

# Service Transcript

## Climate Sunday April 11<sup>th</sup> 2021

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### **Prayer 1**

*Heavenly Father*, how majestic is your name in all the world, everything we see reminds us of your power and glory because you made everything out of nothing. You made the sun and the moon, you made the land and the sea, you made the birds and the fish and all the animals, and you made us to love you and take care of your creation. We praise you for all the gifts and for helping us take care of your beautiful creation. Thank you for your creativity, your faithfulness, your love, your salvation and for the promise of your return in glory. Grant us strength in this life to honour you Lord; both in worship and in witness, for Jesus Christs sake. - Amen

### **Genesis 2:15**

*In Genesis 2:15 it sais this: "The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.;"*

God placed humans in the Garden of Eden and instructed them to 'work it and take care of it'. In other words, God has given us all the responsibility to act as stewards of his creation – to care for, manage, oversee and protect all that God owns. Isn't that an amazing privilege!

However, when we forget our responsibility to be wise stewards, creation cries out and when faced with major global issues such as climate change and polluted land, air and sea – it is easy to become overwhelmed. Some may shrug their shoulders and say: 'Oh Well, it is not my fault. There is nothing I can do to prevent it. May as well leave it to the government leaders.' or they may think 'Who really cares if I don't bother to recycle or if I throw away wasted food, no one's bothered'. Did you know that food waste is not just a humanitarian concern it's also an environmental one too. Today it's estimated that around 1.8 billion tons of food waste goes to landfill every year and as this food rots it produces methane gas that pollutes the atmosphere. By simply rethinking how we shop, cook and reduce waste we can lessen our contribution to climate change. Simply put as a planet if we stopped wasting food altogether, we could eliminate approximately 11% of our total emissions and even closer to home if the United Kingdom alone stopped throwing away food for just one week it would do the same for climate change as taking approximately 100,000 cars off the roads for an entire year! God Cares: and he cares for our planet too, therefore we too should care and try not to get into the 'Why bother?' frame of mind, Climate change is a moral and spiritual issue. What we do in our daily life does matter. The immediate consequences of our actions might not be felt by us, but they will most certainly affect someone, somewhere.

God cares, he sees and honours the efforts we make, no matter how small they seem. Let's be wise and caring stewards to this beautiful creation God has given us; so that generations to come can continue to marvel in God's creation. Together, we can make a difference and together we can fight climate change – Amen

## Response for call to Worship

We gather in the image of the Creator  
**who is a community of love.**  
We gather in the name of the Redeemer  
**who reconciles all of creation.**  
We gather in the presence of the Life Giver  
**who inspires new life and renews it.**

### Prayer 2

Heavenly Father you are the creator and giver of life, You sustain the earth and direct the nations. In this time of climate crisis grant us clarity to hear the groaning of creation and the cries of the poor; challenge us to change our lifestyles; guide our leaders to take courageous action; enable your church to be a beacon of hope; and foster within us a renewed vision of your purposes for your world; Through Jesus Christ our Lord, by and for whom all things were made.- Amen

### Prayer 3

Heavenly Father, thank you that you are indeed a great God; thank you for the works of your hands, for the moon and the stars, for the birds in the sky and the fish in the sea. Thank you for crowning us with glory and honour and for making us stewards over the works of your hands. Help us to care for your creation. May we respect the land and animals as we use and recycle resources carefully and gratefully. Thank you too, God our father for creating humanity in your image, may our love for others and the world that you made reflect your love for us and your creation. - Amen.

**Reading:** *Exodus 8:6-14*

### Sermon

A few weeks back we completed our Lent Course for 2021 where we looked at the subject of Caring for Creation. I was impressed how knowledgeable those on the course were about things environmental. We were encouraged to think as God's people how and why we should engage with both debate and action relating the issue of climate change and other environmental issues. The Lent Course itself covered a wide range of material, in many ways too wide, as we barely scratched the surface each week.

#### CLIMATE CHANGE: A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE?

I found the course issues-based along the lines of making a moral response to where the current science is taking us with respect to climate change and environmental issues and matters of social justice this tends to throw up. Where I thought it was weaker was in exploring whether we as Christians have a perspective on creation care that is distinctive (and different) from current secular thought on environmental issues where there are already well-established lines of humanistic and quasi-religious ideas such as the notion of "Mother Earth." What does God's word say about how we as human beings, and more importantly how we as God's people care for God's creation.

I'm going to try to redress that a little in the few minutes I have today, by looking at the way in which Israel were commanded to establish themselves in the Promised land after having spent 40 years in a strange nomadic existence in the wilderness, after leaving the most prosperous,

organised, powerful, technologically sophisticated but socially exploitative society of the day: the Egyptian Empire.

Although this was a different age to the present, there seem to be some timeless principles here that give God's people a unique perspective on climate change and its consequences. There is much that resonates today in the world of the Israelites and the land they were invading. The passage we read shows us that it was a land rich in agricultural resources, fertile land, good water resources and mineral resources. The land flowing with milk and honey earned its name well because it was in all likelihood, under-used by the rival Canaanite tribes that lived there. They seem to have been disorganised, technologically backward, politically unstable and relatively lawless.

I would have thought that the Israelites brought out of their experience of Egypt a unity of their tribal system, a strong level of community organisation and the technological skills to make best use of the resources the land possessed. Remember that even though they were in slavery in Egypt, they brought with them the knowledge and skills of the Nile Delta region, and by the end of their time in the wilderness, military accomplishment and a sense of nationhood. And most importantly they were the chosen people of the Living God.

And this is the first of three main reasons for their success in establishing themselves in Caanan.

#### DEPENDENCE ON GOD

How could anyone resist a people who had made a covenant with the living God, who would sweep away everything in their way? No-one. But as we see from our reading today which is repeated many times in the Torah; it was on condition they depended entirely on Him and obeyed Him. He is the Creator God and in verse 10 of Deuteronomy 8, He reminds them of this simple fact: *When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the LORD your God for the good land **he has given you**.* The land was not theirs from being the spoils of war, but because God had given them the land. As a result they needed to *Be careful that you do not forget the LORD your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day. .... because then your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.*

The fidelity of the nation towards God was a condition of both their society and their environment. Unfaithfulness towards was not merely going to leave them vulnerable to their enemies, but also a disaster for the environment. Here's a bit of Deuteronomy 11 that explains this clearly. Deuteronomy 11:13-15 *So if you faithfully obey the commands I am giving you today – to love the LORD your God and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul – then I will send rain on your land in its season, both autumn and spring rains, so that you may gather in your corn, new wine and olive oil. I will provide grass in the fields for your cattle, and you will eat and be satisfied.* Sometimes in the OT we read of the direct judgment of God on their nation because of disobedience., but it goes deeper than that. The breakdown of society and the environment are consequences people inflict on themselves by not honouring God. If we honour God then He honours us, if we don't, then we lock Him out from pouring out His blessings on us. That applies as much as in our personal lives as it did the Israelites in Canaan. We inflict the wound on ourselves because of our sin.

The entry into Canaan established a link between God, the people of Israel and the land. When society broke down because greed and corruption, where there was social conflict, where there was injustice towards the poor and helpless, then the environment suffered too. That hasn't changed in thousands of years. Look at a broken nation like Syria after years of civil war and you see a country beset by environmental disaster too. And it's a country full of the "religious" that act like the godless.

On a global scale we see that the wanton damage to the atmosphere caused by the rich countries of the West (like ours) is degrading land on desert margins, increasing the incidence of flood damage in low-lying poor coastal countries, increasing soil erosion destroying rainforest, and causing instability and poverty in many of the poorest nations.

And where's God? Left out. Pushed to the margins. If you desire to see change as God's people that brings justice to the oppressed, protects the world's bio resources, creates sustainable systems of agriculture and reduces pollution, then by all means do your bit for the environment, lobby your MP, join a conservation group. All of those things are good, set an example and are a witness to the love of Christ.

But we would be failing the world if we did not say clearly that this disaster facing humanity is because of sin and there is an essential need to restore the relationship between people and their Creator. And that can only be through pointing them to God's solution that has already been presented to us in Christ, in His death and resurrection, and through the advancement of His Kingdom in the lives of those who trust and follow Jesus.

Without God in the equation, all we'll do are some noble things which advance the care of creation a little but which will kick the can down the road on other important issues for the next generation to sort. How do I know that? Because I studied all this stuff at University 40 years ago. Back in the Eighties the human race did resolve many global problems, and the rest we just left for another day as they did not seem urgent or had no political traction, until a time when it would become more of a crisis. And now there is one. What will we do? Apply some sticking plaster – maybe a large piece this time, and defer the problem to 2050, when most of us will be dead and gone.

And God? He was excluded then as now, so all we made was a few steps forward and some back. Sin is still here, greed is still here, love of money is still here, acquisition of wealth is still here, war is still here, extremism is still here, injustice is still here, poverty is still here. What will it all be like in 2050? It will all still be here but in a slightly different combination. A few steps forward and a few back and another "global emergency" to deal with. You may think me cynical, but I've lived long enough to see that in the thousands of years since Canaan, the problem of sin has not changed in nature one iota. The wages of sin is still death. All that changes is the scenery in which death occurs.

What difference may the gospel make that conventional science and politics can't do? It goes to the source of all our global problems – sin. The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Our God is a redeemer God. Ours is a redemptive faith. It starts here at the table. The death of Jesus on the cross, the forgiveness it brings and the new life that arises from resurrection lie at the heart of solving the current environmental crisis, reversing the tide of injustice and poverty, bringing peace to the armed scramble for resources and all the rest of it because God is about redemption. We are here to usher in a new Kingdom with new

values. Part of Thy Kingdom Come is to recognise that. Our faith can transform society as it transforms individuals. If we went about prayer, if we went about bringing and being good news with the same zeal that some of us recycle, look for ways to be greener, lobby MPs or whatever, then we will see change, because it is a return to recognising that we are completely dependent on God in this His world.

There are two other principles that lay behind the establishment of Israel in the promised land.

#### THE PRINCIPLE OF RESTRAINT

The nation's training in the wilderness was that dependence on God was about taking what you need from what God has provided. They were given manna daily which sustained them. It appeared predictably. It couldn't be hoarded by those wanting financial advantage from it because it went off in 24 hours. It was the principle of enough. The whole system of land holding and agricultural practice in the Torah was designed to manage the land with restraint and avoid the over exploitation of the land for the benefit of a few rich people at the expense of the poor or the land. In economies driven by greed, natural resources are usually degraded badly and can give rise to poverty, injustice and famine for the majority – as happens right now in many lands. In a series I did a couple of years back we looked at the principle of Sabbath and Jubilee that was designed to manage land effectively and ensuring that each family had access to land to sustain them. It rarely happened because of the greed of individuals and ruling classes.

Yes, Canaan was a fertile land, but like all Mediterranean environments, it was easily degraded by poor land management uncontrolled deforestation and overcropping. God provides the land, but failure to restrain and keep land and resources sustainable have consequences for all, particularly the weakest in society.

Our world is still able to support all its citizens to an adequate quality of life but the sin and greed of others who do not show restraint are usually at the heart of all poverty, famine and conflict over resources. The gospel is about a God who loves and cares for His world, His created beings (us) and opened a way by which all may find salvation and advance His Kingdom. He is also the God of the poor and the friend of the weak. We have just recalled a week back that Jesus challenged those leaders of the Jews who were supposed to be the friends of the poor and week for amassing wealth and power for their own benefit at the expense of others.

#### THE PRINCIPLE OF STEWARDSHIP

The earth is the Lord's and everything in it is the reality of global ownership in Psalm 24:1, but the human race are God's stewards of this earth as we have looked at previously. As a race we have power to change and adapt it. We can do it sustainably, like the early Israelites did, looking to God, or we can be like so many in our current world, whose greed is destroying the planet. Sadly, as a nation, we are part of the latter. As God's people it is our responsibility to set an example and also speak of a better way, God's way, which comes in Christ.

The Israelites failed in the stewardship of their land. It produced chaos, conflict, dispossession and exile. In this Climate Sunday service, we need to come before God recognising that our world isn't what it should be, yet we have the power to make the difference as God's people. How? Because we can pray and we can act as the Spirit leads us.

As the world looks for a solution to the climate emergency, we have a key that can unlock the situation and that's in the finished work of Christ and our being His hands feet and voice.

Let me close with some words from Tom Wright

*"When we pray Thy Kingdom Come, we are really praying that all that Jesus did will be channelled through His Spirit through us, through all his people out into the world, and to those who need to see the signs of the Kingdom in God's world."*

Let's pray and be that difference in the brave new post-lockdown world ahead of us. Let's come in confession as we prepare for Communion.

### **Confession**

Father, we recognise that we live in a broken world full of broken people. And the sin and disobedience is writ large in our planet whose very climate is being threatened by the greed of many. We realise that we are part of one of the richer nations who consume most of the resources, emit most of the greenhouse gases and share few of our resources with those in need. Lord help us to realise that we are a people of truth, that we recognise our part, our sin and seek to walk in obedience to you to be a people of Good News, not to just say the words but to pray, and to seek to walk in obedience to Your Holy Spirit to make a difference. Lord Jesus, you are our Saviour, our Redeemer and our Lord. May our distinctive message make a difference in a world which is seeking answers to its problems, but not seeking Your Kingdom and righteousness.

*Amen*

Let's just take a few moments to bring our own confessions in the silence now.

### **Communion**

There is a sense in which our world will always be tainted until Christ comes. It doesn't mean that we shouldn't be His witnesses and extend His Kingdom through proclaiming Good News. Our actions and prayers can and do make difference to our environment. What we are certain of is that ultimately, the Kingdom of God will come in its fullness as Jesus returns. We seek answers now, but the future is already fixed – it's just that we don't know when it will be. Here are some words from Romans 8 from The Message.

Romans 8:18-21 (MSG)

*18-21 That's why I don't think there's any comparison between the present hard times and the coming good times. The created world itself can hardly wait for what's coming next. Everything in creation is being more or less held back. God reins it in until both creation and all the creatures are ready and can be released at the same moment into the glorious times ahead. Meanwhile, the joyful anticipation deepens.*

Until that time, we proclaim the Good News of the kingdom, but until Jesus comes we have our own reminder of what God has done in Christ and that's communion.

Father, thank you that in Christ we have already been saved and redeemed. We wait expectantly for our coming King. As we wait, we remind ourselves of the reason we can be in Your presence

Let's remind ourselves of the invitation to break bread and drink wine with Him.

For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: the Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said,

*'This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.'*

In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying,

*This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.'*

For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

*As we break this bread, we remember the body of Christ broken for each of us.*

*As we drink this wine we remember the blood of Christ shed for each one of us.*

Father thank you that we have been able to break bread and drink wine today.

Lord Jesus may we act as your hands feet and voice in this broken world.

Holy Spirit, empower us to live and act to glorify Jesus as we see to minister in this our generation.

We ask this in Jesus' name.

Amen.

### **Prayers**

Before we finish our service, let's lift our world up before God.

Father we lift our world before You, so broken and damaged by the sins of the human race. We pray that You will give us a positive vision of what our world should be like – one where You once looked as You completed it and saw that it was good.

We pray for unity between world leaders on the need to take action for climate justice, particularly at the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Glasgow later this year. Pray that hearts inclined to self-interest and indifference to the suffering of others will be transformed, that positive things will come out of that conference. We pray that all those living at the sharp edge of climate injustice that they might have the resources they need to prepare and be protected from the climate crisis.

Lord, help us to have the courage and wisdom to lift our voices in the cause of climate justice that we may speak and not just be good news about eternal life, but good news for the world today and how it can be changed as Your kingdom is advanced.

We lift these things before You in Jesus' name.

Amen.

Let's take this opportunity to bring before God those we know of who need a special touch from Him today.

### **Closing Blessing**

May God, the father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the source of all goodness and growth, pour his blessing upon you all things created, and upon you, his children, that you may use them to his glory and the welfare of all peoples. Amen.

## Items for Reflection and Discussion

*Read Exodus 8:6-14*

1. Dependence on God and respect for His laws and His creation are a fundamental part of the establishment of the Israelites in Canaan. Failure to do so was not only a moral disaster but an environmental one too. How can we as Christians bring biblical values into our own thinking and action on climate change and environmental issues?
2. The current climate crisis had been put down directly to climate change caused by human activity. Governments are trying to come together to address the problem. Are you pessimistic or optimistic about the outcome of efforts to curb global warming? On what do you base your hopes and fears? Where can the Gospel be transformative in this situation?
3. Knowing that when Jesus returns, he is going to sort out creation issues, what should our role be as God's people today in promoting care for God's creation?