

WORLD VIEW SERMON SERIES

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WORLDVIEW - REDEMPTION/RESTORATION

Romans 5&8

Leo Douma

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I remember many years ago when I was doing my first practical experience as a theological student. I was asked to teach a catechism class about heaven. As I remember it, the kids were quite unenthusiastic. So, I tried to get things going a bit by generating some excitement. 'Wouldn't it be great to be with God in heaven?' One honest lad spoke up and said, 'I couldn't think of anything more boring! Who wants to flit around as a spirit playing harps for eternity and singing hymns? It's bad enough singing them on Sunday morning'. Tell me what is your vision of where your life is headed? Does it inspire hope in your life, or despair, even boredom? Our view of what comes after this life or at the end of time, has a major impact on how we live. This is a key worldview issue. Remember a worldview is a set of beliefs about how everything came into being, what it means to be human, where all of life is headed. The Bible provides us with a set of glasses with which to look at the world. To work out a person's worldview ask four questions: Where am I? Who am I? What is wrong? What is the answer? The worldview we get from the Bible can be summed up under the headings: Creation, Fall, Redemption, Restoration. Today we will focus on the question What is the answer? We do it under the themes of Redemption & Restoration.

Now, since those early days, I realized I was sending the kids up the wrong track by only talking of heaven. For thousands of years Christian theology has been deeply affected by the Greek idea that spiritual things are good and material things are bad. The result is much of Christian thinking has come to understand that Jesus came to 'save our souls'. The understanding is that our bodies and this creation will disappear, and we will finally live forever with God as spirits in heaven. How does that view affect our living here and now? Well, I think of a mate who loves four-wheel driving. He loves to thrash through the bush. When I challenged him once, he replied, 'Mate, it's all going to be destroyed in God's judgment. It will disappear as we go to heaven. So, what does it matter?' I think of many Christians who do their work simply for an income to live on. They do work that has no connection with God, except to be good workers, biding time till they go to heaven. This is not the biblical view.

In this series we said all that exists is the obedient response to the word of God. "God said, 'Let there be ...' and it was so". In that obedience, the creation brought God great praise; "God saw all that he had made and it was very good!" We too, as human beings, were created to obey and bring God all the praise. Being made in God's image, ours was to be a response of obedience out of a free will and love for God. But instead of obedience there was disobedience to God's Word. There was the distortion and twisting of God's word. There was the human self-glorifying and worshipping gods of our own making. The result of all that is the brokenness and the devastation we see around us. So, we see that the biblical worldview affirms the goodness of the creation and it speaks very highly of us as human beings and our task in the world. But it does not romanticize life. It is utterly realistic about the human situation. If we stopped at this point on the two themes of Creation and Fall we would have cause for deep despair. But the biblical vision offers great hope. It also speaks of Redemption. It tells us that God has answered our deepest need in Jesus.

Look at Romans 5. We see Jesus described as the new Adam, the head of a new human race. Both the old Adam and the new Adam have an impact on humanity and the whole creation. What is different about the second Adam is that Jesus is himself the Word of God. As John 1:1 puts it "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God... all things were made through him." In the coming of Jesus, God speaks his Word again. Jesus is God's final Word. And as the 'Immanuel', Jesus is God himself with us in our humanity. So, Jesus is both God's commanding Word, and the one who obeys that Word. Note Romans 5:19 "For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so through the obedience of the one man, the many will be made righteous." Throughout salvation history God has made covenants with Adam, Abraham, Moses, David in which he calls his people to obedience, to hold to their part of the covenant. No one did properly. But now out of God's covenant people comes Jesus who will fulfill the human side of the covenant of grace. With the incarnation is a man who is also God's son. He is the God-man who brings salvation by obedience; all the way to the cross. So, we see the parallels here between Adam and Jesus. By the one, all who follow are condemned. By the other all who follow him are reconciled with God.

But notice also, both affect the whole creation. Adam's fall was the ruin not only of humanity, but of the whole creation. Everything was cursed. The obedience of Jesus also affects the whole creation. This is seen very clearly in what Paul writes in Romans 8:18-25. Here we have a glorious passage that speaks of the entire universe as a woman in labour pains, waiting anxiously for the moment of birth: (: 19) "We know that

the whole creation has been groaning as in childbirth right up to the present time... The creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed". In other words, the whole creation is waiting for Jesus to come back and gather in his people. The creation, as an obedient response to God's word is suffering under the disobedience and curse of sin. It too wants to be liberated from the curse. (: 20) "For the creation itself was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God." The moment of Christ's return is what the entire universe is hanging out for. The words of the psalms and prophets spring to mind here as they speak of "mountains singing, ...the rivers and the trees clap their hands". I think this is more than picturesque language. Creation will absolutely jubilate when Jesus returns. For then all will, again, be "good...very good". So, what are we saying? The scope of Redemption will be no less than the scope of the Fall. It affects everything, the whole creation. Everything will be restored to how it was meant to be.

This is demonstrated even further when we see how the New Testament speaks of the "new heavens and the new earth" in Revelation 21 & 2 Peter 3. What is very interesting is that the Greek word for "new" in those contexts does not mean 'brand new'. It means new in the sense of 'renewing what already exists, to renovate'. What does that imply? Well it is this earth, the mountains and valleys we know, the seas and rivers, the birds and animals, this universe, the stars and the galaxies, this creation that will be renewed. Not some brand new spiritual world. It will be this world, "cleansed by fire" as Peter describes it. And then it will be renovated, renewed, with the curse of sin gone.

This understanding is backed up by the fact that all the basic words in the Bible describing salvation imply a restoration, a returning to an original state. Redemption: to redeem means to set free, to buy back, e.g. someone pays the ransom on behalf of the captive person and buys back their freedom. Reconciliation: refers to friends who have fallen out and who return to their friendship. A sinful person is restored in their relationship with God through Jesus. Renewal: to make new again. That which has gotten worse for wear is brought back to back to its former glory. Salvation: the Greek 'soteria' generally has the meaning of health or security after a sickness or fear. So, in another words Jesus our great physician, restores us from our sickness of sin and death. Regeneration: to bring to life that which has died. So, in a sense, salvation does not bring anything new. Redemption is not a matter of adding something spiritual. It's a matter of restoration. It's about bringing back to the obedient life and vitality what was there all along- Gods "very good" creation. What redemption adds is the remedy for sin.

We see the same idea of restoration in the understanding of the Kingdom of God, which is the central theme of the New Testament. Remember Jesus preached (Matthew 3:2), "Repent for the Kingdom of God is at hand". By kingdom we mean there is a king, a people and a land. In Jesus we see that the rightful king of the world has come to reclaim what is his. Jesus didn't just preach about the coming of the Kingdom. He demonstrated it. Think of all his miracles. They were not only 'signs' to prove he was God. They demonstrated his authority, his kingship over everything, over the power of nature, sickness, even Satan. And so many of Jesus miracles were restoring people to health, to life, to freedom from demon possession. They were examples of what life will be like when he fully claims everything as King. It will be a world that is free of sin and death. It will be a world where nature no longer brings hurricanes that destroy and kill and drown. It will be a world where accidents no longer happen, where sickness and disease won't creep up on your body and slowly take away your life. Jesus told us to pray for the kingdom; "Your Kingdom come". He meant for us to long for the time when everything is again good, very good. In Jesus the kingdom has already come. So, it is 'already' here, but 'not yet' fully. 'Already, but not yet'. In Jesus' first coming he established a foothold on the creation. When he comes again he will have complete victory.

So, what's all this mean for us? What does this worldview, do? Well, it gives deep meaning to you and me and the world we live in. Let's start with ourselves. We must be of great significance to God, if he not only created us in his own image, but also sent Jesus to die for our sin. And he will further raise us to new life to live with him forever. And by 'us' I don't just mean our souls, our bodies are important too. Whatever our weaknesses, our frailties, the time will come when we will be whole, truly complete, able to enjoy our humanness. Let no one say, 'I am nothing, I am useless, worthless.' We are indeed unworthy of God's love because of our sin and disobedience. But in Christ we are of great worth, deeply loved, with the best yet to come. Do you see the implications? If in time we will be physically whole, on the restored earth, it means we will be able to do all that we could not do on this earth. Perhaps disease, or poverty, lack of opportunity, so many effects of sin robbed us of developing our gifts and potential. The things we wanted to explore, do for God, on the new earth we will have an eternity with God to do them all. So, we can live now with patience and hope.

Let's think about the earth itself. If God gave his precious son to die to restore all he had made, it tells us a lot about how he values this earth, with its mountains and plains, its rivers and seas, its plants and animals. We too should value it all deeply and properly care for it. We should carefully think of our farming practices, our policy on

National Parks, mining resources, our way of life and our use of the limited resources. This earth is not just going to hell, so who cares. The work we do, is not just a passing of time, using the resources of this earth till it all disappears, and we head for the 'spiritual realm'. The Kingdom of God has come to the creation in Jesus. He is reclaiming it all from the forces of sin and evil. So that should be the goal in everything we do. We should strive to reclaim marriage and family life for Jesus, work and sport, economics and politics, science and the arts. All of life belongs to King Jesus. And what we do in his Name, what area of life we reclaim for him, will have its impact on the new earth. The kingdom of God is seen when we are together in worship. It is seen when we evangelize in Jesus Name, where people hear the Word and respond in belief and repentance. And the Kingdom is also seen where we do our work, our study, our science for Jesus. Everything that we do for Jesus will have its place on the new earth. Not just saved souls, not just hymns in worship, but all of life will have its place. Doesn't that give us so much more vision for life, so much more inspiration and hope?

To share the gospel today we cannot assume people accept there is a God, let alone a need to be right with him. We need to get into their worldview and help them see where it leads. That's where the four questions are helpful. When their worldview leads to despair share the joy of how we see things. Our very lifestyles should be demonstrations of hope and grace. We as Christians should be the most joyful, enthusiastic, hopeful, visionary people on the earth. For our vision is not just a possible hope. In Christ the kingdom has already come. Jesus is already the victor by his death and resurrection. He is coming again with the new heavens and the new earth. It's just a matter of time.