

The ecological crisis presents big questions which do not have easy answers. How should we live? Is there any hope for humanity? What is the church's task in all of this? The Bible and the church's theology may not tell us specifically how to deal with issues like climate change but they do give us essential insights and wisdom.

Creation

The world is God's creation and is good. The heavens declare God's glory. The earth is filled with the Lord's unfailing love. Humanity is a part of God's creation, made from the earth, and a part of the landscape. But humanity has a particular role. Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness" (Gen 1.26). As such we are called to show God's creative love in the world.

Stewardship

Humanity occupies a special place in God's created order: Genesis 1:28 and Psalm 8 both speak of humanity's rule or dominion. Our delegated freedom and authority in the world can be used or abused and, clearly, particularly over the last 200 years we have badly abused our position.

Our challenge is to take seriously our role as stewards of God's creation. In Genesis 2:15 God gives Man the task of looking after the Garden of Eden, caring for it and protecting it on God's behalf. The world is not ours. It belongs to God: psalm 24:1 – 'The earth is the LORD's and everything in it, the world and all who live in it'. We are therefore called to use our power responsibly.

Continual involvement

As the Bible story unfolds God makes covenant agreements with the world, with Abraham, Israel, David, and through Jesus with all people. God's relationship with the world is one of commitment, and it is continual. God has not simply set the world up and then left it.

The books of the Law, the Prophets and the Wisdom writings address questions of how to live. Proverbs depicts the wisdom of God as intimately involved in the process of creation. True wisdom is not in opposition to the life of the world but in harmony with it.

The prophets see beyond the mundane to the activity of God, and from that vision have a message. Sometimes the world provides images of God, as it did for Jesus in his parables. At other times world events are agents of God: a drought, a famine, a plague of locusts. But there is not a great plan. The future is open. It can be different from what the prophet sees. God can change his mind. Israel, or humanity, can change its ways. People and peoples can repent, and do things differently. We can turn to walk humbly with the loving God whose desire is liberating justice, healing and peace.

Incarnation

In Jesus the word of God is made flesh. Jesus breathed, ate, moved, thought, spoke, and suffered. 'The image of the invisible God' is Jesus Christ, who is crucified.

God's engagement with the world is total. God is not a remote observer. We suffer. Humanity suffers. Creation suffers. And God suffers with us.

The Kingdom of God

In the gospels Jesus is not just a teacher but the bringer of a new order: the Kingdom of God. It is portrayed as both breaking in, and still to come. It includes a human community shaped so that it is in accord with God's values, and based on God's creative love.

Jesus teaches us that if we focus on God's kingdom and his justice the things we worry about, like food, drink and clothing, will follow.

Resurrection

When Jesus was crucified and cried out to his Father God did not intervene to stop what was happening. Jesus died. But out of Jesus' death came his resurrection: an affirmation of who he was and what he said and did, and also a new way of being. Jesus was taken into the life of God beyond the confines of space, time and matter.

Jesus' disciples came to see themselves as following him both now, in carrying out his work of bringing in the kingdom, and beyond death, in the life of God in eternity. Paul spoke about a new creation: the whole creation being made new; possibly (like the kingdom) something happening now and to be completed outside time.

New Possibilities

In damaging God's creation and in failing to be what God intends we cause God pain and we frustrate his creative love. And in damaging the world we damage ourselves. But in Jesus we see how God's creative love overcomes the destructive forces of humanity: indifference, greed, hatred, jealousy. From our own failures to love, our own destructiveness and acts of greed and jealousy, we can move on with God's forgiveness to new possibilities. And do so empowered by God's Spirit.

God is continually active in the world by his Spirit. To live by the Spirit is to be responsive to God. To respond to God is to live by the Spirit. The picture is of us being caught up in the life of God: with the Father, the being of God, beyond space and time; with the Spirit, the energy of God, within space and time; and with Jesus, the Word, the Son, within human society and history.

Love

We should love God with our whole self and our neighbour as ourselves. If we love God we will treat God's creation with care and respect. Jesus would not have us draw boundaries between those we were to love and those we weren't. We are therefore called to help whoever we can who is suffering as a result of the present ecological crisis.

Justice

In the scriptures we see God working to rescue people who suffer from those who are causing their suffering. God's love works itself out in justice. Inasmuch as we cause the suffering of others through our greed or negligence we stand condemned by God. But God offers the possibility of forgiveness and a new start, and that new start involves working for God's justice, rather than against it.

Now we are able to anticipate the suffering of future generations if we continue to live in a way that causes climate change, a shortage of resources, pollution, or soil loss. To do so is to fail to love our neighbours. Developing a sustainable lifestyle is therefore a Christian imperative, not simply an option. There is no ethical neutrality here. We go with the flow or we change direction.

Hope in God

The magnitude of the crisis we face and the forces we are up against can make us feel powerless. Is it worth doing anything? However, we are not called to do the impossible. We follow Christ, doing what we can in response to the love of God.

We are one with millions of people across the world who often feel overwhelmed by what we face. But our hope is in God, at work in the world now and whose life and love reach beyond time into eternity.

Isaiah and Revelation speak of 'a new heaven and a new earth'. This can be seen in a number of ways. But whatever we make of these visions of a new creation, there is no suggestion in Isaiah or Revelation that God's present creation should be treated as of little consequence. Instead, they are suggesting that however damaged this world may be, there is continually hope in God the creator.