

Summer 2007 - King's Centre Church, Sheffield

Engaging with our World : The Environment

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Reading – Psalm 24:1-6

“The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; for he founded it upon the seas and established it upon the waters. Who may ascend the hill of the LORD ? Who may stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to an idol or swear by what is false. He will receive blessing from the LORD and vindication from God his Saviour. Such is the generation of those who seek him, who seek your face, O God of Jacob.”

Introduction

We are in the middle of our teaching series on ‘engaging with our world’. I’m really pleased to cover some practical issues, as well as remembering that the root of all we do for God, needs to be constantly coming back to God in love, prayer, worship, community.

Today – climate change! I aim to give you a few facts. To offer a Godly-framework to help us as Christians know why and how to approach the issue. And prompt us with a few practical ways to make a difference and not feel powerless

Climate Change

I’m no expert on climate change! I appreciate that there is a massive debate going on within the scientific community around the world about whether its real, or how much its happening. The science is complicated, but the basics of climate change are simple. The Earth’s atmosphere is trapping more of the sun’s heat than it used to. The ‘greenhouse gases’ causing these changes come mainly from our use of fossil fuels in power stations which supply the homes, offices and factories in the developed world, and from our vehicles and aeroplanes.

Here is some of what the scientists are saying:

- People in the UK are responsible for emitting as much as 50 times more CO₂ than people in the poorest countries. With the USA, Japan, Germany and Canada we are one of the five largest per capita emitters of CO₂. These are the countries most responsible for climate change.
- But it will not be they who suffer most. Rather it will be those who are least to blame - and indeed they are already suffering.
- According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, loss of life and adverse economic impacts from climate change are expected to be greatest in developing countries. The three countries most vulnerable to climate change during the 21st Century will be Sierra Leone, Ethiopia and Afghanistan.
- According to the Red Cross, by 2022 the costs of climatic disasters are expected to rise to a figure 10 times predicted aid flows.
 - all our financial aid for poverty reduction, water access, disease eradication, education, will be absorbed by the cost of dealing with disasters.
- The number of refugees will leap from 15 million today to 150 million or more by 2050. This country already argues about how to receive refugees; but the situation today is dwarfed by the likely situation in 2050.
- Sea levels are expected to rise by up to a metre before 2100 (IFRC), and to go on rising. A half a metre rise could create 92 million refugees in from low-lying coastlands and deltas, such as in Bangladesh (IFRC).
- But it will not just hurt people abroad. Over 1.8 million homes and potentially 5 million people in the UK are at risk from increased storm and flood damage (EST).
- And it is not just the poor today who will suffer; the effects for future generations – for our children and their children will be far worse.

As Christians, should we care, and what should we do about it?

Regardless of the specific arguments raging, as disciples of Jesus we should work from God's framework & principles. LIKE: Stewardship, Justice, Working on the side of the poor & oppressed, Redemption, restoration, saving – God's character should be our agenda. And keep in mind that future (Eschatological vision) – a healthy, perfect environment is on God's heart and agenda too **Therefore, we should aim to live a lifestyle to promote these things.** With the inspiration and help of God's spirit in us

A Godly framework informs much of our lifestyle

First – let's understand God's heart, what the bible teaches us about creation and the environment. That Godly framework is what should inform our own approach to environmental issues and concerns.

Its all God's

The first chapter of the whole bible sets the scene, the framework for us to hold on to.

- The creation narrative outlines how God, by his Holy Spirit, made the earth.
- Regardless of the big bang, the timing, or the role of evolution or however God *exactly did it...* the point is the same: "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen 1:1)
 - "Then God said, "Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds." And it was so....And God saw that it was good." (Gen 1:11-12)
 - "And God said, "Let the water teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the sky."And God saw that it was good. (Gen 1:20-21)
- **Its all God's – he created it and 'owns' it.** Seas, skies, creatures, landscapes, in the sea, in the air, on the land.... And really importantly - God created it good and perfect. "He saw that it was good"
 - Ps 24:1-2 says this: "The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; for he founded it upon the seas and established it upon the waters."

Humans were created to enjoy and steward (rule over) the earth

- The rest of the creation narrative goes on to show how humankind was created to enjoy and steward (or "rule over") the earth (Gen 1:26-30) What's important about this is less the 'rule over' bit, but the fact that we are made in God's image.
- You know we are on a path to be Christ-like, to aim to take on as much of God's character as we can while we are alive (and then inherit the rest in glory)
- God's heart is shown clearly in Genesis: He loves the earth. He created it, he know the intimate goings-on. And He has appointed humankind to be his agents on this earth in order that we further God's rule, his kingship, his ownership of these resources and creatures.
 - That's what the language of "subdue" or "rule over" means – to see to it that God's ways are primary on this earth
- In the meantime, we can use the resources available to us – eat the food, grow things in the earth, subdue the rivers to create electricity etc
 - But we are not there to exploit, waste or wreck them, but to care for them and to use them in the service of God and humankind

The principle is stewardship

- It's the same principle as I've taught in the past with money - Its all God's money & resources – we simply get to look after a bit and make the best use of it.
- Its all God's earth, his animals, his Ozone layer, his ice-caps, his Dodos and dinosaurs, his crops.... Our job is to be good stewards of God's resources
 - **And this is the main reason why Christians should care about environmental issues, and about preventing damage to the earth, and as a result, to the people on this earth.**

I heard it said (in London) a few weeks ago that we need not worry as Christians so much about environmental issues, because people are more important to God than anything else. But Genesis makes it clear that its always been God's heart that the earth be in good shape, and the humankind gets to enjoy the fruits of the land, and prosper the earth. And the sad fact about the environmental crisis looming for this world, is that the worst victims will be people. Poor people, living in the less developed countries will bear the brunt of the predicted effects of global warming. That really matters to God.

So in the end, its in everyone's best interest to look after this earth. Because that's one of the roles God has given us. And because if we don't, we run the risk of going against God's character in other ways too.

This is the Godly-framework we should work too.

- It's essentially STEWARDSHIP, and it applies beyond just environmental issues
 - we should take a similar approach to social issues, people, injustice, & money etc
- **its about resources (& whose they are).** The same biblical framework informs it all.

But what about.....?

God's heart is for a restored world

- I realise that you might be thinking.... "but Genesis was the perfect situation, before the fall, and since then the earth is in a right state and this is all unrealistic"
 - Genesis 3 explains the fall of humankind – when sin, death, decay entered the world
 - The result (3:17-19) - humans now have to work much harder to get returns
 - Even Jesus predicted natural disasters aplenty before the world ends (Luke 21:11)
- But principle remains – stewardship and responsibility for God's earth.
 - Isaiah 65:25 (and 17-25) is an eschatological vision, a vision of what the earth can and will be like if the kingdom of God breaks in finally.
 - One of the pictures (along with Eradication of poverty, Respect for the vulnerable, Purpose in the workplace) is of Harmony with the environment (v25.. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain," says the LORD.)

Or perhaps you are saying “There are other more urgent problems” (poverty, people rather than planet etc)? Unfortunately, there isn't time to remedy these other problems ahead of climate change. They must be tackled together now. In fact, as I've already said, development agencies say that climate change risks reversing any progress we make in overcoming poverty, disease and conflict.

Summary

All this means that the threats to the earth's life-support system is not a trivial issue! But the good news is that in such despair only faith in God and his future can find a cause for hope. We believe in a God of hope, a God who renews the face of the earth. We are called to be the salt of the earth, that is, the very means for its preservation. So climate change is a religious issue and we cannot ignore it. It is essential for Christians to speak clearly to the world on the implications of climate change, especially to the most vulnerable.

Its God's heart, but is it my heart?

Climate change, looking after and protecting our environment is an issue of discipleship.

Just like other discipleship issues - how we spend our money, what we do with our time, where we exercise faith, who & how we share the good news of the Christian life with. In short, how we live life.

This means that there may be implications to our lifestyles, and they may require some element of commitment, even sacrifice. But we know that the path of discipleship leads to life.

Question - Will you still follow Jesus if it means a pay-cut, or expensive lifestyle choices?

The reality of dealing with climate change means that we in the West need to look at our lifestyles, and consider if we ought to tone-them-down for the greater good.

- For example, Marjorie and I have been buying 100% green electricity for the past 3 or 4 years. But it costs slightly more than regular electricity from the main suppliers. And I miss out on the 'dual fuel' offers to save money. But from my point of view, paying slightly above the high-street rates for my electricity is well worth it, because I know that it's from entirely renewable sources – mainly wind farms

Often, better alternatives usually do exist, but we are often simply not attracted to them. For instance, how many of us who commute to work by car can, or would be prepared to, do so by bus? Or arrange a car-share to school

Lets not just blame other people! You and I have power, as consumers, to set the agenda too. We can make a positive choice by choosing renewable energy and changing our lifestyles, and by boycotting companies associated with irresponsible practices.

But the hard fact is, sometimes being a disciple, living as God best intends humans to live, carries with it elements of sacrifice, of simplicity where we might prefer excess.

We have to ask ourselves the question: **Is my lifestyle a reflection of my desire to be a disciple of Jesus?**

What can I do practically?

FIRST – Don't be overwhelmed! This kind of topic can seem overwhelming. What good can little of me do? Actually, this is a great opportunity to 'engage' – to show the world that Christians care about life and this world, don't live in a holy huddle and shut themselves away!

- There is one church in USA whose whole 'OUT' is based around environmentalism & green issues, because that is the biggest testimony to their community.

What could our practical response be? - 3 suggestions

Practical

- Make some simple changes, they don't even need to cost much
- Switch to **Green fuels** (The easiest and most effective thing you can do is to switch your home to cleaner electricity. In one phone call you could save tonnes of greenhouse gas every year. 'Green Energy & [Good Energy](#)' companies) or big utility firm's 'green schemes' (but check them)
- lower our carbon footprint
 - eg. plane travel, car, home insulation
 - Following the Queen's recent visit to the USA, UK her carbon footprint will be calculated and offset financially (to an environmental charity) for the first time for a state visit.
- recycle & reuse – '[sheffield freecycle](#)' website
 - recycle glass, paper, plastic (like milk cartons), clothes, shoes....

Political

- don't leave it up to the Government to set the agenda – set it for them! We got Jubilee 2000 & debt relief at the top of Gordon Brown's agenda. Make your voice heard that hard political action on climate change is vital. And tell your friends!

Spiritual

- Ask God to change your heart and values towards his framework for living.
- Simplicity, care for others, a community where we share alike, not consume as individuals.
 - A low-carbon lifestyle is desirable in itself. It means that we can live in a relationship of justice and love with each other, the planet and future generations.
 - [Simplicity, Love and Justice](#) – Group Study by James Odgers (founded The Besom)

KC is committed too

KC as a church is committed to 'doing our bit' where possible. We are looking into feasibility of being 'carbon neutral' within a few years eg. solar panels on our large roof instead of gas, environmentally neutral carpets, switching off computers/monitors etc. We will change our utility suppliers to green options (like Good Energy) as soon as possible.

Conclusion

In conclusion: DON' T Feel guilty. But do feel something!

Let's welcome the opportunities that this new vision brings for ourselves and others. This is partnering with Jesus' kingdom agenda. Change, redemption, saving people, bringing justice, hope etc

We can't all do everything. But we can all do something.

3 responses recap

- 1) practical - make 1 or 2 practical changes to your own lifestyle or situation
- 2) political - get involved – be aware, speak up, tell others, challenge others/companies
- 3) spiritual - pray & go round the 'Learning Circle' with your partner, friends, small group

Lets do something about the challenges facing our world – but lets do it out of knowing and receiving God's enormous love and compassion – for us first, then for others.

RESOURCES TO HELP INDIVIDUALS AND SMALL GROUPS

<http://www.christian-ecology.org.uk/>

<http://www.tearfund.org/Campaigning/Climate+change+and+disasters/>

<http://www.christian-aid.org/indepth/environm.htm>

What the Bible says

Care for Creation: *For cattle you make the grass grow, and plants for people to use, so that they can grow their crops. (Ps 104.14)* **Climate change upsets natural cycles on which God's creation depends.**

Responsibility for the vulnerable: *"You hear the cries of the oppressed and the orphan; you will judge in their favour." (Ps 10.17)* **The effects of climate change will be felt most harshly by those least responsible.**

Justice between generations: *His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation (Eck 1.50).* **The full effects of today's greenhouse gas emissions will affect future generations.**

Love for neighbour: *"Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty, and do nothing?" (Mt 25.44)* **The whole world is our neighbour when we cause atmospheric pollution, as its effects reach across the globe.**

Simple lifestyle: *Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Gal 5.22)* **Fossil fuels have become a cause of conflict and oppression. By handling energy more carefully we can show the fruits of the Spirit.**