



+ This week at Magdalen Road we reached our penultimate week considering what it means to be made in God's image. We were thinking about what it means to be stewards of God's planet. Before jumping into the topic we considered 3 things that we didn't have time to consider this week, though maybe of great relevance

- the social justice aspect (more of than not it's the marginalised or downtrodden who suffer most when the environment is abused - perhaps we should engage for them?)
- the witnessing aspect (so as to engage with an increasingly 'green' and environmentally conscious society, perhaps we should engage more so as to 'live such good lives among the pagans'?)
- we didn't consider the specifics (whether we should get allotments, drive a Prius, recycle as much as we can etc etc... We're a people who love rules and laws. Instead of setting them though, we wanted simply to gain a more robust framework of thinking and then leave space for application).

Historically the Christian faith has something of a history with the environment:

- sometimes fingers are pointed at the Christian faith as the reason for the environment being taken advantage of. The story goes, eg via Lynn White in Science's 1967 journal, (<https://www.uvm.edu/~gflomenh/ENV-NGO-PA395/articles/Lynn-White.pdf>) that historically due to a pagan animistic understanding framework that mankind lived in a symbiotic respectful relationship with the world. Trees, rivers etc would have spirits that would need to be placated before changes were made. White's perspective though is that as Christianity took precedence it saw the creation as simply a resource to be used rather than respected. Indeed Genesis 1v28 speaks of 'ruling over' or having dominion which could conceivably be seen as in negative 'top of the food chain' terms.
- there often been a skepticism against environmental issues because it's seen as something 'new-age-y'. Much thinking from environmentalists is pantheistic - that is the universe is god, we are all one, we are all divine. If the Universe is divine so we become gods... Sometimes because of not wanting to be associated with with this thinking Christians have withdrawn.

We considered the topic under 4 basic headings that outline the board structure of scripture.

Creation

- we looked at Gen 1v26-28, but also Gen 2v5 (God creates in such a way that humanity has responsibility) and v15 (the words are far 'softer' to serve and care for, cultivate and preserve. We're to play the long game of looking after the world rather than simply maximising profit and output (eg Deut 25v4).
- we said that from Gen 1 creation is good in and of itself, before the creation of humanity. It has value outside of mankind.

- this earth does not belong to us, so who are we to simply spoil it - rather we are to be stewards (end of Lev 25)

De-Creation

- The outworking of walking out on God is that creation is cursed at the macro level (Gen 3), but also at the micro level (see for eg Israel's relationship with the land when they are disobedient Hosea 4v1-3).
- In Gen 9 we see the creation being de-created as the flood brings it all back to a pre-Genesis 1 state. God's covenant with Noah then (v13) is with all the earth (not simply humanity).

Re-Creation

- Just as the Fall brought about cosmic rebellion and shattering, so the cross of Christ brings cosmic reconciliation (Col 1v15-23) - all of the curse is dealt with.
- Indeed all of creation is looking forward to God's gospel plan being fulfilled (Romans 8v19-22). Which means we'll never save the planet! It is groaning as in childbirth waiting for Christ to return

New Creation

- Despite secular thinking that the world will essentially finally finish (we'll run out of fuel, the sun will explode etc), the bible says the world is permanent. God cared about matter so much he took or flesh and died to rescue it
- It will be transformed and made new - there will be no more death or disease or decay, but it will still have continuity with the old. Just as Christ's resurrection body was recognisable and similar but different and new, so will the creation be.

We finished by talking about living not to change the world, but simply as acts of rebellion. Just as a nurse has to deal with death and dying each day as death seems to hold the upper hand, so it is still worth it as she lives a life of rebellion as she knows what is to come and what will be when Christ's work is finally consummated. So as Christians we don't live wise lives of stewardship to save the planet, but as acts of rebellion because we know what has been and what will be as we reign with him finally over a new creation.

Here are some questions for your group. Feel free to engage in the usual tweakage for your context

Do you think Lynn White's observations still hold true today? Do people still point the finger of blame at the church?

How do you think we should engage with the environment? Do you? Why / why not?

- + Creation - How do you square the verbs in Gen 1v28 with Gen 2v5 and v15? Why does Deut 25v4 matter? What might a modern day re-writing of this verse look like?
- + De-Creation - what relationships are ruined from Gen 3? How are these interlinked? Why is Gen 9 and the flood relevant to this topic?
- + Re-Creation - What kind of reconciliation does Jesus bring in Col 1v15-23? What does this mean?
- + New-Creation - What will the environment be like in the new creation? What will be our role with it? How might this shape our grasp of it now?

How important do you think these green issues are? How much ought we engage with them?