

## **Sermon**

# **HARMFUL HUMANS AND CHANGING CLIMATE**

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In the biblical accounts there is an integral connection between God, humanity and the world of nature. God is the Creator and Sustainer of the creation that consists of the humans and nature. Any estrangement in relation among these three can adversely affect the well-being of both the humans and the natural world. But a delicate balance in relationship among them helps maintain the equilibrium between the two. Bible conceives human sin as the cause of disturbance in the harmonious relationship between humankind and the world of nature. We shall briefly consider the effect of such human disobedience and its disastrous consequences on the world of nature, especially with reference to climate change, focusing on Joel 1: 2-20.

### **Divine Promise & Human Failures**

In God's act of creation, at the end of each day when God looked upon what he had created, God saw that it was all good. But the estrangement in relationship between God and humanity, as a result of human disobedience, has brought about universal distress that affected not only the humans but also the world of creation. The first of such natural calamities (excluding the effect of Adam's sin narrated in Genesis 3), is Noah's flood which had terrible consequences on the entire created order consisting of the humankind and the world of nature including the animal kingdom and the vegetations. Not only that sin entered the world but with it also the effect of sin that completely changed the harmonious existence that characterized the relationship between God, humans and the world of nature.

However, a compassionate God could not allow such large scale destruction of God's beloved handiwork. Hence, God made a covenant with Noah wherein God promised to never again destroy the whole life by waters (Gen. 9:12-16). It not only meant that God would refrain from destroying life through natural calamities but that God will also preserve life by assuring proper climatic conditions for sowing and harvest and pastures for cattle (Deut. 11: 13-15). The land that God promised to the people in fulfillment of this covenant was "a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, flowing forth in valleys and hills, a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey." (Deut. 8: 7-8) All that was required on the part of humanity was that they remained faithful to God.

In traditional agrarian societies, the quality of the soil and normal rains coupled with adequate human efforts determined the outcome of the harvest from the cultivable land. However, the dearth of good soil, disturbances in the normal climatic cycle with its seasonal rains and any natural disasters made the life of the subsistence farmer really burdensome. Palestine, notwithstanding the divine promise, was a land filled with rocks, mountainous regions and deserts, and where scarcity of water was a common experience. Hence, God's promise was an abundant supply of rains, that too, without discrimination. For "He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous." (Mat. 5: 45; cf. Acts 14: 17) While abundance of rains marked divine blessing, the scarcity of rains the displeasure of God.

Nature can thus serve as a means of blessing or a cause of divine judgment, working out God's moral purposes.

### **Divine Retribution & Ecological Imbalance**

Prophet Joel who had a deep appreciation for the re-established worship conducted in the Temple, very likely, in the postexilic period, speaks of the failures of the returnees from Babylon that brought about divine judgment in the form of locusts plague and droughts. The locusts had an effect both on the countryside and the city underlining the totality of the devastation. While in the countryside, it affected the crops and thereby the harvesters, farmers and cultic personnel, and through them the Temple worship, the use of the metaphor of an army describes its widespread effect on the city. Everyone is thus called upon to lament for healing comes only through means of repentance.

Both, the animate and inanimate nature share in human judgments as well as blessings. All sections of society fall victim to the collective chastisement of the nation as a result of the disasters that disturb the natural order just as they share the blessings derived from nature. The drunkards (1:5), the tillers of the soil and the vinticulturists (1:11) have all been affected. The vines, fig trees (1:7), the fields are laid waste, wine dries up, grain destroyed and oil fails (1:10), wheat, barley and crops ruined (1:11), vine withers, fig tree droops and fruit trees dried up (1:12). The chief products of Palestine (Deut. 7:13) have all been destroyed due to the locusts plague accompanied by a severe drought. The agricultural calamity had its effect on the Temple celebrations as well. (1:13)

The day of the Lord is no more seen as the day of rejoicing, but one of cosmic upheaval. It is a day of devastation—devastation of fields, agricultural products and even food leading to starvation of humans and animals (1:15-20). The creation is so interrelated that even the earth, plants and animals share in the punishment of human sin (cf. Gen. 3: 17-18). People, priests, prophets, domestic and wild animals, earth, trees and the entire vegetation suffer under the impact of human failure.

### **Harmful Humans & Changing Climate**

While all through human history, there were floods, earth-quakes, fires and various other natural calamities detrimental to the preservation of life on earth, it is also true that many of them were caused by human intervention in the process of nature. Aided by modern science and technology, it has only been intensified in recent years. One dominant way in which it is experienced in modern times is through the climate change that we experience due to human activities leading to pollution, deforestation and green house effect. This results in changes in weather patterns, heat waves, global warming, droughts and floods, melting of ice caps and rising sea levels. The impact of climate change badly affects capacity of agriculture production, balance of ecosystem and preservation of biodiversity.

Human consumption patterns, life-style changes, economic and social inequities, lack of concern for future generations, lack of awareness of the rights of creation, population growth, military activity, deforestation, desertification, flawed spiritual perceptions, all of which based on selfish human interests, have been largely responsible for creating situations that contributed towards global warming and accelerated climate change. As Prophet Joel reminds us, human failures in

being obedient to the divine intentions have their direct influence on the behavioural patterns, which in turn, affects human relationship with nature. The accelerated climate change at the global level only testifies to the greed and selfishness of human behaviours with no regard for God and fellow creation. Harmful human conduct that originates in utter disregard for God leads ultimately towards a lack of concern for the natural world, the results of which are life styles and living patterns that not only propels climatic change but also disturbs the entire ecological system.

This should challenge us as Christians to wake up and act now before it is too late. We should ask ourselves, what we can do as Churches, NGOs, Christian families and individuals to respond to climate change.

- A) In Personal life styles
- B) In Development activities
- C) In Missiological engagements
- D) In Spiritual Perceptions

We might need to pray for those in powers of decision making at government levels and others for wisdom and commitment for ecologically viable planning and projects. Pray for governments and NGOs working towards ecologically friendly developments and life styles.

We need to act in re-ordering our personal life styles. Encouraging and promoting ecologically helpful programmes and projects. Speak against and participate in agitations that highlight ecologically unviable developments. Commit to use and promote only ecologically helpful products.