

What happens when Christ Returns?

Some people say that God will come and take us to another place (heaven) and that earth will be destroyed – so why care for it? Revelation clearly shows God coming to earth (Rev 21:2), restoring and redeeming all things under Christ.

- **New:** Jesus says he **is** making all things new (note the tense: “is”)
 - New creation explained in Isaiah 65:17-25
 - Isaiah 43:18; 65:17-25
 - Luke 4:21 – “today”
 - 2 Corinthians 5:17
 - Ephesians 2:15
 - Colossians 1:17-21
 - 2 Peter 3:13
 - Revelation 21:15
- **Hope:** of healing and restoration of all things
- **Liberation:** of all creation – Romans 8:18
- **Celebration:** of all creation of this redemption – Psalms 96
- **God with Us:** the ending is God living with us – Revelation 21:3

Our Role and Responsibility

To Rule: kingly responsibility

- **The characteristics and tasks of a king are:**
 - To protect
 - To set rules, laws that enable all to flourish
 - To provide for all
 - To ensure succession for future generations
 - To create and leave a legacy that represents their mission and purpose
 - To enhance and increase

To Serve: A stewardship responsibility

- **The characteristics of a servant are:**
 - Obedience
 - Hard work and cultivation, and looking after all that which they have been given responsibility over
 - Vigilance and keeping watch, ensuring the safety and wellbeing of all they have been given charge over.
 - They serve not for themselves but for their master and his property

Conclusions

Because we love and obey our Creator – we care for creation

- To love God means we care for his possessions. We cannot claim to love God if we ruin his property
- Jesus says if you love me keep my commandments (John 14:15) – the first command we have been given is to care for creation

Missional Task: called to be kings and priests

(1 Peter 2:9 and Exodus 19:6)

- Restored humanity: roles and responsibilities of kings and servants / priests is our redeemed state. (Rev 5:9-10)

Urgent Mission Task: proven evidence

- Signs of disease and destruction require our action

Response: Compassion and Justice (Matthew 5:1-16)

- Love and care with compassion (Ps 145:9, 13, 17 – The Lord has compassion for all he has made)
- Hunger and thirst for justice – includes environmental justice
- A sign of righteousness and justice is when we care for the poor and those in need (Proverbs 29:7)
- A sign of righteousness and justice is when we care for creation (Proverbs 12:10-11)

Prophetic Role: a need to disciple nations

- Speak up and influence our nations to keep caring for our world
- Raise awareness and campaign against actions that exploit and destroy creation

WHY SHOULD WE CARE?

Question: Is Creation Care a Part of Christian Mission?

To answer this important question we need to see what God says.

Foundations

We believe that God is the creator and sustainer of all things in heaven and earth. (*Colossians 1:16-17*)

This underlines a number of important truths:

- If God is Creator then he is the owner of everything
 - **Deuteronomy 10:14** *To the Lord your God belong the heavens, even the highest heavens, the earth and everything in it.*
 - **Psalm 24:1** *The earth is the Lord's and everything in it, the world and all who live in it.*
- As Creator and Owner, God provides us with his Word (the Bible) to guide and instruct us about all he created.

- To understand creation and our role and responsibility within it, we need to read the whole Bible.
- We will discover that creation care is one of the major themes in Biblical theology and practice.

The Bible begins and ends with creation:

- **Genesis 1:1:** *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth...*
- **Revelation 21:1:** *Then I saw a new heaven and new earth...*

A Gift from God: God's Earth

Creation is “good” and has the potential for change (good or bad)

- God says creation is good seven times in Genesis 1.
- Creation dualism: to say that spiritual things are good, but material things are bad. This dualism has caused serious problems in our worldview and has distorted our response to creation care. The Bible tells us clearly that creation is good and an integral part of God's mission.
- The Good News is that God longs to heal, restore, redeem and reconcile all things in heaven and earth in Christ. (Colossians 1:20; Ephesians 1:10). So, if this is God's Mission and his mission is our mission – what does this mean for our response to creation care?

Creation celebrates God: Psalm 19:1-4 / Psalm 50:6 / Psalm 104 / Acts 14:17 / Romans 1:20

Creation has intrinsic value because God values it.

Creation has the capacity to develop, evolve, grow, adapt, change, transform.

Creation is distinct from God, but dependent on God. God is Creator, we (heaven, earth, humanity) are the created. This means that only God is divine.

Creation is sacred because of its relationship to God and hence we should respond to it with respect and care.

God created all things for a purpose. It is not just human beings that have a purpose – but all of created things have been designed by God for God.

The whole of creation bears witness to God and his goodness.

A Gift from God: Our Earth

The earth has been entrusted to human beings!

- **Psalm 115:16** *The highest heavens belong to the Lord, but the earth he has given to man.*

Created in God's Own Image

- **Genesis 1:26-27** *Then God said. "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.*
- All of us human beings are created in God's image.
- We were human beings before we became Christians and we don't stop being human beings afterwards.
- God holds us accountable for our humanity as much as for our Christianity.
- The commands given to all humanity still apply to all humanity.

What makes human beings distinct in creation?

- **God has given us the responsibility of earth.** We need to understand this responsibility with deep humility and respect. Human beings have a lot in common with the rest of creation:
 - **God blessed us** as he did all of creation.
 - We were **all instructed** to multiply and fill the earth. (Genesis 1:22)
 - Human beings did not get their own creation day – they were **created on the same day** as land creatures (livestock, wild animals, creepy crawlies).

What kind of Kingship does God exercise over Creation?

We need to ask this question because if we are to be his delegated representatives we must know what we are expected to do and how to do it.

There is no exploitation and abuse of creation in God's character – nor should there be in ours!

- God created the animals from the ground and human beings from the dust of the ground! (Genesis 2:19)
- We human beings have the same chemicals and molecules of the earth.
- We share the breath of life that God has given to all he created. (Genesis 1:30)
- In our human case, God actually breathes this breath of life into our very nostrils. (Genesis 2:7) God has a relationship of particular intimacy with human beings.
- **Human distinctiveness is linked to us being:**
 - Created in the image of God.
 - Created in order to rule over (dominion over) the rest of creation.
- **Being made in God's image does not mean we physically look like him**, rather we are made to be like God in that we have been given the authority to rule and the ability to create / innovate.
- **With authority comes responsibility:**
 - God creates humanity in the image of himself with the intention of exercising God-like authority and dominion within creation.
 - God intended humanity to exercise his delegated authority over creation.
 - God has given us authority / kingship to both rule and take care of creation.
 - We are his ambassadors and servants within creation to care for creation on God's behalf.
- **As God's people, we are part of the redeemed humanity** – this intensifies and reinforces our obligation to live by God's original mandate of being caretakers and stewards of his creation.

God's kingly characteristics: (Psalm 145)

- God is **compassionate** to all he has made
- God is **gracious** to all he has made
- God is **good** to all he has created
- God is **faithful** to all he has made
- God is **loving** to all he has created
- God is **generous** to all he has made
- God **protects** all he has made
- God is **righteous** and **just** to all he has created.

The Curse and the Covenant

The Curse (Genesis 3:17)

- Human beings chose to rebel against their creator.
- Their disobedience affected their whole environment.
- Their rebellion affected:
 - their relationship with God
 - their relationship with one another
 - their relationship with creation.
- **The whole of creation suffers** because of human rebellion and sin.
- **Link between human action in history and ecological consequences in nature**
 - When we as human beings behave badly, the creation suffers.
 - **The Bible also links social justice / injustice to a negative or positive impact on creation.**
 - **Positively:** Psalm 72 says that if the king does justice (vs 12-14 caring for the poor and needy etc), then the land will be productive and fruitful – there will be economically and environmental benefits from the land.
 - **Negatively:** Hosea and Jeremiah point out that when human beings behave with injustice and oppression, political disorder and idolatry, then the land mourns (Hosea 4:1-3) and wildlife dies. War is particularly destructive of creation, (Habakkuk 2:17 impact on animals, destruction of land).
- **What we do or don't do has an environmental effect!**

Liberation: Healing, Redemption and Purpose

What is the goal and purpose of human existence?

- **Human life and all of creation's ultimate fulfilment in the glorification and enjoyment of God.**
- **All of creation is to give Praise and Worship to God:**
 - **Us:** we worship God with our minds (expressed in what we say and do), our hearts (expressed in how we love in word and deed) and hands (expressed in all we do, all we create – music, poems, art, infrastructure, etc)
 - **Creation:** All of creation praises God day and night. In Revelation 5:13 we see every creature in heaven and earth praising God. Creation worships God through its fullness and abundance (biodiversity) and beauty.

Covenant (Genesis 9:8-17)

- This is the covenant given to Noah after the flood.
 - This is God's covenant relationship to human beings and to all of creation.
 - This covenant is both vertical (God to us) and horizontal - we are ambassadors of God's covenant to all of creation.
- Note: **the Covenant with Noah is described as an eternal covenant.**

What about earthquakes, tsunamis and volcanoes – are these part of God's curse and judgement?

- Unlikely as scientists show that the presence of shifting tectonic plates, animal predation etc. happened well before human beings were created. (Geological research, palaeontological evidence)
- Some argue that the impact of Satan's expulsion from heaven has resulted in these so called "natural disasters" and animal predation (animals killing animals for food).
- Hurricanes and their growing intensity are linked in part to global warming.

What does this look like today for us?

- **Us:** Being in a right relationship with God
- **Creation:** bringing glory to God and enhancing our relationship with God

God's plan is to heal and redeem all of creation.

Remember the Jubilee Principle: a time set aside for restoration. A time when we need to care for those in need, share with one another and ensure restraint against exploitation and abuse. Jubilee is for the whole of creation.