

**The Heart of God//Justice from Genesis to Revelation**  
**Part Three – God of All Creation**

**September 22, 2024**  
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**Genesis 1:26-28; 2:15**

The big idea: To love God means loving what God loves, and God loves the world he made.

We all “read the world” around us out through a grid that relates to the questions:

- **Where do we come from?** And Who are we? Like, what does it mean to be human?
- **What’s wrong with the world?** Like, why do we hurt? Why does the world around us hurt?
- **What’s the solution?**
- **Where is history heading?** Is there a “destination” – a *telos*, an ‘end goal’ – that history is heading toward?

These questions are usually called our “worldview.” And how we function in the world will be deeply impacted by how we answer each of these.

**I. Where do we come from? Who are we?**

Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”

So, God created mankind in his own image,  
in the image of God he created them;  
male and female he created them.

God blessed them 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 on the ground.” – Genesis 1:26-28

The “image of God” also is about the responsibility. It is a task to “rule,” to reflect God’s priorities to the rest of creation. A bit like a house-sitter.

We have a problem!

In 1967 in the journal *Science*, Lynn White Jr. wrote a hugely influential essay called “The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis.”

He laid the responsibility for the state of the environment, in large part, at the doors of the church. Referring to a “Christian arrogance toward nature,” he proposed that the ecological crisis wouldn’t abate “until we reject the Christian axiom that nature has no reason for existence save to serve man.”

He argues that the text of Genesis 1, that tells us that humans are to have “dominion” over the earth is understood as meaning: “God made the earth *for us* to use to our own benefit.” Essentially, the Christian view is “anthropocentric”, meaning, humans are at the centre of the story. Is that true?

We can admit: many Christians have thought so. The story goes:

“Well, we know that human sin has corrupted the world, so maybe God’s plans have changed – like, now he’s *just* in the business of saving souls? So why care about ecology, why worry about acid rain, or the pollution of lakes and rivers, or climate change, because Jesus is coming back soon, and will whisk humans away to some ‘other-worldly’ heaven; and this world will just burn up anyway.”

As one scholar summarizes this view: “Why wallpaper the house today when it’s going to be knocked down tomorrow?” – *N.T. Wright*

T.S. Elliot says it right: “A wrong attitude towards nature implies, somewhere, a wrong attitude towards God.”

### **Understanding “Rule” and “Dominion”**

The word for “rule” or “have dominion” (Hebrew: *radah*) does imply “mastery,” like learning to ride a horse. It’s wisely managing the resources for the sake of the whole created order – representing the true owner, God.

What this means is clear from Genesis 2:15:

“The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.”

**Work it** – implies developing its potential.

**Care for it** – that implies managing in a way that respects what God made within appropriate bounds.

## **II. What has gone wrong?**

One of the most influential environmentalist activists of the past few decades is Gus Speth, former dean of the School of Forestry and Environmental Studies at Yale University and a senior environmental adviser to the US government. A man of no religious faith as far as anyone is aware, Speth offers a fascinating diagnosis.

Though he once thought that decades of “good science” could address the most urgent environmental problems, including ecosystem collapse and climate change, his wizened opinion had changed.

“He [Gus Speth] proposed that the critical “environmental problems are selfishness, greed, and apathy”—cultural and spiritual underpinnings that science alone can’t tackle. – Andy Banister

That’s exactly the way the Bible answers the question. Sin is ultimately about “selfishness, greed, and apathy” a lack of love for God and what God made and loves.

Throughout the scripture we see what happens when humans live out of sync with God – with this call to “image” him well. **When wickedness rules, creation unravels.**

- a. The first major ‘judgment’ of God on human sin? **The flood** – a scene of creation coming undone.
- b. In **the Exodus**, we see God’s judgement of Egypt in the 10-plagues. What do we see? Creation is in chaos – hail, darkness, frogs overrunning their natural habitat, the river turned to blood.
- c. In the showdown between the feckless king **Ahab and the prophet Elijah** – between the false-god of rain, Baal, and the true God of Israel, Yahweh – God shuts up the sky from raining for three years.
- d. In Revelation, using symbolic language and images that swamp all our categories, John describes creation undergoing plagues, and anti-creation, much like the Exodus story.

Then we read in Revelation 11:18b. “The time has come,” say those elders gathered around God’s throne, “for judging the dead, and for rewarding your servants the prophets – and your people who revere your name, both great and small – *and for destroying those who destroy the earth.*”

The just judgement of the Living God includes justice *for the earth* he made and loves. And that includes accountability for those who destroy the earth. Human sinfulness breaks relational wholeness at every level. Between us and God, us and each other, our own selves, and the rest of creation.

### III. What’s the solution?

Andy Banister concludes with this:

“But the Bible does know how to transform hearts and minds. It tells the story of what God has done, in and through Jesus, to deal with the damage that sin has wrought to us and to creation. The cross is God’s answer both to the damage in our hearts and the damage in creation.” – *Andy Banister*

“For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him [in Jesus], and through him to reconcile to himself **all things**, whether things **on earth** or things **in heaven** by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.” – Colossians 1:19-20

Jesus’ redemptive work encompasses the whole of the cosmos.

“For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed.” – Romans 8:19

Creation is waiting to “...be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.” – Romans 8:21

“Glory means, among other things, rule and power and authority. Part of the point of God’s saving his people is that they are destined not merely to enjoy a relaxing endless vacation in a place called heaven, but that they are designed to be God’s stewards, ruling over the whole creation with healing and restorative justice and love.” – *N.T. Wright*

“This Is My Father’s World,” by Maltbie Babcock:

*This is my Father’s world: Oh, let me ne’er forget  
That though the wrong seems oft so strong,  
God is the ruler yet.*

*This is my Father's world. The battle is not done:  
Jesus who died shall be satisfied,  
And earth and heaven be one.*

#### **IV. Where is History Heading?**

**“And earth and heaven be one.”** That’s the image that we have in Genesis – earth, the dwelling of humans – and ‘heaven’, the dwelling place of God – reunited; ‘overlapping.’

God “walked” with the humans in the garden of Eden. God’s space, and human space, were completely overlapping.

Sin tore that asunder, but Jesus comes to us as fully God and fully human, bringing those back together. And through Jesus’ cross and resurrection, we are anticipating that ‘overlap’ of heaven and earth once again.

Revelation 21:2: “I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them.”

The Bible’s notion of salvation is not saving souls to send to a disembodied, other-worldly place. It is being with God in perfect peace forever, where God comes to dwell with us in this world that God made and loves, reborn, somehow remade, but nonetheless, *this world* remade.

**What is the nature of Christian hope?** It’s to experience real transformation of our real bodies, and live on this real, renewed earth. The whole creation is groaning for it to be so.

**Jesus’ own resurrection body** is best picture we have of that. Remember, when Jesus is raised again, he is in the same body. He has the scars to prove it.

**Objection:** What about 2 Peter 3:10?

“But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare.” - 2 Peter 3:10

“Fire” is very often used in the Bible as a metaphor to speak of “purifying”; a way to remove what doesn’t belong. Like, a “refiner’s fire.” Everything that does not belong in God’s good creation is judged for what it is and removed. Evil, sin, injustice, gone forever to make way the world “where righteousness dwells,” as Peter concludes.

“Our story does not end in annihilation and destruction but in restoration grounded in resurrection. We are singing from a different song sheet, not in a minor key, but in a triumphant key that points with certain hope to the one who is both the creator and the redeemer of all.” – *Ian K. Smith*

**Our hope for the future shapes how we live in the present.**

We “live into” the future, embodying the kingdom now as a signpost of the world to come. How could this not be true of our care for world God made and God loves?

As Psalm 24:1 says, “The earth is the *Lord’s*, and everything in it.”

**The stewardship mandate of Genesis 2 has never been rescinded.** Let me say that again: humans still have the call to care for God’s good world.

## **V. *Some Implication***

### **1. Christians need to engage in research into sustainability and environmental policy.**

Some Christian people, in response to God’s call on their lives, would be deeply invested in the environmental sciences that inform best practices. It does mean engaging at the policy level in the political sphere, but with that distinctly Christian bent.

### **2. Creation-Care Bears Witness to the Hope of the Gospel**

Many people in our world *do care* deeply about the environment, and how the environment relates to other areas that impact human flourishing too – like food security or making sure that those who are poor are not suffering the effects of pollution because of where they can afford to live.

Christianity speaks directly to this. The Good News of Jesus is better news than our neighbours realized.

- a. Christianity has *good reason* to care about the environment, and how environmental policy impacts humans and non-human creatures too.** Many of co-workers who care about the world and about others, maybe don’t have a good a theoretical foundation to do so. We do. God calls us to this. So...
- b. Christianity says that *the world has value and purpose* because it was made by the one true God, who loves the world and values what he has made.** Our view of environmental justice – about treating the natural world with the care it deserves – is not based on a story that can be changed but is based on God’s valuation of his world as “very good.”
- c. Christianity says *God has a good plan for all his creation, not just humans* – that the Gospel of Jesus Christ extends to the whole of creation experiencing liberation and healing.**
- d. Christianity says that *the bodily resurrection of Jesus is the beginning of God’s new creation* and gives us a foretaste of what lies ahead for those who trust in God – real, bodily resurrection, on a real, physical “new heavens and earth.”**

The hope of the Gospel is the very hope that our friends and co-workers are longing for. And when we share the true story the Bible offers, the Christian Gospel becomes incredibly attractive. By sharing God’s heart for the created world, we are pointing our friends toward the God who their hearts were made to know and love.

### 3. We make meaningful changes to how we think about and use natural resources.

Jesus and his followers collect all the leftover food after he miraculously feeds the five thousand. This is an example of careful resource use.

Jesus prays in thanksgiving before he breaks bread for meals. This demonstrates a thankfulness for all God gives and doesn't take for granted the God is the one who sustains our life through the natural world.

I love the title of a chapter by N.T. Wright in his book *Surprised by Scripture*. He calls it: "Jesus is coming – plant a tree!" This may sound like a paradox until we understand the creation mandate, and when we see that God is making all things new – we lean into that coming future. So, we do plant those trees. We find ways to care for the world God made and loves even as we pray for and anticipate Jesus' return.

### 4. Go for a walk.

What speed does God move at? About 5 – 5 kilometers an hour.

"Then the man and his wife hear the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day..." – Genesis 3:8.

Of all the possible ways God could move through his world, we read that he *walks*.

When the resurrected Jesus wants to reveal himself as God's Messiah to two heartbroken travelers, he meets them on a road and walks with them – a time for discussion and thought (Luke 24).

"[Walking] is the gait best suited to paying attention, most conservative of land and equipment, and most permissive of stopping to look or think. Machines, companies, and politicians "run." Farmers studying their fields travel at a walk." — *Wendell Berry*

Just *be* in nature...slowly. Breathe some fresh air. Go sniff a tree. Walking can be a profound practice that is not just good for our bodies, and brains, but also our prayer life. It's a way to learn to more deeply value what God values.

### 5. Let the beauty of creation lead you to worship our Creator God.

*Earth's crammed with heaven  
And every common bush afire with God;  
But only he who sees takes off his shoes,  
The rest sit around and pluck blackberries.*

– Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Would you look, and see? Would you lift your eyes and recognize the One who is holding all things together and simply respond in worship to your Creator, Sustainer and Redeemer?

How we live out of our God-given, human vocation, and how we live into the future hope – that's a matter of worship. Of glorifying God. How will you respond today?

## Life Group Discussion and Reflection:

### Open Up

Do you find it easy or difficult to think about, or have conversations with friends and neighbours about environmental stewardship? Why might that be?

*(I can imagine some might describe: 1) how politicized or polarizing opinions can be on the topic; 2) a sense of "I'm not doing enough, so I don't want to think about it," and perhaps 3) general confusion about how to think Christianly and Biblically about it).*

### Dig In

1. Read **Genesis 1:26-2:1 and 2:15**: How have you typically read and understood these texts? How did the major themes of the message help you reimagine what stewardship might mean?
2. Romans 8:21 says that creation is waiting to "...be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God."

"Glory means, among other things, rule and power and authority. Part of the point of God's saving his people is that they are destined not merely to enjoy a relaxing endless vacation in a place called heaven, but that they are designed to be God's stewards, ruling over the whole creation with healing and restorative justice and love." – N.T. Wright, *Surprised by Scripture*

Why is this view of God's good future "good news" to you?

### Take It Home

3. Psalm 24:1 declares: "The earth is the *Lord's*, and everything in it." This is neither an "anthropocentric" view (humans-at-the-centre) of the earth. Nor, as many non-Christian environmentalists will argue for, a "biocentric" view (all creatures are equal in dignity and worth – i.e. A human baby is no more valuable than a kitten). It is a thoroughly "theocentric" view of creation (God is the centre of it all). How does understanding that the earth is not ours but God's, motivate how you do/want to approach environmental stewardship? What might that practically mean for you this week/year?
4. In the message, Pastor Dave suggested that "Creation-Care Bears Witness to the Gospel." What do you think of that idea? (see the notes above for more details). How might learning to articulate and demonstrate a Christian view of the environment make this truthful reading of the Gospel attractive to your neighbours/co-workers?
5. Pastor Dave also suggested that we simply spend time in God's creation to cultivate a deeper love for God's world, and to be a means of giving God glory and praise. How can you deepen that kind of practice this week?

**Pray:** Take time to give thanks to God as our Creator, Sustainer, Redeemer, and Loving Leader. Ask God to meet the real needs of your group and ask for God's grace in learning to give yourself to caring for what he cares about.