



Sermon notes



An explanation of where Bin Twinning fits into a Kingdom response



A case study from Pakistan



Sermon notes

Creation Care

'For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. For the creation 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 freedom and glory of the children of God.'

Romans 8:19-21

'To claim to love the Creator but to abuse the world in which we live is like claiming to be fans of Shakespeare whilst burning his plays. The created world is God's masterpiece.'

Marika Rose and Jason Fletcher, Tearfund 2007 report entitled *Why should Christians care for the Environment?*

Care of creation is not a fringe element of our discipleship. Our participation in God's mission requires that we value His creation, and bear witness to His final redemption of all of creation.

Authentic Christianity asks three questions:

1. How do we live to glorify Jesus?
2. What does the Bible say?
3. How can we serve the world with the gospel?

So, why should Christians care for the environment?

- There are more people living on this planet and making use of its resources than ever before.
- Climate change, planetary boundaries, the impact of pollution and the use of resources are clearly present concerns.
- We are told to recycle, reuse and reduce.
- Governments gather in meetings to negotiate climate change treaties and coordinate approaches.
- 97.5% of scientists published attribute climate change to human activity.

It is only right, then, that we should think how we should live our lives in relation to the earth. This is, of course, an area of controversy. After all if the present heaven and earth are to be destroyed as described in 2 Peter 3, what is the point of working to preserve them? Perhaps, in the face of environmental (or other types of) calamity, we should rather redouble our energies in preaching the gospel and helping people come to saving faith in Jesus.

In considering our relationship with the planet, Christians need to ask the question: 'Whose Earth do we live on?' and ask how, in this context, we can best act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with our God (Micah 6:8).

The plan for creation

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. This is the story of Genesis – God's creation of the world, including the creation of humanity. Here we learn that God crafted the universe, piece-by-piece, ensuring that every part of it was good.

Psalm 24 declares that:

'The earth is the Lord's, and everything that's in it.'

And God did not leave creation once it was made: the Bible shows him being intimately involved with sustaining creation throughout history. Psalm 65 declares that:

'You visit the earth and water it, you greatly enrich it.... You provide their grain... You water its furrows abundantly; You settle its furrows... You bless its growth. You crown the year with Your goodness, And Your paths drip with abundance.'

The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are all involved in sustaining the world:

- God creates in love and power
- Jesus holds all things together (Colossians 1:17)
- and the Spirit fills and inspires (Psalm 139:7-10).

The picture the Bible presents is one of God lavishing goodness and love on his creation – and of this creation responding to him in worship.

That biblical vision of creation care requires us, as Christians, to live in a way that acknowledges and expresses God's role as Creator and his sovereignty over his creation – our Earth. We are also commanded to love our neighbours as we do ourselves (Mark 12:31), which requires us to think about the impact that all areas of our lives have upon our fellow humans.

The Lausanne movement in Cape Town in 2010 declared: 'The earth is created, sustained and redeemed by Christ. We cannot claim to love God while abusing what belongs to Christ by right of creation, redemption and inheritance. Creation care is a thus a gospel issue.'

In Genesis 3 we learn that God created humans to, 'Till the earth and to keep it.' Our place in creation is a gift from God – and it is a gift that comes with responsibilities. The Hebrew words we translate as 'keep' and 'till' are *abad* (connoting servitude, not management) and *shamar* (for conservancy of life or observance of covenant), leading theologians such as Claudia Wallis to suggest that the phrase should run, 'To serve and to preserve.'

This is not about keeping creation unchanged, but about protecting and preserving it, keeping creation and its resources in trust – both for future generations and, most importantly, for Christ’s return, when we will answer to him as our sovereign God (Psalm 115:6).

Godly leadership and rule demands responsibility – we should govern the world as God does, reflecting His compassionate kingship through the expression of His other characteristics as we watch over his creation. Are we going to worship God and discover what it is to be fully and gloriously human, reflecting his healing, transformative love into the world – or not?

The plan for redemption

As Genesis 3 shows, God’s original humans chose the latter. So the rest of the Bible gives us the story of God’s redemptive plan for his creation – for nature and the physical environment, as well as for his people. The Bible begins with creation and ends with a new creation, and this narrative from creation to recreation tells us where we are (on earth) and who we are (made in the image of God and loved by him).

The cross is the point in this narrative where this promise of redemption begins to be fulfilled. Tom Wright argues that the resurrection of Christ gives us a strong view of God’s justice and His goodness as creator. In Jesus, the eternal son becomes human that he might be God’s steward, ruler of the world, and the ultimate expression of God’s love, bringing redemption to man and world through his death and resurrection.

Romans 8 also makes it apparent that God intends that humanity and creation will be redeemed together. Paul writes:

‘The earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God... because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.’

(Romans 8:19-21).

There is much debate over what this will look like – whether the new creation will follow in continuity from the present creation, or whether a wholly new creation will replace the current one. However, the point is that, in the light of redemption, we must live holy and Godly lives, looking forward to the full revelation of the Kingdom.

Living in the love and hope of redemption

In *Surprised by Hope*, Tom Wright argues that the hope that we have in God for the future is not simply a ‘future destiny’, but rather something that exists now but also not yet. We live in the tension between the ‘now’ and the ‘not yet’. God’s redemption – the Kingdom of Heaven – exists in our world, but not yet fully and completely. Hosea envisions the new and future covenant for God and His creation:

‘In that day... you will call Me, ‘My husband’, and no longer call Me, ‘My master’... In that day I will make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field, with the birds of the air, and with the creeping things of the ground... I will betroth you to Me forever; Yes, I will betroth you to Me in righteousness and justice, in loving kindness and mercy; I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness, and you shall know the Lord.’

(Hosea 2:16-21).

As we engage with the gospel, we see the centrality of God's desire for reconciliation, with God's will being done on earth now, as part of human history. Ultimately, the Bible is full of people doing things – that have a positive impact (for example, in the history of David's anointment and rule as King of Israel, in contrast to the reign of Saul).

In 1 Corinthians Paul writes:

'Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.'

(1 Corinthians 15:58).

Our work – our mission – is to participate in the redemption of creation: caring for creation is part of our mission, our worship and our reason for being.

So, we say, in the words of the Cape Town commitment:

'The earth is created, sustained and redeemed by Christ. We cannot claim to love God and our neighbour while abusing what belongs to Christ by right of creation, redemption and inheritance. We care for the earth and responsibly use its abundant resources, not according to the rationale of the secular world, but for the Lord's sake. If Jesus is Lord of all the earth, we cannot separate our relationship to Christ from how we act in relation to the earth. For to proclaim the gospel that says 'Jesus is Lord' is to proclaim the gospel that includes the earth, since Christ's Lordship is over all creation. Creation care is thus a gospel issue within the Lordship of Christ.'

Humanity's worship of God is about God, and our preservation of creation as a part of that worship centres on the innate value of that creation – but it is also critically connected to the gospel command for us to love our neighbours as we love ourselves.

This is summed up in the gospels, as Jesus teaches his disciples to keep the commandments, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.'" (Mark 12: 28-31). Worship of God, without the pursuit of God's justice for the people of creation, as well as for creation itself, is hollow. Concern for the last, the least and the lost of society is the recurrent social concern of the law, the prophets and the Messiah – and should be our concern as well.

Jesus made it clear that healing and salvation were both physical and spiritual, saying to those who questioned him, Which is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'? But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins. So he said to the paralysed man, "Get up, take your mat and go home." Then the man got up and went home. (Matthew 9:5-7).

We sing verses that cry out:

*Our father, all of heaven roars your name
Sing louder, let this place erupt with praise
Can you hear it, the sound of heaven
touching earth
The sound of heaven touching earth*

*Spirit break out, break our walls down
Spirit break out, heaven come down*

*King Jesus, you're the name we're lifting high
Your glory, shaking up the earth and skies
Revival, we want to see your kingdom here
We want to see your kingdom here*

We ought to challenge ourselves about what we're doing to make this a reality.

As Desmond Tutu declared:

'When you have *ubuntu*, you embrace others. You are generous, compassionate. If the world had more ubuntu... we would not have this huge gap between the rich and the power... You are powerful so that you can help the weak... This is God's dream.'

Those of us who live in high-income, industrialised countries (the western hemisphere, the global north, the minority world, depending upon your choice of terminology) have a particular responsibility. The gospel states that:

'From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.'

(Luke 12:48).

This discipleship is, as the New Testament makes clear, a path of self-denial, servanthood and obedience. Jesus asks his disciples, 'Why do you call me Lord, Lord, and do not do the things I say?' (Luke 6:46).

The command to love God and neighbour demands a response. And there are layers of response: personal, communal, national, technological and international; a personal response is not just an individual one.

So, as a church, we have to act better in our 'serving' and 'preserving' of creation.

Dave Bookless has noted that in a 2007 survey by the UK Environment Agency, 25 leading British environmentalists were asked about their 'top tips' for tackling climate change. Among the obvious responses about energy conservation, transport and food, the second most significant suggestion was for religious leaders to make the planet their priority. The report states, 'It is time the world's faith groups reminded us that we have a duty to restore and maintain the ecological balance of the planet.'



So – why is our church considering twinning its bins?!

There are two things about Bin Twinning:

1. Bins and
2. Twins.

Let's start with Bins.

2 billion people – that's 1 in 4 people on the planet – don't have a rubbish collection service. That means 2 billion people in the world's poorest countries are living and working among piles of waste. This creates a breeding ground for disease-carrying rats, flies and mosquitoes. Burning rubbish to get rid of it pollutes the air, causing respiratory problems. Waste also clogs waterways, which then causes floods when it rains. Each day the waste mountains are growing.

Up to a million people die each year due to pollution caused by waste. That's one person every 30 seconds.

Which brings us to the Twinning part of Bin Twinning...

Today, as a church, we can donate £45 and twin one of our bins with a social enterprise in Haiti, Pakistan or Uganda that is collecting people's rubbish, disposing of it safely and recycling as much as possible. So, that means that to twin all our bins in the church / church hall, we need to donate £xx.

Why would we want to do this?

In our consideration of God's plan for creation, and redemption, we have considered the passages of Genesis 2 and Mark 12:

Now the LORD God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed. The LORD God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. A river watering the garden flowed from Eden ...

The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.

Genesis 2:8-9, 15

"Of all the commandments, which is the most important?"

"The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these."

Mark 12:28-31

Imagine if you were living among uncollected rubbish. Imagine the risks of disease, injury and vermin. How would it feel to face all that rubbish every single day, and know that no-one is going to do anything about it?



A case study from Pakistan

Let me tell you about Rubina. Rubina is a young mother of three who lives in an urban slum in Pakistan. *Let's hear her story:*

SHOW FILM [this talk can be done with or without the film – if you have no film, paint a picture of Rubina's life with your words].

Rubina's eldest child Javed lives with a disability and needs to be carried everywhere. Due to his disability he has a hard time breathing, which is aggravated by toxic fumes in the air around their slum. So Rubina saves money from the three jobs she does to pay for oxygen at the hospital, so that for a short time he can breathe freely again. And little Tariq, her youngest, when he was three, picked up some harmful waste from the street rubbish and it burnt his face so badly it took two months to get better. Rubina is still upset that Tariq cried with the pain and cried himself to sleep every night. Heartbreaking.

But, motivated by God's call in Genesis for us to steward his beautiful earth, and by Jesus' commandment for us to love our neighbour, Bin Twinning is helping to fund a project in Pakistan to sort out the rubbish in the lives of people like Rubina. Not only to find a way to collect it so it's no longer left in the street and burned, or clogging up their waterways with the risk that it could float out to the ocean... but also to recycle it, which is enabling the local community to create an income from the waste.

And these recycling hubs are starting to make a massive difference to families like Rubina's.

It's an amazing, biblically-inspired piece of work, that:

1. improves the health of everyone in the community, as they breathe cleaner air and are not at risk of disease and injury from the rubbish,
2. cleans up the environment with less plastics ending up in the ocean, and reduces the greenhouse gases caused by the burning
3. *AND* it provides dignified jobs for local people.

This is neighbourly love in action: motivated by God's call for us to steward the earth.

And today we have an opportunity to support this – by Twinning our Bins!

When we twin our bin, we will put a sticker on the bin that has a photo of the social enterprise that is hard at work:

- Collecting people's rubbish
- Disposing of it safely
- Recycling as much as possible, and
- Pushing for action to reduce the amount of waste being generated in the first place.

When we twin our bin, we do our bit, to follow God's great command, to reach out in love to our neighbours living in extreme poverty, to literally save people's lives, as rubbish is a matter of life and death.

I pray that together we will see Rubina's prayers answered – that her precious children will have a **good and better life than her and her husband's.**

Amen