

Hebrews 1:1-4 – Caring for God’s creation

1. The present reality

We live in a vastly populated world.

<< Illus’n – flying over the world – the comment made – about lights being everywhere >>

The increase in the global population has had a dramatic impact on climate change.

According to the federal government website on climate change:

“Our climate is changing, largely due to the observed increases in human activities such as the burning of fossil fuels (coal, oil, and natural gas), agriculture and land clearing. Changes over the 20th century include increases in global average air and ocean temperature, widespread melting of snow and ice and rising global sea levels. The extra heat in the climate system has other impacts such as affecting atmospheric and ocean circulation, which influences rainfall and wind patterns.”

“Another serious impact of the increasing concentration of atmospheric carbon dioxide is ocean acidification. Around a quarter of the carbon dioxide produced by humans is absorbed by the oceans. As the carbon dioxide dissolves in sea water it forms a weak carbonic acid, making the ocean more acidic. There are early indications that some marine organisms are already being affected by ocean acidification.”

“The global average air temperature has increased by around 0.85 degrees Celsius since 1880. The observed increase in temperatures has occurred across the globe, with rising temperatures recorded on all continents and in the oceans. World Meteorological Organization records show that the decade of 2001-10 was the world’s warmest decade on record, and that the 2000s were warmer than the 1990s which in turn were warmer than the 1980s. In Australia, average air temperatures have increased by around 0.9 degrees Celsius since 1910, and each decade has been warmer than the previous decade since the 1950s.

Scientists agree that the worst effects of climate change can largely be avoided if carbon dioxide emissions are reduced to an acceptable level.”

Reference - <https://www.environment.gov.au/climate-change/climate-science/understanding-climate-change>

So how are we to make sense of climate change, from a Christian perspective?

And how are we to respond to this issue, from that same Christian perspective?

2. Making sense looking back (to creation & the cross)

First, we need to look back, and in particular, look back to two very significant events.
The first is the starting point, the origin of creation.

a. Humanity as stewards of creation

Now, I'm working from the basis that God is the creator,
and there is a distinct difference between the creator and the creation.
So the pertinent point that comes out of the creation account
is relationship between humanity and creation

Specifically, Genesis 2:27-28, and the cultural mandate that God gives:

²⁷So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. ²⁸ God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth."

Humankind is placed in a very unique position, by God, in relation to the rest of the created world.
That is, we have been created 'in the image of God',
Which is unpacked in the following verses –
We are to rule over the animals, birds, and everything that has life,
In a similar manner to the way that God rules over, and sustains the universe.

Now, I think this has been misunderstood as directive to conquer and desolate, to crush and to kill.
But that breaks the connection between being the image of God and caring for creation.
That is, we are to care for the world, being placed in a unique position over the world,
In the same way that God cares for the whole of his creation.

And yet, sadly, through the impact of humanity's rejection of God,
We see also humanity's rejection of the proper care for God's creation.

b. Jesus as the true 'son of man' (Hebrews 2)

And so, as Psalm 8 reflects on humanity's unique and special place in caring for the world,
So, in Jesus Christ, we see the one human who acted in a radically different fashion.
For as the preacher to the Hebrews quotes Psalm 8, but applies it to Jesus, << Heb 2:9-10 >>

⁹but we do see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. ¹⁰It was fitting that God, for whom and through whom all things exist, in bringing many children to glory, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through sufferings."

Jesus 'tasted death for everyone', and therefore has brought many sons/children to glory.

→ Humanity's role in caring for creation

So what does this have to do with climate change?

Absolutely everything.

- i) The starting point is that we are to care for world,
in the same way that God cares for the universe.
- ii) The reality is that humanity, in general,
will seek to use and abuse the world for their own purposes
- iii) Jesus redeems us through his self-sacrificial gift of his own life
– restoring us to God, and now showing us how we can now live and act in the world.

3. Living in the present (1Peter 2:11)

There are a myriad of implications for us.

But I want to draw your attention to three implications for us the present, w.r.t climate change.

a. Anti-consumerism

First, as the apostle John writes, in 1John 2:15 – “Do not love the world or the things in the world.”

We live in a consumeristic society.

Unless you have the latest and greatest, then you’re just left behind.

However, the excesses of consumerism surround us.

For example, today it is cheaper to write off a car than it is to repair it.

It is cheaper to buy a new computer than it is to upgrade our current ones.

These examples, in and of themselves are not wrong,

but they are symptoms of an entrenched consumerism in our society.

b. Anti-oil conglomerations

Second, I was doing research for this sermon, and I knew of a graduate of Moore College,

Who was now doing his Ph.D in climate change – Byron Smith (at Paddington).

So read some of the papers that he’s written.

A number of things stuck out, but one idea was fascinating.

The idea was the divestment of oil companies.

That is, he was calling on investors, and particular Christian investors,

and in particular the Sydney Diocese and the E.o.S to divest from fossil fuels.

In a similar way to ethical investment companies invest accordingly,

So divesting in oil companies, means withdrawing stock from those oil companies.

See - <http://www.biblesociety.org.au/news/the-theology-of-climate-change-part-one>

c. Caring for those around us & the simple life

Third, caring for those around us is the flipside of loving the ‘things’ of the world less.

If we use our possessions to care for people. If we use our time to invest in eternity,

And particularly the souls of our fellow humans that last into eternity,

Then we will be expressing the love of Christ to those around us.

<< Illus’n – the “Breathe Network – UK Christian group – “less stuff, more life”

– see- breathenetwork.org

- Initiatives like – “Consumer detox” program,

- and ‘Conspiracy of Freedom” videos aimed at ‘kick starting a convo about simpler, more sustainable, more generous living” >>

4. The future shedding light on the present (Matthew 25:14-30)

Finally, as we look to the future, there are two aspects that shed light on the present.

a. The reality of the return of Jesus

The first is the reality of the return of Jesus.

We look forward to the day when our Lord and Saviour will usher in a new heavens and new earth.

A day when all the trauma that flows out of humanity's rejection of God will end.

Global warming, civil war, senseless violence, innocent lives taken by callous and wicked people.

All that will end, and God's reign will be known by all.

b. The impact on future generations

But whilst we wait for that day, we have a two-fold responsibility to future generations.

Jesus tells the parable of the talents in Matthew 25:14-30.

I'm sure that you know the story well.

The man goes on a journey, but summons his slaves to entrust his property to them.

<< Tell story >>

First and foremost, I think here,

Jesus is teaching the disciples about what has been entrusted to them.

Jesus is teaching the disciples about the kingdom of heaven, entrusted to them.

Followers of Jesus have an even greater possession than mere coins or talents.

Followers of Jesus have eternal life, itself, through the good news of Jesus Christ.

And therefore, as stewards of the gospel of Jesus, we need to invest in the kingdom of God.

And in particular, I think we need to pass on the gospel of Jesus to future generations.

But second, as God's people, who grasp the magnitude of the grace shown to us,

We need to understand the impact our actions have for future generations.

We can't simply bury our heads in the sand, or our coins in the ground.

We need to seek to act for the benefit, not of our own generation but future generations.

<< Illus'n – The Governor of the Bank of England, 29th September 2015, said this –

the current challenges of climate change 'pale in significance with what might come'

"Because the cost will fall on future generations there was little impetus on the current one to fix it"

"In other words – once climate change becomes a defining issue for financial stability, it may already be too late"

-See - = <http://www.bbc.com/news/business-34396961>>>

Therefore we need to act in two ways, to impact future generations

First, we need to reach the next generation with the good news of Jesus. << Rachel notice >>

Second, we need to take action on the matter of climate change.

5. Faithful stewards today

So how should we take action on climate change today?

What can we do, as individuals, as a church, as a group within our community?

First, individually, we can work towards reducing our own carbon foot print.

Is there a way that we can live with 'less stuff, and more life'

Chat over morning tea about what steps we can take.

Second, as a church, we already are an eco church, but we need to continue in this direction.

Old mobile phones, printer cartridges, can all go in the boxes in the foyer.

Third, and think this is the one where we need to speak out in our community,

We need to lobby the government.

We need to speak to the those with the power to legislate,

so that action is taken on a local, state and federal level.

We've reached a point where our government needs to act, so that businesses will fall in line.

We need our governments to legislate, in order for our society to change.

So we need to add our voice to the conversation in the public forum.

In whatever shape that takes.

<< e.g the letter that we wrote to the then Prime Minister, Tony Abbott ...>>

Let's pray – and ask God to work in the hearts and minds of those who govern our country.