

On the Creation and Judgment

Todd Thomas Tamura

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. Romans 8:18-25

The whole of creation will be a full participant in God's redemptive plan for his people. Just as we long for the completion of our salvation in new glorified bodies, so the creation yearns to be freed from its bondage to corruption, as from the pains of childbirth, and it is not difficult to understand the apostle's anthropomorphic expression. Sin, death and curse have left their mark not just on us, but on all creation. I see it as I work the small plot of land around my home. Plants, vines, bushes and trees, which hold the potential of beauty in their variation of bloom, color, form and texture, often succumb to the elements, despite my meticulous care. Empty places in beds are reminders of scorching summers, bare spots in the lawn of pestilence, misshapen trees

of heavy winter ice storms. Meanwhile, weeds and other undesirables thrive and encroach with no assistance at all. I know the odds are against me.

This same drama plays out on a much larger and grander scale every year at Augusta National golf course, home of *The Masters* golf tournament. When it comes to lawn and garden, this is the most curse reversal money can buy! The flowering of the azalea and dogwood accent an unspoiled and rolling carpet of green beneath tall Georgia pines. No offense to the best golfers in the world, but the course is always the star of the show. And yet, the course is only in this pristine condition for a fraction of the year. Like a banquet that takes days to prepare and only minutes to consume, the course is in a continual cycle of planning and preparation for next April.

There is more than enough order and beauty in the universe to point us to the Creator, (see Psalm 19:1, Romans 1:20) but we can also see that the creation is marred. As a pilot, I spend many hours looking down on the earth from altitude. Our oceans are vast and inhospitable to human life, covering approximately 70 percent of the earth's total surface area. Most of the earth's land mass is unpopulated or sparsely populated for a reason. Human beings are not so much running out of room, as they are wanting to live in the same desirable places. Only a small percentage of the earth is considered attractive for habitation.

If we observe more closely, we find more of the same. Hurricanes, thunderstorms, tornadoes, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions and tsunamis are just part of the creative order as it currently exists. Localized flooding and landslides here. Drought and wildfires there. Sweltering heat and extreme cold. The predatory action in nature, the desperate and heartbreaking struggle to survive in the wild, the death of a beloved pet.

Consider how creation has been affected even at the microscopic level in viruses, bacterium, and their associated diseases, sometimes reaching epidemic and pandemic proportions. Far more people have died in history from waterborne diseases like dysentery, cholera and typhoid, than directly from all wars combined. It's not even close. Other common infections include staphylococcus, streptococcus, influenza, polio, tuberculosis, leprosy, tetanus, HIV and AIDS, Ebola, Legionnaires, Lyme, SARS, COVID-19, smallpox, typhus, malaria, yellow fever, dengue, Zika, and the list goes on. Nothing is as it should be and will be. The dog bites and the bee stings, and we live in the land of the not quite right.

The Lord Jesus has promised that he will return, and he will set all things right. But the images and descriptions of how he will accomplish this are frightening to say the least:

“Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other. Matthew 24:29-31

... when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, when he comes on that

*day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed,
because our testimony to you was believed. 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10*

Jesus will return suddenly and unexpectedly like in “the days of Noah.” (Matthew 24:37) He will come as conquering king and judge. (see Revelation 19:11) He will subdue his enemies, and his judgment will spell either “eternal punishment” or “eternal life.” (Matthew 25:46) The existential significance of this truth is terrifying! No one is opting out of these two destinies. There is a record and an enrollment kept in heaven. (see Revelation 20:11-15) After death comes judgment, all will be called to account, and unless one belongs to the Lamb, who can stand before his wrath? (see Hebrews 9:27, Hebrews 4:13, Revelation 6:17) Though we may struggle to understand the sequence and interrelation of future events, which have been described in highly symbolic language, the discrete elements of Christ’s activity will be swift, fearsome, irreversible. He will carry out his plans with zeal and ferocity. He is Lion and Lamb.

But it is the rare church anymore, which takes its congregants to judgment and wrath, and we wonder where fear of God has gone. (see Ecclesiastes 12:13, 2 Peter 3:11) I get that it’s easier to focus on love rather than wrath, but God’s love is rendered meaningless apart from his righteous wrath, because it was in love that the wrath of God was poured out on Christ and satisfied. It was in love that Christ drank the full cup of the fury of God’s righteous anger. This is the reason the Father sent the Son. This is the reason the Son came to us. He came for us, on a rescue mission to save us. He suffered the guilt, shame, judgment and condemnation that should have been ours. He endured the Cross for our sake, for the joy set before him. Like father Abraham and his son Isaac both understanding what must be done in the hour of testing. (see Genesis 22)

This message could only be from above. It deserves repeating and full acceptance: God saves us from himself, for himself, and at great cost to himself.

As for the creation, we have already seen that the current heavens and earth are on a parallel course to freedom and glory, along with those who belong to Christ:

But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly. ... But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. 2 Peter

3:7, 10-13

It's true that God has given mankind a delegated dominion over the earth. We have stewardship and responsibility for life and the habitats, which support life. (see Genesis 1:26-29) All of us have a role to play in "saving the environment." But the heavens and earth that currently exist are stored up or reserved for fire until the day of judgment. Imagine the apostle's alarm and struggle for the words, which would remain faithful to what the Spirit was telling him! Everything must *burn, melt, dissolve*. The creation will be purified by fire. When mankind is finished with the earth, and after judgment, woe and wrath have run their course, can there be any doubt that what will

be required is not mere cleanup or renovation, but a complete re-creation? And that is what we are told to expect: new heavens and a new earth!

And what can be said of that final living condition? (see Revelation 21 and 22) We end up in a new holy city, like a radiant jewel. A river, a street, a tree. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and God will dwell with his people. They will be comforted. No more death, mourning, crying, pain. No longer anything accursed. And to emphasize that the former things have indeed passed away, no more sea, no more sun, no more night, for the Lord God will be their light. And they will worship their God and reign with him forever! It's a limited description, and one that probably begs more questions than it answers, but it's certainly enough to whet the appetite. There is a glory to be revealed to us!

Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. Matthew

24:35

And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." Revelation 21:5