

Eco Church Study 3: Learning from the Psalms

"The earth is the Lord's and everything in it" Psalm 24.1.

The psalms are a songbook of God's people. What inspires their thinking more than anything else is God's creation and through the psalms so many fundamental truths about God are taught. This wonderful planet may be our home but it does not belong to us – it is on loan to us as a precious gift to be looked after. It belongs to God who created it in the first place and looks after it. God loves this world deeply and continues to care for this world – for every mountain and forest, for every bird and animal, for the changing of the seasons and the ebb and flow of the tides.

Read and consider the following psalms:

Psalm 8 *O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! v.1 and v.9.* This is a hymn of joy, of praise and wonder at creation and then how mankind has been made God's king.

"Yet you have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honour. You have given them dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under their feet, all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas. v6-8.

Psalm 50.10 *'Every wild animal of the forest is mine and the cattle on a thousand hills.'*

Psalm 115:16 *"The heavens are the Lord's heavens, but the earth he has given to human beings."*

Psalm 104 is the great hymn to the creator and provider showing that the whole of creation is dependent on God for day to day existence. *"From your lofty abode you water the mountains; the earth is satisfied with the fruit of your work. You cause the grass to grow for the cattle, and plants for people to use, to bring forth food from the earth, and wine to gladden the human heart, oil to make the face shine, and bread to strengthen the human heart. v13-15.*

Ps 19: *The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge. v1-2.* God is actively proclaiming his name through nature. All creation transmits the message of God's glory and his name.

Ps 36 Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains, your judgements are like the great deep; you save humans and animals alike, O Lord. How precious is your steadfast love, O God! All people take refuge in the shadow of your wings. They feast on the abundance of your house, and you give them drink from the rivers of your delights. For in you is the fountain of life; v6-9

Ps 46: *God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change, though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea: though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble with its tumult. . .v1-3 . "Be still, and know that I am God! I am exalted among the nations, I am exalted in the earth". v10.*

Ps 65 a hymn of thanks giving for earth's bounty.

By your strength you established the mountains; you are girded with might . . . You visit the earth and water it, you greatly enrich it; the river of God is full of water; you provide the people with grain, for so you have prepared it. You water its furrows abundantly, settling its ridges, softening it with showers, and blessing its growth. v9-10

Question: What do these psalms tell us about God's creation?

In what way do we acknowledge God's majesty over all the earth?

What is the state of the planet today? Have we treated it as our world – a 'natural resource' for us, rather than a natural treasure for God?

Do we recognise the intrinsic value in creation because God made it, God cares for it and it finds its value in relation to Jesus Christ?

Read Psalm 8. Consider this commentary by Edward Brown in the opening chapter of "*Creation Care and the Gospel*". Chapter 1 "*Ruling God's World in God's Way: Dominion in Psalm 8.*"

Anyone who wants to explore creation care or the environmental crisis will have to come to grips with the fundamental question of where we human beings fit in the overall scheme of things. Are we just one of many thousands of species . . . or are we divinely appointed dictators, having ability and divine right to determine the fate of anything that is not us? Or something in between? It is a question that cannot be avoided. We human beings are the single biggest force in nature at this time in history, and our own future depends, humanly speaking at least, on how we answer this question.

Dominion can be and has been the excuse for all kinds of selfishness, arrogance and general abuse of God's world. Scholar Lynn White famously suggested that Christianity itself is to blame for the modern environmental crisis. Disturbingly, a number of Christians have inadvertently given Lynn White's conclusion support by using dominion as an excuse for their own environmental exploitation and neglect.

For all these reasons, dominion makes some of us uncomfortable. Given a choice, we would prefer to promote stewardship rather than defend such an apparently pernicious doctrine. Genesis 2:15 ("The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and keep it" ESV) feels like a nicer, or I say, a greener concept. Genesis 1 seems to open the door to rulership and seems to sanction actual abuse of creation – but Genesis 2 suggests cooperation, cultivation, and stewardship.

Our dominion is constrained by God's authority over us. Therefore, the way we exercise dominion should be guided by the way God exercises his authority over us. We should rule creation as God rules us. . . . God's sovereignty is marked by mercy and compassion and love. . . . God rules us in love, always seeking our best. And we should – no, we must – do the same in our care for God's creation, not our own. We can best do that by looking at the goals God has as he cares for us. We can think of it like a creation-wide version of the golden rule: not just that we should 'do unto others as we want them to do unto us' but that we should care for all creation as we would want God to care for us – which is marked by tenderness, compassion, mercy, and ultimately sacrifice.

Our goals for God's creation should mirror God's goals for our part in it. And one of God's goals is that his name should be proclaimed in his creation. Does our current practice of dominion enhance God's proclamation of his name? In a word: no. Measured in this way, human dominion over creation is an abysmal failure, as it demonstrated throughout this book. This failure is not an accident nor due to incompetence. It is

because of disobedience, and an indictment against us. Our failure to obey . . . has important, immediate consequences. God's world was created to operate in harmony with God's purposes. When we ignore those purposes, we can expect to have big problems.

We have economies that do not work; paralyzed political systems; environmental nightmares; corruption and crime on every level in all our countries. Should we be surprised at what they cause: It is surely what we should expect from a world built around the pursuit of our own goals rather than God's.

We *ought* to proclaim God's name because he wants us to. More, we *must* do this, if we are to survive and flourish in God's creation. This is apparent in the Call to Action which leads with two convictions: (i) Creation Care is indeed a "gospel issue" and 'we would care for creation even if it were not in crisis' and (ii) we are 'faced with a crisis that is pressing, urgent and must be resolved in our generation'.