising forecasts they made yesterday! There is no '**the** science'. Scientists disagree together and there's much they don't know: just last week the president of the Royal Society admitted there are 'extraordinary amounts of uncertainty' about the virus. This becomes increasingly clear as alternative voices are heard.

The world 'in its wisdom' (1 Corinthians 1.21) refuses to pay attention to the warnings God gives, so **when 'tomorrow' comes the reaction is fear**. Fear is the opposite response of that which Jesus offers, he tells us not to fear, not to worry, not to be anxious. He says this because he gives a solid foundation on which to prepare: we're to build on the Rock – *himself!* But the world will never do that. So when storms break, the world reacts with fear. Fear breeds panic; panic leads to irrational, inconsistent and ineffective responses; to confusion, muddle and injustice. The unprecedented global reaction to coronavirus has almost assumed the character of idolatry: nations willingly sacrificing freedom, wealth, jobs, mental and physical health and all manner of future prospects on the altar of covid19 – including immunisation programmes to fight other fatal childhood diseases.

Fear leads to measures that have no moral or ethical justification; measures that dangerously undermine legitimate freedoms, often with little positive effect. We ought never to forget that measures that may be introduced by benign governments leave an open door for the most appalling abuse by hostile governments – tracing apps may have an ominous future.

Different groups of people have different fears: politicians fear one thing, citizens fear other things. Politicians fear the loss of power; citizens fear danger, uncertainty, death; the loss of business, loss of possessions, loss of security. (All of this is found in the Book of Revelation – see chapters 8 and 9 for instance).

Fear affects how we comply with the demands authorities place on us. The more fearful we are the more control government can impose. Fear makes us willing to give up freedoms. To ensure compliance, governments may intensify the sense of fear with simplistic and alarmist messages. Democracy depends on popular support, on high levels of trust and respect for a government. That depends on honesty – or on clever dishonesty! Behaviour that erodes public support is highly irresponsible; distrust breeds dissent, sets an example of irresponsibility and puts citizens at increased risk – the opposite of what Paul says is the duty of governments: *They are God's servant for your protection.* (Romans 13.4; Psalm 82.3-4)

Because they can secure their self-comfort, self-security and self-interests **the world's 'haves' fair far better when storms break than the 'have-nots'**. This comes as a shock to many – some question: 'How can a God of love allow vulnerable people to suffer so much?' That's a question we mustn't ignore – the Bible has many examples of people who asked the same question: Job, Abraham, Moses, David, Thomas, Peter, John and especially Psalm 73. Two things: firstly, we're not able to answer these questions, nor are we required to answer them. We're not expected to be able to explain God's ways and God's will – we're only asked to *trust him*. And we can! Secondly, such suffering and injustice are *always* the consequence of human greed, selfishness, arrogance and sin – not the sin of those who suffer so much as the sin of those who cause their sufferings; whose decisions bring war, famine, disease, poverty; who create homelessness, force millions to become refugees and migrants; whose decisions add to the sufferings of refugees, putting them in camps unfit for human habitation. We're told those who cause this suffering and injustice will fall; they always have and always will. (Job 20.5) This is the pattern of life in a world in rebellion against God – rejecting him, his Word and his will.

Finally, there is **a better world than the world we have known**. The world as we know it is not the world God intended – not the world that in his own time and way he will remake. We've seen we don't need the extravagance, wastefulness, acquisitiveness and distractions of the world. The better world is a world that is **'still'**: *'...be still and know that I am God'*. The better world is a world that *knows* God, is *still* enough to love him, learn of him and trust him: *'Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth and it is in heaven'!*