

Ps 147:2,3
Hy 1A
Ps 73:4,5,6
Ps 107:7,8
Ps 145:4,5
Leviticus 26:3-5; 14-45
Revelation 16
Lord's Day 10

Yarrow, December 20, 2009

Beloved Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ!

What do you make of the climate change discussions currently filling today's chatter? Does your heart join the millions who bleed for the polar bears loosing, we're told, their icebergs?

It would be easy, and perhaps tempting, to dismiss the meeting of world leaders in Copenhagen as so much hot air. Yet that would be too hasty; something, congregation, is happening here that we need to take note of. Nothing comes by chance, says the church in Lord's Day 10, and that would include that meeting – as well as the stories about the disappearing icebergs.

It is not my place to comment on this pulpit on the correctness, scientifically speaking, of claims about climate change. But I must, congregation, draw your attention to a couple of critical passages from God's Word that bear greatly on the current discussions. Take, for example, the passage we just read from Revelation 16. At a minimum this passage speaks of climate change. But in so doing it impresses upon us two things: 1st, this climate change is God's doing, and 2nd, it is His judgement on people's sin. Both of these points, of course, have everything to do with the material we confess today in Lord's Day 10.

So I preach to you today the word of God using this theme:

THE SCARE ABOUT CLIMATE CHANGE IS IN GOD'S HANDS.

1. The extent of Father's control,
2. The manner of Father's government,
3. The response of Father's children.

1. The extent of Father's control

"In the beginning God created heaven and earth." After God finished creating, what did He do? For argument's sake, let's consider a tree God made on the third day of creation. God spoke, and the tree was there. If, now, after creating that tree God had left it to itself and given His full attention to something else (or deserted His work), what would have become of that tree? It would, congregation, have disintegrated into the nothingness it was before God created it. I say that because of what Elihu says: "If [God] should gather to Himself His Spirit and His breath, All flesh would perish together, And man would return to dust" (Job 34:14f). So Paul can say to the people of Athens: "In [God] we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). That is: without God no one –and no thing– can live or move or even exist. After God created that tree, He did not leave it to itself; God continued to involve Himself with that tree, gave it continued existence. That action of God whereby He keeps His handiwork existing is described in our Lord's Day with the word 'upholds'. Top of page 484: "as with His hand, He still *upholds* heaven and earth and all creatures."

God does more than keep His creation existing. God also cause His handiwork to change, to develop, to make progress. So, that tree He created on the third day grew some more leaves in the

days that followed, developed fruit, generated seed. Here is development in the tree. But that development too is God's active work. The Bible is filled with references to the effect that it is God who causes crops to grow, God who gives wind and rain, etc, etc. That action of God whereby He causes development in His created works is described in our Lord's Day with the word 'governs'. Again on page 484: God "so governs them that leaf and blade, rain and drought, fruitful and barren years, food and drink, health and sickness, riches and poverty, indeed, all things, come not by chance but by His fatherly hand." Together, this 'upholding' and this 'governing' is called the Providence of God.

Is God, then, far removed from His creation? Do we do well to think that God in heaven is very, very far away from the birds in your backyard and the leafless trees along your street? You've all heard of the clock-maker; after days of labour he had his clock together. With satisfaction he wound it up, listened for a while to the musical tick tock of his new clock, then set it on the shelf and went home. Is God like that? Has He made a world, wound it up (so to speak), and so can absent Himself from His world while that world ticks on by itself? Is God far removed from His creation, detached from it – be it that He comes back once in a while to check up?

Let it be clear in our minds, brothers and sisters: if the Lord would retreat from His handiwork and leave us on our own even for the shortest of moments, *the world and we with it would disintegrate into nothingness!* "In Him we live and move and have our being." "If [God] should gather to Himself His Spirit and His breath, All flesh would perish together." God is not far away, ever. God is always *actively involved* in every aspect of the world He made. That is why Jesus could remind His disciples of the sparrows. Listen: "Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father's will. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows" (Mt 10:29ff). Sparrows: they were so common to the disciples; there were thousands of them around. And not one falls to the ground "apart from your Father's will"? Truly, what a thought! Talk about God's active involvement in the world He made! In fact, Jesus says, "the very hairs of your head are all numbered." I really don't know how many hairs are on my head, let alone on your heads. I really don't know either how many hairs I lost when I showered this morning. Jesus says that God knows! And the point of His knowing is that He controls even the most insignificant things so that not a hair gets stuck in the comb unless God permits.

Can you fathom that, beloved? Truly, I can't! But this is the Word God revealed to you and to me: the Creator of heaven and earth remains today very actively involved in every aspect of His creation. No polar bear loses his iceberg without the will of my heavenly Father. No trees catch disease without the will of the almighty Creator. Even the carbon dioxide levels in God's world cannot change unless sovereign God permit. So, if global warming is indeed fact, it is God who has permitted it.

That conclusion, of course, raises the next question. Why would God permit global warming? Does He answer that question in Scripture? That brings us to our second point:

2. The Manner of Father's government

The climax of God's creation was mankind, a creature fashioned to image God. Part and parcel of that task to image God was the responsibility to take God seriously; else one cannot reflect what He is like. So much so did God endow mankind with the ability to act responsibly that He gave man's actions a place in how He would govern His world. So God told Adam not to eat of that particular tree, and added that if he did eat of it he would die. The implication is mind-boggling: if Adam the creature would abstain from eating, the history of the entire world would travel down a particular path. On the other hand, if Adam would yield to temptation and eat from the forbidden fruit, the history of the world would proceed down an altogether different path. The Lord God entrusted so very much to mankind! It turns out that Adam ate, and as a result God's curse came upon mankind and the world in which he lives, as Genesis 3 tells us.

I admit right away that I cannot understand the interplay between God's sovereignty and man's responsibility. Is God somehow *dependent* on man's actions in whether He can carry out His plan? Is the future of the world up in the air, depending on what the human race does?? Or is God so sovereign that man can't make any independent decisions; all we can do is decide what God has foreordained us to decide? I think of a puppet dancing on the strings the puppet master holds. The puppet master's sovereignty means the puppet has no responsibility. If on the other hand you cut the strings and let Pinocchio make his own decisions, the puppet master can't be sovereign anymore.... That's the way my little mind works. Yet neither position captures what the Lord tells us in His Word. He insists that He remains 100% sovereign, and that we at the same time remain 100% responsible. My finite mind is too little to grasp how these two things can be true at the same time. And that's OK; if I could understand how God remains totally sovereign while He counts me totally responsible, He would not be such a great God after all. We need to let those two realities stand side by side; the Creator determines each day's carbon dioxide level in the atmosphere as well as every temperature reading anywhere on earth – and at the same time mankind is 100 % responsible for the way he cares for God's world. God, then, governs this world, and does it by interacting with man's conduct.

For example: I read in Genesis 2 that “the LORD God had not sent rain on the earth ... but streams came up from the earth and watered the whole surface of the ground” (2:7). Other translations speak here of ‘mist’ covering the earth so that some commentators think of a canopy of moisture surrounding the earth and watering all vegetation. However that may be, the flood of Noah represented distinct change in the weather. Scripture relates that “rain fell on the earth forty days and forty nights” (Genesis 7:12) so that “the waters rose and covered the mountains to a depth of more than 20 feet” (7:20). This wasn't global warming, but it was certainly global wetting! After the flood God set the rainbow in the sky as a sign that He would never destroy the world with a flood again – and the implication appears to be that prior to the flood there had been no rainbow because there had been no rain.

Now, what brought this drastic climate change about? God Himself gives the answer: “The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become” (Genesis 6:5) and so He determined to “wipe mankind ... from the face of the earth” (6:7) – and settled on this radical weather to bring about the intended goal. Notice: here climate change was brought about by *man's conduct*. For the sake of planet Earth man was responsible to obey His Maker and worship Him. Because He refused to do so he brought God's judgment upon himself.

This pattern recurs time again in Scripture. When Israel was enslaved in Egypt, the Lord's hand pressed upon Egypt so that plagues of gnats, plagues of flies, plagues of hail, plagues of locusts, even blackest darkness beset the land. What weather systems did the Lord use to bring plagues of gnats upon Egypt? And plagues of flies? And devastating hail (in a land that ‘never’ received hail)? I don't know what weather systems God used to bring these tribulations upon Egypt, but the Lord is clear as to why He did it. The trigger for His sending these plagues is that “the Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out” (Exodus 2:23) under the abuse the Egyptians laid upon them – something God would not tolerate. These plagues –and hence the weather that brought these plagues– were man-induced – by their sins!

In the covenant God made with Israel at Mt Sinai, He stressed with His people the significance of their conduct. Think of the passage we read from Leviticus 26. “If you follow My decrees and are careful to obey My commands, I will send you rain in its season.... But if you will not listen to me and carry out all these commands..., I will ... make the sky above you like iron and the ground beneath you like bronze” (Leviticus 26:3f; 14, 19). In keeping with His promise in Leviticus 26, the Lord shut the

heavens in the days of King Ahab's apostasy and granted no rain for 3½ years. Only when Elijah prayed did the Lord grant rain. Talk about climate being anthropogenic!

This, brothers and sisters, is the pattern of how God sovereignly governs the world also in the New Testament dispensation. Romans 1: "The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness" (vs 18). The passage describes how God responds to man's sins of denying Him, how God in response hands people over to body worship and then to the lusts of the flesh and then to homosexual behaviour and finally to anarchy. The point we need to notice is that in the New Testament dispensation the Lord God continues to govern His world in direct interaction with man's conduct.

That is equally the point of the plagues of the book of Revelation. The "seven bowls of God's wrath" as mentioned in 16:1 are not to fall on the earth just because sovereign God happens to be in a foul mood. Instead, the Lord God, according to the pattern of the flood and the judgements on Egypt, and according to the promise of His covenant with Israel, responds to man's disobedience and rebellion with His divine judgments. I read in vs 2 of "ugly and painful sores ... on the people who had the mark of the beast and worshipped his image." I read in vs 3 of the sea turning to blood so that its creatures died, and in vs 4 of the rivers and springs of water also turning to blood. Are we to think here of plagues of illness and pollution? Perhaps so; I cannot go today into the exegetical detail of what precisely is meant. Vs 8 seems clearer; here's reference to temperature change, global warming. And shall we read in vs 10 a reference to the collapse of the electricity grid? God is certainly able to plunge Vancouver into darkness – and why shouldn't He, given His disgust at the city's night life (to mention only that)? And shall we see in vs 12 not just a reference to physical armies crossing the Euphrates River, but also spiritual armies from the east flooding into the western world, be these the worldview of Hinduism or even the Muslims? Has our country, and western culture as a whole, guarded itself through godliness and humble repentance of sin against the judgements of God? Why should God let an apostate society flourish in its apostasy? There's much not clear about this chapter, but this much is crystal clear: this chapter speaks of God's judgements on human transgression, and those judgments are anything but pleasant! Those judgements can distinctly include climate change.

We need to go a step further. The judgment God announced against Israel's sins in Leviticus 26 included not just famine and war and sickness and the like, but also a plague of *fear*. Vs 17 describes Israel fleeing "even when no one is pursuing you." And vs 36: "I will make their hearts so fearful ... that the sound of a windblown leaf will put them to flight." Is global warming reality? Perhaps, perhaps not. But something is certainly happening in our world, and if it's not *real* climate change it's certainly *fear* of climate change. Either way, *the hand of your God is behind it*. And He brings about the current circumstance in reaction to the global apostasy characterizing our time. All this global warming talk is definitely man-made, in a very real sense; here is God's reaction to modern man's disobedience. Our God interacts with human responsibility in the way He governs His world. Here is a way of thinking we need increasingly to make our own if we are to understand our times in the light of God's word.

That brings us to our last point:

3. The Response of Father's Children

The global warming thing of our time attracts responses of many colours. There are those who insist that to save ourselves the world needs to adopt a one-child policy as China has. There are those too who insist that governments need to tax carbon – and the result of that would be that our standard of living will go down. Meanwhile, environmentalism becomes the new religion of the masses and guiding philosophy of government action. None of these developments strike us as positive or exciting. And that in turn can trigger anxiety in relation to the future.

But the church has learned to that there's no place for anxiety. The almighty God who still controls this world so fully that "leaf and blade, rain and drought, fruitful and barren years, food and drink, health and sickness, riches and poverty, indeed, all things come not by chance but by His ... hand" is none less than our *Father in Jesus Christ*. And He will allow nothing to tear His own from His caring hand. That's Scripture in Romans 8: "I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (vss 38f). So we confess with certainty in our Lord's Day: "with a view to the future we can have a firm confidence in our faithful God and Father that no creature shall separate us from His love; for all creatures are so completely in His hand that without His will they cannot so much as move."

Then Yes, we are ourselves not free of sin in how we live in God's world, and so join society in attracting the righteous judgment of God. But this same God who controls all things perfectly has sent His only Son into the world, and this Son has taken on Himself the sins of all those whom the Father has given to Him – so that on the cross of Calvary He received on His shoulders the full weight of the curses our sins attract, including our contribution to the plagues besetting society today. Because of His suffering our sins are atoned so that God sees us as righteous – and that's to say that the judgment our actions deserve *do not come upon us*. So the plagues of Revelation 16 are not triggered by the sins of the children of God; those sins are forgiven. It's a glorious gospel!

But this takes nothing away from the vital demand of Scripture that we *act responsibly!* Without repentance and obedience we can not be covered by Jesus' blood, and the just judgements of God fall on us also; indeed, without repentance we contribute to God's righteous judgment falling on our society and country. So the child of God is to *embrace* this gospel, and make a point of distancing himself from all sin. The response of the child of God to the global warming thing –whether it be reality or fear– is one of being the more careful in obeying God's commands – for the judgement of God is so obvious. The global warming thing of our day drives home to us again the inseparable link God has placed between how He governs His world and human responsibility. *And we are responsible for our own conduct first of all*. So exactly because we see the reality of God's judgement, we'll make a point of being more careful in living in harmony with His instructions, also in how we treat His world.

God is at work in today's world, and the talk and fear about global is part of God-at-work. Dismiss the chatter as so much hot air we won't. Get anxious on account of it we won't either. But we'll acknowledge our sins, confess them before Him, and believe that they are washed away in Jesus' blood. Then, in gratitude for His deliverance, we'll stretch ourselves to look well after the creation He entrusted to our care.