

From: Tom Lutz
To: Ming-Jinn Tong, Bryan Pickering
CC: Jason Meyer
Date: March 22, 2021

Brothers,

I am wrestling with this question: Why do some of you feel the need to frame the story of the Atlanta-area massage parlor killings in the light of race/ethnicity? The recent killings in and around Atlanta are terrible. Image-bearers of the Almighty God were killed by a man tormented by a sex addiction. But let us please understand that this was not focused on people of Asian heritage, but on people working at massage parlors with a known reputation for providing sexual services. The world is casting this in the light of race/ethnicity - but it is not what we should do. Here are some facts and figures that are important to know:

- The killer - Robert Aaron Long - was/is a sex addict and had been participating in a treatment program of some type focused on his addiction.
- The three massage parlors were particularly known for providing sexual services for hire. It appears that Robert had visited at least two of them prior to the day of the killings.
- The three massage parlors - along with many others across this country - were listed in websites specifically designed to promote this illegal activity. These websites provide client ratings and descriptions of the experience one can indulge in at the massage parlor.
- There are over 9,000 illicit massage businesses in the United States, with an estimated \$2.5B done in illegal business each year.
- Both the Polaris Anti-trafficking Organization and Teng Chen, of Supchina.com, cite that these businesses are owned and operated by Chinese women and they are 'the backbone of the illicit massage industry in the U.S.'
- Captain Jay Parker, of the Cherokee County Sheriff's Department said, 'He apparently has an issue, what he considers a sex addiction, and sees these locations as something that allows him to go to these places, and it's a temptation for him that he wanted to eliminate.'

Media sources like Forbes, The Federalist, USA Today and others have consistently pointed out these facts and made them available - and, yet, the world quickly frames this up as violence against Asian Americans. It was violence against sex workers, in an industry largely owned and populated by Asian Americans. We look like the world when we view this first as a crime perpetrated with racial motives, when it clearly was not. We bring a lens of ethnicity & race to conflicts too quickly, and do a disservice to true issues (and there are many) related to race and ethnicity. We foster fear and demonstrate a lack of wisdom and discernment as we discuss this issue this way. The incessant cry of 'Wolf' is dulling our ears, and we risk dulling the hearing and compassion of the hearts of our flock.

The story in Atlanta should first serve as a reminder to us all of the dangers of sin - particularly sexual sin. And that forgiveness of that sin, and the providing of a means of escaping that temptation was purchased for us by Jesus Christ. As John Michel (brother of victim Paul Michels) said, 'Although this is a tragedy, I forgive that man and so will Jesus Christ...I cannot hate him for it. I pray for his repentance.' Let us not talk first of those victims being Asian (most of them were), but of the horror of trafficking, and the killing people made in the image of God - and the hope that we have in Jesus Christ in light of the depravity of sin.

May God unite us as we seek to shepherd well together, Tom

From: Bryan Pickering
To: Tom Lutz, Ming-Jinn Tong
CC: Jason Meyer
Date: March 23, 2021

Hi Tom,

Thank you for clearly articulating your perspective. It is so very important, as you did in your email, to acknowledge that the victims who lost their lives in Atlanta are image-bearers of Almighty God: Soon C. Park, *image-bearer*, Hyun J. Grant, *image-bearer*, Suncha Kim, *image-bearer*, Yong A. Yue, *image-bearer*, Delaina Ashley Yaun, *image-bearer*, Xiaojie Yan, *image-bearer*, Daoyou Feng, *image-bearer*, and Paul Andre Michels, *image-bearer*. I also do not think there is an either-or choice to be made between condemning the sin(s) of racism and sexism on the one hand and sexual immorality on the other. But the command to "weep with those who weep," compassionate wisdom, does help me prioritize what I say and when I say it.

One of the particular aims I had in my pastoral prayer on Sunday was that our Asian-American and Asian-immigrant brothers and sisters in our church (and beyond) would know 1) that *the Lord* sees them, and 2) that *we, as a body*, see their continued pain and deep grief and fear. Ming-Jinn has articulated this categorically better than I possibly could have in his response. His God-designed image-bearing comes in the form of an embodied-male of Chinese descent. "Child of God" is Ming-Jinn's *given* identity by new birth. "Male," "Asian," "Chinese," "Taiwanese," "New Mexican" were also his *given* identities by physical birth. All of these things are real. All of these matter to God and to us. All of these are part of image-bearing in Ming-Jinn Tong. All of this comes to bear when he speaks so personally in his response. Can we take it in?

Joash Thomas, an Asian-American ministry leader at International Justice Mission in Atlanta, GA in [this article](#) writes something that I found profoundly helpful (and I do commend the whole article to you--though I would caution all of us, since we have a tendency to do so, not to latch onto a particular word with which we disagree and use that as justification to dismiss the whole thing out of hand):

Make no mistake – many of your Asian American neighbors are in deep grief, fear and mourning right now. And not just because of the killings in Atlanta. Asian American hate crimes have spiked 150% in 2020 because of COVID-related fears – even as the number of overall hate crimes fell. And those are just the reported hate crimes. Asian American women in particular are more vulnerable to these hate crimes. This is why the shootings in Atlanta (regardless of the killer's confession) feel very personal to many of our Asian American neighbors. So instead of wanting to be right, let's just try to be light to these neighbors by listening, learning and grieving with them.

I would also like to note that many of my Asian brothers and sisters who feel *both* crushed *and* energized to speak in this particular moment are not doing so in a "wordly" way. They are not deluded into thinking that "the world" (or "the flesh" or "the Devil") has a solution that Jesus himself does not. It is precisely **because** they are united to our Lord Jesus Christ by grace through faith that they are speaking up about their great pain and the deep disappointment from not hearing their White brothers and sisters see and acknowledge their experiences. Would you consider taking 11 and-a-half minutes to listen to their [plea for solidarity](#)? Can we take it in?

A dear brother and colleague of mine, Jonathan Holmes, is a counseling pastor in Cleveland at the church where Alistair Begg preaches. He is Korean-American. He wrote a poem a few days ago for others to enter into his experience. I commend it to you:

**Have you ever had
The feeling that
You do not belong?**

**"You're so lucky to be here"
But stop taking our jobs
And our places at schools**

**Why your English so bad?
As they pull back their eyes
And mockingly reply**

**Slant eyes, flat face
Kung flu, China virus Chinks and Japs
It wasn't that long ago when you put us in camps**

**Where are you from?
Where are you from?
Where are you from?**

**Enough is enough
It's time to be done
All that hate in your heart
Is not like the Son.**

Where are you from? | JH

Tom, *is it time to be done?* We are crushing God's image-bearers, some of whom have been bought with the precious blood of Christ--this is OUR family. Our Lord does not and will not smile on this, and in his strength, I will oppose it. He calls us to do justice, and to love kindness,

and to walk humbly with him. And we are called to love the Lord our God with all of our hearts, souls, minds, and strength. And we are called to love our neighbors as ourselves.

I want to close this email with the words of just a few of our dear Asian sisters from our church (part of our body at BBC Downtown):

Hello Bryan,

I'm [your sister] who goes to Bethlehem Baptist Church. We've met several times at church and greeted each other. But you might not remember me but your wife Debby and I had several playdates with other moms and sometimes sit next to each other on the pew (nursing our babies 😊). She has been a sweet friend to me.

I just want to say thank you for recognizing us. As a Korean immigrant woman, your congregational prayer means a lot to me. I thank God to remind me that we are not forgotten, and that He sees us and we are seen in this church through your prayer. My husband [your brother] and I been members of BBC for 10 years but today was the first time I thought we are seen in this church as a congregation (To be clear, I have had good friends who know us and love us in this church personally.)

Thank you for lamenting with us and seeing us. Hope to meet you in person someday.

With gratitude _____

Hi Bryan,

I hope all is well with you and your family. I just wanted to thank you for praying yesterday at the service for the recent shooting in Atlanta and the possible sorrow and hurt happening within the Asian Americans. It was a beautiful prayer. Thanks for remembering the Asian brothers and sisters through congregational prayer. _____

Thanks so much for your text and prayers brother! Still processing it all, amidst being caught up in my own personal laments this season, but doing okay and trying not to read too much news! and really truly grateful for prayers and friends reaching out and saying something. Means a lot to me and the Asian community to be reminded that we're seen and cared for and valued in the church and by God

Grace to you,