

HUMAN VOCATION: Study 3 The Redemptive Mandate—God’s Call to the Church

God’s Creational Mandate we have considered in Study 2. This is quite easily understood from a glance at the whole of Psalm 8, together with Genesis 1:28 and Genesis 2:15.

God’s Redemptive Mandate has to do with proclaiming the Sovereign work of redemption.

GOD HAS REDEEMED

The words ‘*redemption*’ and ‘*redeem*’ convey the basic idea of an owner, buying back that which was previously owned, but which had become lost. It was transferred to, or captive of, another.¹ Fallen humanity is enslaved to sin, captive due to guilt, and in bondage through fear of death (Hebrews 2:15). Fallen humanity is in desperate need of redemption. Jesus reclaims us to be free indeed (John 8:36).

Isaiah the prophet, reminded the nation of Israel that they had been both **created** by God, and **redeemed** by God: ‘...*he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel, Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are mine*’ (Isaiah 43:1).

When preaching the gospel to humanity, we proclaim that it applies both to ‘our bodies’, and to ‘the whole creation’ (Romans 8:18-23). The Redemptive Mandate is expressed by Paul within this passage in Ephesians 3:7-13:

⁷ Of this gospel I have become a servant according to the gift of God’s grace that was given me by the working of his power. ⁸ Although I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given to me **to bring to the Gentiles the news of the boundless riches of Christ** ⁹ **and to make everyone see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God, who created all things,** ¹⁰ **so that through the church the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.** ¹¹ This was in accordance with **the eternal purpose** that he has carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord, ¹² in whom we have access in boldness and confidence through faith in him. ¹³ I pray, therefore, that you may not lose heart over my sufferings for you; they are your glory.

Paul goes to the Gentile nations with good news. He wants to ‘**make everyone see**’ what life is all about. Jesus Christ is the mystery. He is the matrix. He is the centrepiece. There are **boundless riches** in knowing Jesus Christ. He is the Son of God. As such he is **One** with God the Father, and God the Spirit, who created all things. *All things have been created through him and for him* (Col. 1:16). *Through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things* (Col. 1:20) *on earth or in heaven*. God sends Jesus to us and makes peace *through the blood of his cross* (Col. 1:20). This is his **eternal purpose**.

Elsewhere Paul describes Jesus Christ as God’s **inexpressible**² **gift** to the world. Redemption is an excellent word, useful in encapsulating the work of Jesus Christ, in his Cross, together with the Triune God. His life, death, resurrection, and endless reign redeems. P.T. Forsyth says, ‘The feeble gospel preaches “God is ready to forgive”; the mighty gospel preaches “God has redeemed.”’³

Jesus is the universal Saviour of all people (1Timothy 4:10), though sadly, some—even many—may never repent. He is **the Redeemer** of Israel (Isaiah 49:7), and **Redeemer** of the nations from the Curse

¹ F.J. Taylor ‘Redeem’ in *A Theological Word Book of the Bible*, Alan Richardson (Ed.), Collier Books, p. 185

² 2Cor. 9:15 in the RSV and ESV. The NIV and NRSV translate 2Cor. 9:15 ‘Thanks be to God for his **incredible** gift’ (Greek: gift = ‘*Dorea*’).

³ P. T. Forsyth, *The Cruciality of the Cross*, NCPI, p. 52

upon creation (Titus 2:14; 3:13). Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29), the Son of God (Matthew 27:54), God the Son (John 1:1), Son of Man (Matthew 16:27) our Mediator, the Good Shepherd (John 10) and much more.

REDEMPTION IS MADE KNOWN ‘... THROUGH THE CHURCH’

This Risen Jesus, the Messiah, called and commissioned Paul—also known as Saul of Tarsus—to a church-founding task. He **sent** him to the Gentile nations, as an **apostle** within the body of Christ (Romans 1:1-6; Acts 9:1-22; 13:3; 13:47-48; 20:24; 22:1-21; 24:1-21). Paul worked with other co-workers such as Barnabas, John Mark, Silas (Acts 15:36-41), Phoebe, Prisca and Aquilla and many more (Romans 16:1-27) to attend to that great goal from the Lord to go to the **nations** (Matthew 28:18-20) of the world ‘to bring about the obedience of faith’ (Romans 16:26).

All members of the body of Christ, are ‘called to be saints’ (Romans 1:7). All those people called to belong to the Lord, and given eternal life, are **gifts** (Greek: ‘*domata*’) to the body of Christ. Some specifically share in this work as ‘apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers’ for the upbuilding and equipping of the church.⁴ But not all people do that work. All members called are however, given a corresponding avenue of service within the body of Christ: **a vocation!** *To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good* (1Cor. 12:7). This is so that ‘the church’ can do its job. It can corporately take up the Redemptional Mandate! That is why people in the community must not confuse, ‘the church’ with ‘the museum’, or mistake the church for ‘the movie theatre’ or ‘the rock concert’ or for ‘the community singalong’.

It is essential that we *see* the church as it truly is—by faith. It is both better and worse than we know (John Dickson). We do not confine our *seeing* to our own local congregation, community, or nation. *We walk by faith and not by sight*. We must deliberately be members of the apostolic church, the proclaiming church, seeing life, society and the church with the eyes of faith—not by fallen human sight. Remember, the Christian Church is the church of **the Living God**, the pillar and **bulwark of the truth**. Without any doubt, the mystery of our religion is **great**: He was revealed in flesh, vindicated in spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among Gentiles, **believed in throughout the world**, taken up in glory.⁵ The Living God has every intention of seeing his plan through to his appointed goal. *Telos*.

THE CHURCH IN THE MIDST OF CREATION⁶

John Wesley said to his people, “You have nothing to do but to save souls; therefore spend and be spent in this work.” However, to do that effectively, we must proclaim **the whole purpose of God** (Acts 20:27).⁷ If our proclamation has taught **salvation**, but without giving a clear understanding of the place of **creation** within the purpose of God, the message from the church will be amiss.

The American church in general, has undoubtedly muddied the gospel message quite a bit, by getting entangled in various forms of dark, hopeless, escapist millennialism, which eclipsed the present reign, and current triumph of Christ,⁸ and failed to proclaim the sure, secure future of God’s good creation in God’s good hands. Fear of any future for the creation is a logical way to think for the alarmist atheists. However, the Christian church has a central role right here and now **in the midst of creation**,

⁴ Ephesians 4:11-12 (Greek: ‘*domata*’);

Numerous other gifts (Greek: ‘*Charismata*’) are listed in 1Cor. 12—14; Romans 12:6-13, and 1Peter 4:10-11. See the excellent diagram in G.C. Bingham, *The Beautiful City of God*, Redeemer Baptist, p. 150

⁵ 1Timothy 3:16

⁶ The great title of a great book: Vincent Donovan, *The Church in the Midst of Creation*, Orbis Books, 1989.

⁷ I notice that the NRSV translates this, not as, ‘the whole counsel’ of God, but rather as ‘**the whole purpose**’.

⁸ Adrio König, *The Eclipse of Christ in Eschatology: Toward a Christ-Centred Approach*, Eerdmans, 1989.

to **make everyone see** just exactly what **God's plan is** in and through the suffering, risen, reigning, **redeeming** Jesus Christ! It is essential for the church to know and proclaim *the redemptional mandate*. John Wesley's concern that 'souls' be saved, must not be misunderstood. The gospel proclaims that it is not only souls that are saved through Christ's cross, and resurrection victory. It is humans that are saved, and that are given resurrection bodies. It is **the whole creation** that is waiting with **eager longing** for the future of God's plan of **redemption** to be unveiled (Romans 8:21-24). As John's brother Charles Wesley, prayed in his hymn: *'Finish then Thy New Creation, pure and spotless let us be, let us see thy great salvation, perfectly restored in thee'* (AHB 148).

In the next two studies we shall explore further some of the matters concerning the age to come. We can only know what God has revealed. The secret things belong to the Lord (Deut. 29:29). However, what no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him—**these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit** (1Corinthians 2:9-10). In other words, God has revealed things concerning the age to come that can, and indeed should assist our proclamation of the matter of redemption. We shall be truly human. We shall see Jesus face to face. We shall see our loved ones face to face. God is a *faithful Creator* (1Peter 4:19), who can be trusted. *It is the glory of God to conceal things, but the glory of kings is to search things out* (Proverbs 25:2). The NIV describes the riches of Christ as 'unsearchable'; the NRSV prefers the word 'boundless'.⁹

John Henry Newman said our teaching from the Scriptures must develop and grow over time:

To the end of our lives and to the end of the church, the biblical message must remain an **unexplored** and unsubdued land, full of **concealed wonders** and **choice treasures**. Of no development of doctrine whatever, which does not actually contradict what has been delivered, can it be asserted that it is not in Scripture. **Everything** our Saviour did and said in the New Testament is characterized by simplicity and mystery, which are evidence of revelation, in germ, to be developed; a divine truth subject of investigation and interpretation.¹⁰

Vincent Donovan added: 'Everything Jesus said or did is crying out for development'.¹¹

THE CREATION IS PRIMARY

Central to our message of the redemptional mandate is that God has guaranteed and effected 'the removal of guilt and evil by the work of the Atonement' in Christ's crucifixion. That work is done. It is finished. The outworking of this is that 'the creation will ultimately be in great shape, because the purposes of God will be fulfilled in it'.¹² To trust Jesus in what he has given to us, changes everything.

It is essential that we recover the understanding of the creation as primary, not salvation. I can not recommend highly enough the contemplation of this passage of writing by Geoffrey Bingham, on page 73 of *'Creation and the Liberating Glory'*. I don't think we have fully grasped its import.

'When we ask why it should be said that creation is primary, the answer must be, 'If creation fails, then God fails', in which case He does not prove to be 'a faithful Creator'. In a myriad of ways God would be less than His word claims Him to be. No matter what element of Scripture we read, it will always have to do with creation, at least in the last analysis. It is simple enough to see that the Scriptures commence with an account of

⁹ Ephesians 3:9

¹⁰ Donovan, *The Church in the Midst of Creation*, p. x

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Geoffrey C. Bingham, *Creation and the Liberating Glory*, NCPI, p. 148

creation and close with an account of the new creation, but does that have to be significant? Conceivably it could mean that God had failed with His initial creation—called ‘the old creation’ by contrast with the new—and had to start again. If creation fails, then all has failed: God has failed. Making a new and different creation is not the sign of God’s success but of His failure. Indeed a new creation has no guarantee, either, that it will succeed. If the work of redemption is a corrective and an aid to initial creation, then that is not good enough: creation would still prove to be defective if it were to fail. It must succeed. Those who see redemption as a **‘repair job’** of God, as though an afterthought—an expediency to meet a contingency—have **missed the point**. Either redemption is incorporated into God’s plan prior to creation—having creation in view—or creation has failed.¹³

Creation will not fail. God will not fail. The gospel will not fail. But we might. We may fail to grasp some important aspects of our hope. Many people within the Christian church in Australia today, are rightly concerned at the seeming lack of uptake of the Christian message, by the wider community. However, worrying about this may achieve very little, except perhaps as a personal call to prayer. What is needed is to rediscover the great and joyous privilege and role of the church to declare the great things of God, and to pray ‘Thy kingdom come’. This is our vocation.

On a teaching trip to South Sudan in 2015, I learned of the unrest due to civil war since 1955. At one time, the only remaining infrastructure amid a lawless nation, was the Christian church. People knew they could trust a local pastor. (Many Anglican clergy publicly wear their ‘dog-collar’). *Blessed are the peace-makers*. This fact was borne out when we were detained over a passport and visa matter. When they learned that I was in fact a pastor in a Christian church, they immediately made my pathway smooth! They know the church has an important role among nations, in the midst of creation!

Application

As we look to the Lord, to take up our part within his plan, it may be that we would benefit from regaining a focus on where we can best make our personal contribution. The gospel has something to say to virtually every arena of life. But we don’t have to sigh and wonder where to begin. We need only take up our part, where the Lord calls us. We have a gospel widely applicable. But we are not experts in so many areas of life. And yes, “... everywhere lurks the peril of dilettantism” (Emil Brunner).¹⁴ Amateurs can pretend to be experts. In many areas of life, we do best to leave things to others. However, neither do we need to be professionals at everything in order to contribute. That may make us forever paralysed. Inert. God’s call upon our lives is personal, at this time within his story. May we take up our part within the creational mandate, and in the redemptional mandate. And this, as guided by the Spirit today. Emil Brunner says:

God never requires “something in general,” He does not issue proclamations, nor does He set up any kind of programme. He never issues commands into the air—with the idea that anyone may hear them who happens to feel like it! He tells me, or us, or you, as definite persons, to do some definite thing.¹⁵

Go well. Stand secure, in the justifying grace of God. Be filled with the Holy Spirit. Tell the world, that Jesus Christ is Lord of creation, and that in him our sins are forgiven, and our hope is sure. Go in peace, to love and to serve the Lord.

¹³ Bingham, *Creation and the Liberating Glory*, NCPI, 2004, p. 73

¹⁴ Emil Brunner, *The Divine Imperative*, Lutterworth Press, p. 11

¹⁵ Brunner, p. 198