

Enter by the narrow door

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Preacher: Steve Ellacott

[0 : 00] Thank you. Hello everybody. So yes, myself. I first wandered into this building because I was attracted to another student called Kate and came to one of these very talks.

! I came to this church for my time at university and this is a very dear place to me and my wife who isn't here today.

But that sounded a bit morbid. She is alive. She's at home is what I mean to say. Do I need to press F5?

And then it's a little bit of a problem. Oh, there we go. So there's Kate who also came to this church and went to Sussex University.

There's Jesse John, my boy, three and a half. And there's Rosa. And Rosa's four months old. So I should tell you that we're not getting any sleep at the moment. I might fall asleep before any of you do.

[1 : 29] And I might be on a bit of another planet, but I'm sure you'll be gracious with me. I'm also moving house on Monday. So I really am on another planet.

Yes, and I work for Agape, as Steve said, in Birmingham in the arts and culture scene. I'm here today to talk about my book.

I should try and tell you what it is first. It's a slightly odd book. Can I ask, it sounded like a few people had read it. Have many people read it?

Three people, bless your hearts. And you're here to tell the tale. It's kind of a strange book. I have copies, if you're not appalled by the time I've finished talking to you.

But what it is, is actually notes on an album. I have a band, or had a band called the Army of the Broken Hearted.

[2 : 39] And we play kind of socially, spiritually, politically conscious music in public spaces to try and encourage public dialogue and recreate the public sphere somewhat in Birmingham.

But when you make songs, a lot of people just think that you're doing it because you want a record deal. So I thought, if people are going to take it seriously, we'd better write a little book to go along with it.

So, it's liner notes. It's also kind of, it's a little bit like apocalyptic literature. A little bit like the way that the book of Revelation or the book of Ezekiel is very poetic.

And the way these books use spectacular imagery and apocalyptic imagery to join together in people's minds the spiritual and the political realities or the social realities.

This book kind of does that. It starts off with a strange spiel about a god, a lowercase g god, a cycloptic god with an invisible hand crouching over Western society.

[4 : 00] So, in spite of all that, the people that take the book seriously tend to be lots of atheists, lots of students of philosophy, politics, lots of very lefty sorts of people.

Feminists are very into it. Muslims, that was very unexpected to me. Muslims connect with this book in a wonderful way.

I've been holding discussion groups with lots of Muslims lately about it. And then Christians of the Shane Claiborne kind, I think. Does anyone know who Shane Claiborne is?

I suppose these are Christians who are quite ecumenical. And for whom social issues and gospel issues aren't...

They're not even both and. They're just sort of together, one and the same thing, I suppose. Evangelicals, interestingly, it splits the crowd.

[5 : 05] Some evangelicals connect with it very excitedly. A lot of evangelicals, not so. Why that is... I'll be fascinated. You might have further ideas on that by the time I finish talking.

I don't know. I think the paradigm it addresses the gospel in is quite different. I think a lot of people perhaps find it a bit opaque and on another planet with its language.

Or perhaps the scope of its critique. Yes, it's a slightly mad book, I think. But I think there's worthiness in that.

I'm a year on from having written it. So I'm in a place where I'm able to be very critical of it. So I'm not bashful about that. And I'd be very excited to hear your criticisms. Steve is a wonderful man who's given me lots of helpful critique about it.

So I think most people have been too shy to do that. I would welcome that kind of thing. Right. I should begin actually talking about what's in the book. The first thing, I think, is to talk about the terms kingdom and empire and try and decide what we're talking about.

[6 : 25] Perhaps you have ideas in your mind about what's being referred to there. I think in a room of Christians, perhaps evangelical Christians in particular, if we ask what is the gospel, I think most of us of an evangelical background would have a thing that comes into our minds quite quickly.

And if we compared what we thought, it might be quite consistent. If we ask Christians... Oh, has it disappeared? That doesn't matter, actually.

If we ask Christians, what is the kingdom of God, I think there might be more head-scratching.

Some people might be more hesitant to answer. I would be more hesitant to answer.

And if we compared our ideas, they might be very different. If you read theology books about it, you often get very mixed responses. You often get theology books full of all kinds of different responses about it.

If you ask Jesus about it, he would probably tell you a story about a farmer or a woman making bread or something like that, which is wonderful in one way, but it doesn't really give us something very specific a lot of the time, does it?

[7 : 40] Perhaps one approach to the question of asking what the kingdom of God is, is to ask what is its opposite? I would like to see what suggestions we might have.

In the Bible in particular, what springs to your mind if you think of the opposite of the kingdom of God, the nemesis of the kingdom of God, the opponent, as it were, of the kingdom of God?

Any thoughts? Yes. So I think Babylon is interesting because obviously Babylon is a real place that conquers Israel and takes them into captivity at the end of the Old Testament story.

But then in the New Testament, after Babylon has been and gone and is no longer a current historical reality, the term is still used. The term becomes a term that speaks of oppressive empires. It gets reattached to Rome, I think, in the book of Revelation. And depending on how you look at it, perhaps Babylon is the term used to describe the future of that kind, the future opposing order of God.

[9 : 05] Any other thoughts? Sorry? This world. Oh, this world. This world. Yeah.

The phrase that comes to my mind, which is almost the same as the world. So in John's Gospel, that term comes up constantly. Is that the kind of thing you had in mind?

Yeah, John talks about the world a lot. Is anybody geeky enough to know the Greek word for it?

Yes, cosmos. So that's different to the word used when you read creation or something like that in the New Testament. It's not describing the planet and the natural world as such.

The word cosmos in Greek was also used to say order or system. So people like theologians like Walter Wink interpret it that way.

[10 : 11] So what kind of thing to say? If anyone wants to keep his life in this order, then he will lose it in the one to come. In this order or this system. Okay.

Any other thoughts? It's enough for me, but I didn't want to shut anyone down if anyone was burned. It's often associated with the prince of this world.

Yes. Yeah, the prince of this world. And there's the kingdom of this world or the kingdom of the air.

So I think that designates a sort of, yeah, a spiritual being.

It's an opponent or a nemesis to God as king. I will add to the biblical examples. Saint Augustine wrote a giant book called City of God.

Has anyone ever come across that? So City of God actually spends the first half of the book talking about something else.

[11 : 26] He talks about the city of man, which is really he's talking about Rome and Roman culture and critiquing Roman politics and Roman social mores and that kind of thing.

But he has that war of two orders or that clash of two orders. And the characteristics he uses are very relevant and very much, I suppose, where my book builds on.

That the kingdom of God or the city of God is characterized by humility. It expresses itself in humility, which is quite the opposite of the city of man, which expresses itself in pride.

And yes, remember, he's talking about Rome there. I'll just read you a bit from the beginning. I know how great is the effort needed to convince the proud of the power and excellence of humility and excellence, which makes it soar above all the summits of this world, which sway in their temporal instability, overtopping them with an eminence not arrogated by human pride, but granted by divine grace.

Pardon me, it's a bit wordy. Therefore, I cannot refrain from speaking about the city of this world, a city which aims at dominion, which holds nations in enslavement, but is itself dominated by that very lust of domination.

[12:59] So pride and humility. The pride is self-defeating, whereas humility by some mystery overcomes that.

In the last 15 years in the theological world, the word empire has begun to be used a great deal. There's all kinds of theological books talking about empire of late. Could we have a definition? What is the difference between a kingdom and an empire in the political sense?

A king, an empire, an emperor. Haha, but what's the difference between a king and an emperor? One's got more than the other.

Which has more? The empire has more. The empire has more. Why does the empire have more? The empire has more. The empire has more.

[14:05] Yes. I think that's right, yeah. Yeah. Very good. I mean, a king is the ruler of his realm, his country, isn't he?

But as soon as a king becomes ruler of the next door's country, then he's an emperor, isn't he? Because empire is about conquest of what is not your own.

The king rules over only what is his own. The empire rules over, or seeks to rule over, to conquer and to acquire and to consume that which is not its own.

So, if we think of the kingdom of God, and we think of Jesus as king, and his rule over only his own, and contrast that with the idea of empire, which is about acquisition.

Therein lies an elemental difference, I think. I suppose there's also a sense in which a king, perhaps, has a belonging to the land that he rules over, and therefore a sort of a duty of service in the role, ideally.

[15:30] I don't know if it ever works out this way in human politics, but there we go. Whereas an emperor doesn't seem to have that characteristic of serving the land.

The emperor seems to take, whereas there seems to be some expectation that the king needs to give in some way, ideally. In the microcosm, we can perhaps see how this works in the individual. An imperialistic spirit in the self would probably just be described as selfishness, as wanting what isn't yours, self-interestedness.

To speak of empire, this is. And that's very much in the evangelical gospel, I think, isn't it?

The macrocosm, the big picture, however. Looking at society in that way. How the structures of society operate. Whether they are there to acquire and consume, or to give and to serve.

[16:37] Whether they want what is not yet theirs. Or whether the society cultivates and serves what is its own. There, I think, perhaps you have a basis for a gospel critique of your politics, or your social situations, or your national life.

That kind of thing. Does that make sense? Does that make sense? By the way, I'm very happy. I like to have questions thrown in. So if you want to have something clarified, or beg to differ, just wave at me.

Don't be shy. I'm just reading Romans 13, where it says, of the end of the end, he is God's servant. The good to you. So, would you think that if we're not talking about the sort of complete segregation between one way of doing things and another way of doing things, in life as it is, in this current age on this planet, we have some ideas in operation, other ideas that might be, they might be contradictory to each other, but they're both operating in the same area, in the same person, maybe even the same institution.

Yes. We've made a sort of a basic distinction, haven't we, between kingdom and empire, the spirit of kingdom and the spirit of empire. But then the reality that we're faced with, I mean, I'm not

making an argument here that the monarchy, by no means, and against empire, well, I probably am making an argument against that.

[18:27] I'll probably argue against everything. It's not that kind of argument. But having made that, I suppose, that philosophical distinction between the spirit of kingdom and the spirit of empire, then to examine our politics, our social situation, our communal spirituality, you're immediately faced with something very complicated.

And the New Testament, I think, reflects this. So, I mean, Caesar says, Caesar is Lord. That's the Roman rhetoric about Caesar.

So the New Testament is continually subverting that whenever it says, Jesus is Lord. That's, they didn't invent that phrase. They co-opted it from the Roman Empire to say, no, Caesar isn't Lord. However, it's not a case of throwing out that worldly politics necessarily. Paul describes a, in Romans 13, the rightful role of Caesar is as a servant of the people.

And we should submit to that authority. That kind of political authority is a good thing. You know, the police force that stop us all speeding and, you know, causing lots of road traffic accidents is a good thing.

[19:44] That's a way of serving the people. So, it's deciding what the interests of an authority is, and in what way it's to be submitted to, and in what ways it's to be subverted.

It's a very complicated question. Yeah. Does that? So, there we have a, I guess, a philosophical distinction between kingdom and empire, the spirit of kingdom and the spirit of empire.

I'm interested in the spirituality before the politics, I think. How to apply this, or how do we begin to look at our own national, cultural, political, economic situation?

I begin with the Hebrew habit of assigning certain emotions or phenomenon or philosophies to parts of the body.

So, you'll read a lot about the heart in the Bible, which is sort of characterized as the seat of emotion. The feet.

[21:00] Whenever it talks about the feet, it's the phenomenon of mass communications as best as they could manage it, carrying messages and that kind of thing. The tongue is the member of kind of mischief and foolishness sometimes, I think.

The hand and the eye. Any thoughts about what the hand and the eye, these two go together often, what they kind of often symbolize in the Bible?

Justice. Ah, what are you thinking of there? Well, kind of like, seeing and then reacting to what you see.

Right, right, yeah. Because, like the, like the, like the, kind of, ultimately eye.

Hmm. Hmm. Oh, God sees. Yeah. God's eye is scouring the land and looking for, for this or that, for one who is righteous or for...

[22:11] Yes. I think the idea of authority, of power and authority in the hand and the eye in particular is there.

The, um, so the examples I'll use is, I mean, Jesus talks a lot about pulling your eyes out and chopping your hand off, doesn't he? Um.

I'll read Matthew 18, verse 7. Uh, these are rather negative examples, but I think flip sides of the same thing.

Um. Um. He says, Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to sin.

Such things must come, but woe to the man through whom they come. If your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. Um.

[23:19] And if your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. Um. This isn't, uh, a novel thing. This is Old Testament language.

In Zechariah, uh, it says, Woe to the worthless shepherd, um, who deserts the sheep. May his right eye go blind, may his right arm wither.

The thing they have in common is, um, power. The eye and the hand being symbolic of power over people. Um.

And in particular, these examples are about corrupt power. You know, may his right arm wither, um, because it's, because he's a corrupt shepherd or a bad shepherd who doesn't care about the sheep.

Um. And it's, Jesus says, it's better to pull your eye out or chop your hand off, uh, than to, uh, become part of that kind of power structure. The reason it's a power structure is because he doesn't

Um, because I think that's, that narrative of sexual conquest has become, uh, just the narrative that is used to sell everything from sex itself to ice cream and spectacle.

Um, I can never resist when I'm here, um, having a poke at the sun because I'm very enthusiastic about the No More Page Three campaign, which operates in Brighton, I believe.

Um, but apart from what's on page three, um, what is it all about? It's about, uh, royals caught sunbathing in a compromised fashion.

Um, it's about someone losing weight inspired by Fifty Shades of Grey, the, uh, the kind of very saucy novel. I don't know what that is at the top there, but again, it's, it's all about selling something, uh, using the sexualized image of a woman, which is, it's, it's very normal.

[30 : 20] Um, the danger of this is that we, that it makes it look like a, a tabloid issue or a, um, or a working class issue. But I don't think it is. I think it's just a normal, um, virtually invisible issue.

Um, in the way that that is, you know. It doesn't offend me. It's, um, it just describes how things are bought and sold, uh, in a consumer economy.

I think the relationship between the invisible hand of capitalism and the phallic gaze of consumerism is that they, they operate together. They need each other. They perpetuate each other. This is how we keep our, our capitalist economy going, um, by cultivating desire, cultivating lust.

Um, and at the, the, the, the center of both is the, the self, which I sort of, I take, I suppose, a misguided version, a vision of, of the self to be the, the deity of, uh, the empire as I, as I live in it.

Um, the self, self-interest being the, uh, the law of capitalism and sort of, um, self-interested, um, conquest and conflict.

[31 : 34] And consumerism and self-gratification, um, uh, in consumerism. Um, I should, I suppose I should say a word. When you start shooting your mouth off against capitalism, there's a certain pitfalls.

Um, is it an anti-capitalist book? Not really. Um, in that, I suppose, and when you say anti-capitalist, it tends to be that.

Um, uh, that you're concerned particularly with the disparity, uh, in wealth, the inequality in wealth, which is concerning, but it's not really what concerns me in the book.

Um, or that you're angry with a perceived powerful elite, um, who, who are messing up, you know, my life.

I want more money, but you're taking it all from me, like that kind of thing. This isn't really where I'm coming from. My problem is, is the fundamental spirituality that underpins of self-interest.

[32 : 40] Um, I take that starting point to be completely contrary to the, the first two commandments that Jesus gives me. To love God first, and to love my neighbor as myself.

I can't operate under Adam Smith's, uh, system if I start from that point. Or I can, but I'm contradicting myself if I do. Um, we could talk about it for a long time, but I won't, um, have time to unpack this too much now.

But, uh, as I, as I see it, the relationship between, um, the invisible hand and the phallic gaze is something that has gradually, uh, been unpicking, atomizing, um, British, uh, society.

We're, we're, we're a very segregated society. You know, segregated as individuals or as families. Or Margaret Thatcher's famous phrase, there's no such thing as society. There's only, uh, families and individuals.

We've kind of gone that way. And I think the social outworkings of that are, are being seen. Um, we're kind of, uh, herded into our homes.

[33 : 56] I'm actually moving house to a Muslim area. And it's so different because there, everybody lives. Nobody, actually, if you go into people's houses there, there's nothing in them. They don't really hang around in their houses.

They hang around out in the, uh, you know, on the street together. But where, where I live at the moment, there's nothing, you know, you're in limbo. Uh, you're in C.S. Lewis's kind of, uh, the great divorce hell type scene.

When you're in between your house and wherever you're going. Um, because life only happens in the private home. We're atomized and segregated in that way by, uh, by our order. And we're socially disintegrating because of the relational ethics, uh, that come with a, um, a society of self-gratification.

Ultimately, I take this to be the loss of the image of God in, in the British people, in the British individual, uh, or in, you know, Western society in general.

The image of God I take to be fundamentally relational. God is characterized fundamentally by love of the other, uh, because God is a Trinity.

[35 : 08] Um, I think part of what means we're, uh, what it means to be in the image of God is to be relational. To be, um, to live, um, a life based in love of the other.

Um, and I think that is undermined and the image of God is undermined in a society when, when that continues. Okay. Um, we come to the awkward part, which is the issue of complicity, of, uh, the, perhaps our complicity, uh, whether we're Christians or not.

Has anyone seen that picture before? Oh. Sorry. Uh, I better, it's such a weird picture, I better just tell you what it is, haven't I?

Um, this is the front cover of, um, uh, Thomas Hobbes' Leviathan, which is a boring book of political philosophy that, um, no sensible person could agree with from, uh, the 17, well, 1600s, I think.

Um, but the Leviathan, what, what is he talking about when he talks about the Leviathan? We have the beautiful hills of England. The head is the king.

[36 : 40] Uh, can anybody see what the body is made of? It's a bit far away, isn't it? Sorry. Sorry? It's a subject. It's a subject, yeah, yeah.

Well, all the people that make up the nation. Uh, Plato uses the same idea in the Republic. Um, what kind of, what kind of Leviathan, what kind of beast does it equal if we add up the sum of all of our lives, all of our habits, all of our comings and goings and purchasings and cultures and, uh, outlooks and philosophies?

Um, if you add it all together, you get society. You get your, your society or your people. And what does that, what does that beast look like? That's an interesting question, isn't it?

That's a different answer for, uh, for wherever you are, I should think. Um, obviously we have, um, an interesting parallel with the body of Christ.

So the, in the New Testament, we have the, the sense that, um, that we Christians, in all our diversity and difference, uh, the sum of us is the body of Christ, the physical, fleshly presence of Christ in the world, in history.

[38 : 04] Um, and perhaps this is the flip side of that. Um, if the, uh, what I call empire creates a Leviathan that is as grim as I've just described, um, then the question of what to do as Christians, or perhaps even as, just as moral people, um, what to do about being part of that is, is a very difficult question.

Um, perhaps here, on, uh, on the king's left hand is all the demagogues and the rebels and the people who, uh, want to overthrow the system. And on his right hand is all of the, um, the conservatives and so on who want to, to bring, bring us back to reason and so on.

Uh, the whole can accommodate all that difference. If, if the whole is something that's really oppressive, how do you begin to subvert the situation?

Um, I think, looking at the New Testament in that way, you begin to see how the, the early church community were, um, subverting the imperial situation they were in in various ways.

Uh, uh, however, the point is that if we are, um, willingly or perhaps passively, um, accepting or operating within structures that are fundamentally oppressive or sinful, then we are in some way complicit.

[39 : 45] Um, we might be part of the body of Christ, but what if we are also part of the empire in some way? Um, um, I think this works out in some obvious ways.

One is, um, check out democracy. I think people my age, very few of us vote. Uh, some do, but most, most people my age I don't think really vote.

Um, which probably isn't very good, but I think one of the reasons is that people my age feel like you're shaping the world when you buy something much more profoundly than when you tick a box once every four years.

Um, every time we buy something, we vote for it, and we vote for what it represents. We vote for the way it was produced. We vote for the advertising campaigns that that company uses.

Um, so I don't know about you, but I suppose I'm constantly troubled. I'm constantly troubled by what I'm voting for when I buy things. Because in this country, I probably buy something every day.

[40 : 50] I probably buy, you know, numerous things most days. What am I voting for? There's a brick wall behind the product, and I don't know how it was made. I don't know what the circumstances are.

Um, often we're voting for foreign slavery. When we buy electronics, we're almost, you know, certainly, uh, voting for foreign, uh, or for working conditions that are, would be considered slavery if they were anywhere near our own country anyway.

Um, when we shop at certain supermarkets, um, we're voting the same thing and this kind of thing.

Um, the other side, there is oppression of foreign peoples there, which has all sorts of questions attached to it.

But the other side is oppression, cultural oppression of our own people. When we buy certain magazines or, um, certain, uh, media or links, for example, and advertising campaigns they use, as amusing and frivolous as they are, um, anything that has anything to do with Rupert Murdoch probably, you're, you're perhaps voting for cultural oppression.

You're, uh, uh, voting for a regime of imagery that casts a certain narrative over our people. Um, so when we buy things, there's, we're quite often voting for foreign slavery.

[42 : 18] We're quite often voting for, um, uh, cultural oppression of our own people. And then lifestyle. Um, obviously there's debate about it, but there's the possibility that we're doing unprecedented environmental damage.

With the, um, disproportionate consumption of power, uh, of energy. That is in Western countries.

Um, so in what ways am I complicit, um, when I, you know, with how I'm using a car or how much energy I use in my house or how I arrange my life in that kind of way?

Um, and in what ways does my lifestyle contribute to that social atomization? That, um, reduction, uh, or, uh, suppression of community life and cultivation of, of private and self-interested life?

Um, the, Jesus says the kingdom is within you. I think the opposite danger is also the case. The empire is within you.

And this stuff troubles me very much because I don't know how to shake it free. I don't know how to shake my life in such a way that I'm not complicit, uh, in these sorts of things. Um, so I don't know what kind of, uh, things this evokes in you.

[43 : 41] Perhaps, um, skepticism, theological suspicion. Uh, perhaps defeatism, despair. Perhaps it feels like, um, you know, shouting at a mountain.

Perhaps there seems like a, a certain futility about it. I think I feel all of that. Um, while we leave that hanging for a moment, we're going to examine our gospel, um, and what that, or how that impinges, uh, on, on said situation.

Um, so the crucifix, um, Um, to look at it as, uh, as one belonging to the spirit of empire, you have to say it's a complete, um, absurdity.

But, um, mostly I don't think we notice it. Perhaps it's become very normal to us. And it's, uh, it's just part of the furniture. Um, what is it?

Um, at the, um, at the base level? At the most superficial level, it's a piece of, um, religious paraphernalia, a piece of sacred art. Um, what does it depict in general?

[45 : 28] Um, it depicts, uh, a scene of capital punishment. Um, so there's the first level of absurdity that we would walk, you know, as if we would walk around with, um, um, a man dangling from the gallows around our neck.

Or reverse that kind of symbol as something to live up to. Um, and then what does it depict in particular? What, what story does it actually tell?

Or, um, who, who is, who is it being executed? Um, and then we come to the, the ultimate absurdity.

Um, as the spirit of empire would see it. Uh, that the person being executed is God. So if the spirit of empire is about self-assertion, that every man and woman should assert themselves, uh, the idea that this is God stooping to become a mere man, and then, uh, suffering the, um, the most pitiful and, uh, shameful fate that could, uh, befall a man, it doesn't make any sense that this should be an object of worship or reverence.

It's, um, it's an absurdity. So before Jesus, uh, the cross was, um, the Roman PR campaign for its, um, for its strength and supremacy.

[47 : 09] The cross was the billboard, uh, that the, the Romans would put places from time to time, um, to assert itself and to make sure people stayed in line. It was, um, it's the ultimate symbol of empire, the ultimate symbol of, of, uh, the will to power.

Uh, uh, after Jesus, the cross has become something completely different. Um, it's become, um, uh, a symbol of, uh, not power of that kind, but of self-emptying grace.

Not self-assertion, but self-emptying grace. Um, I think the absurdity of it wasn't lost on the Romans.

So this is a piece of Roman graffiti. It's, I don't know if it's a bit hard to make out. Um, I think it's from the, the second century. Um, and it's a piece of anti-Christian graffiti.

Um, so how absurd the Christian who worships this, and he's depicted as a, as a donkey, this person being crucified.

[48 : 23] Um, which of course, where crucifixion was, you know, the, the lowest of the low, you can kind of see where they were coming from. The irony of it is not lost on the Christians either.

So in 1 Corinthians 1, Paul talks about the cross as being about the foolishness of God, and how that kind of makes a mockery of man's wisdom, or the weakness of God, how that makes a mockery of man's strength.

It's quite, it feels, I mean, you get used to hearing it, but it feels quite bold to me, uh, to be talking about the foolishness of God and the weakness of God.

But that is exactly the way, uh, Paul interpreted it. In Colossians 2, uh, the cross is talked about as, uh, Jesus making a public spectacle of the powers.

A public spectacle of Roman power. This is a big subversion, isn't it? Because the cross is the way the Romans made a public spectacle of its enemies. But by hanging on it, God made a public spectacle of the Romans.

[49 : 30] They turned the whole thing upside down. Uh, Philippians 2, it talks about the cross being how God, um, God's, uh, the word is kenosis, or something like that, um, self-emptying, um, which is the opposite of the law of self-interest, perhaps the law of the invisible hand, if you will.

So, I mean, in my book I'm saying that this is the starting point of exit from empire and entry into kingdom. God, uh, steps off of his throne and makes space on it for us, uh, even though we may well not deserve it.

Um, and that the receiving of that involves us stepping off the throne, um, where self would be inclined to sit, foregoing it and giving it to other, to God, and, and to, um, and to the other, you know, the other, the other person first, God and neighbour.

Um, uh, this, I think, is the beginning point. Um, but I don't think this is all there is, and I think perhaps it's easy to get stuck in a, uh, a gospel of, uh, where, where forgiveness and restoration of the soul means I'm solved.

In fact, I think that's quite a consumerist concept, um, in a sense. Jesus' command is, from that point, you need to pick up your cross and follow.

[51 : 07] You need to engage in the same, uh, in the same act of subversion of empire, um, that he has, um, ultimately brought about in the cross.

Um, lastly, and I won't talk much about this, um, this perhaps will be something more to talk about tomorrow morning, if anybody's about. But, um, repentance.

Um, again, repentance has been sort of seen as this thing that happens when you become a Christian or something. Um, whereas I think repentance is, um, an ongoing, um, subversion.

Um, as you find yourself complicit in it. Um, the reorientation of ordinary life.

So that we don't live our lives passively, um, disinterested in what our actions are connected to. But we begin to address, um, how can we reorient ordinary life?

[52 : 10] As the early Christians did. They, they shaped a way of life that was completely different, um, and subverted the situation. Around them. So one is social faithfulness, um, which probably seems very obvious to, uh, to Christians.

But I think the, uh, the consumer, uh, the law of consumer gratification, uh, consumer gratification, um, um, is subverted by social faithfulness.

Dedication and responsibility to the other, to, to each other. So, how do you start with social faithfulness? Um, social faithfulness. Social faithfulness. I will, I will, I will, it's simply, um, loving responsibility toward the other.

Um, so to family. Obviously, I mean that sounds obvious. But obviously we're, we're also in a calamity where family is falling apart. Where the, the reasons for family sticking together seem to be getting thinner and thinner.

Um, uh, to friends, to community. These are things where Christians, um, hold those values very dear. But then also to the destitute, to the suffering, uh, to the foreign, um, and even to enemies.

[53 : 29] These are very specifically commanded. And I think probably we've forgotten about these things. How do we, um, make it more than just a principle? But how do we reorient our lives, um, to make space for the other?

I went past a homeless man on my way here today. Uh, and I didn't give him anything. Sometimes I would go and get a sandwich. I didn't give him anything because I was in a rush. And so often we don't do something because we live, live very busy lives.

And I realized, for me, to express social faithfulness to this person, I actually need to have less in my diary. I need to have less of a busy life. There are so many people suffering who need some food and someone to talk to.

But, you know, we're all too busy. So one of the factors is busyness, you know. How do we reorient ordinary life in order to do these things? Um, and I think churches, uh, in the most practical way, um, have a massive scope, um, in being a recognized building where such things can happen, where there is a spiritual ethos, where this is seen as important.

Uh, the second thing is non-participation. How do we withdraw our participation from, uh, things that we recognize as oppressive? How do we reorient life so that we don't buy the things that we know, um, have slavery at the other end?

[54 : 54] How do we educate ourselves to know what is behind the things that we buy? We're, uh, I am massively ignorant about this. I've, I've just subscribed to ethical consumer. Well, my brother's subscribing, actually.

Um, but how, how do we make education about this kind of thing normal? Um, and the other thing is, uh, redressing.

How do you, how do you reorient life away from excessive consumption of, of power and energy and, um, and that kind of thing? Again, I think the churches, um, holding gatherings like this and opening them up perhaps to the wider community, um, can have a key role in, in, in, um, opening up the possibility of education about these things or discussion about these things and debate.

Because the answers are never simple. It's all, it has to come with debate. Uh, and the third one, the most bizarre and untenable, is prophetic action. I think our invitation to the kingdom of God, um, should, um, involve our critique of the empire of man.

And my own experience is, it's when my invitation to the kingdom of God comes with my critique of the empire of man, that people's hearts are really stirred because they know it, but it's not talked about.

[56 : 17] Um, I think this is something that Jesus does. I think it's something that, um, so many of the prophets in the Bible do. Um, so there we come.

Back to the original question, what is the kingdom of God? I haven't given you an answer. I won't give you an answer. Um, perhaps what we've talked about in terms of the dark side begins to lead us in a certain direction in terms of how we might think about what the kingdom of God is.

Um, but I will close there. Um, I don't know if there's, do people have questions and discussion at this time or what normally happens? Um, okay.

Well, I haven't got particular questions for you, but, um, if, if anyone has a, thoughts or questions they'd like to throw out now. Um, I don't know.

No, I do believe there's a better alternative. Um, I think the general idea is that basically there's the left and the right, and I think that's a false dichotomy really.

[57 : 39] Um, that, um, if you're going to move away from something called capitalism, you need to move towards something called communism. Um, which I don't think is good.

My critique of both actually is the same, that with communism and capitalism, uh, socialism is perhaps something different. And I'm very, um, positive about, um, the socialist elements in our society, like free education, healthcare, that kind of thing.

Um, but yes, my criticism of capitalism and communism, um, or, yeah, one of my key issues, is that they, they centralize power.

Um, communism does it because it needs a strong man to come in and say, right, we're going to be communists now. Uh, I'll be in charge. We'll make sure everybody's the same and it'll be brilliant.

Um, as in like Stalinism or, you know, Mao's China or something like that. Um, capitalism does it, um, insidiously.

[58 : 47] Um, that, you know, however much we like the idea. The idea of an environment where entrepreneurs and small businesses are free to start up and do this, that, that, and the other.

Gradually, you just end up with giants ruling, you know, dominating markets. So, um, you know, bookshops all disappear because Amazon rules the market.

And, um, grocers do much worse because a supermarket is plonked there. And there's only three different kinds of supermarkets. These are ways in which capitalism centralizes power into the hands of, um, an elite of businesses.

And actually, there's, if you look at these businesses, they're often owned by a handful, you know, a small handful of other business. Uh, a handful of, uh, other small businesses. Uh, sorry, giant businesses.

Um, so, yes, the power centralizes and conglomerates. Um, what I would, um, would love to see us move towards is, um, a localized way of living.

[60 : 00] Um, one of the things I've done because of my book, I reached the end of it and I realized that the way I was living my life was completely, I, I needed to, you know, you know, it sort of hit me at the end.

Oh, no, I'm, I'm, I'm the worst. Um, how do I reshape my life? Um, one of the things that, for example, struck me was I want to live within walking distance of my church.

Um, so that I'm living, you know, in the week, um, in general, amongst the people that I, um, worship with, um, debate with, um, engage in action and, um, um, you know, social stuff out in our community with.

I want to share life holistically and to, to live in a church community where we can begin to, because basically if you want to redress how you spend your money and how you, how you use energy and that kind of thing, you can't do it by yourself.

You have to work together. You have to start, um, you know, pooling resources and that kind of thing, which is what the early church did. Um, I think out of that kind of local perspective, you know, the whole community can be blessed by that.

[61 : 22] Um, as I, I think you were describing, Philip, the involvement that this building has had with, uh, the local community group. I mean, I think that's the kind of thing that needs to grow and, um, to help local economies and local business support each other and that kind of thing.

Um, um, um, bit vague. I'll just say localism. Um, still. I'll comment. I think it's the one point where I don't think I agree with you.

I don't think the local, even in New Testament times, the church had a, a local perspective. So we, we, we find, um, um, poor organizing collections for the poor in Jerusalem, for instance, over, you know, half the entire.

Yeah, yeah. So, you know, every, you know, every context. And I think that the global ideal trade is not necessarily a bad thing.

I mean, the church has a very localized system. They're very, um, they're fragile. Mm. They don't have resources to stand up to a drought or flood.

[62 : 42] Mm, yeah. Yeah. So, you know, no one can imagine, um, you know, you have this nice view of sort of people going around the food on their own patch. Mm.

And, um, I, I, yeah, I'm not convinced that, um, you know, that localization is, is, is, is the, the way forward, I personally.

And I think this is one thing we need to discuss and think through. Mm. And I've been very sure I've been doing serious concerns on progress. And, it's, yes, it's very community, community oriented. And I'm actually talking about the world of work on this Sunday. And, it's, it's a kind of, you can't get it.

Mm. it's also general because the proverb says that here is diligent will serve before kings he won't he won't serve before insignificant men or something like that so the proverb begins where?

[64 : 19] I can't remember the exact word but it says a diligent worker will serve before kings he won't serve insignificant men or something like that but it's not exactly yeah it's not a I mean not that Solomon himself was very interested in international trade that didn't work on a very local artist I suppose I mean for myself Solomon is one of the great examples of the tipping point where it where it kind of goes wrong because I mean immediately after Solomon partly because you know it was going so well that slave labour became an issue and that issue developed into the splitting of the kingdom and things began to unravel from that point and you have I mean in Kings I can't remember what the chapter is but it specifies three things about Solomon it says he married many foreign women he accumulated wealth and he got this random bit of information he got his horses and chariots from Egypt and this is this is a reference to

Deuteronomy 17 I think where it says when you have a king there's three things you shouldn't do you shouldn't accumulate wealth shouldn't marry lots of foreign women and he shouldn't get any horses from Egypt peculiar three things but to me that's a biblical commentary saying okay yeah it was a great empire but it led into this sort of yeah yeah I hate loud speakers I would much rather do that but I have to say well yeah I'm very sort of sceptical about so much of the the razzle dazzle and the mediation that comes into life because we live in a wonderful globalised world on the other hand I do agree with what you're saying so the next thing I want to do because really this book is all about it's just a big critique of empire and it's a there is a level of prophetic anguish that means that it's very overblown it's one sided really the next thing I want to do is to explore the idea of what kingdom politics look like one of my notions is that we need to begin to see ourselves as political people we need to see everyday life as involving political activism in small ways and recognise our ways of living as being political and economic and social it raises the because I think kingdom politics works from the edge of society from the periphery it kind of respectfully shuns the seat of the emperor as being a politics of one kind but there's a more powerful politics coming from the unexpected places so I'm wanting to cultivate that sense in the local situation however the question came to me so what do I think about centralised government and I think it's good

I think we need centralised government I do think it's good that we have trade that goes beyond the borders of your town it would be disastrous if we didn't we need that kind of thing however the localised sense of empowerment political responsibility and so on has gone to nothing and I really think we need to cultivate that and that the churches should be on the forefront of that and I think you're quite right needs to be in balance with the bigger picture I suppose one of the issues is because in capitalism economics gets dominated and monopolised by a few giants there are ways in which localised communities if there's education and debate about the subjects can begin to work together and organise and subvert that and withdraw from that and shrink the power of economic bullying and I think that's part of what we need to do but not to the

I also want to be able to eat oranges and I think that's part of the powerful picture of the Lord Jesus gives is a salt and light you're the salt of the earth and you're the salt of the world and I'm just wondering if there's a bit of a trap if we try to in any way mimic for everything that the empire sort of offers to give a kind of alternative the idea of salt seems to be there's actually pretty good things out there as well as bad things and something to be preserved and encouraged and the idea of light seems to me to suggest that there's something which we can shine at the nature of Jesus Christ and the representation of that even in a local church like this there's something extremely powerful to say this is a complete sort of the other side of the empire it's giving something very different out to display lovely things to do with community social folk and they're suggesting it makes me very exciting about the potential for a

[70:16] Christian believers together and I suppose what I've come towards advocating is engagement rather than withdrawal when I talk about non participation it's I'm not going to pay my money into that pot because of what you're doing with it but that is a way of engaging with what's going on it's to do with engaging with the empire or what have you can I read a bit of this book this is a book about the prophets by a Jewish theologian a theologian of Judaism so it's a book about Old Testament prophets it says we and the prophet have no language in common to us the moral state of society for all its stains and spots seems fair and trim to the prophet it is dreadful so many deeds of charity are done so much decency radiates day and night yet to the prophet satiety of the conscience is prudery and flight from responsibility our standards are modest our sense of injustice tolerable timid our moral indignation is impermanent yet human violence is interminable unbearable permanent to us life is often serene in the prophet's eye the world reels in confusion the prophet makes no concession to man's capacity exhibiting little understanding for human weakness he seems unable to extenuate the culpability of man who could bear living in a state of disgust day and night without wishing to ascribe the title of prophet to myself as in one who predicts the future or brings the word of the

Lord there's a certain affinity with the prophetic books in I suppose bringing a vision of God's character to bear on the political situation and it does come out inevitably in a certain one sided I mean when Jeremiah wrote what he was writing to Jerusalem was nothing good going on at all was there no good anywhere or you know when the psalm says there is not one who does good was it because the psalmist was a Calvinist was there really nobody doing anything I think there was so when I finished this book my head collapsed somewhat because of its outrageously critical vision

and one sidedness so in a roundabout way I'm saying I entirely agree with you there's so much that is good going on and I say that that ultimately belongs to is a testimony to to the creator and to God's goodness and belongs to the kingdom you know in the end of all things so yeah

I agree with you it's not good to have your head in in the poetics of gloom forever but sometimes you need to sometimes it becomes necessary to put things in in a preposterously stark way to to start something moving I was just thinking about the the timescale we're in so we're in the timescale which Jesus has done and his kingdom is coming but we're not in the timescale where everybody is a member of that so if we're thinking of just going back to Ben's question are we proposing an alternative a complete alternative structure of capitalism or something like that I was thinking back to the structure that

God gave to Moses in that previous time I was thinking of the what is it about which was something that God didn't will or in terms of will but it was putting to that structure this gladness of your heart because given the simple failings divorce was a better provision in what should happen under certain circumstances circumstances and that was in a sense for the good of that society I was thinking about our society now increasingly capitalism so you're saying it had one of its propelling factors is selfishness and yet for the hardness of people's hearts because that's the sort of society we live maybe this is a speculation maybe if

Christians were a rural world for example you wouldn't make it that much to capitalism because people have all our hearts that's got to be for many people in that system yeah and I don't imagine for a moment that most Christians think capitalism is a bad thing but yes I suppose I'd cite things like the wheat and the tares the parable of the weeds and the wheat should we pull up the weeds no you have to let them grow up together otherwise you'll mess everything up things have to happen in tension there is an inevitable madness in criticising capitalism it's like criticising the ocean it's hard to someone said once it's easier to imagine the end of the world and the end of capitalism this is the situation and we have to work with it I agree with you I think another kingdom image the kingdom of God is like a woman working yeast through a batch of dough and that gradual permeation is part of how the kingdom of

[76 : 55] God works towards fulfilment but I do think that happens partly because of because we seek God together by prayerfully discussing and seeking and asking I think the danger is an indifference to the politics or the economics you're in just because you know you have to you know capitalism is going to be there tomorrow I'm going to have to find a way to live in a productive tension with it yeah