

In order to talk about creation care, I'll start with two views of ourselves and God: Luke 18, starting at verse 10. This is a story that Jesus told to illustrate these two views.

"Two men went up to the temple to pray"... Stop right there. If you or I were asked to describe two different kinds of people in the world, this is not how we would start. We would say that there are the people who believe in God and then there are the people who don't believe in God. So we'd probably start: one man went up to the temple to pray, and the other man stayed home. But Jesus, who is God Himself, doesn't see it that way. Jesus says: two kinds of people and both of them believe in God, both go to the temple and both of them pray. But there's an infinite difference between these two kinds of people. Let's go back to the story.

"one was a Pharisee and the other a tax collector." (Pharisees were the religious people, the religious leaders) "The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men – robbers, evildoers, adulterers – or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.'

"But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.'

"I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God."

So let's look at the first person, the religious person. Can you see what his heart and mind are like? In his head, he's thinking: "I'm a good person. I do what God wants. I live a moral life. I follow all God's rules. I should be rewarded for the way I'm living.

The second person is not a good person. He has not lived a moral life. He's been a thief, stealing money from the people when he collected their taxes, passing on some to the government but sticking the rest in his pocket. He has not followed God's rules and he even knows it. He's ashamed of his life and he should be ashamed. He doesn't expect a reward from God. He asks God for mercy, for forgiveness when he knows that he hasn't done anything to deserve to be forgiven.

Now you would think that the person who had tried hard to do everything God wants, who had tried to follow all the rules – would be the one that God would accept. But Jesus – who is God Himself – says no, it's the second one who God accepts.

How can God reject good people and accept bad people? What kind of world is this? Okay, let's find out.

Genesis 1 says that in the beginning, when God made the world, he made the fish, the birds, the animals, and it was all good. But there was nobody to take care of it all. Clearly, the whales were not going to take care of the planet. Who was God going to entrust with caring for the world? The giraffes? Not likely. So we come to chapter 1, verse 26:

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let *them* rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

God made us – humans – to be in charge of this beautiful, good world. Many people get that backwards. They think that God made this beautiful world for us. But that's backwards. It actually says that we were made for this world.

But something went terribly wrong. Humankind rebelled against God. Human beings became twisted, perverted, in a word, "selfish." So, now I don't look at the world and think, "How can I take care of this world?" No, I think, "Mmm, how can I use this world to give me pleasure?" Instead of looking at another person, and thinking "how can I help that person?", I think, "How can I use that person to make me happy?" I am, by nature, selfish. We're all like that. When we read the Bible or look at the world around us, at the internet, or the newspaper, we see this selfishness everywhere: abuse, child abuse, sexual abuse, murder, rape, war, violence everywhere...

So how should we expect our Creator to react? He puts us in charge of a beautiful planet and we ruin everything. If I were the Creator, I'd look at all of us and say, "Well, you can just all go to hell. I'm out of here. I will have nothing more to do with you."

But instead, God mounted a rescue mission. God, in the person of Jesus Christ, entered our world on a mission. John 3:17 says, "For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him." Instead of sending Jesus to condemn us, God sent Jesus to rescue us. As it says in Colossians 1:20, "through him (Jesus) to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross."

So we as humans have rebelled and ruined everything, yet Jesus has come to us to rescue us and bring us back – and everything back – to Himself in reconciliation.

Now remember the two views? The first is the religious view. When the religious person hears that Jesus has come to rescue him, he thinks to himself: "I don't need to be rescued. I'm not violent. I'm not selfish. I'm good, I'm kind, I'm generous. I do what God wants. I follow the rules. God is pleased with me the way I am. I deserve God's reward."

But the religious person is living in a delusion. God tells us, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Everyone is selfish. No one is living the kind of life that pleases God.

The second kind of person gets it. He knows that he is not a good person. He throws himself on God's mercy and says, "God, forgive me." And because God is on a rescue mission, God does forgive him.

Now, a long time has passed since God created the world. We have now reached the point in history where our scientists are saying to us that human beings are badly polluting the air, the water, the soil, and changing the climate in a destructive way. For people who are convinced of their own goodness, people who have a religious view, they cannot accept what the scientists are saying. In their minds, they're thinking, "I'm a good person. How dare you say that I'm contributing to the destruction of the world! There's nothing wrong with the way that I'm living. And there's no reason for me to change the way that I'm living."

But for the second kind of person, the person who knows he's a selfish sinner, people like me – I think that what the scientists are saying is to be expected. It seems completely consistent with what God tells us about ourselves in the Bible. That we are a greedy and selfish human race who exploit everyone and everything for our own pleasure. God told us to care for this world and we rebelled. We are destructive and our sin has consequences which even the scientists can measure.

However, I have hope. I know that God has not abandoned me, or us, or this world. Jesus wants to rescue us and reconcile us and everything else back to Himself. He has begun that process with his death on the cross and His resurrection. He will not stop and He will not lose.

We're going to have a question and answer time in a few minutes. Let me start with two questions that are commonly asked.

Christians (not religious people) often say, "But doesn't the Bible say that this world will be destroyed by fire? If God is going to destroy the world anyway, why should we waste our time taking care of it?" They are referring to 2 Peter 3, which basically says that just as God once destroyed the world with a flood, so he will one day destroy the earth with fire. There are two possible ways to understand that. It may mean that God will destroy the world in the sense of annihilating it, obliterating it, so that it ceases to exist and will be replaced with something utterly different. The second possible meaning is that if God is going to destroy it as he once did with a flood, well, the flood did not obliterate the earth or cause it to cease to exist. It cleaned it or purified it. So, many biblical scholars think that it means that the earth will be refined the way that fire refines things and so the earth will be made new.

Which view is correct? I have no idea. But I don't think it matters in terms of caring for God's creation. Let me give you two examples why. In Luke 12:27-28, Jesus says, "God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today, and tomorrow is thrown into the fire." God, knowing full well the limited lifespan of the grass, still cares for it. Its lifespan does not enter into whether God cares for it or not.

A second example. When my wife and I had our children, we looked at them and thought: "They're so cute and adorable!" But then we realized, "Children don't last forever." So we took them out to a corner of our backyard. We didn't feed them. We didn't clothe them. We didn't give them an education, never taught them to read or write.... Do you think that's what we did? If we had done that, wouldn't the whole

community of our town have marched to our home and said, "Are you two parents crazy? God gave you these two children to take care of. It doesn't matter whether they live ten million years or two days. Your job is to care for them, not argue with God over whether their potential lifespan justifies your time and effort to love them."

A second common question is: "Shouldn't we care about people, rather than the environment? Aren't people more important than trees and squirrels?"

People are part of creation. You can't care about someone without caring about their environment – do they have drinkable water, nourishing food, clothes that keep them warm? The book of James talks about this. To care for people, you have to care about the environment that sustains them. Once you realize this, it can be very freeing. Some of you may be very interested in science and would love to pursue a career in environmental science, but as a Christian you'd feel guilty, because you feel you should really do something that cares for people instead. But if you could do something that would preserve or restore God's creation, you could be impacting thousands or millions of people, or even the entire planet. A doctor can only care for one person at a time. Of course, we need more doctors, but if your gift and interest is in environmental science, go for it. Matthew Sleeth was an emergency room doctor who was driven to consider his potential role in caring for God's creation when he had to treat children in the emergency room who were having asthma attacks. As a doctor, he believed there was a link between worsening air pollution and rising rates of asthma. He determined to deal with the problem at its source, which was the destructive effect humans are having on the environment that in turn is harming our children. He became a leader in the creation care movement. He understood that caring for creation is a way of caring for people.