

Worship as Response
Isaiah 28:23-29, Romans 8:18-25

Well friends, as we continue to prepare for our Green worship experiment in November... I'm wondering if you are, as the scripture verse we just read describes it, waiting in eager expectation for this worship experiment to be revealed.

Certainly as I've stood up here and said "what we're doing in November is going to be very different from what we normally do on a Sunday morning" has created some curiosity!

And a number of you have been involved in batting around some creative ideas and suggestions, and maybe you've heard some rumors that we're bringing in some special guests and performance acts – but beyond that I haven't revealed the all the details yet.

Now it's not that I'm withholding that information from you deliberately, to tantalize you and create that sense of expectation – though if that is happening, that's great. 😊

It's just that we've never done anything like this before, and we're still working at creating it and getting all the details in place, and I don't actually have all the information to reveal yet.

But I'm hoping that you are growing eager and anticipating what we are working on preparing for November!

Now, truth be told, I'm going to determine the success of this experiment through your engagement in it and response to it – either positive or negative. I'd only consider it to be a failure if you were apathetic about and basically ignored it.

Which would really be a shame because after all the time and energy that we've spent reflecting on how to create this, and then working to create it, and the preparing you for a whole month to participate in it – well... at the very least it deserves some sort of response that shows you've engaged with it – whether you liked it or not.

And brothers and sisters in Christ, it's important that we understand this dynamic between the initiative in creating something and the response which that act of creation necessitates, because then we start to grasp what's involved in the foundational relationship that God has with all of His creation, and especially with us.

And that foundational relationship is one of initiative and response; God acts and it brings forth a response...

God speaks and the creation responds by coming into existence... God breaths into the earth, and Adam gasps his first breath and comes alive – whenever God acts, the creation responds.

That is why in Job 38:12, 35 God asks *“Have you ever given orders to the morning, or shown the dawn its place”* and He boasts *“Do you send the lightning bolts on their way? Do they report to you, ‘Here we are’?”*

And God says in Isaiah 55:11 that *“my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.”*

So the most basic way to describe the relationship between the Creator and His Creation is one of initiative and response, and that means we ought to be asking ourselves – are we even aware of God's initiatives?? And are we responding appropriately??

Because the truth is that all human beings come into God's creation with a sinful nature and whatever you might think sin is friends – the bible reveals to us that sin is an orientation of our nature that ignores and deliberately refuses to respond to God's initiatives.

And it affects every part of who we are, every aspect of what it means to be human - from our physicality to our our emotional and rational capacity and to our spirituality – so much so that it necessitates God having to go beyond his creational revelation in order to get our attention.

Thus our scripture passage from Isaiah 28 starts off with God saying; *“LISTEN and HEAR my voice; PAY ATTENTION and HEAR what I say!”*

Now we would think what follows this headline introduction would be something super spiritual, or powerfully prophetic, or really really religious – but what follows is God talking about agriculture.

And specifically God is saying that a farmer’s knowledge to plow a field, and use different methods and locations for planting different crops, and the knowledge of the different ways these crops must be harvested and threshed out – that this knowledge about the right way to farm is taught to the farmer - by God Himself!

And if this is true, by extension we can say that the knowledge of an engineer, or a physician, a carpenter, a marketing specialist, a fashion designer, or an investment banker, is taught to them by God as well.

Now this challenges us – first of all because we know that engineers, doctors, and carpenters and so on, they all go to school and study and take training and go through apprenticeships to become knowledgeable and skilled in their profession.

And secondly because we’ve never heard about instructors in these fields saying to their students; “I have a message from God for you today... about home renovation - thou shalt repaint and thin no more!”

Nor do we see professors choosing the Bible as their textbook for economics or fashion design.

And in instances where we do see people trying to use the Bible as a handbook of specific instruction for these sorts of enterprises it usually doesn’t take very long for their enterprise to actually fail and come up short in some way.

But – here in this scripture we have God himself saying that He is in fact the chief agriculture instructor, and by extension

the chief instructor for any other field of expertise we might find in His world.

So what's going on here and how does this work?

Well first of all friends this is God breaking through the barrier which our sin puts up to tune out or filter out the God part of creational revelation.

And God is pointing out to us that whatever knowledge and wisdom we learn by studying the world around us, whatever we figure out through trial and error, whatever skills are passed on from teacher to student - this is in fact God at work and it is part of how the creation reveals His Word to us.

Remember last week we learned from Colossians 1:17 that ALL things hold together – they cohere; they exist – in God's Word – whom we now know as Jesus Christ.

And since the basic relationship between the Creator and His Creation – mediated by the Word is one of initiative and

response... when we discover and can see how any two bodies in the universe attract each other with a force that is directly proportional to the product of their masses and inversely proportional to the square of the distance between them...

Brothers and sisters in Christ, we're not just witnessing what we call gravity at work – we are discovering how the creation holds together in the Word, and we are witnessing the creation responding to that ever-speaking Word.

And this applies to everything friends, whether it is $2+2=4$, or measure twice and cut once, or the fact that a cake takes longer to bake at higher altitudes than at sea level, or the fact that a particular style of dress really compliments your body shape, or that a baseball thrown with a particular spin will curve, drop or seem to wobble in the air...

ALL of creation is governed by the Word and responds to the Word and reveals God to us as it does this.

God's Word governs the heavenly bodies and galaxies far far away, it governs biology and chemistry, it governs engineering and mechanics and technology, it governs the arts and aesthetics and athletics, it governs society and politics, and it governs education and thinking and logic.

Hebrews 1:3 says that "the Word made flesh; our Lord Jesus Christ - sustains ALL things by His powerful Word."

And what this means for us in our day to day life friends is we can now experience our relationship with God in a much broader way.

As we learn and grow in our education and our work and relationships with knowledge and skill and wisdom – seeing how the creation responds to the governing Word...

We also begin to see how this is considered praise to the Creator – as David writes in Psalm 148:7-10 *"Praise the Lord from the earth, you great sea creatures and all ocean depths, lightning and hail, snow and clouds, stormy winds that do his*

bidding, you mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars, wild animals and all cattle, small creatures and flying birds..."

And here's the amazing part friends, our response, our interaction to this knowledge and wisdom of the Word in creation is also considered praise and worship.

That why I'm always teaching you that all of life is worship – its way bigger than 1 hr on Sunday morning, and includes much more than music!

That's why we sang *"we're coming back to the heart of worship and it's ALL about you Jesus"* In Him ALL things hold together, right!?

So in the end, if we believe what the scripture is revealing to us, if we use this scriptural revelation as a set of glasses through which to view what we learn and know about the creation then our profession of faith will be Isaiah 28:29 that *"all this also comes from the Lord Almighty, whose plan is wonderful and whose wisdom is magnificent!"* AMEN?!

Now brothers and sisters in Christ, if I've made Green spirituality and Green worship sound so easy and accessible in all this that you're thinking *"it can't be as simple as that!?"* Well... you are partially correct.

As we've started learning about this I've had people ask me *"How am I supposed to see God being revealed in what ISIS is doing?"* and I'm sure there are other questions people that might want to ask, such as *"How is God revealed in things like abuse and divorce, drug and alcohol addiction, sickness or disease or the manifest perversions of human sexuality that seem to be everywhere these days?"*

Well brothers and sisters, my answer is that we need to go back to the scriptures again and perhaps it's helpful to understand that when we use the scriptures as a pair of glasses through which to view the creation – in many ways they operate like bifocal or trifocal glasses.

Trifocal glasses are able to bring different situations into a clearer focus - depending on whether the user needs to focus

on things which are far away, closer or immediate in front of them.

And while there are many parts of the scripture that affirm the original goodness of God's creation and how it reveals Him to us - there are other parts of the scripture which explain to us how sin and evil entered into God's creation what the effects of that are and what God is doing in response to our rebellion.

And a large part of handling the Word of Truth correctly, as the Apostle Paul speaks of in 2 Tim 2:15, is knowing which parts of the bifocal or trifocal lens of scripture will bring what we are looking at in the world around us into a clear picture, and that's why we also read Romans 8:18-25 this morning.

Friends when we look around us as we see things like ISIS and addiction and perversions and if we view them through the lens of scriptural revelation... we will discover they are not hidden or glossed over in that. These are not rose-colored trifocals that make everything seem better.

Romans 8:18 acknowledges that there are “present sufferings” in God’s creation and the rest of this passage hints to us that their alien presence in God’s good creation reveals the need for God’s redemptive work, and for that work to be applied fully to all areas of the creation and calls for patience on our part until that occurs.

So on a very basic level when we see things like ISIS or other evils and brokenness in the world around us – it reveals the need for God’s redemptive work.

But Romans 8:19 also reveals that our present sufferings also come from something we don’t often talk about or acknowledge and that is how God has subjected His creation to frustration.

We tend to explain all suffering in our world as the consequences of Adam and Eve’s fall into sin, and that is true especially in the sense in which God has allowed His creation to be developed and ruled over by human beings in their sinful

state . Much of the consequences the creation has suffered since then are a result of that.

So when Paul says that God subjected the creation to frustration, in part he is speaking about how our sinful actions bring consequential suffering into our world.

However he is also talking about how the creation’s potential has been frustrated because our sin always twists and warps what we do with the creation.

The result is that the Creation is not directed back to God and Christ in worship – which was its original and intended purpose... *“ALL things were made by Him and for Him”* (Col 3:17) Every area of this creation ought to be offered to God in worship – worship should be our everyday response, its not and the creation is therefore stymied – it is frustrated.

But the second sense is in which the creation is frustrated is that God has cursed it.

And this means that the original relationship we had with the Creation, which was co-operative and harmonious has now become antagonistic to us.

The creation opposes us in our efforts to develop and rule over it and only marginally delays our mortality, and in other cases speeds up our mortality through the deterioration of aging and sickness and disease.

We catch a glimpse of how the curse will affect creation and ourselves in Gen 3:16-19 when God says to Eve *“I will make your pains in childbearing very severe; with painful labor you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.”*

And subsequently God says to Adam *“Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the*

ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.”

And so the implication this has when it comes to Green spirituality and our Green worship experiment is that we acknowledge sin and brokenness and evil in the creation, its part of the package.

We don't try to hide it or hide from it – we step up and make the most of every opportunity, redeeming the times for the days are evil (Eph 5:16)

And it also means that when we study and observe and learn from creational revelation we need to be aware of the way sin and evil can warp and twist things and the fact that there is still a curse on the Creation.

So we have to be very intentional about practicing Green spirituality through the lens of the scriptures, and learning how to co-operate or keep in step with the Holy Spirit – who was sent to lead us into ALL truth.

So, if you are familiar with what the 3 colors of spiritual growth tool that we use here at Valleyview, you will recognize that I just reaffirmed that you can't just have one kind of spirituality on its own – you need all three because God is three in one, one in three.

Green Spirituality also needs Red Spirituality – God's saving revelation in scripture, and it also needs Blue Spirituality- God's transforming work in the power of the Holy Spirit.

And the best way that I've discovered of doing this is forming your worldview and outlook on life along the biblical storyline of Creation, Fall, Redemption and New Creation – and doing the hard work of engaging what can be learned and known from God's creation from that perspective.

And if you look carefully, as we present our green worship experiences to you each Sunday in November – you will be able to trace that progression in what we are doing.

And hopefully you will see how this biblical worldview helps us to interact with creational revelation to discern what we need to reject, what we can receive, and what we are called to redeem and reform.

For example – when scientists present us with knowledge and insight regarding biology, but are coming from an evolutionary bias; we need to do the hard work of looking at how that bias skews their knowledge and how it might be different working from the assumption that God is creator.

Or when those who wrestle with some variation of sexual perversion insist that they were born this way, and this means God created them as such and their deviation is in fact normal and good.

We need to do the uncomfortable work of pointing out that "Creation" is different from being born and in fact all who are born into our world after the Fall are born sinful, and born into a world that is cursed and this shows up in any number of different ways in our lives.

And when society wants to write people off as worthless, or when certain parts of the creation seem to be so twisted and broken that they cause nothing but pain and strife... We need to do the important work of insisting that nothing, and no one is beyond redemption!

There is nothing that is created which Christ's incarnation and atonement do not cover and the power Holy Spirit cannot transform and undo the effects of sin and reverse the curse- in fact this is central to our purpose in discipleship as Christ's Body.

And finally – when we are tempted to grow weary, and give up because in spite of all our enthusiasm and prayer and our hard work and dedication – the world seems to be going from bad to worse instead of getting better.

We must do the necessary work of bringing hope by pointing to the small signs of healing, restoration, freedom, and how we see God at work in all of His creation – as indicators that one day a New Creation will be established.

We can say Joy to the world – because the Lord has come, and the Lord will come!

The Word, through which ALL things were made and for whom ALL things were made, has come in the flesh and will return in glory to claim his inheritance as Firstborn over ALL the creation.

And then as Paul says in vs 21 “the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God!”

Brothers and sisters in Christ – this is what we are working towards through Green Spirituality and Green Worship...

I hope you are getting excited and are waiting in eager anticipation to experience what God wants to do in and through us in the coming month of November!

Amen

