Jesus’ View of Nature

Since Jesus stressed the authority of the Hebrew Bible {or scriptures} (which for Christians became the Old Testament) (Matt 5:18), he implicitly affirmed its teachings on nature. He did not rescind the ecological ethics of the Law, although he was less strict about ceremonial laws. All foods are clean and do not defile a person (Mark 7:19). He touched the sick to heal them, rejecting ceremonial uncleanness laws found in the Hebrew Bible (Mark 1:40-45; 5:25-34).

Jesus appreciated the beauty of nature (Matt 6:28-29) and showed respect for nature in his parables, which are rich in nature imagery. Through his upbringing in rural Galilee he learned about God’s care for creation by observing fruit trees, flowers, birds and fishermen and by working as a carpenter.


Nature provides ethical lessons. God’s provision of sun and rain for the wicked is a model for loving our enemies (Matt 5:44-45). Since God provides for the needs of animals and plants, humans
should trust God to provide for their material needs and reflect this in prayer for daily bread (Matt 6:11, 25-33).

Jesus used nature metaphorically. The people of God are sheep that God cares for (Mark 6:34; John 9:36; 10:15) and those who would destroy them are wolves (Matt 10:16; John 10:12). Jesus is the good shepherd who gives his life for his sheep (John 10). He is the bread that gives eternal life (John 6:25-40). The Holy Spirit is the water that gives life (John 4:14).


Jesus used natural objects to illustrate moral and spiritual lessons. Bread and wine were sacramental symbols of the new covenant instituted through Jesus’ redeeming death on the cross (Mk 14:22-25). He made an unfruitful fig tree wither as a visual parable of judgment on people unresponsive to God (Mark 11:14; cf. Luke 13:6-9).

Jesus was comfortable with the material world (Mark 2:16), yet he was not consumed by it. One’s priority should be to seek God’s kingdom (his reign and presence) and righteous character above money and material possessions (Matt 6:19-24, 33; 13: 22; John 6:27). Material things are not evil in themselves, but the pursuit of possessions is not the highest good. “What profit is there if a person gains the whole world and loses his soul?” (Mark 8:36) If a person trusts God and pursues God’s kingdom and righteousness as first priority, God will provide his basic material needs (Matt 6:33). We should thank God for providing for our material needs (Matt 14:19; Mark 14:23).

All created things have worth in God’s eyes. Nature has intrinsic value whether it provides
human benefits (sheep, Matt 12:11) or has little utilitarian value to humans (grass, sparrows, Matt 6:26; 10:29-31). {what about unproductive fig trees? Or pigs?} Even rocks glorify God (Luke 19:40). God knows what happens to sparrows and provides for them (Matt 6:26; 10:29-31). Nevertheless humans have greater value than animals and plants (Matt 6:26, 29; 10:31; 12:12), since humans are created in God’s image (cf. Gen 1:26). Jesus healed many people, but there is no record of his healing an animal. However, he taught the moral imperative of properly caring for animals (Luke 13:15; Matt 12:11).

Several of Jesus’ teachings have indirect implications for environmental stewardship. Leadership involves service of others, not power over others or an excuse for oppression (Mark 10:42-44). Hence human dominion over nature (cf. Gen 1:26, 28) should be exercised for the good of creation, not the selfish destruction of nature. The parable of the talents and the parable of the wise steward imply the earth is a stewardship for which humanity is accountable to God (Matt 24:45-51; 25:14-30). The earth belongs to God not humanity (Matt 11:25; cf. Ps 24:1), and humans will be judged on the condition in which they return God’s possessions (Matt 25:27).

In the Lord’s prayer, Jesus teaches his followers to pray that God’s kingdom would reign fully on earth (Matt 6:10; Luke 11:2). Although God is Lord of heaven and earth (Matt 5:13; 11:25), human and demonic evil cause many things not to be as God intended them (Matt 4:24; 10:7-18; 12:22; Mark 3:20-27; Luke 13:16). The Lord’s prayer asks that God’s purposes be fulfilled in both physical and spiritual realms.

Miracles show Jesus’ divine power, glory and authority over nature and encourage faith in Jesus (Matt. 8:23-27; 14:22-33; Mark 2:10-11; 4:37-41; Luke 8:22-25; John 2:1-11; 9:30-38). He performed creation miracles such as multiplying loaves and fish to feed the hungry and transforming
water into wine (Mark 6:34-44; 8:1-9; John 2:1-12; 6: 1-13). Simply by speaking a word, he calmed storms (Mark 4:39-41; Matt 8:23-27), much as God created with a word in Genesis 1. He healed numerous diseases with a touch or word (Matt 4:23-24; 8:8) and raised the dead, including a man who had been dead four days (Matt. 9:18-25; 11:5; Luke 7:11-15, 22; John 11:38-44).

The return of Christ will be preceded by cosmic disasters, including earthquakes, plagues, famine, changes in the courses of astronomical bodies and the darkening of the sun and moon (Matt 24:27-30; Mark 13:24-27; Luke 21:11, 25-27). Heaven and earth in its present form will pass away (Matt 5:18; 24:35). This is does not imply the destruction of the world, but the transition to God’s universal reign over creation (Matt 13:37-43). Although Jesus does not explicitly refer to a new or transformed earth as do some NT authors (see New Testament), there are hints that there will be a perfected earth after Jesus’ return. The righteous will eat and drink with Jesus in the consummated kingdom (Matt 26:29; Luke 22:29-30). The humble will inherit the earth (Matt 5:5), a broadening of the promise in the Hebrew Scriptures that the righteous will inherit the land of Israel (e.g. Ps 37:11). The dead will be resurrected bodily to face eternal rewards or punishments (Luke 14:14; John 5:21-29; John 11:24-25). This implies the righteous will enjoy some type of physical existence in the eternal age, although different than the present physical life, since there will be no death or need for human procreation (Luke 20:35-37).

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