

Sermon Series: Creation Care



#1 Why Creation Care Psalm 8

When our church recently joined with the Australian Religious Response to Climate Change (ARRCC), some of its members reacted with surprise. “We didn’t think Christians were interested in climate action?” they said.



How does that make you feel, as a Christian? As a church?

To some, the Church looks completely out-of-place in the climate-action scene!



Not only might we **look out-of-place**, we might also **look late on the scene**. Either way, we must **make sure don’t pretend to be the superhero** come to the rescue when we arrive. After all, Western Christianity is thought by many to be **complicit** in the causes of our climate crisis.

For example, in a famous 20th Century essay, **American historian Lynn White Jr.** labelled Christianity in the West as “the most **anthropocentric** religion the world has ever seen.” Like John Gray in the UK recently, White **linked** pollution, global warming, and widespread species extinction to Christianity.



In defence of the Church in the modern era, Christians have argued loudly for climate action since the early 20th Century.

Wilderness preservation pioneer, Aldo **Leopold**, and Marine Biologist Rachel **Carter**, both initiated significant **movements** separately for **climate action**.



For Evangelicals, **Francis Schaeffer’s** book, *Pollution and the Death of Man*, in 1973, stimulated **widespread biblical discussion** about Gospel-driven preservation of the planet.



More recently, we've been learning more about creation care from **aboriginal Christians** such as Brooke **Prentis** and Gary **Deverell**.

Nevertheless, perception is 9/10ths of truth today, and many of our neighbours may need to **be convinced** that we Christians believe God's salvation extends to the **cosmos**, not just the Church. We know that, as John's Gospel puts it, Jesus came into the world, not to condemn the world, but to **save** it (Jn. 3:17). But **can we articulate** this to our friends? To ourselves?

Enter, **this new sermon series: Creation Care**. "Creation" because we are committed to the **Bible's view** of our origins and identity. "Care" because we are led by the **Bible's ethics** and directed by its hope for our shared **destiny**.¹

Today, I'll just briefly address the question, **"Why care for God's creation?"**

1. Firstly, **climate degradation** is a **global existential concern**. It impacts, all peoples, and all creatures of the earth.

Our congregation is **not new** to our **climate emergency**. Many of our members have been thoughtful and active in this space for a long time.

We should also note that **Western modernity**, and not the Church per se, is more correctly to blame for this crisis. Yet, if honest, we know the Bible has often been used to **justify exploitative behaviour**. We know too that the Church seems slow to respond. Only recently (2015), for example, 17 Anglican bishops called on Anglican leaders worldwide to **remove their financial investments** from the fossil fuel companies that drive climate change.

Meanwhile, marches for climate action regularly take place today in all nations. Young people, most of whom are not Christians, plead with the world to act. Such a global existential concern should move us to ask what **the Gospel of Jesus has to offer** to this challenge in our time. That's the first "why?"

2. Why should we care for God's creation? Well, secondly, because the **scientific evidence for our mistreatment of it is compelling**.

Global warming, rising sea levels, increasing frequency of catastrophic weather events and rapidly disappearing species of the earth's creatures are **undeniably** linked to human behaviour. We must remember that skilled

¹ I wish to acknowledge the excellent book and lectures by Douglas and Stuart Moo under this same title

scientific research and development has long been considered by the Church as a blessing under the **providence of God**. If we are called to **love others as we do ourselves**, it must consider how our lifestyle impacts our neighbour.

We should **listen to the science** and should include its wisdom in our consideration of Scripture. We should give thanks for it in our prayers.

3. Thirdly, Christians should regard “creation care” as important because it is **part of the revelation of Who God is, and who we are**. In other words, our understanding of the Bible **should motivate** us to **care** for **God’s creation**.

When asked **what the Bible has to say** on the matter, many Christians would, I think, **struggle** to have an answer. Hence, this series of sermons to come.

Today, we need a good starting point (or refreshment station). Our reading from **Psalm 8** offers a **simple life-hack** for creation care.

The Psalmist (King David of Israel, see vs. 1) delivers a **poetic expression of wonder** about God and the universe. In **verses 3-4** we read,

When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them? (Psalm 8:3-4)

David did something **each of us can do**. He **gazed at the night sky** and was in awe of the work of God’s “fingers”. He could not **but question** how human beings could matter to God amidst such **beauty** and **complexity**.

Other Psalms speak of how creation displays **God’s greatness**. E.g...

- **Psalm 97** tells us “The heavens proclaim God’s righteousness...” (vs. 6).
- **Psalm 104** surveys all of creation and exclaims: “O Lord, you are very great...” (vs. 1)²

That alone should motivate us to creation care.

But Psalm 8 reveals **another motivation**. David sees himself in light of the night sky **with a right and humble perspective**. He comprehends his smallness, yes, but more importantly, he imagines **how much a part** of the **fabric of the cosmos** he is; his connectedness.

² There are limits to what the world around us tells us specifically about God. We need the revelation of God in Christ for that. But the Bible consistently teaches that creation points to God’s goodness, glory and greatness.

Author **Douglas Moo**, writing about humanity in the light of Scripture, says...

“The discovery that we share 96% of our DNA with chimpanzees, that in every physical respect we are no different from other animals, and that in fact our lives are so dependent upon and entwined with the rest of creation that even our bodies would not function without the other organisms that make them their home (e.g. our humble gut bacteria) should hardly [surprise or concern readers of the Bible]. Scripture has always taught,” says Moo, “that we stand firmly on the “creature” side of the Creator/creation divide.”

As a starting point³ for creation care I want to encourage you to **make time to gaze upon God’s creation** and gain **perspective**, to realize your **creatureliness!** This is an important step in the **motivation** to care for God’s creation.

Being a city-slicker all my life, getting out into the wilderness is all too rare. Gazing at the stars as David did is also difficult under our **street light canopy**. I find myself in what you might call a “**built**” **environment** most of the time.

Instead, one thing Penne and I like to do is **to zoom in** on God’s creation wherever we are. Being a keen photographer, Penne literally zooms in on the **detail, complexity, beauty** and **variety** of what God has made wherever we go.

One place we like to go, for example, is the Royal Botanic Gardens and to the **herb garden** within it.



Each garden-bed is like a **micro-universe**. We take in the colours, the smells, the textures, the diversity, the complexity. We talk about the eco-system and nutrients and gardening skills that must lie behind the beauty at hand.

Gazing at God’s creation, whether **zoomed out** in a vast skyscape or **zoomed in** via a single flower; whether **forest-bathing** or **deep-sea diving**, whether seated on a park bench or investigating through a microscope helps us to **rightly marvel** at God’s greatness and to humbly consider our **connectedness**. This is a good place to begin or to refresh a commitment to **creation care**.

³ Or refreshment station

Our own **church site** offers this opportunity every time we visit. In May of this year we also have organised some **guided tours** of very special gardens that are created to help people engage their spiritual senses to this same end.



Where can **you** go this week to gaze upon God’s creation; to start this journey with me, or to refresh your commitment to **creation care**?

With Psalm 89, why not join the biblical chorus which declares:

“Let the heavens praise your wonders, O Lord... The heavens are Yours, the earth also is Yours; the world and all that is in it—you have founded them” (Psalm 89:5,11).

Surely this is **motivation enough** for creation care.