



An Inconvenient Truth

Sermon – Trevor Ackman

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Psalm 8, Luke 12:13-21, 2 Peter 3:3-14

We live in a beautiful place. It's hard not to be moved as you look at a glorious sunrise, or sense the power of the ocean crashing over rocks at Surf or Jones' Beach or tremble as a huge storm sweeps over the land.

In Psalm 8 you can imagine David being overcome as he stares up at a cloudless night sky. Wow, God! You are amazing!

How majestic is your name in all the earth. When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers...

Did you notice that nice little touch? Creation is so effortless; it's like God just has to move his little finger and it is done!

No wonder he feels small and insignificant. And yet... possibly as he looks at the sheep grazing around him, so dependent on him, he starts to wonder...

God, why do you bother with people?

What is it that makes us so special?

Yet, you've made us a little lower than the angels. You've made us rulers over all the animals - these sheep and the wild animals, the fish in the sea and the birds in the air.

Wow, God! I don't really get it, but... Wow!

That's my translation for God, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

Nature can do that... make us feel really small... and yet somehow special as we realise how unique we are. I mean, look at all we can do. We think logically, plan for the future,

build things, exercise some sort of control over our environment.

The idea of man being special has its roots back in Genesis 1 and 2. Unlike the rest of creation, men and women were made in the image of God. He blessed them and, unlike any other creatures, gave them a special responsibility - **fill the earth and subdue it. (1:28)** Subdue = ‘care for’ and ‘manage’ the world God has made. This becomes more specific in the Garden of Eden where they are told to **work and take care of it (2:15)** – which means tend it, cultivate it, even serve it.

You won’t find the words ‘nature’ or ‘environment’ in the Bible. That’s because there is no ‘Nature’ that is separate or distinct from people. Our dominion over creation does not mean we control or somehow stand outside nature. We are all part of God’s good creation and everything is intimately interconnected. That’s why species loss is not only tragic but has ongoing consequences. If shark numbers decline, fewer fish are eaten so they eat more plankton which can’t reproduce fast enough, causing more fish to die, which increases the growth of algae and bacteria which prevents plants from photosynthesising causing everything to die. If you remember the Lion King movie... it’s the Circle of Life in reverse. The wonders of creation, with all its diversity, beauty and power, is meant to encourage worship of the creator as seen in Psalm 8. **Wow, God! You made all this. You are amazing!**

But a new world view has gradually taken hold. As modern science discovers the order and complexity of our world, we’ve confused knowledge with power. Many no longer worship the Creator God, but some inanimate force they fondly refer to as ‘Mother nature’. Our status has also changed - from caretaker to manipulator. Mankind’s role is to discover

how nature works so we can exploit it for our benefit. Think genetically modified foods, artificial fertilisers and coal seam gas fracking. A new arrogance has also evolved. There are no problems we cannot solve. If there is no God then an issue like climate change is simply a miscalculation, a small blimp in our ongoing domination of all things, which human ingenuity and technology will eventually solve.

I realise that is quite a bleak portrayal. However, recent history abounds with problems caused by manipulation of our environment. Christians have generally been slow to jump onto the ecological bandwagon. This has allowed people who do not acknowledge God, but who care deeply about nature, to articulate their ‘theology of mother nature’. If nature exists solely for the benefit of humanity and is waiting passively for us to conquer her riches, then a personal God, who might interfere in the process... who might demand accountability for our actions... is a nuisance and an impediment to progress.

Since at least the 1980s scientists have been warning of the danger of greenhouse gases. The first World COP (Conference of the Parties) which sought to control man made global warming was held in Toronto in 1988. There have been no less than seven COPs since then culminating in Glasgow last year. The common thread in all these world conferences was the need for progressively greater cuts to greenhouse gas emissions – and the sad admission that past broken promises are getting us nowhere.

For only the second time in history, we are facing the prospect that human action could destroy life on earth, as we know it. However, the first occasion required a deliberate choice by a few powerful individuals, who thankfully decided mutual nuclear destruction was not a good way to go. But this time we may not have a choice.

Here's the kicker. The world could have met their 1988 Toronto goals with a 2% cut each year. Instead, nearly half of all greenhouse gas mankind has pumped into the atmosphere has happened since that conference.

Only a few years ago, climate change was just another of those bizarre conspiracy theories. Now those 'dire forecasts' have become everyday events. I wonder how many climate change deniers you still know? I suspect very few!

We shouldn't be surprised how much sin has harmed our world. If self interest is our guiding principle and this life is all we have to look forward to, why should we care about nature, except to exploit it? Climate change should humble us by showing us we are not invincible. But don't expect society to change. Rather, we should expect people to continue acting in their own selfish interests, even if that means turning back the boats of refugees whose land and livelihood is being destroyed by global warming... or discounting other people's suffering lest we jeopardise our precious standard of living.

My aim is not to tell you **what** you should do. Although we certainly need to redress the latest finding that Australia's natural environment is **“poor - AND has deteriorated significantly in the last five years”**.

Not WHAT to do but some principles to work out a Christian perspective? Or in terms of our overall theme: How does grace guide our response to environmental issues?

I begin with what I call 'an inconvenient truth'.

Our world is doomed. That is the inconvenient truth we have to get our heads around. This planet on which we live is temporary. One day it will be destroyed. 2 Peter 3:10:

On the day of the Lord, the heavens will disappear with a roar, the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.

You may have noticed in the Bible study notes there are a couple of potential interpretations of the end. I personally think it means God will literally destroy our broken world and create a new one. He could, however, simply restore creation to its original state... a bit like reinstalling your computer's operating system to its factory default. Either way, God will overcome all the damage done in our world. So the state of our planet immediately before Jesus returns is irrelevant. Furthermore, the scientists are wrong when they predict human activity could destroy our planet. God will do it. If he chooses to use climate change as his tool, so be it. Although I suspect the end will come suddenly, when Jesus appears, rather than the slow, suffocating dystopia envisaged by global warming.

I suspect news of the earth's pending destruction might not be well received by supporters of mother nature. So let's look at what Peter has to say about it V3:

In the last days scoffers will come...4. They will say, where is this coming he promised?

Peter is writing to comfort Christians who are being ridiculed for believing Jesus will return. Have a look at the evidence for this criticism.

...everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation.

There is a very contemporary feel to that argument. We don't need to believe in God. **Everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation!** Even if God once existed, he's no

longer relevant or necessary. Man is in control now. We've got this!

Notice how Peter responds in v.5:

They deliberately forget that long ago by God's word the heavens came into being and the earth was formed out of water and by water

It's a clear reference to Genesis 1:1,2

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

Peter reminds us, this is God's world. He created us and everything in it, out of nothing... and one day Jesus will return to judge the ungodly... and by the way, that will also mean the destruction of the world.

And he even tells us why God seems to be taking so long in V9:

The lord is not slow in keeping his promise... he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish but everyone to come to repentance.

Judgment is coming. Don't lose heart. The delay shows God's continuing grace towards us. He's holding back the end so more people have the chance to become Christians.

Once you see things from God's perspective, the news that our world is destined for destruction is not necessarily bad. In fact, it can be quite a relief to realise our fate is not tied to the survival of this broken planet. God will create a new heaven and a new earth where all those who have accepted his gracious gift of salvation, will dwell with him, in perfect harmony, forever.

However, that doesn't tell us much about how to respond to environmental issues. If God is going to destroy the earth, does it really matter what we do? Peter answers that too in V11:

Since everything will be destroyed...what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives.

We deal with temporary things all the time. Think about your home, car, even the food you will eat today. None of these will last. Everything will fade away. So, why do we look after them? Because even temporary things have value. A holy and godly life requires us to examine our motives... be a good steward... give your house, car, meals the respect they deserve, but don't inflate their importance. In the same way, we are called to be good stewards of God's creation, to **work it and take care of it (Gen 2:15)**, even though it too will pass away.

A Christian ecology begins with gratitude to God for making this world and graciously entrusting it to our fallible care. Respond as you would if you've enjoyed a nice meal at a friend's home! It's not the meal that is important, but the warm, nurturing relationship you have with your friend. We honour God by treating his creation with integrity. What does that look like? I have no idea. But God does! Like everything else in the Christian life, it all comes down to God. It was his grace that saved us and his grace will empower us...

...to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. (Eph 2:10)

Or as Greg so aptly explained it a couple of weeks ago:

The grace that gets us in is the grace that moves us forward.

President Roosevelt was meeting with his advisers late into the night. At the conclusion he surprised everyone by suggesting they go into the Rose Garden to look at the stars before bed. After several minutes of staring at the millions of tiny lights shining down on them the President announced, “All right. I think we feel small enough now to go to sleep.”

Let me conclude with a second inconvenient truth. Our treatment of the environment is not a gospel issue. A sustainable lifestyle won't make you right with God. Neither will it convict unbelievers to accept Jesus. The way to overcome the harm caused by man thinking he is at the centre of the universe is not to dethrone man and replace him by mother nature. Rather it is to acknowledge that God is on the throne and always has been.



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