4. (RE)CREATION: now or never

"I have learned you are never too small to make a difference. … I'm not that special. I can't convince everyone. I'm just going to do what I want to do and what will have the most impact." *Greta Thunberg*

It would be remiss of this study to ignore the voice of the young. In a report from Tearfund and Youthscape—*Burning Down The House* (2020), 9 out of 10 young people (14-19) cared deeply about climate justice *(NB the term change is not used for, as we have observed, this is also a case of injustice in the wider sense)*. Just one in ten were confident their church family is doing enough about it.

This is not about getting more young people in the church but about the church engaging in the issues that matter in our day. However, our desire to engage with this conversation will very much depend on our view of what happens to this world in the end. Should we care? Do we really need to do anything other than to make others feel better?

How high on the agenda is climate justice in your church life and your personal life? What is your understanding of what happens to creation at the end of the world? (Share honestly and don't miss the personal bit!)

In this study we consider what happens at the end of time.

We've all seen the movies about how the world will one day explode or aliens will come and blow it up! But what does God reveal through his word? Our final study explores what happens at the end of time when our world is no more. We start in Isaiah hearing the promise of a restored "Messianic Kingdom". Though the family tree of Jesse (David's father) has been reduced to a stump, God will make it grow a new branch (see Isaiah 4:2; Jeremiah 23:5; 33:15; Zechariah 3:8). The new king will be given God's spirit and we hear about the creatures in this Kingdom of peace.

Read Isaiah 11:1-9

- ❖ Who is affected by the arrival of this 'shoot'? How are things different?
- Thinking about v6-9, what do these images suggest about God's intentions for creation?
- Can you spot any echoes of Genesis 1 and 3?

Read Isaiah 65:17-25

- ❖ What similarities do you notice with Isaiah 11:1-9 and where has the vision expanded?
- Can you spot any echoes from Genesis 1-3?

- The phrase ‘a new heaven and a new earth’ expresses a vision of cosmic redemption and salvation. Whilst this study is focused on the climate issues, take a moment to note how this passage also draws in wider issues, such as social justice.
- To appreciate the fullness of this vision we have to translate it into our culture. E.g. v23: what might the world look like if everyone earned a liveable wage so they need not worry? Try translating some other themes into your context.

❖ **Read Revelation 21:1-5**

- If you’re having déjà vu reading this then that is no surprise! John uses very similar language to Isaiah. What similarities can you see and what do they tell you about the importance of a restored creation?
- The Greek word behind ‘new’ implies renewal *(NB some commentators disagree)*, and the ‘sea’ represents the threat of chaos and cosmic evil. With this in mind, how might you summarise this passage in your own words?
- One major difference between Isaiah 65:17-25 and Revelation 21:1-5 is God’s place in the narrative. What do we learn about God’s role in the new creation? Note: do we go up or does he come down?
- If you’ve time, read Genesis 2:4-3:20. What similarities/differences are there between the first and the new creation?

- Isaiah 11’s beautiful description of a redeemed creation is understood to have been ushered in with Jesus and therefore gives us a picture of the world we should be working towards. How can we play our part in the redemption of the earth without going to the other extreme and ignoring our responsibility to invite people to meet Jesus too?
- ❖ If God’s ultimate purpose for the ‘new earth’ is to restore/renew all things (rather than destroy) how should this shape our conversation as Christians around creation justice?
- Which of the promises from Revelation 21:3-4 offers you the most hope or comfort at the moment?
- How would you use this study to help someone struggling with Christians engaging in climate justice? Are there questions you’d still need to explore to be convinced this is a discipleship issue?

- As you consider all that has been covered, how will you respond — in the realms of climate justice *and* social justice?
- Take time to study the various passages again reflecting on God’s love for his creation. Others you could read include: Job 38-39; Psalm 104; Micah 6:1-8; Ezekiel 34:17-22; John 1:1-5; Revelation 22:1-5.
- ❖ Share about an area of creation that interests/wows you. Do some research. Pray for wisdom & guidance as to how you can play your part in creation care.

- Think about your every day habits. Are there any 'quick wins' you can do — sharing lifts, reviewing your energy supplier, changing support to local food suppliers vis-à-vis those importing food from afar, recycling another item, buying less…

"God's intention for the earth was not for it to be exploited but for it to have the ability to produce and sustain life for us all not just humanity." *Arthur Brown, BMS World Mission*

CONTINUE THE JOURNEY

As we come to the end of our study, take time to pray that the Lord will take this head knowledge and place it in your heart so that your hands might respond in praise to Him. We can't do everything but we can do something. What is it you will do in response to his love for the world (John 3:16)?

Here are a few more ideas for individual application and to consider as a wider church:

- **Creative Worship** Review how your church incorporates the theme of creation care into all areas of gathered worship — songs, prayers, responses, sermons, activities. Could you create new songs, poems, reflections based on Bible passages we've studied?
- **Live lightly** Reduce consumption, compost, grow food, change bulbs, public transport, car pool, eliminate plastic bags.
- **Act positively** Restore a stream or wildlife area, join conservation groups, support Christian agencies in this area, look local and become a friend of a society. Review how your church could be more environmentally aware and responsible.
- **Be informed** Read and surf the net, newspapers, speak with local interest groups. Consider how the consumer attitude of global trade in the West is having a negative impact on global care.
- **Keep watch** Be aware of destructive policies from corporations and politics both local, national and international. Be active in making your church aware.
- **Act politically** Lobby your local MP — "vote earth!" Sign petitions.
- **Work together** Consider as church what it looks like to care for creation and its creatures within your local context. How can you be good news in this area?
- **Live counter-culturally** Consider committing to do 3 / 6 / 12 months without buying any: new clothes / new shoes / DVDs / food from major importers (for example).
- **Offset travel** How might you reduce your carbon-footprint to NET zero?
- **Pass it on** Who else can you influence to raise awareness both biblically and practically? Who are your 'people of peace' (those open to faith discussions)?

A GENTLE WARNING: don't just cut and paste this study or ideas for your Pastor, start a conversation and explain why all this matters to you. Offer to help implement little changes or ask to create a group to explore this further. Work gently from where you're at, gradually educated your fellowship, and your ideas are more likely to be welcomed compared with a complete overhaul expected by tomorrow!