

Sermon Series: Creation Care



#3 The Gospel & Creation Care? Isa. 52:3-10; Rom. 10:9-17

When is the last time you received good news? A promotion? A big tax return? A new baby born? A negative covid test, perhaps? **We love to hear good news.**



But let me ask you: **Do you think the Gospel is 'good news' for our planet?**

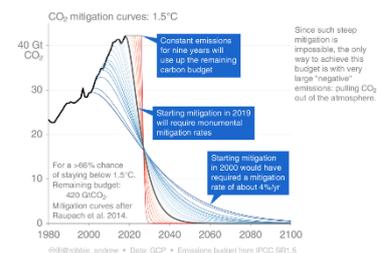
'Bad news' from the scientists

We hear plenty of **'bad news'** right now about the future of our planet. Even the usually humble science community is becoming outspoken with **bad news.**

For example, on Earth Day last week, **three eminent climate scientists**¹ with a collective 80 years of experience in climate change research, spoke out with a dire **warning to world leaders.**²



All three pointed out the **flaws** in aiming for 'net zero' CO2 emissions by combining renewables with carbon capture storage (CCS) technology. They claim that without urgent radical reduction in our reliance on high emission energy sources (such as gas and coal) we will not reverse the rising average temperatures on the face of the earth. This tolls a bell for **pending disaster.**



Prof. James Dyke, University of Exeter, admits that for himself...

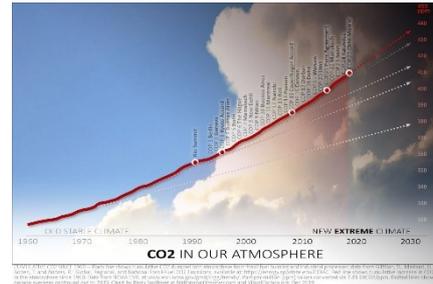
“Over the years doubt has developed into dread... I freely admit a sense of panic. How did we get this so wrong? What are our children supposed to think about the way we have acted?”

Dr. Wolfgang Knorr of Lund University sorrowfully admits that his own calculations, adopted years ago by governments around the world, had grossly underestimated our capacity to compensate for human-made CO2 emissions.

¹ James Dyke, University of Exeter | Robert Watson, University of East Anglia | Wolfgang Knorr, Lund University

² In an article published on line for The Conversation April 22, 2021

The **bad news** is that **yet-to-be-developed** CCS technologies will not suffice. Unilateral reductions in fossil fuel CO2 emissions is required **now!**



God’s Good News is also for the planet



Some will say, as our Prime Minister did this week, that people like you and me chatting in cafes and wine bars won’t solve our climate problems. They may also say pulpits are **not the place** to offer solutions for the climate change either. Yet, we know that the Bible presents what God **has done for us** in Christ as “good news”, the “Gospel” of God **for all** the world, why not also for the planet?

The prophets of ancient times, like the climate scientists today, often had to declare **bad news**. But prophets of old also held in their hands **the good news** of God for each crisis at hand. Isaiah chapter 52 for example, reads:

⁷ How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, **who brings good news**, who announces salvation, who says to Zion, “Your God reigns.” ⁸ Listen! Your sentinels lift up their voices, together they sing for joy; for in plain sight they see the return of the LORD to Zion.

⁹ Break forth together into singing, you ruins of Jerusalem; for the LORD has comforted his people, God has redeemed Jerusalem.

¹⁰ The LORD has bared his holy arm before the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.

The Apostles of Christ looked back to Isaiah’s **good news** to exiled Israel as foretelling a **greater salvation to come** through the messiah God would send **for all the nations**. It’s interesting that the Apostle Paul drew **directly on this Isaiah text** when speaking of the good news the Church proclaims to the world. In Romans 10...

¹³ For, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” ¹⁴ But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? ¹⁵ And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent? As it is written, “**How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!**”

Our church has apostolic foundations. In the footsteps of Paul and the other apostles, evangelism is **in our DNA**. But does this good news we share **extend to our climate crisis?**

We often **define the good news** of the gospel **too narrowly**. Consider this alternatively broad view of the “good news” from author John Oswalt regarding what is forecast in Isaiah’s prophecy. He describes it as...

“...a condition where all things are in their proper relation to each other, with nothing left hanging, incomplete, or unfulfilled (peace, shalom); ...a condition where creation purposes are realized (good); ...a condition of freedom from every bondage, but particularly bondage resulting from sin (salvation).”

Lest we think Jesus came **just to save souls** in a mystical sense, the Apostle Paul argued over and over that the word “gospel” means “**all that God has done in Christ for us**”. The scope of Paul’s understanding of the word “gospel”, like the “good news” of Isaiah long before, **extends beyond immediate experiences of love and grace to reconciliation of whole of creation to God!**

What, then, should we include in our proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus so that it clearly offers good news to people for **our shared our climate crisis?**

- We’ve seen in this sermon series how the Bible tells of our intended purpose as “**keepers**” and **carers** of God’s creation.
- We’ve also seen how the end game in the Bible’s vision for the world is one of a **renewed creation**, not an escape from the physical world.

As well as addressing our **identity** and our **destiny**, the bible deeply impacts upon our **ethos** – our **daily living**. If the scope of the good news we believe in **includes all creation**³, then living for the love of others as Christ calls us to do may be **exactly what the planet needs right now!**

In Philippians 1 the Apostle Paul calls Christians to live “in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ” (vs. 27). That is, to **conduct our lives** in keeping with what God has **done for us** in and through Christ. Here’s **two suggestions** from me about the Gospel and creation care:

³ E.g. see Romans 8:18-23

1. **Let the Gospel help you to see the world as it really is** (Rom. 12:2)
Alistair McGrath says, “The gospel **transforms our view of reality**, enabling us to see things as **they really are.**” We should seek God to renew our minds and to see how we can and must live differently in the light of Christ.

McGrath goes on to say, Lyn White is right to say that...

“...self-centeredness is the **root of our ecological crisis**, but quite wrong when he asserts that Christianity is the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen. The most self-centred religion in history is [secularism]...whose roots lie in the Enlightenment of the 18th Century and whose foundation belief is that humanity is the arbiter of all ideas and values.”

In Romans chapter 12 Paul calls Christians to **renew their minds**. We know that the Gospel of Jesus helps us to **see our own failings**. With renewed eyes and minds God’s good news also helps us to see ourselves **as those being restored**. The Gospel helps us to **see ourselves anew as caring stewards** of the world we live in - the world which God sustains, cares for, and intends to redeem and renew (Romans 8:18-23).

2. Secondly, **let the Gospel help you to live for others** (Rom. 12:16,18)

Getting people of the earth to **act sacrificially** for the sake of others is, in my view, **the single most important challenge** for climate action today. This is why I believe the Gospel of Jesus is **important for the planet**. Jesus’ calls us to **love one another as we love ourselves**. And the call comes with the offer of **inner power** to overturn self-centredness and to install a love that gives to others without regard for reward. In Romans 12 Paul urges Christians to “live in harmony with one another” and says, “so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.” Surely this includes love for those most in danger from climate change, without discrimination or favour.

Let me conclude with two quotes, one regarding the “bad news” around us today about our climate’s future, and one regarding the “good news” of Jesus.

- Regarding the **bad news**, Douglas Moo says, “Christians should seek the best information about the earth over which humans have been appointed stewards”. Let’s get better informed as part of renewing our minds and seeing clearly our situation.
- Regarding the **good news**, I like this quote from US climate scientist Katherine Hayhoe, who says, “I’m more convinced now than ever that the two most central parts of my identity — that of climate scientist and evangelical Christian — aren’t incompatible. They drive what makes me who I am, and how I shall live.” Let’s bring together as one our connectedness to the earth and our daily discipleship following Jesus.