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“Very Good But Not Perfect” Sermon Series: “God and Global Warming”

Sunday, September 28, 2008©

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Scripture Lesson: *Genesis 1:28-31*

God made this world and called it very good.
Not perfect. Let us pray.

*Lord God you are the Father of the
Cosmos and you have made us in
Your image. You have redeemed us by
the blood of your only Son and you
have called us to live lives of holiness.
It is in His name this morning that we
ask you to fill us with our Holy Spirit
so that we might be transformed
through hearing your Word. Amen.*

Do you remember the first job you had? The first time anyone put you in charge of anything? Do you remember the feeling of responsibility? When I was 15, I ran a little soda pop, popcorn and cookie stand at Worlds of Fun. It was a one-man operation. But it was a building with four walls and I was fond of telling people about the “store I managed.” It was a big deal to a 15 year old kid. I frankly couldn’t believe that Mr. Lamar Hunt, the owner of Worlds of Fun, entrusted me to manage his soda stand. The profits of Hunt Midwest enterprises, albeit a small part, were in my young hands.

The first job God gave give to human beings was to manage His earth. But unlike Mr. Lamar Hunt, who could not to do it all himself and needed other people to help him run his empire—God can do it all Himself. Jesus Christ alone is sufficient. He is able to manage the earth very well without us, but He has chosen to use human beings to do it. Why?

In Genesis Chapter One, we have the story of God’s creation of the world. Genesis teaches that God made the earth in six days. Again, whether or not we believe that God made the heavens and the earth in six 24 hour days or six hundred billion years misses the point. Genesis says that at the end of each day, God looked at his creation and called it “Good.” On the first day, God said, “Let there be light,” and He called the light “good.” And on the second day, He separated the water from the dry land and at the end of the day He saw that it was good. On the third day, He caused the earth to bring forth plants and trees and it was good. On the fourth day, He hung the sun and the moon and the stars in the sky and it was good. On the fifth, He filled the sea and the sky with life and put animals, livestock and creeping things and beasts of the earth on the dry land, and again, the Bible says it was good. On the sixth day of creation, as we covered last week, God made humanity, male and female, together in His image. And at the end of the day, God said that it was “**very good.**”

What can we take away from this? First, we can say that God believes the earth to be better with human beings in it. Human beings are not houseguests who have overstayed their welcome on the planet. In fact, we are God’s guests of honor. God made the planet for people not people for the planet. We are here for God’s pleasure and purpose.

The second thing we can take away is that we can de-bunk the common misconception that

God made the earth perfect. God made the earth sinless and in that way it was holy. But the Bible does not call the earth perfect. The word perfect, in Hebrew “taw-meem,” appears in the Old Testament 56 times. “Taw-meem” means whole, complete, in its entirety. But Genesis calls the earth very good.

There is a cartoon that shows God wearing an apron and hot pads, pulling the earth resting in a silver pan out of a hot oven. He’s saying to Himself, “I think this thing is a little half-baked.” Pretty funny, but also pretty heretical. It’s not what the Scripture teaches and it’s not what I am teaching today.

God put human beings in charge of His **very good** creation. *Genesis 1:28, “And God blessed them: and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.”*

There is one reason why a perfect God would make the earth very good—but not complete, very good but not whole, very good but not perfect—and then put human beings in charge of it. Because His desire is for us to make it a better world.

Aha—that gets your attention. Improve upon creation, that’s blasphemy! Improve upon creation, that’s impossible! We do have some Biblical precedent for this--the parable of the talents. Jesus taught that a rich man went on a journey. Before he left, he gave money to three different men. One man, knowing his master was a harsh man, just took the money and buried it in the dirt. His master, upon his return, called this servant wicked and slothful. The two men, who traded their master’s money, doubling it, were told “*Well done, my good and faithful servant...enter into the joy of your master.*” (*Matthew 25:21*) There is a word for this... stewardship. The job of a steward is to take care of and even improve something for the rightful owner.

Aristotle taught that virtue is the mean between two extremes. In the attention we pay to God’s creation, there are two extremes. There is worship—where we believe that the natural world is perfect and there is nothing we can do to improve upon it and indeed our job as human beings is to simply preserve the earth

as it is made. At the other extreme is abuse. This is where we treat God’s creation as something like a disposable razor. In the middle of these two extremes is the virtue of stewardship.

We’ve been talking about global warming for the last few weeks and I have hammered away pretty hard at some of the theology which I see implicit in the global warming movement. What I want to do today is spend the time I have left talking about three Biblical keys to making the earth a better place and being good stewards of the environment. The question isn’t if we leave a footprint on God’s earth, but rather what kind of footprint we leave.

First, choose life. I remember one morning when I was about seven or eight. We had a big rain storm overnight, and I woke up that morning, looked out my window and saw my Mom on her hands and knees on the wet sidewalk. I thought to myself that she had lost her mind, but I was so curious about what she was doing that I went outside in my pajamas. She was picking up worms that had crawled onto the sidewalk to get away from the rain.

“Mom,” I said to her, “They’re only worms.”

“They deserve a chance to live just like we do,” she said, which was her way of saying, “God gave them life too.”

Deuteronomy 31:19 commands us, “*I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life.*” Life is irreplaceable, precious, spun by the very hand of God alone.

Whenever we are given the power to do so, we must choose life. What does this mean? It means giving our life so that others may have a life. It means that we choose life before beauty, before luxury, prosperity and ideology. It means that if we work to make the earth a better place, we do it so that it is better place for people.

I got a lesson in this first hand on a mission trip to Nicaragua. Over the course of going to the same place about four times in eight years, I noticed that the trees on a particular mountainside had disappeared. What once was a beautiful, lush green hilltop had been stripped of all the trees and was now

ugly, brown and bare. Thinking I would impress him with my “politically correct” pity, I said to the missionary I was traveling with, “What a tragedy!” His normally pleasant demeanor immediately shifted and he flashed anger. “The tragedy is that we didn’t have a thousand hills just like that one to save more lives.”

Bio-fuels, ethanol for example, are hailed as a help in the battle against global warming, and they may be a good first step toward renewable energy. But, it is pretty clear that filling our gas tanks with corn is making it much more expensive for people around the world to fill their stomachs. Jeremy Clarkson, a British automotive reporter, tells the story of being picked up from the airport in an eco-limo. The driver told Clarkson with pride and in great detail how the car ran on fuel from a bio-plant rather than an oil refinery. Clarkson asked, “You don’t mind leaving all the world’s normal oil in the ground and running your car on what could be an African’s lunch?” Choose life.

Second, conserve for those coming later. When I was a youth pastor, we had a simple rule whenever we traveled or even just stayed at the Church. “Leave it better than you found it.” We were determined to witness for Jesus Christ by not leaving a mess for anyone else. We live in a world of amazing abundance, but not without limits. *Proverbs 6:6-8* teaches us to not sacrifice tomorrow so that we might live as we like today. “*Go to the ant, O sluggard: consider her ways and be wise. Without having any chief, officer or ruler, she prepares her bread in summer and gathers her food in harvest.*” We are also taught that God’s intent for the earth is to be a tool rather than a treasure. This is the difference between conservation and preservation. Conservation seeks to save for others. Preservation simply seeks to save.

When Teddy Roosevelt signed the legislation making vast swaths of the Western United States into national parks, he said, “We look upon these resources as a heritage to be made use of in establishing and promoting the comfort, prosperity and happiness of the of the American people, but not to be wasted, deteriorated or needlessly destroyed.” Teddy Roosevelt was a great steward of God’s earth.

Yes, reduce, reuse, recycle—but remember to do it not to save the planet, but to save it for your grandchildren’s grandchildren.

Third, create rather than consume. When God commanded the woman and the man to “be fruitful and multiply,” He was not simply talking about having children. God loves us so much that He wants us to know the joy of creation. Our job is to be co-creators with God. Part of being created in the image of God is the ability to create. Think about it. Human beings are the only species on the planet who create out of the sheer joy of creation. You may see a bird making a nest or a beaver a dam or even a monkey use a rudimentary tool. But these are their survival instincts at work. To create for the sheer joy of creation is an act reserved for God and humanity alone.

Now you may say, “Clearly I am not created in the image of God because I am not a creative person. I somehow managed to turn a play-dough snake into something that looked like a Frisbee.” “I couldn’t draw a stick figure if I had mulberry bush as a model.” “My idea of creativity is ordering a pizza that has half pepperoni on one side and half mushrooms on the other.”

But God has commanded every person who has ever walked on the planets—“Join Me in **creating** a better world.” Pablo Picasso said, “Every child is an artist. The problem is how to remain an artist growing up.” Do you remember bringing home that final art project? At some point, the sinful weight of the world convinces us to stow our creativity, to keep our head down and stick to what we know best. At some point, we learn that it is easier and often less painful to consume rather than create. But when we are empowered with the Holy Spirit, we are given the ability to create a masterpiece. Your creation may be love for the unlovable, grace for the sinner, acceptance for outcast, redemption for the rejected, reunion for the estranged, the Gospel for the godless. Your masterpiece may be helping a village get clean drinking water or a turning around the life of a teenager. Your masterpiece may be a community garden or a free medical clinic in a rural, mountain hamlet. God might even work through you to create something from nothing.

James Hampton was a janitor who worked for the General Services Administration in Washington D.C. He was born in South Carolina, the son of a Baptist preacher. At about the age of 18 or 19, he moved to Washington D.C. and worked as a short order cook. He served in the army during World War II and returned to Washington where he worked for the government as a janitor. He was never married and had no close friends to speak of. He was the kind of person of whom we might take little notice if we passed him on the street and, as a black man who lived his adult life in the 40's and 50's, would not have been considered among society's elite. James Hampton died alone from stomach cancer at age 55 in November of 1964. The world little noticed his passing. From 1950 until his death, Hampton rented a garage on 7th Street in Northwest Washington D.C. When the garage's owner (unaware that Hampton died) had not received his rent payment for six or seven weeks, he decided to evict his renter and remove the contents. What he found in that garage was a throne room,

central throne, literally built for Christ to use upon His return to this earth. All 177 pieces of work are built from pieces of trash which Hampton found by digging through the dumpsters and garbage cans, trolling the used furniture stores near the garage, even paying off winos for the foil from their bottles. The entire throne room, to be properly displayed takes up something in the neighborhood of 360 square feet and the central throne rises to a height of about 10 feet. All of the pieces are covered with Scripture verses and poetry. During the last 14 years of his life, Hampton labored every day from the time he got off the night shift at midnight until 6:00 AM to create his masterpiece. During that entire time, he never told a single soul about his incredible work. James Hampton worked every night without sleep, pouring himself into his masterpiece, which today is on display at the Smithsonian. He was so filled with the Holy Spirit that he could not help but create. What masterpiece has God called you and filled you with the Holy Spirit to create?

God made this world very good—not perfect. Will you, with Him, work for a better world?



¹ This is from a *Far Side* cartoon drawn by Gary Larson. I am sure that it was referenced more than once by preachers circa 1984.

² Quote found in Iain Murray, *Really Inconvenient Truths* (Washington D.C., Regnery Publishing, 2008) p.66.

³ Quoted in Car P. Russell, "Coordination of Conservation Programs," *Regional Review*, January-February 1941.

⁴ Co-creators does not mean that we are equal with God. To be sure, we are junior partners in this enterprise.