

Sunday 24 May 2009 Sermon - King's Centre Christian Church, Sheffield, UK

Heaven 8 – Living in the light of heaven – This World Counts

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Intro

Final sermon in the Heaven series. It's been a journey of discovery for us, some truths of the bible we didn't realise were the case. I hope some changed thinking as a result. I pray an increased sense of hope for the future – both in this life, and the next.

Last week we considered 'Living in the Light of Heaven' and said 'Your life matters – Make it Count.' This week, as we continue 'Living in the Light of Heaven' we're saying 'This World Matters – Make it Great'.

STORY

My brother & sister in law are missionaries. Just like everyone who follows Jesus is a missionary.

- They've chosen to work for a mission agency, and have been living overseas for a few years in a poor Muslim country in central Asia.
- To some people, what they do with their time might not look like mission. But it is.
- She is a Medical Doctor; he is an expert in renewable energy.
- They work in development – advising small, very poor villages in the mountains how to live better lives, how to avoid deaths in childbirth, how to plant seeds to yield a better harvest, how to dig wells for clean water
- Not an easy life
- They have a long-term perspective and an understanding & vision for redemption. Redemption of a long troubled country. Redeeming the land itself, redeeming people – health, education, future choices – and sharing the love of Jesus when possible.
- Their context and way of mission isn't what we are personally called to (or our gifting). We're privileged to live in an open free society where you can share the gospel openly if you have the boldness
- Different from Allans (2 people became Christians in our sitting room this week!). It's all the mission of God.
- We're all called to live out the call of redemption.

Living in the light of heaven looks somewhat different for us as brothers at this time, but it's the same hope that drives us.

We can all have a great hope in Christ Jesus for our lives beyond this life, but the correct biblical perspective on things means that we understand that this earth itself is not destined for the scrap-heap. This is God's great earth, his awesome creation which one day is going to be made even better.

- And in the meantime, you and I have a calling, a role to play in making this world a great place to live in the present.
- That's the biblical mandate. Redemption. Restoration.
- Hope of heaven should mean hope for earth now too – and the church of Jesus Christ are to be the primary carriers of that hope,
- in the words we say, in the works we do, and in the wonders and miracles of God we pray for.

This world matters – Make it Great.

Before we read & unpack today's bible passage I want you to hold in your heads one of the most important understandings of the Christian faith and worldview. If you remember this, you'll live out God's plan for your life much more easily.

1. The account of creation teaches us that mankind was always intended to rule over earth as stewards of creation. Creation was made good, mankind was made good.
2. The rest of the book of Genesis shows us that as a result of rebellion against God's ways and will, things went wrong both for humans and creation in general. We live in that situation still today.
3. The book of Revelation explains that eventually God is going to restore His original intention – that humans will once more rule over, with Christ, a new Heavens and a new Earth.
4. In the meantime, to address the problem of a world infected with sin, God's way is to call people into Relationship (Covenant) and Action (Kingdom).
 - a. Jesus comes to achieve salvation, and Jesus' followers have a role, a part in the equation of salvation to people, to planet earth and even the cosmos!

READING: Rom 8:12-28

¹²Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation—but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it. ¹³For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, ¹⁴because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. ¹⁵For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. ^[a] And by him we cry, "Abba, ^[b] Father." ¹⁶The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. ¹⁷Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

Future Glory

¹⁸I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. ¹⁹The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. ²⁰For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope ²¹that ^[c] the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.

²²We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. ²³Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. ²⁴For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? ²⁵But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

²⁶In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. ²⁷And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will.

More Than Conquerors

²⁸And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

Unpack Rom 8

This is a famous passage that says a few key things for us to grasp if we are to live in the light of heaven. We'll unpack them together now.

Firstly – Paul acknowledges that all is not as it should be. Creation and humanity are messed up, not all that God intended them to be. Paul calls this the ‘the sinful nature’ and it really applies not just to people, but to the whole of creation at this time.

I think it's tremendously important that all the way through our scriptures, alongside the glory and possibilities of life with God, they acknowledge disappointment & pain in the current world & our current lives (& others) too.

There is tremendous promise & hope, for the future and the present. But we live in a fallen world where sin & evil still conspire to warp God's good creation.

- The hope of the future should help us to cope with the trials and realities of the present, and to help others, while all the while we push on towards the prize. (Phil. 3:14)
- Because already, the means of restoration are in place and underway. All is not lost, in fact salvation has already come to this earth in the person of Jesus Christ, and the final salvation is underway being played out in a cosmic battle of good triumphing over evil.

V12 + 14 – so Paul makes it clear that we are not to live by the sinful nature – the way of the world – the natural urges of humanity which is damaged and distorted from its original design of holiness. Instead, we're to live in our new identity – the identity restored to us through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

And out of that identity we can make a positive difference for the kingdom of God on earth.

One of the questions we often get asked – ‘you say that God is good, but why does a good god cause (or allow) natural disasters like Tsunamis & earthquakes & droughts? Assuming that God sends the weather.

- The answer is that the whole of creation is fallen, is in this tension, is not fully under God's rule.
- It's all ‘groaning’ and waiting for redemption and restoration. Until then, scripture says all sorts of things will happen.

V18 – So in dealing with the unfortunate facts of the moment – that life is not all sweetness and light - Paul has the right perspective. Whatever the current situation, he has hope that goes beyond it. And so can you and I have that strong sense of hope.

- The “present sufferings” refer to the lives of humans and Christians
- But also he goes on to acknowledge that our world and creation is suffering too in the present.
 - Anyone who looks around will realise that all is not quite right with the world.
 - There is pain, there is imbalance. There is something out-of-kilter with our whole creation.
 - Amongst the stunning beauty of this world, there is death and destruction – both from ‘natural disasters’ and directly at the hands & actions of humans.
 - There is death and destruction because there is sin in the world. They are the results, the implications of sin.
 - V20 – “For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it,”
 - The world is out of sync with God's glory, by God's will, as judgement for Genesis 1 (the fall, rebellion against God's ways & will)

- V21 – yet within this situation there is promise and redemption in store, also brought about by God’s will - “in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.”

V19 – “The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed.” – Creation, the natural world which is out of balance, and humankind who are out of balance – all of creation has an in-built longing for God. Jesus “is called ‘the desire of nations’. Everyone desires Jesus. They just don’t know it.” (Bill Johnson p.34) (Haggai 2:7)

- Do you realise that all creation awaits our resurrection? This chapter is saying that the gospel is good news not just for humans, but for all creation.
- Earth was designed to be ‘very good’ (Gen 1:31). The plan and provision for redemption includes ‘all things’ (Colossians 1:16-20). That’s creation, the oceans, the ice-caps, the deserts, the cosmos itself.
- **Why do you think we will be given new resurrected bodies?**
 - To rule wisely over God’s new world
 - New Testament has several images of ‘reigning’ – but most Christians don’t try to comprehend this, or think themselves unworthy
 - There will be plenty to be DONE in the new heavens & new earth, we’ll be busy with fulfilling ‘work’ which is also worship. For one thing, the ‘garden’ of Gen 1 & 2 will need to be tended once more.

But the thing for us to grasp is also that humans were created to be stewards of God’s earth, and that stewardship begins now. Because, as we’ve seen in v.15-17, the preliminaries are taken care of and we’ve already inherited ‘every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realm’ (Eph 1:3)

So Paul is saying “Yes – creation is in problems – but redemption is planned.”

- Earth is in trouble – God’s salvation plan is to rescue it in the NOW, and one day to perfect it
- And we have a role in that
 - Because we have the first-fruits of that spirit, the spirit of adoption back into the will, purposes, protection, redemption, restoration of God (Rom 8:25)

What this passage is saying is this: **Followers of Jesus have a role to play in the salvation and redemption of planet earth.**

- You shouldn’t be passive, you should be active in bringing hope and redemption to the world around you now – living in the light of heaven that even more hope is to come.
 - Because “we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” (v.28)

It’s NOT the case that because earth will one day be re-booted, we should ignore, abuse it or despise it in the present.

- That is to collude with the evil forces of sin & death (& decay) at work in the world
- And we’re not ‘of this world’ so we shouldn’t do that (John 17:16)
- We are part of the plan of salvation & restoration in the present too, as well as part and beneficiaries of the re-boot in the future.

EXAMPLE – get a disposable polystyrene cup, drink & then rip it up & throw it away. Then get an attractive bone china cup & saucer – drink & place carefully back to be used again. A lot of effort put into making that cup, its beautiful, it has intrinsic value, and far from being disposable it is valued by its creator.

- God made the earth & will one day remake it. We should respect it & bless it
- KC – switched to GOOD ENERGY a renewable electricity supplier in 2009

- Take every effort to look after planet earth. Think green, act green.
- This world matters – make it great.

Eoghan CD – words as well as the picture – underscores living a life that makes a difference in response to our own salvation

V24-5 “*For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has?*”²⁵ *But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.*”

These verses are about our salvation. Our hope is in the fact that there has been a plan from the beginning. That since the fall, God has worked a way to pull creation and humanity out of the mess it got itself into through rebellion against God’s ways.

- Salvation is not simply about ‘my relationship with God in the present and ‘going to heaven & peace’ in the future – that’s not what the New Testament teaches
 - You are already saved (Rom 8:24) = past tense,
 - but also ‘in hope’ of more to come.
- We are saved from something, and we are saved for something.
- We are saved for – making a positive difference to God’s earth now, and people around us, **and to draw people towards the source of all salvation, Jesus, who can make a difference for them forever!**
- **Sure we don’t see it all yet in the present – we hope for what we do not yet have fully, but we wait patiently, we work for the positive purposes of God, we look after his earth, we reach out to everyday people....**

That’s what God does. And humans are saved so as to be transformed into God’s likeness. God is Good. Good works are the evidence of God at work within us

- So we should also be about the things of God
 - Transformation
 - Reformation
 - Restoration
 - Hope
 - Peace
 - Love, joy etc
 - **beauty** instead of **ashes**, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. (Is. 61:3)
 - Kingdom truth & power into apparently ‘hopeless’ human situations – miracles, signs & wonders
 - Redemption

The plan of redemption. “The point about redemption is that it doesn’t mean scrapping what’s there and starting again from a clean slate, but rather liberating what has come to be enslaved.” (Wright p107)

- Let’s get a vision for local-redemption, like business & social transformation in Sheffield
- Satan seeks to destroy the earth and wants us to give up on our purpose and calling – our planet.
- God’s intent is not to destroy the world but to deliver it from destruction. His plan is to redeem this fallen world, which he designed for greatness.”
- And then to hand it back to his children.

Romans 8:20-25 – word hope used 6 times. **We shouldn’t say ‘look what the world’s coming to!’ We should say: “Look what’s coming to the world!”**

Once we realise that this earth is highly prized by God, destined for renewal not destruction, then we can begin to prize it and enjoy it at a deeper level.

- Unfortunately some Christians don't see this truth and instead neglect, or even abuse the good creation that God has given human beings to enjoy.
- Some Christians even hate earth, and wait for heaven.
- That's not the point.
- Let me repeat: We're saved to make a positive difference to this earth now, and to draw people towards the source of all salvation, Jesus, who can make a difference for them forever!

Recap main point

So let me recap what I'm saying, and what Romans 8 is saying. It's saying 'This world matters – make it great'. Work for justice, work for green issues and so forth. Because the world is not disposable & destined for destruction – it's destined for renewal & redemption (creation & people alike) – and our assignment is to be part of that (however imperfectly) on earth, until the final day comes.

v.28 – So Paul concludes with these words of hope: “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”

Jesus said 'whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.' (Matt 25:40)

God's anointing is on us to bring the message and reality of salvation to earth. To bring healing to troubled lands, troubled people, and troubled physical bodies. To be tools of deliverance for many from oppression, bondage and blindness into freedom, joy, hope and peace which can only come from the source of all life and future – our God, father, son and Holy Spirit.

(This world matters – for Jesus' sake, and in Jesus' name – lets make it great)