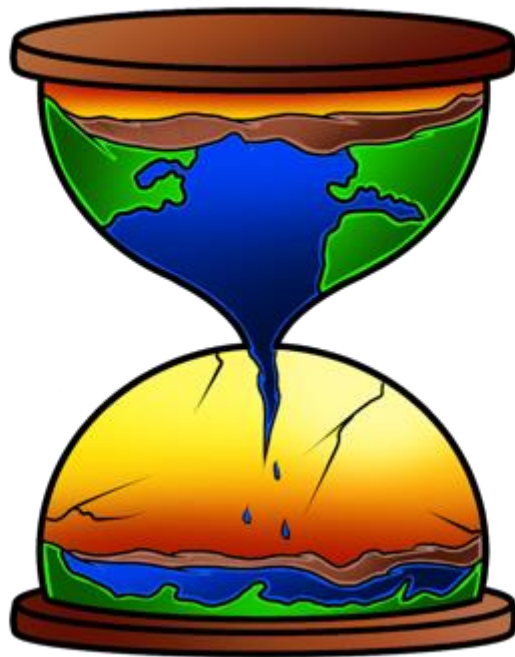


Sermon & Small Group Study Guide



Is God Green?
Exploring the Bible
in a Climate Emergency

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Welcome to this new study guide for the autumn teaching series.

This term we are exploring the theme '*Is God Green – Exploring the Bible in a Climate Emergency*', using the whole Bible as our text. I am writing this in the aftermath of COP26 at Glasgow, as we all reflect on decisions made by governments and to what extent those decisions have set us on course for a safer future. There is no Planet B, so we can't afford to take these matters lightly or ignore them. I hope this series will inform and challenge us into personal and collective action rooted in a biblical vision of the relationship between God, human beings and the rest of creation and in the great historic doctrines of creation and salvation.

You may be holding this study guide because you are a member of a small group at St James. That's fantastic! Small groups are key to our strategy for nurture and discipleship, so we are delighted that you are in one. We hope you enjoy using this guide to prepare for your group meetings and then to explore the material together. Being in a small group is by far the best way to learn and grow as a disciple of Christ.

You may be holding this study guide as a member of St James who, for whatever reason, is *not* in a small group. You can find out more about small groups by reading the Small Group Purpose Statement on page 3 of this study guide. If you would like to join one, then please speak to Rob or Johan. If you can't manage that, then we don't want you to miss out on the benefits of the studies. Why not work through the studies yourself after each sermon or, better still, arrange to do them with a friend over a coffee.

The study guide is also available on the church web site – www.stjames-streatham.org

We have included some blank pages for sermon notes. Why not bring your study guide to church on Sunday morning or use it when you watch the service online at home and take notes during the sermon. And, if you miss a sermon, you can always catch up by watching the recording of the livestream on our YouTube channel or visiting the church web site.

So, buckle up, here we go!

Small Group Purpose Statement

Small Groups at St James are small, Christ-centred communities meeting regularly for Bible study, fellowship, prayer, worship and service, fun, mutual support, accountability, and mission. Group members will encourage each other to grow as active disciples, rather than passive spectators, encourage others to join a group and support those who wish to grow in leadership.

Our expectation is that:

Group members will come to know the saving love of God in their lives more deeply as they pray and study the Bible together.

They will be mutually encouraged to become more like Jesus in every part of their lives.

Group members will support each other in prayer and keep all prayer requests confidential. They will come to trust each other and be accountable to each other for those things the Holy Spirit is prompting them to change in their lives.

Group members will share each other's practical needs and seek to provide what they can to meet them.

They will be encouraged to grow as active disciples rather than passive spectators.

Group members will encourage others to lead and join a group.



Introduction to the Series

“Planet earth is in crisis. Earth will survive. Humans, or at least our way of life, may not.”

So begins the Preface to the book ‘Changing the Climate’ by Debbie, David and Jamie Hawker. It goes on:

“If we carry on as we are doing, we are on course for an average temperature rise of over 3 degrees Celsius by 2100. That might not sound like much, but it would be catastrophic, because this is an average that includes greater temperature rises where it matters. It would be impossible to live in large parts of the world. Many millions of people would die, if life survives at all. Crop yields would fall, and those who survive would fight over the remaining land and food, leading to many more deaths. That is the forecast for less than 80 years from now. Children alive today are facing a traumatic future if we do not turn this around.

Climate change attacks the building blocks we need to survive – air, water, food, health, and security. Diseases, including pandemics, increase. We are all at risk. This is a crisis of choices we have made and keep on making: greed, selfishness, waste, destruction. The climate is changing, plants and animals are dying, and we are heading for a dangerous future.”

Climate change is undeniable, it really isn’t fake news! We can see the signs all around us. It is caused by so called greenhouse gases, such as carbon dioxide, which trap the sun’s radiation in the atmosphere, resulting in a gradual increase in global temperatures. There has been a 1 degree Celsius rise since the industrial revolution and scientists tell us that we must limit any further increase to a maximum of 0.5 degrees. This won’t remove the negative effects of climate change we are currently experiencing, but it could stop things becoming so bad that life as we know it will come to an end. Significant change will come both from small actions taken by all of us and by big actions taken by governments and corporations. The average carbon footprint of UK citizens is 8-10 tonnes per year, excluding international flights. This must be reduced if we are to have hope for the future. The richest 10% of nations in the world are responsible for over 50% of carbon emissions whilst the poorest 50% emit only 10% of the total carbon emissions each year.

So, what do we think about all this as Christians, followers of Jesus Christ? Is it all just bla, bla, bla? Is the environment just a fringe issue for a small group of enthusiasts or is it central to the Gospel and the biblical vision of the Kingdom of God? Is God green and should we be green too, and, if so, what should that look like in practice?

This is the theme for our series this term. The first eleven studies focus on the climate emergency and we end the term with Holy Week and Easter. I have been deeply challenged in preparing this series. I hope and pray you will be too.

Soli Deo Gloria



Two books I would recommend reading to accompany the series, both published by Bible Reading Fellowship (BRF), are:

‘Changing the Climate’ by Debbie, David & Jamie Hawker

‘A Christian Guide to Environmental Issues’ by Martin and Margot Hodson

Study 1: Creation

Genesis 1 v 1 – 2 v 3

Context:

The first chapter of the Bible is foundational. Here we find the building blocks for everything else we read in the rest of the Old and New Testaments. That God is the Creator of everything that exists is fundamental to every major doctrine of the Christian faith, including how we view the current climate emergency and our approach to environmental concerns. Our series asks the question: Is God Green? Well, perhaps this first study already answers that question for us?

Observation:

1. Describe what you see in 1:1-2.
2. How does God create (look at 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26)?
3. Describe what God creates and the order in which he creates.
4. How does God describe what he has created in 1:4, 10b, 12b, 18b, 21b, 25b?
5. How does God describe the finished creation in v 31?
6. What sets mankind apart from the rest of God's creation (1:26-27)?
7. What does God do in 1:28?
8. What does God give in 1:29-30?
9. What does God do in 2:2-3?

Meaning:

1. How does the order in which God creates resolve the formlessness and emptiness of 1: 2?
2. In what ways are we in danger of returning God's creation to the formlessness and emptiness of its initial existence?
3. What is the significance of the fact that God creates by the power of his word or command?
4. All 3 members of the Trinity were involved in creating the universe. Where in this passage can you see Father, Son and Holy Spirit in action in creating (clue: you should be able to see Father and Spirit at work in Genesis 1, but you may need to look elsewhere in the Bible to see explicit references to Jesus the Son's involvement, for example: John 1:1-3, Colossians 1: 15-16, Hebrews 1: 1-2).
5. What is the significance of God's assessment of his creation as 'good' and why is it only after the creation of mankind that he declares it to be 'very good'?
6. What do you think it means for mankind to be created in the image of God? Do you see any hints in the text as to what it might mean?
7. What do you think is the connection between God's blessing and mankind's fruitfulness (1: 28)?
8. God's provision of food for all his creatures is part of his blessing for his creation (1: 29-30). Do you think this text suggests we should all be vegetarians?
9. An infinitely omnipotent God obviously never gets tired. So, what does it mean that he rested on the 7th day and what is the significance of this for mankind (2: 2-3)?

Application:

1. How would you answer the question 'Is God Green' from what you have seen in today's passage?

2. God revelled in his creation. What are some of your favourite parts of God's creation?
3. Clearly creation is no longer 'very good'. Look at each day of creation in turn and identify contemporary evidence to show how this initial perfect state has been lost.
4. WWF estimates that between 200-2,000 species go extinct every year due to human mismanagement of the environment. What are some of the specific causes of this loss of bio-diversity and what does today's Bible passage have to say about it?
5. What can be done to restore creation so it can once again be 'very good'?
6. Has mankind lived up to God's command in 1:26-29? Explain your view.
7. God has created a world which is finely tuned and where changes in one part of the eco-system have knock-on effects in the rest of the system. How do we see this at work, both positively and negatively, in our world today?
8. God told mankind to 'fill the earth' in v 29, but to what extent is population growth a contributing factor to the climate emergency? Should it be addressed and, if so, how?
9. Are there any changes to your diet you could/should make to fight the climate emergency?
See 'A Little Bit Extra' at the end of this study for some reasons to eat less meat.
10. Uncontrolled exploitation & consumption of resources is fuelling the climate crisis. What can we learn from the Sabbath principle (2:2-3) that may help us fight the climate emergency? (Note: In addition to the weekly Sabbath, the OT law commanded that every 7 years the land should enjoy a year of rest and all debts should be cancelled, and every 50 years in the Year of Jubilee slaves should be freed and any land that had been sold should be returned to its original owners. In fact, Jeremiah tells us that one of the reasons God sent Israel into exile to Babylon in 581BC for 70 years was to give the land its Sabbath rests because God's people had *failed* to implement the Sabbath laws every 7 and 50 years. God wanted the land to catch up on its Sabbath rest and for that to happen he had to remove the people from the land for a while!).

Pray:

- Thank God for his creation in all its vast array.
- Repent of ways we have spoiled it by our exploitation and consumption.
- Pray for God's grace to make changes in our personal lives where we can.
- Pray for governments to keep their promises made at COP26

A Little Bit Extra:

Three reasons people often give for eating less meat and switching to a more plant-based diet:

- Personal Health – It is commonly claimed that a more plant-based diet is healthier for us, though some essential nutrients are harder to obtain from plants.
- Animal Welfare – what sort of lives and deaths are commonly experienced by animals raised for meat and should we be concerned? Should we even be eating sentient animals if we don't have to?
- Global Warming – raising animals for meat often involves land clearance and deforestation which reduces the number of trees able to absorb carbon from the atmosphere and causes soil-erosion. Cattle and sheep also produce lots of methane which is a greenhouse gas and adds to global warming.

What do you think about the above?

Debates about diet can become very heated very quickly (adding to global warming 😊), so we need to take note of Paul's advice in Romans 14 before passing judgement on someone who takes a different view on these issues!

Sermon Notes:

Study 2: Care

Genesis 2 v 4 - 25

Context:

In our previous study we witnessed the way in which God created the universe in all its vast array out of nothing (Hebrews 11:3). Human beings were the crown of his creation, uniquely made in God's image and given the responsibility to care for creation on God's behalf. It is this command to care that we will dig into deeper in today's study.

Observation:

1. How would you describe the earth in v 5 and why was it in that state?
2. What did God do in v 6 and v 7 to remedy this state?
3. What two things did God do in v 8?
4. What two features did the trees have that God caused to grow in the garden (v 9a)?
5. Which two special trees stood in the middle of the garden (v 9b)?
6. What were the four headwaters flowing from the Eden River (v 10-14)?
7. What natural resources were found in the land of Havilah (v 12)?
8. What responsibility did God give the man in v 15?
9. What freedom did God give the man in v 16-17 and what were the limits to that freedom?
10. What would be the consequences of ignoring this limit to the man's freedom (v 17)?
11. What was not good according to v 18 and what did God say he would do to remedy this?
12. What were brought to the man in v 19 and what did the man do with them in v 19-20?
13. As no suitable helper was found, what did God do in v 21-22?
14. What did the man say when he saw God's new creation in v 23?
15. What special consequence of God's new creation is mentioned in v 24?
16. What idyllic scene is painted by the author in v 25?

Meaning:

1. In what ways is the man God created in v 7 similar to the animals (compare 2:7a with 1:24a) and different to the animals (compare 2:7b with 1:26-27)?
2. What is the significance of this similarity and difference for the place of human beings in God's world?
3. God made the trees with both a practical and an aesthetic purpose in v 9. They were to be for food and for beauty. What does this tell us about God's purpose for the whole of creation? How do we see these two functions of creation in our world today and in what ways are they affected by the climate emergency? **[Go to A Little Bit Extra at end of the study to see how trees fulfil both a practical and aesthetic function].**
4. V 10-14 describe the abundant richness of the natural resources given by God – rivers, gold, aromatic resin and onyx. How are God's natural resources being affected by the climate emergency today?
5. What is man's primary function on earth as described by 2:15 and how does this verse help us to *correctly* interpret what God meant in 1:26 when he told mankind to 'rule' and in 1:28 to 'subdue'?
6. For the first time in the history of creation something wasn't good (v 18). Why do you think it wasn't good for the man to be alone and what clue do we find to help us answer this question at the end of v 18?

7. Why do you think God put the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the garden if the consequences of eating its fruit would be so deadly (v17b)?
8. What is the significance of God allowing the man to name all the animals in v 19-20?
9. Why does God create the woman and what is the significance of the way in which he makes her? How does the creation of the woman solve the problem of v 18? How does 1:26-28 help us understand the kind of help the man needed?
10. V 24 describes the establishment of marriage. What implications do you see for marriage today in the description given in this chapter?
11. How would you describe the state of God's creation as this chapter comes to a close and how does that compare with the state of God's creation today? What has gone wrong?

Application:

1. Having studied this passage, how would you respond to someone who says: 'Human beings are just more highly evolved animals! No more, no less?' What difference does it make if you do hold this view?
2. How can we get the right balance between preserving both the practical and the aesthetic functions of our world?
3. How can we ensure that our ruling and subduing of God's creation means *care* rather than exploitation and over-consumption?
4. In what ways are we seeing the deadly consequences of sin, which God warned about in v 17b, being worked out in our world today?

A Little Bit Extra: The Practical & Aesthetic Function of Trees

Taken from 'Changing the Climate' by Debbie, David & Jamie Hawker.

- Trees absorb sunlight and use it to turn carbon dioxide and water vapour into food and oxygen, thus removing greenhouse gases from the atmosphere and cooling the earth.
- Tree roots prevent rain washing soil away, this protecting the soil and preventing flooding.
- Trees provide shade in the sunshine which helps cool anything below them.
- Trees absorb air pollution, purifying the air.
- Trees help control regional rainfall as water evaporates from their leaves.
- Trees provide shelter and food for insects, birds, animals and plants.
- Fruit trees provide food that, especially when eaten locally, is a low-carbon produce.
- Trees can enhance well-being for people. Research shows that within minutes of being surrounded by trees, people experience a reduction in blood pressure and stress levels. Improvements in mood, sleep and energy levels are also reported.

Read Deuteronomy 20:19 to see how God embedded his care for trees in the Law of Moses.

Pray:

- For God's grace to fulfil our proper function and purpose in his world.
- For united action to restore God's shalom to his creation.
- For countries disproportionately affected by the climate emergency.

Sermon Notes:

Study 3: Corruption

Genesis 3 v 1-24

Context:

So far in this series we have seen the way in which God created the world very good with the dual purpose of providing food and beauty for all his creatures. He created mankind in his image and gave them the responsibility to care for his creation. We have also acknowledged that God's very good world is no longer very good but is returning to its original formlessness and emptiness. In today's study we will see the root cause of this looming climate catastrophe.

Observation:

1. What creature enters the scene in v 1 and what does he say to the woman?
2. How does she respond in v 2-3 and what response does she receive in v 4-5?
3. What does she do in v 6 and why?
4. What were the consequences of this action in v 7?
5. What did the man and woman hear in v 8 and what did they do?
6. What did God say in v 9?
7. What reason did the man give in v 10 for hiding from God?
8. What did God ask him in v 11 and what was his reply in v 12?
9. How did the woman reply to God's question in v 13?
10. What are the consequences brought about by God in v 14-19 to a) the serpent, b) the woman, and c) the man?
11. In what ways do we see both hope and judgement in v 20-24?

Meaning:

1. Who does the serpent represent (see Revelation 12:9)?
2. Why do you think he is eager to lead mankind astray so early in the history of creation?
3. How would you describe his strategy, his tactics in v 1-5? What does he want the man and woman to believe about God and themselves?
4. To what extent can we see this same strategy being worked out in our world today and how is it affecting the climate and the environment?
5. Fear and shame were two of the consequences felt by mankind after their rebellious act (v 10). In what ways do we feel fear and shame with regard to the current climate crisis?
6. The man and woman play the game of passing the buck in v 12-13. They are reluctant to take responsibility for their actions and are quick to point the finger at others. How do we see this same tendency playing out in our world today with regard to climate and environmental issues?
7. V 14-19 are sometimes referred to as the 'curse of the fall' in that the whole of God's creation comes under a series of curses as a consequence of their rebellion against God. How do we see these curses played out in our world today, particularly with regard to the environment?
8. The final verses of this chapter see mankind banished from the garden and denied access to the tree of life. However, there are seeds of hope here too (v20-21). Read Romans 8:18-25 – how does this passage serve as a commentary on the events of Genesis 3 and what is the hope expressed here by Paul?

Application:

1. Satan wants us to live in God's world in such a way that we ignore the undeniable fact that our actions have consequences. He wants us to believe that we are gods and are free to do whatever we please without thinking of the effects of our lifestyles and choices. What difference would it make to the climate and the environment if we thought more seriously about the consequences of our actions?
2. Is there any specific way in which God is calling you to put this into practice right now?
3. How can fear and shame disable or discourage us from taking climate action and what can we do to overcome them?
4. This chapter ends with seeds of hope and Paul waters those seeds in Romans 8:18-25. Why is hope so important in the fight against the climate crisis? What differences should we expect to see and hear in the way a *Christian* approaches the climate emergency in contrast to someone who doesn't know God or believe in the Bible? Does this difference matter?
5. *'Behavioural science tells us that whenever a positive vision is central it becomes the touchstone that shapes our words, actions and policy-making, and the magnet that draws us forward. If we always focus on problems, we lose sight of where we are going, and get dragged down.'* Do you agree with this quote from Archbishop Thabo Makgoba? What difference does it make for us as Christians to approach climate action from a place of hope rather than despair?
6. Some Christians may say: *'If God is going to restore his creation by establishing a new heaven and a new earth at the end of the age when Jesus returns, why should we bother taking action now? What's the point?'* How would you respond to this argument? What can you do to make sure this future hope promised by God does not act as a *disincentive* for you to care about creation and take action against climate change NOW?

Pray:

- For God's forgiveness for pretending to be gods and ignoring the effects of our choices.
- For God's wisdom to respond to the climate emergency as he would want.
- For hope that God will redeem all things in the end.

Sermon Notes:

Study 4: Want

1 Kings 21

Context:

Two of the factors fuelling the climate emergency are Want and Waste. Humanity wants to consume more and more of the earth's finite resources and tragically produces alarming and lethal amounts of waste in the process. This dual action of Want and Waste is causing catastrophic problems for the global environment, disproportionately affecting the poor, and, if left unchecked, could even end in the destruction and disappearance of the human race. It is that serious! So, the next two studies will focus on these two factors, beginning today with Want.

Observation:

1. This true story is about a vineyard. Where was it located, who did it belong to and who lived nearby (v 1)?
2. What proposition did King Ahab put to Naboth in v 2?
3. What was his reply in v 3?
4. How did Ahab react in v 4?
5. What did his wife ask in v 5 and how did he reply in v 6?
6. What was her response in v 7?
7. What was her strategy in v 8-9?
8. What happened as a consequence of her actions in v 11-14?
9. How did Jezebel and Ahab react to the news of Naboth's death in v 15-16?
10. Who did God call to be his messenger in v 17 and what message did God give him to carry to Ahab in v 18-19?
11. What does Elijah say to Ahab on God's behalf in v 20-24?
12. How is Ahab described in v 25-26?
13. How did Ahab respond to Elijah's message in v 27?
14. How does God react in v 28-29?

Meaning:

1. Wasn't Ahab's proposition reasonable? Why do you think Naboth refused, even though he was offered a better vineyard or a good price in exchange?
2. How do we react when we don't get what we want (v 4)?
3. How do we see the power differential between rich and poor at work in this story? How do we see the same differential at work in our world today, particularly in the area of climate change and its consequences?
4. Jezebel's strategy was based on lies and untruths. To what extent are lies and untruths perpetrated by the rich fuelling the climate emergency to the disadvantage of the poor?
5. God makes his view on Ahab's actions very clear through Elijah. How would you sum up how God thinks and feels about the injustice inflicted on Naboth?
6. What do you think God feels and thinks about the fact that the nations contributing most to global warming are some of the richest countries on earth while the nations suffering most from the consequences of global warming are some of the poorest?
7. What hope does this passage give to individuals and nations if they heed God's word and repent of their unjust attitudes and actions (v 28-29)?

Application:

1. In what ways do you think our consumption is creating the climate emergency?
2. Read the following passages and reflect on what they tell us about our own wants and over-consumption, which fuel the climate emergency and do harm to the poor:
 - Exodus 20:17
 - Philippians 4:11-13
 - Matthew 6:19-24
3. 'Live simply, that others may simply live!' How can we move towards a simpler lifestyle, wanting and consuming less and therefore contributing less to the climate crisis? What changes could I make to my lifestyle, however small, to consume less of the earth's resources and reduce my contribution to the climate emergency?
4. God gave Israel clear instructions about how to live equitably as they entered the Promised Land as his redeemed people. God made it clear that the land and its resources (the whole earth and everything in it) belongs to him and his Law stated that each Israelite family should be given a portion of land on which to live and work which would remain in the family in perpetuity (hence Micah's vision of God's ideal future in Micah 4:4). There were laws against taking someone else's land illegally by moving your neighbour's boundary stone. If someone fell on hard times there were laws allowing them to glean in someone else's field, to borrow money without interest and to receive support through the annual tithe that each citizen was obliged to give to the Temple. If things got really bad and someone had to sell their land or their labour or even themselves, then the entire economic system was reset every 7 and every 50 years, the Sabbath and Jubilee years, so no one person could accumulate lots of land at the expense of others and the gap between rich and poor was kept to a minimum.

What does this tell us about God's approach to economics, the environment and justice? How can we apply such principles today when we live in a system that relies on encouraging us to want what we don't really need and to consume what we can't really afford?
5. Read Micah 6:8. How could putting this verse into practice in our own lives (as individuals and as nations) make a difference to the climate emergency?
6. The peoples most affected by climate change tend to be black and brown. How does a concern for climate justice connect with racial justice, which was the theme of the previous study series: Beyond Diversity?
7. Read Proverbs 30:7-9. Why are both extremes of wealth and poverty so dangerous?

Pray:

- For forgiveness for the way my lifestyle adversely affects others, especially the poor.
- For wisdom to know what changes I can make to the way I live, to what and how I consume.
- For courage and commitment to act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with God.

Sermon Notes:

Study 5: Waste

Luke 15 v 11-32

Context:

In our previous study we looked at the way in which *Want* is possibly the chief driver of climate change and the environmental crisis faced by the world today. If only we would reduce our consumption the world would be a better place and the poor would be able to live fuller lives now and have greater hope for the future. The double whammy of consuming more and more is first, the earth's limited and finite resources are plundered and reduced, and, second, the processes of making all the stuff we consume produce waste which damages the environment and increases global warming. So, *Waste* is the damaging flip side of *Want* and so, in today's study, we turn to explore this major contributing factor to the climate emergency.

Observation:

1. What did the younger son ask his father to do in v 12?
2. What did the younger son do on receiving his share in v 13?
3. What natural disaster struck in v 14 and what did the younger son do in response in v 15?
4. How was he feeling at this point in the story (v 16)?
5. What did he realise when he came to his senses in v 17 and what did he decide to do in v 18-20?
6. How did his father react when he saw him coming in v 20?
7. What did the younger son say to his father in v 21 and how did the father respond in v 22-24?
8. What did the older son hear as he worked in the field in v 25 and what explanation was he given in v 26-27?
9. How did he react and who went out to plead with him in v 28?
10. What does he say to his father in v 29-30?
11. How does the father reply to the older son in v 31-32?

Meaning:

1. Normally a son would only inherit his father's property after the death of the father. So, how does the younger son show disrespect to his father at the beginning of this story?
2. In what sense is the current environmental crisis a sign of human beings showing disrespect to God our Father?
3. This story is often called the Parable of the Prodigal Son. The word 'prodigal' means 'wasteful'. How did the younger son demonstrate wastefulness and a lack of thought for the future in v 13?
4. In what ways does the climate emergency demonstrate human wastefulness and lack of thought for the future?
5. The younger son's *Want* and *Waste* left him in big trouble when a famine struck the land. How are human *Want* and *Waste* contributing to an increase in famines and other environmental problems?
6. The younger son's suffering helped him to come to his senses in v 17. Do you think the world is coming to its senses with regard to the damage we are inflicting on God's creation? What is causing us to wake up to the crisis? What more can be done to help us to appreciate the danger we are in and to rouse us to action?

7. The younger son repented in v 17-20. To repent means two things: a change of mind leading to a change of action. How did the younger son demonstrate both aspects of repentance in these verses? What would it look like for humanity to demonstrate both aspects of repentance with regard to the climate crisis?
8. What encouragement can we take from the way the father, who represents God, responds to the younger son's repentance?
9. Who might the older son represent in the current climate emergency?

Application:

1. Take a look at the following kinds of wastefulness and *reflect on what might practically be done to reduce waste and improve the environment:*

a. Food Waste

Approx. 1/3 of the food produced in the world is wasted each year. In 2015 in the UK households wasted about 5 million tonnes of food, which is enough to fill 70,000 three-bedroom houses. This waste was worth £15 billion, which is almost £70 per month for an average family. In addition, businesses wasted a further 2 million tonnes of food.

b. Clothing Waste

Clothes production uses more energy than all planes and ships combined and contributes to around 10% of global greenhouse gases. People actively use the same clothes for about 3 years on average.

c. Plastic Waste

Plastic isn't all bad, but it contributes to greenhouse gas emissions at every stage of its life cycle, from production to refining and how it is managed after use. 8 million tonnes of plastic enter our oceans every year adding to the 150 million tonnes already there. Plastic has been found in over 60% of birds tested and 50% of sea turtles and one person dies every 30 seconds from diseases caused by plastic pollution and other waste. Did you know that most tea bags contain plastic?!

d. Energy

Heating buildings contributes to at least 10% of the UK's carbon footprint. In 1970 the average indoor temperature was about 12 degrees C, but since 1997 it has risen to about 18 degrees C. Many houses and buildings are poorly insulated, leading to energy waste, and most households have multiple devices powered by electricity, some of which are left plugged and on standby when not in use.

e. Human Resources

The Prodigal Son hired himself out to a local pig farmer. For a Jewish boy it couldn't get much worse than that, and he wasn't even allowed to eat the pigs' leftovers! Sadly, countless numbers of people, mostly from the developing world, find themselves living and working in pitiful conditions and circumstances today. Many are exploited and some are even treated as slaves. This is a tragic waste of human life and potential. Whether it is children forced to pick food or cotton rather than get an education or people held in forced labour; garment factory workers threatened with violence if they are not productive enough or car washers who have their passports taken away; or young women and girls desperate to earn money in a wealthy country to support their families back home who are trafficked and, if they survive the tortuous and expensive journey, end up in the sex-slave industry working in a dangerous and undignified trade simply to pay of their never ending debt to their trafficker.

2. Share your thoughts on the following strategy for reducing waste, known as The Five Rs:
 - **REDUCE** the number of items we buy
 - **REUSE** what we have (or let others reuse it)
 - **REPAIR** items so they can be used again
 - **RECYCLE** items when they are finished with
 - **RECOVER** the energy from waste (e.g. composting)

The idea is that we work down the list of The Five Rs and only when we have exhausted all five do we consider disposing of an item.

3. Read Exodus 16:13-20. What does this true story teach us about how God wants human society to work and what the dangers of waste are?
4. Read John 6:1-13. What are the parallels with the Manna story from Exodus? Why do you think Jesus insisted that nothing be wasted (v12)? What can we learn from this true story in the context of our current environmental crisis?

Pray:

- For God's forgiveness for our wastefulness.
- For a change of mind leading to a change of action.
- For practical solutions to the problems caused by our wastefulness.
- For God's help to make the necessary sacrifices to reduce our Wants and our Waste.

Sermon Notes:

Study 6: The Great Commandments

Matthew 22 v 34-40

Context:

Between delivering Israel from slavery in Egypt and taking them into a new life in the Promised Land, God gave them his commandments at Mt Sinai. Known as the Torah or the Law of Moses, these commandments frame God's design for the life of His people once they settle in the land. He put them at the crossroads of the world to show the nations around them what life is like when God is your king. Rabbis have calculated that there are 613 laws in the Torah. That's a lot of laws to remember! So, God kindly summarised them in the Big 10 (Exodus 20:1-17). Even that was too many for some, like the Pharisee in our reading today who wanted to whittle them down even further. In this study we are going to explore Jesus' reply to the Pharisee and ask how it relates to the current climate crisis.

Observation:

1. Who asked the question in v 34 and what was the question?
2. What was Jesus' reply in v 37-38?
3. How did he end his response in v 40?

Meaning:

1. Why do you think the Pharisee asked this question? What was his motivation?
2. Jesus was asked about *the* greatest commandment, but answers by stating not one, but *two*. Why does he do this and what is the connection between the two?
3. In what sense do the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments? In what sense does the first great commandment sum up 1-4 of the Big 10 and in what sense does the second great commandment sum up 5-10 of the Big 10?
4. Drawing on what you have learned so far in this series, how might we obey the first of these two great commandments in our response to the climate emergency?
5. In Luke 10:30-37 Jesus tells the Parable of the Good Samaritan as an illustration of the second great commandment. Read the parable and reflect on the following questions:
 - a. In what sense can we see those who are disproportionately affected by climate change as being like the man who was beaten, robbed and left for dead?
 - b. The first two to come across the man were both religious people, but they passed him by. They probably felt they had good reasons, even religious reasons to pass him by. What kinds of reasons might Christians give for not taking action on climate change?
 - c. The Samaritan inconvenienced himself in order to help the needy man. In pity he changed his travel plans, he used his valuable resources (linen, wine and oil) and spent his money, he asked others (the landlord) to provide the help he was unable to give. In what ways could and should we inconvenience ourselves in order to love our neighbours who are suffering as a result of the climate emergency?
 - d. The Samaritan changed his travel plans to help the man in need. Transport is a huge contributing factor to global warming, particularly planes and cars. How might love for our neighbour cause us to make changes to the way we travel?
 - e. The parable teaches us that our neighbour, the one to whom we are to show love, is anyone in need, regardless of class, colour, creed, culture or any other human distinctive. What does this mean in the context of the climate crisis?

Application:

1. The Samaritan did what he could as an individual to help someone in need? However, I wonder if he ever asked the question: 'Why do so many travellers get attacked and robbed on this road'? It is good and right that we respond as individuals with mercy to help those in need, but it is also our Christian responsibility to try to do something about the bigger picture, to try to transform the circumstances that cause so many people to suffer and to seek to create a more just system. In what ways can we do this in response to the climate emergency? What action can we take to change the ways governments and big corporations operate to the disadvantage of the poor?
2. If global warming continues and we fail to limit the temperature increase to 1.5 degrees, it is highly likely that we will see a massive uptick in the movement of migrants and refugees, risking their very lives to seek a safe haven elsewhere. When danger threatens, our common response is either Fight or Flight, and so it is with the climate emergency. The danger posed by global warming will lead to *Fight* – conflicts between peoples and nations fighting over ever scarcer natural resources, such as clean water, and *Flight* – people fleeing drought, famine, floods, desertification etc. In fact, Fight will also lead to Flight as people flee from war and terror and join the river of humanity on the move. How might the two great commandments inspire us to respond to this scenario as Jesus would want?

Read the following poem by Brain Bilston called Refugees. First read it from top to bottom and then from bottom to top. Then share your reflections.

***They have no need of our help
So do not tell me
These haggard faces could belong to you or me
Should life have dealt a different hand
We need to see them for who they really are
Chancers and scroungers
Layabouts and loungers
With bombs up their sleeves
Cut-throats and thieves
They are not
Welcome here
We should make them
Go back to where they came from
They cannot
Share our food
Share our homes
Share our countries
Instead let us
Build a wall to keep them out
It is not okay to say
These are people just like us
A place should only belong to those who are born there
Do not be so stupid to think that
The world can be looked at another way***

3. In 2 Kings 20:16-19 we read of King Hezekiah hearing from the Prophet Isaiah that God is going to bring judgement on the next generation for the sins of Hezekiah's generation. Hezekiah breaths a sigh of relief and v 19 tells us that he said: 'The word of the Lord you have spoken is good'. For he thought, 'Will there not be peace and security in my lifetime?' To what extent is our generation behaving like Hezekiah? Are we guilty of failing to care about the impact global warming will have on future generations? If so, why do we behave like this and what would be different if we obeyed the two great commandments?

Pray:

- For God's forgiveness for failing to love him and others well.
- For God's grace to be prepared to be inconvenienced for the sake of others who may be far away from us in time or space.
- For those who are disproportionately affected by climate change.

Sermon Notes:

Study 7: Cosmic Sovereignty & Salvation

Colossians 1 v 15-20

Context:

So far, we have seen how God created the universe in all its vast array from nothing and created human beings in his image to care for it all. We saw that tragically humanity became corrupt and this fall from grace had knock on effects in creation so that, in Paul's words, it now groans. We saw that the double whammy of humanity's corruption is Want and Waste = we want too much and we waste too much – and this is the chief cause of the environmental degradation and climate emergency we are now facing. But there is hope. God calls us as his people to love him with all our heart and to love our neighbour as ourselves and, in this way, we can have a positive impact on the environment and on the lives of those who are disproportionately affected by the consequences of climate change. In today's study we take a step back, put on our wide-vision goggles and catch a glimpse of the stunning vista of the sovereignty and salvation of Jesus Christ which stretches to the edges of the cosmos and beyond.

Observation:

1. What three things does Paul tell us about Jesus in v 15?
2. What does v 16 tell us about the connection between Jesus and creation?
3. What further two things does Paul tell us about Jesus in v 17?
4. For what reason does Jesus have the supremacy in everything, according to v 18?
5. What do we learn from v 19 to help us see that Jesus was more than just a man?
6. How far does God's reconciliation (salvation) stretch, according to v 20a?
7. How was this peace (reconciliation) accomplished, according to v 20b?

Meaning:

1. The status of the 'firstborn' was important in Jewish society. The status was usually given to the eldest son born in every family and it would bestow both rights and responsibilities. He would enjoy honour and respect as the firstborn and he would have the responsibility to care for and look after his siblings. What is Paul telling us about Jesus by using this phrase of 'firstborn over all creation' to describe him in v 15 and how does it relate to the climate emergency we are now facing?
2. Paul tells us that all things were created *in* and *through* Jesus (v 16). How does the fact that everything was created in and through Jesus affect how we think about the environment?
3. In that same verse Paul tells us that all things were created *for* Jesus (v 16). What does it mean that all things were created *for* Jesus and what difference should that make to the way we respond to the climate emergency? (See these texts for clues: Psalm 19:1-4, Romans 1:20, Psalm 148, Psalm 104:31, Job 38-39).
4. If all things '*hold together*' in Jesus (v 17), why is creation in such a bad state today? Does this verse encourage you when you consider the dangers of climate change?
5. Paul tells us in v 18 that Jesus is the *head of the body*, the church. What does this tell us about the part Christians have to play in responding to problems in the environment? If Jesus is sovereign and supreme, shouldn't we just leave it all up to him rather than getting our hands dirty trying to solve a problem that seems beyond our power to solve?

6. How might the fact of the resurrection of Jesus (v 18) encourage us as we consider the deadly corruption and degradation of our planet?
7. We tend to think of God's salvation in Jesus affecting individual people, which, of course, it does. However, what stunning news do we hear in v 20 and how might this give us hope for the future?
8. What impact does the cross of Christ have on our environment and climate (v 20b)?

Application:

1. God has created a universe where the health of the material world is dependent on the holiness of mankind. He has tied the two together in a dynamic relationship (see Genesis 1-3). So, when humans live in joyful obedience to God, creation flourishes, but when humans shun God and reject his good purpose for them, creation suffers. We see this all the way through the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, from Creation to New Creation. Several times in the big story of the Bible God has to clear the land of people in order to allow the land to rest and be renewed, such is the devastating human impact on it (e.g. Noah's flood, and the 70 year exile of Judah in Babylon). However, in the first coming of Jesus God began to renew his creation and he will complete the job when Jesus comes again. It is interesting to note that in the first creation God began by creating material things and ended with the creation of human beings, but in the new creation, which began with the birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus and extends to all who trust in Jesus (see 2 Corinthians 5:17), he begins by re-creating human beings and will end by re-creating the material world. This is because creation can only fully flourish when human beings are renewed and are no longer sinful, because only then will we care for God's creation as he intended.

Reflect on some of the following biblical texts in light of the comments above:

- Hosea 4 v 1-3
 - Isaiah 5 v 8-10
 - Isaiah 11 v 1-9
 - 2 Chronicles 36 v 20-21
 - Psalm 98 v 1-9
 - Revelation 11 v 16-18
 - Isaiah 65 v 17-25
 - Joel 1 v 1-20
 - Isaiah 35 v 1-10
2. In Mathew 7:24-27 Jesus ends the Sermon on the Mount by telling a story about two builders, one wise and the other foolish. What was the difference between the way the two men built, what do you think was their motivation in building as they did, and what were the consequences? How might this story apply to our approach to the climate emergency?

Pray:

- Give thanks for the fact that Jesus is sovereign over all creation.
- Give thanks that God will save and renew all things through the cross of Jesus.
- Pray for inspiration and courage to play our part as the church in renewing creation now.
- Pray for a deeper understanding of the dependant, dynamic relationship between material things and mankind.
- Pray for God's help to reject easy short-termism and to embrace a longer-term view, even if it demands more of us and takes longer to see results.

Sermon Notes:

Study 8: Warning Signs (Seals, Trumpets & Bowls)

Revelation 6

Context:

“God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world.... No doubt pain as God's megaphone is a terrible instrument; it may lead to final and unrepented rebellion.”

So wrote the great Christian writer and thinker, C.S. Lewis, in his book *The Problem of Pain*. He was talking about personal suffering, but perhaps his words could equally be applied to our current climate emergency? In his view pain and suffering are God's extreme measures intended to rouse us to sit up and take notice of what he is telling us about the unhealthy and destructive ways we inhabit his created world. The last book in the Bible, Revelation, contains some hair-raising, shock and awe descriptions of the future, megaphone warning signs from God, and we are going to explore some of them in today's study.

Observation:

The sermon preceding this study will focus only on Revelation chapter 6, because of time restraints. However, to see the full picture we need to read further chapters in the book. God reveals to John a series of visions of future catastrophes which will strike the world, symbolised by seven seals (chapters 6:1-8:5), seven trumpets (chapters 8:6- 11:19), and seven bowls (chapters 16:1-21). These observation questions will focus on chapter 6-8, but if you have time, you may like to read the other sections too make more connections.

1. Who is opening the seals on the scroll (v 1) and what is his true identity (see 5:6-10)?
2. Describe what happens as each of the first 6 seals is opened (v 2-17).
3. Chapter 7 gives a glimpse of the eternal future for those who love Jesus, a vast multitude drawn from every nation, tribe, people and language, gathered before the throne of God (7:9-12). What does the future hold for them according to 7:15-17?
4. What happens after the 7th seal is opened (see 8:1-6)?

Meaning:

1. What are the different general categories of disaster and catastrophe described by the opening of the seals (see also the description of the trumpets in 8:6-9:6, and the bowls in 16:1-21)?
2. How are these general categories connected to each other and how do they interact with each other?
3. Romans 1:18 tells us that, though there is a Day of God's Wrath reserved for the future, his wrath is *already* being revealed NOW. So, to what extent do you see early warning signs of these future disasters in our world today?
4. To what extent are these disasters *deliberately and directly* caused by God and to what extent are they a *natural* consequence of human sin and rebellion (e.g. Judges 2:6-23 speaks of God *giving* Israel into the hands of their enemies because of their sins, and Romans 1:18-32 speaks of God *giving people over* to the consequences of their sin and rebellion). What is the difference between God's active and passive or permissive will and

to what extent are the disastrous effects of climate change a demonstration of God's active judgement against our sin or his passive, permissive judgement?

5. Read 9:20-21. What do these two verses tell us about God's aim and purpose in sending or allowing these disasters to strike the earth and what do they tell us about how mankind responds?
6. To what extent can you see evidence of this response to the climate emergency in our world today?

Application:

1. Scientists suggest that the world will see a greater occurrence of global pandemics in the future, like Covid-19. There is evidence to suggest that Covid-19 was a consequence of the unnatural relationship between mankind and the animal world (i.e. humans eating wild meat not meant for human consumption, the most likely scenario being that the virus originated in a bat, then jumped to a pangolin, and then entered the human system when an infected pangolin was bought for human consumption from a wet market in China). Once the virus had made its way into human beings it was inevitable that global travel would cause rapid spread around the world. As with global warming, the impact of Covid-19 has been disproportionately harsh on the poor. On the other hand, the pandemic has shown us that we *can* take quick and decisive action when we feel our lives are under threat (e.g. lock down, rapid vaccine development) and this action has not only saved countless lives but has also had a positive impact on the environment (cleaner air, less busy roads, more birdsong etc).

So, as we continue to emerge from the pandemic and as we brace ourselves for more pandemics in the future, what lessons should we be learning from the experience of the last 2 years? How can we 'build back better' rather than return to 'business as usual' and what would that look like? To what extent is Covid-19 God's megaphone and, if it is, what is He shouting to us, what does He want us to hear?

2. The word '*repent*' literally means to change your mind. In what ways do you need to repent, to change your mind, as a result of this study?

Pray:

- For God's grace to repent of wrong attitudes and actions.
- For hope in the face of disasters and catastrophes.
- For the ability to hear what God is saying through his megaphone and to act accordingly.

Sermon Notes:

Study 9: Small Actions, Big Impact

Matthew 13 v 31-33

Context:

Sometimes it may feel that the environmental crisis is so grave that we feel paralysed and unsure if there is anything we can realistically do to make a difference. Whilst such a feeling is totally understandable, nevertheless, as Christians we should never give way to hopelessness. We follow Jesus, who taught us that small actions can lead to big changes. If everyone was committed to doing what they can, no matter how insignificant our small actions may seem, the cumulative effect could be way beyond anything we imagine. Of course, if the planet is to be saved it will require big actions from governments and corporations and we will look at that in the next study. But today let's focus on what we can do to make a difference where we are.

Observation:

1. What does Jesus liken the kingdom of heaven to in v 31?
2. What is the impact of this according to v 32?
3. What does he liken the kingdom to in v 33?
4. What is its impact?

Meaning:

1. What do you think Jesus means by 'the kingdom of heaven'? What is the kingdom of heaven?
2. What is the moral of the two stories? What encouragement does Jesus want to give us?
3. Do you ever feel like your efforts to make a difference to the environment and the climate are so small that you doubt you can make any significant difference?
4. How might your attitude change by reading these two stories?
5. How do we find a biblical balance between, on the one hand, unrealistic expectations that we can *fully* transform our damaged world NOW, and, on the other hand, the kind of fatalism that believes either that the crisis is so bad we can never make a difference or that we don't need to bother because the Bible says it is all going to get much worse before God steps in and makes it all new?

Application:

1. Here is a list of small actions you could take with regard to the environment. Look through them, discuss them with your group and a) identify any you *already* do, and b) identify any you might *consider* doing. The list is gleaned from the book 'Changing the Climate' by Debbie, David and Jamie Hawker.
 - Avoid buying plastic bottles of water. Use a reusable bottle instead.
 - Tea bags contain small amounts of plastic, so switch to loose-leaf tea.
 - Try to reduce the amount of plastic you acquire by taking your own bag to the shops and buy items without plastic packaging.
 - Buy food items from the reduced section so it isn't thrown away.
 - Hang clothes out to dry rather than using a tumble dryer.

- Offer used clothes, books, games etc to friends or charity shops or sell them online.
 - Recycle as much as you can.
 - Spend less money on yourself this month and donate what you save to a charity working for the environment.
 - Consider switching to a renewable energy supplier.
 - Unplug any chargers from your electricity supply when they are not in use and try not to leave devices on stand-by as this is both a fire risk and wastes energy.
 - Write out and memorise 1 Timothy 6:6-8.
 - Set up a 'gratitude pot' for your household. Every time you think of something for which you are thankful, write it on a slip of paper and pop it in the pot. At the end of the month read them all out and have a time of praise to God.
 - Instead of buying new items, try to buy second hand.
 - Consider asking people to donate to your favourite charities instead of giving you birthday or Christmas presents that you don't really need.
 - Try not to complain for a week!
 - Try to go a week without buying anything apart from necessities.
 - Pick up litter when you see it (use gloves!).
 - Join a climate protest or write to your MP expressing your concern about the environment.
 - Use the carbon calculator at climatestewards.org/offset to calculate your carbon footprint and work out ways to reduce it.
 - If you own a car, consider switching to an electric or hybrid model. If this is too expensive for you, try to walk, cycle or use public transport more and drive less.
 - Consider holidaying in UK rather than flying abroad.
 - Try to use less paper and, when you do use it, try to make sure it is recycled paper.
 - Reuse wrapping paper or be creative and use newspaper or cloth instead.
 - Buy toilet paper which is labelled as better for the environment – look for the Forest Stewardship Council mark (FSC).
 - If you have a garden, plant shrubs and flowers that attract bees.
 - Say grace before every meal as a sign of your gratitude to God.
 - Try to reduce your intake of meat. Maybe start with 1 plant-based meal a week and build from there.
 - Try to reduce the amount of food you throw away.
 - Use low energy light bulbs and turn off lights in unoccupied rooms.
 - Turn your central heating dial down by a degree or two and put a jumper on or put a warm blanket over your knee when sitting down to watch TV in the evening.
 - Insulate your home if you can afford to.
 - Have a short shower rather than a bath if you can – it uses much less water.
 - Wash your clothes less often and, when you do, put a full load in.
 - Consider the climate policies of various political parties before casting your vote.
2. Reflect on the following words attributed to John Wesley and discuss how they can be applied to the climate emergency:

***Do all the good that you can, by all the means that you can,
In all the ways that you can, in all the places that you can,
At all the times that you can, to all the people that you can,
As long as ever you can.***

Pray:

- For wisdom to identify changes you can make to your lifestyle.
- For the courage and motivation to make the changes you've identified.

Sermon Notes:

Study 10: Prophetic Protest

Amos 4

Context:

I wonder if you have ever taken part in a protest rally? What was it about and why did you get involved? John Lewis, the great US civil rights leader and one of the leaders of the Selma march in the 60s, had a catch phrase for which he was well known: 'Sometimes we need to get into trouble. Good trouble. Necessary trouble.' In the previous study we explored small actions we can take to make a difference to the environment. However, for the world to avoid a temperature rise of less than 2% we need big action by government and corporations. So, to what extent is prophetic protest a legitimate response by Christians to the climate emergency? Should we take John Lewis' advice and get into good trouble, necessary trouble, in order to save the planet? That is the subject of today's study as we shine the spotlight on the strong prophetic strand that runs through the Bible, both Old and New Testaments, using Amos as an example. Amos was a shepherd who was called by God to be a prophet to Israel at a time when the spiritual and political leadership of the nation was in rebellion against God and leading the population astray from God's laws.

Observation:

1. Who does Amos address in v 1 and why?
2. What warning does Amos give them in v 2-3?
3. What ironic words does he speak to them in v 4-5?
4. What actions did God take against Israel in v 6-11? Why did God do these things and what was the response?
5. What is God's final word to them in v 12-13?

Meaning:

1. God accuses his people of injustice to the poor and needy (v 1) while, at the same, being proud of their religious observances (v 4-5)? To what extent could we be accused of the same thing with regard to our attitude towards the climate emergency?
2. Amos explains to the people that the environmental disasters they have suffered are a means of God's discipline, as he seeks to wake them up to their sin and bring them to repentance (v 6-11). To what extent is the climate emergency a sign of God's discipline as God seeks to wake *us* up to *our* sin and call *us* to repentance?
3. Israel didn't listen and so suffered exile. Are we listening? What may happen if we don't?

Application:

1. Have you ever been on a protest rally? What was it for? Why did you get involved? Was it successful in making a difference?
2. Do you think Christians should get involved in prophetic or political protest? Why/Why not?
3. What do you think of protest groups such as Extinction Rebellion (XR) and Insulate Britain? What do you think of Greta Thunberg and her school strike movement? Should Christians get involved with groups like this?
4. Read the following texts and reflect on what they may have to say on the question of whether prophetic protest is legitimate for Christians:
Jeremiah 7:1-12

Ezekiel 4:1-17

Matthew 3:1-12

Luke 19:41-46

5. If Christians can and should get involved in prophetic protest, are there any limits to that involvement (e.g. should it always be non-violent, should it avoid inconveniencing 'innocent' people trying to go about their lawful business)?
6. Can you think of any examples of prophetic protest events or movements that have been significant in bringing about change? What was the key to their success and what can that teach us about responses to the climate emergency?
7. What ways, other than protest, can we influence government and corporations to change their policies and behaviour?
8. Do you agree with the quote from John Lewis in the introduction to this study? Why/Why not?

Pray:

- For God to stir his church to speak prophetically into the climate emergency.
- For courage to get involved in legitimate protest in legitimate ways.

Sermon Notes:

Study 11: New Creation

Revelation 21:1-5 & 22:1-5

Context:

Our series began in the first chapters of the first book of the Bible (Genesis) with the creation of the universe by the power of God's word in the beginning. It ends in the last chapters of the last book of the Bible (Revelation) with a new creation. The apostle John describes in vivid picture language the vision he received of the climax of human history and the beginning of a new reality, a new heaven and earth, the home of righteousness. It is fitting that we wind up our series 'Is God Green?' with this stunning, hope-filled vision of the future.

Observation:

1. What does John see in 21:1-2?
2. What does he hear in 21:3?
3. What is the good news in 21:4?
4. What does God declare in 21:5a?
5. What does John see in 22:1-2a?
6. What stands on the banks of the river and what benefit do they bring (22:2b)?
7. What will finally be no more according to 22:3a?
8. What and who will be in the city according to 22:3b?
9. What is the good news for God's servants in 22:4?
10. What else will be no more and why according to 22:5a?
11. What will God and his servants do according to 22:5b?

Meaning:

1. Look back to the early chapters of Genesis and identify any connections with these two texts in Revelation? What is the significance of these connections and what hope do they give us in light of the climate emergency?
2. Compare 21:1 with 21:5 and share your thoughts on whether we should expect a *New Creation* or a *Renewed Creation*? What is the difference between these two options and does it matter which is right?
3. How is 21:4 a word of comfort and hope to those suffering the greatest impact of climate change?
4. Earlier in this series we reflected on the practical and the aesthetic aspects of God's creation, particularly with regard to trees. How do we see both of these aspects reflected in the vision of 22:1-2?
5. What is the curse being spoken of in 22:3 and why is it such good news, for people and for the rest of creation, that it will finally be removed? [see Genesis 3:14-19 & Romans 8:18-25]
6. What do you think it means in 22:5b that we will finally reign for ever and ever in the future world and why is that good news for the rest of creation? [see Genesis 1:26-28].

Application:

1. If God has promised that he will bring about this new or renewed creation in the future, why should we bother taking action to improve the climate NOW?
2. What have you learned in this series that you didn't know before?

3. What difference, if any, will this series make to your attitude and actions with regard to the environment?
4. How would have answered the question: 'Is God Green' at the beginning of this series and how would you answer the same question now?
5. Can you name one action you will take as a result of studying this series?

Pray:

- Thank God for the glorious future he will bring about.
- Pray for God's help to do what we can to make a difference NOW as we wait.
- Pray the Lord's Prayer slowly and reflect on what each phrase means in the light of the climate crisis.

A Final Word:

**'If, in a Climate Crisis' taken from 'Changing the Climate'
by Debbie, David & Jamie Hawker.**

**If you can ride your bike when all about you
Are driving cars and showing them to you,
If you can trust yourself to reuse nappies
But not to judge those who do not manage to;
If you can walk and not be tired by walking,
And for your holiday choose not to fly,
And practice love, and not give way to hating,
And never boast of what you do not buy:**

**If you can dream – but never stop at dreaming;
If you can think – and act upon your plan;
If you can do what must be done to save lives
And worry not what's said on Instagram;
If you can bear to hear the truths you've spoken
Turned to fake news by those who jeer at you
Or watch the things you gave your life to, broken,
And pick them up and start again anew:**

**If you can march with crowds and stay non-violent,
Or sit alone outside your parliament,
If you rejoice when carbon footprints reduce
But greet increases wit sincere lament;
If you plant trees, and hope they grow to bear fruit,
And don't forget the things which mater most:
God's is the earth and everything that's in it,
Let's care for it, or we will be toast!**

Study 12: Palm Sunday

Matthew 21 v 1-17

Context:

Today we change gear, leaving our series on the environment behind and heading with Jesus into Jerusalem and onto the most momentous week in the history of the universe. Of course, we don't really leave concern about the environment behind at all as we follow Jesus into the city on his donkey on Palm Sunday, because he rode into Jerusalem as the promised King who would establish God's kingdom on earth which, as we have seen, leads to the healing and renewal of all things, including the material world. So, let's take our place in the frenzied crowd that day and cheer Jesus into town.

Observation:

1. Where did Jesus come to as he approached Jerusalem (v 1)?
2. What did he send two of his disciples to do (v 2)?
3. What were they to say if they were questioned (v 3)?
4. Where and how was this event prophesied years earlier (v 4-5)?
5. What did the disciples do when they had brought the donkey and colt to Jesus (v 6-7)?
6. What did the crowds spread on the road (v 8)?
7. What did they shout as Jesus rode by (v 9)?
8. What was the reaction as Jesus entered the city (v 10-11)?
9. Where did Jesus go on entering the city and what did he do (v 12)?
10. Which two prophets did he quote in v 13 and what did he say?
11. Who came to him and what did he do for them (v 14)?
12. What was the reaction of the religious leaders in v 15 and why?
13. What was Jesus' reply to their objection and which Old Testament text does he quote?
14. Where did he go to spend the night (v 17)?

Meaning:

1. Do you think Jesus had pre-arranged to borrow his transport into Jerusalem (v 1-3) or was this a demonstration of his divine knowledge?
2. Why did he specifically choose to ride into the city on a donkey and its colt?
3. What should the crowd have understood about the identity of Jesus – his person and his mission – by his fulfilment of Zechariah's ancient prophecy?
4. What was the significance of laying cloaks on the donkey and the road (v 7-8) – see 2 Kings 9 v 6-13 for a clue.
5. Some years before Palm Sunday, there was a political revolt in Judah, led by Jews yearning for freedom from Herod and his Roman overlords. The symbol of the revolt was the palm branch. So, as they lay palm branches on the road and shouted 'Hosanna', which meant 'Save us now!', what do you think the crowd's expectations of Jesus were as he rode into the city that day?
6. Why would Jesus' actions in the temple have taken the wind out of the crowd's sails? Read Isaiah 56 v 7 and Jeremiah 7 v 11, which Jesus quotes in v 13, and explore the wider context Jesus was trying to address as he cleansed the temple.

7. In 2 Samuel 5 v 6-8, when King David comes to Jerusalem as King and captures the city to make it his new capital, he curses the blind and the lame. How do the actions of Jesus on Palm Sunday compare and contrast with those of David (see especially v 14)?
8. Why do you think the religious leaders got Jesus so wrong? How is this a warning for us?

Application:

1. Jesus made all the arrangements for Palm Sunday, either by human or divine means. How does it make you feel to know that Jesus is in charge of all things, even your very life?
2. What does it mean to you that Jesus is the promised King and how do you show your allegiance to him?
3. What tables might Jesus want to overturn a) in your life, b) in the church, and c) in the world?
4. Jesus shows special care for those least respected and honoured – the blind, the lame, and little children. Who are the least respected and honoured in our world today? How would Jesus treat them and how should we treat them?
5. How can we guard against holding views about the person and mission of Jesus which are sincere but nevertheless wrong?
6. Referring back to our previous studies, both on racial justice last Autumn, and on the climate emergency in this series, what does Palm Sunday have to say to these important issues?

Pray:

- For eyes to see Jesus in his true identity as King.
- For grace to love the least as Jesus did.
- For forgiveness where we have held wrong views about Jesus.

Sermon Notes:

Study 13: Easter Sunday

John 20 v 1-18

Context:

In our previous study we joined the crowds giving Jesus a hero's welcome into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. However, the atmosphere quickly changed when Jesus kicked Jewish traders out of the temple rather than Roman soldiers out of the Antonia Fortress. As Holy Week wore on, the adulation turned to accusation, until it reached a cruel climax on Good Friday when Jesus was nailed up to die a slow, agonising death. But, of course, that was not the end of the story, which was about to take a wondrous twist in the very early hours of Sunday morning. We are going to explore John's account of the events of that day. He was probably the closest of all the disciples to Jesus, known as the beloved disciple, or the disciple whom Jesus loved, so we can trust his account, no matter how fantastic it seems.

Observation:

1. What time of day was it when Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and what did she find on her arrival (v 1)?
2. Where did she immediately go and what did she say (v 2)?
3. Who ran to the tomb in v 3 and who won the foot race (v 4)?
4. What did they do on arrival at the tomb (v 5-6a) and what did they see (v 6b-7)?
5. What was the reaction of the winner of the footrace when he finally entered the tomb (v 8)?
6. What hadn't they yet understood (v 9), and so what did they do (v 10)?
7. Who stayed at the tomb and how was she feeling (v 11)?
8. What did she see when she looked into the tomb (v 12)?
9. What question was she asked in v 13 and what was her reply?
10. Who did she see on turning around (v 14) and what did he ask her (v 15a)?
11. Who did he she think he was and what did she therefore ask him (v 15b)?
12. What did he then say to her and how did she react (v 16-17a)?
13. What did he tell her in v 17?
14. Where did she then go and what did she report (v 18)?

Meaning:

1. Genesis 1 tells us that God began his creation on the first day of the week. So, why do you think he chose to raise Jesus from the dead on the first day of the week too (v 1)?
2. Mary Magdalene doesn't even go into the tomb on her first visit that morning but assumes that Jesus' body has been removed (v 1-2). Why do you think she makes this assumption?
3. Why do you think John didn't go into the tomb even though he outran Peter (v 4-5)?
4. What do we know about Peter that would make it not at all surprising that he should run straight into the tomb (v 6)?
5. What do you think was significant about the description of the linen and head cloth (v 6-7)?
6. What did John believe in v 8 and why?
7. Peter and John had failed to see prophecies of the resurrection in the Old Testament (v 9). Where would you turn in the Old Testament to find prophecies of the resurrection of Jesus?
8. Why do you think Mary was so upset in v 11?

9. Why do you think she failed to recognise Jesus at first (v 14)?
10. Why do you think hearing her name in v 16 had such an impact on Mary?
11. What do you think Jesus means by his words to Mary in v 17?

Application:

1. If the resurrection of Jesus was the beginning of God's New Creation, what implications does that have for our lives now and for the world in its brokenness?
2. Reflecting on John's account and those of the other Gospel writers, how would you answer someone who says: 'The resurrection of Jesus is just a myth invented by his followers and has no basis in historical truth!'
3. John was convinced by what he saw that day. Why is the bodily resurrection of Jesus the lynchpin of Christian faith and belief? What would be lost from the faith if the resurrection never actually happened?
4. It was hearing Jesus use her name that transformed Mary from weeping to rejoicing. What does it mean to you that Jesus knows you and calls you by name?

Pray:

- Thank God for the glorious resurrection of Jesus.
- Pray for those who doubt the truth of the resurrection.
- Thank God that he knows you and calls you by name.

Sermon Notes:

Study 14: Peter is Restored

John 21 v 1-19

Context:

The disciples must have experienced a roller-coaster of emotions over the period we call Holy Week and Easter. From elation on Palm Sunday to heartbreak on Good Friday to inexpressible joy on Easter Sunday! The glorious resurrection of Jesus didn't lead to total and immediate transformation for the disciples. There was still much to reflect on for all of them on and, for some of them, a few skeletons in the cupboard to bring out and deal with, as we will see in today's final study in this series.

Observation:

1. Where did Jesus appear in v 1?
2. Who was present according to v 2?
3. What did Peter decide to do and what was the outcome (v 3)?
4. Who did they see on the shore early in the morning (v 4)?
5. What did he ask them in v 5 and what did he tell them to do in v 6?
6. What was the result (v6b)?
7. Who recognised that it was Jesus (v7a) and what did Peter do when he heard this (v7b)?
8. What did the other disciples do (v 8)?
9. What did they find when they reached the shore (v 9)?
10. What did Jesus tell them to do (v 10)?
11. How many fish had they caught (v 11)?
12. What did Jesus invite them to do in v 12 and what did the disciples not have the courage to ask him and why?
13. Who hosted this breakfast (v 13)?
14. What did Jesus ask Peter after breakfast (v 15), how did he reply and what instruction did he then give him?
15. What did Jesus ask him the second time (v 16), how did Peter respond and what instruction did he receive?
16. How did Peter feel when Jesus asked his third question in v 17 and what was his reply?
17. What does Jesus tell him in v 17b-18?
18. What was the significance of Jesus' words and what was his final instruction to Peter (v 19)?

Meaning:

1. Why do you think Peter suggested going fishing (v 3)?
2. When had they experienced the exact same miracle as the one described in v 3-6 and why do you think Jesus deliberately chose to re-enact this miracle at this particular moment? [See Luke 5 v 1-11].
3. How was Peter's behaviour in v 7 typical of him?
4. How does it make you feel to know Jesus cared for the disciples' physical needs by preparing breakfast? Can you think of any other occasions when Jesus did this kind of thing?
5. Who are the 'these' Jesus mentions in v 15? What is Jesus really asking Peter here?
6. Why do you think Peter was so hurt in v 17?

7. How does it make you feel to know that Jesus recommissioned Peter for ministry, to lead and care for his flock, even though Peter had let Jesus down so badly in the recent past?
8. Do you think Jesus' words in v 18-19 would have been an encouragement to Peter or a discouragement? Explain your view.

Application:

1. Have you ever felt that you have let Jesus down? How did you feel and what helped to change your feelings? How is this passage an encouragement to you?
2. How should the way Jesus treated Peter serve as a model or example for the way we should treat those who let us down? What are the challenges and barriers to following Jesus' example here and how can they be overcome?
3. Jesus told Peter he would one day demonstrate his love for Jesus by dying as a martyr – he wouldn't lose his nerve as he did on the night before Jesus died. In what ways is our love for Jesus costly? What sacrifices does being committed to Jesus bring?

Pray:

- Thank God for second chances.
- Pray that our love for Jesus would be so strong that we are prepared to pay any cost.

Sermon Notes:

