

# KINGTON BAPTIST CHURCH ONLINE NOTICE BOARD - 21

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**T**he vitally important and unavoidable question forced on us by the Black Lives Matter protest is: how do you unravel centuries of injustice to establish a fair and just society – such as the prophets of the Old Testament tirelessly called for – in place of discrimination, injustice and exploitation?

In the book of Revelation John is shown that human exploitation is inseparable from a system that idolises money. The statues that honour men who built empires on slavery, oppression and injustice are the tangible idols of the money-worshipping, exploitative world-kingdom – no wonder it will want to protect them! The desire to remove these aberrations from our streets is not an attempt to ‘rewrite history’; not ‘ripping pages out of history’ – it is the very opposite! It is an awareness of our history and a desire to write a new more righteous and just *future*, an aspiration born from a sense of shame for so much that disfigures our past and present.

Paul was not exaggerating when he stated: *‘the love of money is the root of all evil’*. Revelation shows that slavery and all the many forms of human exploitation that slavery spawns are part and parcel of the world’s worship of money, commerce and trade. It is not that trade and commerce and money are in themselves wrong. It is that they become the source of evil when we *idolised* them, when they are put first in the life of a nation or an individual: Jesus made it quite clear that we cannot serve God and money.

*No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon. (Matthew 6.24)*

Trade, commerce and money are vital aspects of the life of any nation. But the challenge is to relegate those material concerns to the demands of God for justice, compassion and the life of faith and love.

*Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. (Matthew 6.31-34)*

*'Seek first the kingdom of God, that is to say make his righteousness your priority'. (The word 'and' here doesn't mean 'in addition to' but 'that is to say': it's exegetical not additive.) His righteousness is his way, his path, his character: his mercy, grace, justice, compassion, kindness and love – in a word the establishment of God's order in human society. The world argues against the wisdom of God at its peril! And this is what we witness now: the peril the world's rejection of the message of Jesus creates. Slavery, in all its forms, has, and has only ever had, one purpose: to increase the riches of the rich – whether in the ancient Roman empire, the British empire, or the utterly horrifying current, global forms of modern slavery, with over 40 million victims and its annual 'yield' of over \$150 billion.*

*God presides over heaven's court; he pronounces judgment on the judges: 'How long will you judges hand down unjust decisions? How long will you shower special favours on the wicked? Give fair judgment to the poor and the orphan; uphold the rights of the oppressed and the destitute. Rescue the poor and helpless; deliver them from the grasp of evil people.' (Psalm 84.1-4)*

*The LORD your God is the God of all gods and Lord of lords. He is the great God, mighty and awesome. He shows no partiality; he takes no bribes. He gives justice to orphans and widows. He shows love to the foreigners living among you; he gives them food and clothing. And you too must show the same love to foreigners. (Deuteronomy 10.17-19)*

The answer, the remedy to the world-wide sin of exploitation, discrimination, injustice and repression cannot be found or realised so long as the system of the world remains as it is. Not any number of government 'inquiries', not any number of confessions that 'there is so much more to do' about the 'feeling of injustice' of black people, will make a scrape of difference. To pretend that an appendage of 'justice' can be grafted on a system that is essentially unjust is culpable nonsense. Only if and when the world's core-commitment to wealth, affluence and mammon is rejected and replaced by a different priority can this injustice be replaced by fairness and justice.

What Revelation makes plain is that if nations will not heed his warnings and bring about the changes he demands, then God himself will bring about those changes, by their catastrophic collapse and ruin.

*And the rulers of the world who took part in her immoral acts and enjoyed her great luxury will mourn for her as they see the smoke rising from her charred remains. They will stand at a distance, terrified by her great torment. They will cry out, 'How terrible, how terrible for Babylon, that great city! In one single moment God's judgment came on her.' The merchants of the world will weep and mourn for her, for there is no one left to buy their goods. She bought great quantities of gold, silver, jewels, pearls, fine linen, purple dye, silk, scarlet cloth, every kind of perfumed wood, ivory goods, objects made of expensive wood, bronze, iron, and marble. She also bought cinnamon, spice, incense, myrrh, frankincense, wine, olive oil, fine flour, wheat, cattle, sheep, horses, chariots, and slaves—she even traded in human lives. All the fancy goods you loved so much are gone,' they cry. 'The luxuries and splendour that you prized so much will never be yours again. They are gone forever.' The merchants who became wealthy by selling her these things will stand at a*

*distance, terrified by her great torment. They will weep and cry. 'How terrible, how terrible for that great city! She was so beautiful—like a woman clothed in finest purple and scarlet linens, decked out with gold and precious stones and pearls! And in one single moment all the wealth of the city is gone!' And all the ship owners and captains of the merchant ships and their crews will stand at a distance. They will weep as they watch the smoke ascend, and they will say, 'Where in all the world is there another city like this?' And they will be distraught in their great sorrow. They will say, 'How terrible, how terrible for the great city! She made us all rich from her great wealth. And now in a single hour it is all gone!' (Revelation 18. 9-19)*

*The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is upon me, because the LORD has appointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to comfort the broken-hearted and to announce that captives will be released and prisoners will be freed. He has sent me to tell those who mourn that the time of the LORD's favour has come, and with it, the day of God's anger against their enemies. To all who mourn in Israel, he will give beauty for ashes, joy instead of mourning, praise instead of despair. (Isaiah 61.1-3)*

What has all this to do with me – other than being a brief lesson about what the Bible says? Only that what the Bible says is *how I am to live* – I am to make sure that seeking the kingdom of God in my life – his *righteousness* – is my priority: *in this world of darkness so we must shine, you in your small corner and I in mine.*