

Climate Change Sunday - How Should Christians Think About Climate Change

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[0 : 00] The first reading today is from Psalm 19.

It's on page 552 of your Bibles. The heavens declare the glory of God. The skies proclaim the work of his hands.

Day after day they pour forth speech. Night after night they reveal knowledge. They have no speech. They use no words.

No sound is heard from them. Yet their voice goes out into all the earth. Their words to the ends of the world. In the heavens God has pitched a tent for the sun.

It is like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber. Like a champion rejoicing to run his course. It rises at one end of the heavens and makes its circuit to the other.

[1 : 03] Nothing is deprived of its warmth. The law of the Lord is perfect, refreshing the soul. The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple.

The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes. The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever.

The decrees of the Lord are firm, and all of them are righteous. They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold.

They are sweeter than honey, than honey from the honeycomb. By them your servant is warned. In keeping them there is great reward. But who can discern their own errors?

Forgive my hidden faults. Keep your servant also from willful sins. May they not rule over me. Then I will be blameless, innocent of great transgression.

[2 : 10] May these words of my heart and this meditation... May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight. Lord, my rock and my redeemer.

The second reading today is from Romans 8. Chapters... Sorry, verses 18 to 25. It's on page 1135 in your Bibles.

I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.

For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.

We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies.

[3 : 36] For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all, for who hopes for what they already have? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks so much, Emma, for reading. Good morning, St Silas. My name is Martin Ayres. I'm the senior pastor here. It's great to have you with us, whether you've been coming many years or you're just visiting.

And as Simon mentioned at the beginning, our regular diet as a church family, week by week, is that we work through books of the Bible, chapter by chapter, so that God sets the agenda and we hear his voice in that kind of systematic way.

But from time to time, it's good to pull back from that and just think about a particular theme as the whole of God's Word unveils it for us. And that's what we're doing this morning as we think about climate change.

So let's pray as we come to God's Word. Let's bow our heads and I'll lead us in a prayer. Gracious God and creator of all things, we thank you for your Word that equips us for every good work that you call us to.

[4 : 48] We pray that you will help us to think rightly about your creation and that as we spend time reflecting on your Word now, you will stir up our hearts that we would love the things you love and turn from the things you hate and live and work to your praise and glory.

Amen. Great. So in a month's time, as we've been praying and hearing, the nations are coming to Glasgow. 196 countries will be represented at COP26.

It's the 26th UN Climate Change Conference. It's the biggest summit the UK has ever hosted. And it's the biggest climate change conference since the one in Paris six years ago.

Joe Biden is coming. Pope Francis is coming. And the rhetoric is quite edgy. It's been described as the last chance we have to save the world.

How did we get here? Well, last month, to wet our appetites for what's coming, the latest UN report was issued on climate change. So they have an intergovernmental panel of scientists who produce these reports.

[6 : 01] This is their sixth one. And the headlines, if you saw them in the news, were code red for humanity. The report didn't actually say that, but it did confirm what the large majority of scientists who are experts in the fields tell us, which is, firstly, that the climate is changing.

Secondly, that our human activity is contributing significantly to that change. And thirdly, that it's very serious. Our carbon dioxide emissions are, in effect, wrapping a blanket around the planet, and it's warming up.

And unless there is a significant change, global temperatures will rise by one and a half degrees in the next 20 years. And even if nations meet the targets they committed to in Paris six years ago, there will be catastrophic effect on the planet.

That's what the scientists are telling us. I'm not a scientific expert. I'm just going by what the large majority of them are saying. And it's worth, therefore, asking, how should we as Christians think about this great issue for our times?

And what should we do about it? And it's good to acknowledge that some of us will be thinking, at last, we're hearing something about it. Why aren't churches doing more about this?

[7 : 22] It's the greatest catastrophe we've ever seen. Here's a scientist speaking at a graduation in the US recently. He said to the, so this is to people graduating, he said, the oncoming trouble is climate change.

It's going to affect you all in the same way the Second World War consumed people of my parents' generation. They rose to the challenge, and so will you. They came to be called the greatest generations.

I want you all to preserve our world in the face of climate change. You can be the next great generation. So some of us will feel very strongly Christians need to be at the forefront of that.

Why are we not doing more about that for the world? Others of us here today will be thinking, why are we talking about this? If I'd known it was on this, I would have stayed at home.

The Gospel tells us a story of salvation about people. It's people who are made in the image of God. It's people who've rebelled against Him.

[8 : 25] And one day we'll stand before Him. And without Christ, we stand condemned for how we've treated Him and one another with eternal consequences.

But Jesus has died a sin-bearing death for us, meaning now anyone can turn to Him and be forgiven and have eternal life. So looking after this planet, COP26, it's just rearranging deck chairs on the Titanic.

You know, the ship's going down, there's a lifeboat. We're trying to get people on the lifeboat before the ship sinks. It's not the time to rearrange the deck chairs.

Some of you will be thinking that. So what does God say? What does God say? We're going to start at the beginning and hear God's Word. Help us think about creation. And we see first off that it's an ordered creation.

There's an outline inside the notice sheet that will help you as we go. The verses are going to come on the screen, though of course, you can grab a Bible as well and work through them. So we see first off, it's an ordered creation and we're called to be stewards.

[9 : 30] We're going to turn to Genesis chapter 2. Genesis 2. And the first thing we see in the creation story about creation is that we're part of creation.

Creation is something we're part of. So have a look at verse 7 of chapter 2 and we read this. Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and the man became a living being.

In fact, the name of the first man, Adam, is a play on words. The Hebrew for man, Adam, sounds like the Hebrew for ground, Adama. The life of humanity comes from God.

He breathes life into the world. But we are earth people. We are fundamentally part of the rest of creation. Maybe living in a city makes us forget that sometimes.

You know, we drive our cars, we look out at roads and buildings and it's only when we're in more remote places that we realize again how intrinsically connected we are to the world around us.

[10 : 42] Then we see that the rest of creation is a gift to us from God for us to enjoy. So you see that enjoyment in verse 8. Have a look. Now the Lord God had planted a garden in the east in Eden and there he put the man he had formed.

The Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground, trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

So you see the enjoyment there of what God has made and you've got this world that's good but it's uncultivated and then you've got the place Eden and within Eden there's this garden, this demonstration of cultivating and caring for the world and God and humanity are in fellowship together in that garden and the first people are given this commission in verse 15.

The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. So there's this work of taking care of creation as cultivator gardeners and in Genesis chapter 1, the previous chapter, we saw the outward ambition for that.

Chapter 1 verse 28 says, God blessed them, male and female, and said to them, be fruitful and increase in number, fill the earth and subdue it, rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves along the ground.

[12 : 11] So we're given as God's image bearers authority over creation and it's authority like God's, authority to delight in creation, to use creation for good and to take care of it as belonging to him.

We live for him and we enjoy living, knowing him and we look after creation for him. Now these commands are very significant because I think without them, what we see in our world today from people who don't acknowledge God is a kind of frenetic moralising about how to care for the environment.

We want the Garden of Eden, we want the world put right, but we don't want God involved. And so that means when we see people not taking care of the world, perhaps we'll see nations next month saying they won't commit to emissions targets, you see this visceral anger from people and we feel a wrongness to that, but without reference to God, it's hard to ground that in something.

So people say, well we need to care for the world because it's the only one we have. But what about if someone says, but hang on a minute, what is this world? We're just insignificant dust on a planet that is insignificant dust in our universe.

Why should I care for future generations? Why is it not just all about me? And I think there's an opportunity for us as Christians to talk about this with not yet believing friends over the next month who are talking about COP26 and there's a climate scientist, Catherine Hayhoe, who is, she's done a TED talk, she kind of flies around the world controversially, speaking about the climate.

[13 : 53] She says she plans that carefully and she says the best thing you can do about climate change to help is to talk about it. but she's a Christian so she says to friends, I'm a Christian so I care about the climate because I believe it's God's world.

It belongs to Him and it's been entrusted to us by Him and I believe that this is a justice issue because the people who've contributed the most to climate change are being affected the least by it and I care for people because God calls me to that.

And maybe we'll get opportunities to say that kind of thing to friends over the next month and then say to them, why do you care about climate change? Why do you think that it matters? What would you say to someone who doesn't care?

And these verses they also call us to a kind of personal integrity about the issue which I think is encouraging because sometimes we're tempted to just give up on the idea of sorting out our recycling or having LED light bulbs because we think is it really going to make any difference while big industrial companies are just going to carry on polluting?

Why should I worry about how many miles I fly when without fundamental systemic change to all the societies it's just all burning up?

[15 : 12] And that might be right in terms of global impact but it is okay to think well look I'm a Christian and I have a personal responsibility before God for how I care for his world so we can care in the small ways that we have an opportunity to so that's our first point it's an ordered creation and we're called to be stewards our second point is that it's an enduring creation an enduring creation tied into God's plans first it's part of God's plans because it speaks of his glory the glory of God is like the brilliance of God how brilliant he is and his creation displays that brilliance we heard that in Psalm 19 that we had read for us that it says the heavens declare the glory of God the skies proclaim the work of his hands day after day they pour forth speech night after night they reveal knowledge they have no speech they use no words in other words

God reveals through his word principally about Jesus but as we look at the world around us we see the brilliance of God it follows that how we treat creation says something about what we think of him as the creator the natural world is being radically changed by humanity every six seconds an area the size of a football pitch of rainforest is lost a recent report said that in 30 years time 90% of the coral reefs will have gone there'll be more plastic in the ocean in 30 years time than there are fish by weight if we're contributing towards that does that say something about what we think of God if he's revealing himself to us through creation and positively does this not give us a reason as Christians to care for the world people are very anxious about the planet but lots of them don't know the God who made it we know him we love him and we love creation because it speaks to us about the greatness of the God who made us and loves us we see that it's an enduring creation through God's promises so after people rejected God in Genesis chapter 3 the rest of the Bible tells the story of God's plan to rescue the world and it's especially a plan about people people are made in the image of God and he wants to rescue people

I think it's fair to say that God loves people more than he loves trees at the same time God's promises are also about creation and when God makes his promises to Noah in Genesis chapter 9 it's not just a covenant with people it's a covenant with every living creature then through the prophet Hosea when God promises the new covenant that will come through the Messiah through Jesus coming he says in Hosea chapter 2 that he will make a covenant with all living things with the beasts of the field the birds of the sky the creatures that move along the ground so God's promises are not just for people they're for all living things and God's promises for creation are that one day the whole of creation will enjoy his rest it will be in harmony he says through the prophet Isaiah in Isaiah 11 one day the wolf will live with the lamb the leopard will lie down with the goat the calf and the lion and the yearling together and a little child will lead them creation is enduring and it's its inheriting

God's promises we see that it's enduring because it's tied up with God with God the Father's plans for his son his exaltation of his son so in Colossians chapter 1 we get these words about Jesus and as I read them just look out for the references to all things it says the son is the image of the invisible God the firstborn of all creation for in him all things were created things in heaven and on earth visible and invisible whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities all things have been created through him and for him he is before all things and in him all things hold together so the heavens and the earth the whole cosmos it's all for Jesus he is now risen and ascended and exalted to be at the right hand of God he is in the place of honour and authority the gulf stream is for him the rhino and the pangolin every square inch of our planet is for Jesus so the first three

UN science reports intergovernmental science reports their chief editor was an evangelical Christian from the UK John Houghton he was an elder in his local church and he used to point to this passage and say look looking after the world is an issue of holiness for Christians we're called to be distinctive from a world that is obsessed with wealth accumulation we look after the world because Jesus is lord of the world and we see that it's an enduring creation in God's future plans so we turn to the very last pages of scripture and we see our future hope in God isn't that we're all going to be beamed up out of this world somewhere else in Revelation chapter 21 John has this vision of the future and it's of God coming to be with us in our world he says in verse 2 I saw the holy city the new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband so Christian hope isn't ultimately that we go somewhere spiritual and non-physical to be with God it's that he comes down to earth to be with us and in the last chapter of the Bible

[21 : 12] Revelation 22 we hear about our future as God's perfect design for our world restored Eden restored in Revelation 22 verse 1 the river of the water of life is there in verse 2 the tree of life is back in our world in verse 3 it says there'll no longer be any curse on the world in verse 5 it describes the people and says we will reign forever and ever so when we take care of our world and we work day by day in ways that look after creation in a sense we're anticipating what our future will be like when the world is put right and restored and we're going to reign over it with Christ with reference to him relating to him well and each other and looking after creation but as we see around us a planet that shows that God's handiwork is in jeopardy it makes us ask why why is it going wrong so that's our third point it's a frustrated creation and we're called to wake up or a frustrated creation and a sign that things are broken so the grave things in the grave problems in creation they're part of something bigger it's good for us to see that they're bigger because they're just one aspect of human sin in Romans chapter 1 the apostle Paul tells us that

God is revealing himself to humankind through what he's made he's making clear about the world around us that he's there and he's powerful but he's also revealing himself in Romans 1 in a different way when we see people behaving badly it's a sign to us that because we've turned away from God he is giving us over to our own desires our own selfishness so in Romans chapter 1 verse 28 it says furthermore just as they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God so God gave them over to a depraved mind so that they do what ought not to be done they've become filled with every kind of wickedness evil greed and depravity they are full of envy murder strife deceit and malice so you see there greed and selfishness mentioned there within a litany of descriptions of human behaviour without reference to God and if we're being honest there are marks of selfishness and greed in each one of us now when we think about how we're treating the planet in that bigger picture of human greed

I think it gives us a healthy perspective on all that we're talking about when it comes to something like COP26 so that we don't make too much of it and we don't make too little of it first that we don't make too little of it because the way we're treating our planet says something very disturbing about human nature about the selfishness of the human heart that we seem to be heading towards environmental disaster and we find it so hard to work together to turn it back and because it helps us think about how it's an issue that harms the global poor as we've been hearing so it's the people who are contributing least to climate change who are being affected the worst and we heard examples of that already this morning Tia Fund have this example of Orbisa she's on the screen there she's a 35 year old mother who lives in Ethiopia in the Afar region which is an area where Tia Fund have a project helping the poor and Orbisa used to be able to rely on the rains coming at predictable times in the year but now because of the changing climate it's far less predictable so she walks up to 10 hours a day every day to find water for her family to drink and her livelihood depends on selling livestock but she's losing livestock she's lost nearly half her goats nearly all of her cows and she said to Tia Fund we used to get rain every four or five months the area was very fertile and green it hasn't rained now for six months and I don't know when it will rain next

I feel worried whenever I think about the future so people like Orbisa are facing the effects of climate change today and Tia Fund are urging us to see this as an issue where we need to recognise that we have to love our neighbours in how we look after creation so don't make too little of the climate crisis it's an issue of selfishness and greed and God calls us to turn from greed on the other hand seeing it as just one aspect of human greed should mean we don't make too much of it it's not the new morality that takes over everything else it's not that if you sort out your recycling you're a good person and you don't have to think about any other areas of life we should be concerned about creation care and we should be concerned for a whole load of other issues in our own lives and in wider society issues like the sanctity of human life there are issues that as

Christians we're to be concerned for and let's remember that if we could see this problem solved if we could see amazing action taken after COP26 to save the planet then our biggest problem still wouldn't be dealt with without Christ even the most ecologically aware people around us are still sinners living in God's world rejecting him and they're facing a day of reckoning before him so that's our third point we've seen that it's an ordered creation an enduring creation a frustrated creation lastly let's just think about how it's a groaning creation and we're called to have hope so we had Romans chapter 8 read for us about it being a groaning creation the apostle Paul is writing to Christians and he asks them to compare our lives where people are dying people are suffering with the future that God has in store for us so he says in verse 18

[27 : 30] I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us and as he turns to outline that hope he says it's not just us who groan in this life about suffering and death and pain in verse 19 it's not just us groaning he says for the creation awaits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed for the creation was subject to frustration not by its own choice but by the will of the one who subjected it in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God so climate change is just one of many aspects of the ways in which the world is frustrated around us it's a world of natural danger and natural disaster but that frustration all of it will one day be lifted verse 21 creation will be liberated from its bondage to decay not by us but by the living God so the hope of humanity isn't COP26 ultimately it's the return of Jesus Christ he will come back and he will reveal the children of God from all across the world and he'll give us freedom and glory freedom from the presence of sin and glory in the presence of God and when he comes it will be the hope for all creation not just for his people it's hard to imagine isn't it what that future will be like if you think of the most amazing place you've ever been

I think of Victoria Falls in Africa and think that is frustrated creation what's it going to be like when it's redeemed even the greatest natural wonders are not what they should be and on the day of Christ the world will be set free from decay it will be a world that never groans again so these verses they give us a sense of realism that however much progress we make on climate change ultimately we can't save the planet when we see wildfires in Australia and California volcanic eruptions in the Canary Islands they should make us see look creation is frustrated there's something not right if God is good and the world is like this we need a saviour creation needs a saviour but as well as that sense of realism it gives us a sense of hope hope that can infuse all our efforts to care for the world that when you look at extinction rebellion and you look at climate change activism there's a lot of desperation out there there is visceral anger and people are talking about having eco-anxiety eco-sleeplessness even eco-rage young people are especially anxious about this when they hear when they hear about the world heating up from school from the media they're very distressed but as Christians let's allow God's promises to lift us from that not that we think it can't get any worse it does matter and we need to be doing what we can to try and help the planet we know it could get a lot worse because we know people are very greedy and very selfish but we can step out positively optimistically working towards a healthier planet in our own neighbourhoods and around the world and we do that hopefully because we trust that God is still in control and one day soon

Christ will come in glory and the day of liberation that all of creation is waiting for will finally arrive let's pray together let's bow our heads and I'll lead us in a prayer heavenly father and creator God we praise you that creation speaks to us of you that the wonder of creation tells of your wonder and glory that creation is from you and for you and that we wait with the rest of creation for you to renew all things and father God we're sorry that in our greed we've neglected and misused the world around us we ask for your forgiveness and that by your spirit at work in us you would give us the wisdom and the will to be better stewards of all you've made out of love for you and love for our neighbours we ask in Jesus name

Amen we're going to sing together in response to God's word as we're reflecting and the songs that we're continuing with now fix our eyes on the God of all this and his promises and the hope he gives us for the future so let's stand and Catherine the creation the creation was subjected to frustration not by its own choice but by the will of the one who subjected it in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God Father thank you that you made and gave us this good world forgive us when we treat this good gift as if it is our own something that we need not respect help us to live wisely and thankfully in this world longing for the new creation you will bring and always praying for your kingdom to come we pray all these things in Jesus name Amen well please take a seat thank you for coming this week