

Climate Change - Apocalyptic?

This article is a summary of one Christian's view on climate change. Let's begin with four givens:

- The creation belongs to God, who gave us the assignment to steward (manage) the earth and its creatures.¹
- God's ways are different from our ways: God calls us to set aside our ways, follow his ways, and trust him with outcomes.²
- God commands us to love our neighbors as we love ourselves. This includes lifting the poor and extending hospitality to refugees and immigrants.³
- God's command for us: Do not fear.⁴

Here's the problem: We residents of wealthy nations now know that our use of fossil fuels to produce cheap energy has put the earth on an accelerating track toward destruction.⁵

So, years ago, scientists began developing renewable energy technologies. But we are so slow in converting to renewables that global warming continues to hasten. The consequences are increased crop failures from drought, more turbulent weather, and sea rise that will reduce the amount of inhabitable land. These will produce increasing poverty and political unrest and cause people to migrate to survive. Today the number of migrants is large and they meet resistance or outright rejection everywhere they go. This is just the beginning; the World Bank estimates 143 million climate refugees by 2050.⁶ Estimates rise to 1 billion by 2100. To put this in perspective, the last few years have only sent 1 million Middle Eastern refugees to Europe. For most of escalating number of future migrants, their historic lands will be uninhabitable and many will be underwater. I doubt that wealthy nations will welcome them. More likely, wars will increase as people fight for a place to live.

In a just world, we would take responsibility for the climate problem we caused by more aggressively converting our own energy to renewables. And we would recognize that our prosperity came at a high cost to other inhabitants of the earth. So, to act justly, we need to:

- Transfer enough renewable energy technology, and the capital to implement it, to poorer nations so that they can modernize without adding to global warming.
- Extend reparations to emerging nations for our part in degrading their home. Do this by extending financial, social, and political resources, as well as access to markets, to provide poor nations paths into the future.
- Extend hospitality to refugees on a scale that today is unthinkable.

We're running out of time. Estimates say we are the last generation who can avert irreparable environmental damage.⁷ So we must hoist climate change to the top priority. If we don't, none of our other issues will even matter.

Yes, I am suggesting wealth redistribution. Think of it this way: Our energy policy has been redistributing wealth from the poor to the rich and powerful for a very long time. In a just world, we would recognize this and actively adjust. Addressing climate change need not be an economic disaster - quite the contrary. Dramatic actions to decrease global warming would likely produce an economic boom, lifting every nation's GDP. But such a scenario requires a significant shift in the minds and hearts of the wealthy. Notably, we'd need to relinquish our hyper-individualism, me first, philosophies. We'd need to shift our spending preferences from indulgences to renewable infrastructure projects that benefit the greater good. Such change is frightening, so this would take courage. Sadly, we're more likely to use our wealth to try to "defend" ourselves from the pesky multitude of displaced persons - until we can't.

To me, global warming looks like an apocalyptic threat that calls for far more than science and technology. It calls for a spiritual awakening among wealthy nations and people across the globe. Right now, I see no signs of such a thing. But God is patient and far more creative than I am, so I'm trusting that he has a trick or two up his sleeve. It's hard to guess what trick, but the script of his long story provides some clues. It's a story of extending grace, mercy, and compassion to the poor and the humble. In the past, his strategy took the forms of lifting up leaders (think Abram, Moses) or a nation (think Israel) to lead a spiritual awakening designed to bless the whole world. I hope God is preparing such a person or nation right now - and I hope they both show up soon!

Beyond providing enlightened leadership, God has already revealed his eventual default plan, his final scenario. The Apostle John wrote about it in the last book of the Bible: The Revelation. There John describes the future return of the ultimate leader, the Lord Christ, who will come and impose justice everywhere. Humans didn't recognize Jesus the first time he showed up, but the next time "every knee will bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue declare that Jesus Christ is Lord."⁸ So we who follow Christ can remain confident that God is in control, despite all appearances to the contrary. This is what we believe. This is what we have seen. This is what we have to share with the world. In the meantime, our assignment is to live transparently as citizens of God's Kingdom while residing at postal addresses in this world. This requires ingenuity, humility, and courage - but we need not fear.

Before wrapping up this article, I will concede that there is a counter-narrative in Scripture where God allowed evil leaders and nations to overrun Israel/Judah as a corrective for their sin. For one example: God allowed the kings of Assyria to completely destroy the Northern Kingdom of Israel. In another, God allowed Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, to enslave the Southern Kingdom of the Jews for 70 years. There is an element of Christian thinking contending that now is such a time. I don't see it that way. While God allowed this to happen in the Old Testament, he did not call his people to adopt the ways of those evil leaders - quite the contrary. God called his people to the same thing I suggested in the previous paragraph: to live according to the ways of God's Kingdom while residing in an evil context. As I try to do that, I am praying for God to lift up

righteous leaders from our world before it's too late.

Perhaps you will join me in this prayer.

Tim

Notes:

1. Genesis 1.26-31, Genesis 2.15, Psalm 8.3-9, 1 Peter 4.7-11
2. Isaiah 55.6-9
3. Matthew 22.34-40, 25.31-46, Hebrews 13.1-2, Exodus 23.9, Leviticus 19.34
4. Here are 5 places where Jesus told his followers not to fear
5. Global Warming: Causes and Consequences, an article from the Hoover Institution, April 2019
6. World Bank refugee article
7. United Nations meetings report from March 2019
8. Philippians 2.10-11 (NLT)