

'Restoration' – SJD – 19/2/17- Romans 8: 18-25, Matthew 6: 25-34

What does the future hold? Wouldn't it be great to know! When I was still a teacher, one of the specialist courses I taught at 'A' level was on 'natural hazards' – volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, hurricanes, Tsunamis and the like. One of the more interesting parts was to look at prediction and subsequent planning for such events. Some like most volcanic eruptions and hurricanes can be fairly accurately predicted but others like earthquakes can be notoriously difficult as to their specific location and timing. It was always a case of looking for signs no matter how indistinct or unconnected they may appear.

Well you may feel that this is exactly the same about our futures – especially now following two surprising and unpredictable events – Brexit and the election of Donald Trump. The lesson I tried to get across with earthquake prediction was that while the detail – dates etc- was as yet unpredictable – the broad pattern was clear. Hence most seismologists are confident about a large earthquake hitting San Francisco and another hitting Ankara in Turkey sometime within the next 30 years or so.

When we look at our epistle reading today we get the same broad sweep of the future. It is true that the small detail eg timing is uncertain but the larger picture is clear because like earthquake prediction it is based on historic factual records and a knowledge of the underlying causes and direction of events.

The passage in Romans speaks of the future of two things – creation in general and then Christians in particular. It says that both will be changed, transformed, renewed into something which while bearing a resemblance to what we see today, will also bear significant differences..

1. Creation

Genesis¹ reminds us of the original state of creation. It was quite different from what we see today. As Paul writes, '**creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice**'². This surely refers back to the events described in Genesis 3 where, following the disobedience of Adam and Eve, God curses the ground,³ so that it will produce thorns and thistles. The result is that it will require heavy labour from men & women to reap a harvest. Paul uses the phrase '**bondage to decay**'⁴ to describe the state of creation that results. By this I think he means that the direction creation takes is one of short term inbuilt death and decay. Death and decay become the only certainties for all things.

Now this is exacerbated by human effects. Originally we were given authority over creation but our own fallenness means we have tended to exploit rather than nurture it. The results are clear to see – large scale loss of species and the destruction of habitats. Not all of this is deliberate. For instance global warming is an accidental effect of industrialisation but it is catastrophic on many civilisations and habitats around our world, as I saw again in India last month.

¹ See Genesis 1:1 – 2:3

² Romans 8:20

³ Genesis 3:17ff

⁴ Romans 8: 21

But, says Paul, these things will change. Creation will be liberated and restored. Elsewhere in both the OT and NT we have the imagery of the 'New Heavens and a New Earth'.⁵ The picture is of a restoration to how things were before the Fall. Contrary to some doom-mongers today, creation will not be destroyed but it will be restored and transformed. Death will no longer hold sway – hence 'the wolf and the lamb will feed together and the lion will eat straw like the Ox'⁶. Righteousness will rule and all will live in harmony with each other but only, writes Paul, when '**the sons of God (are) revealed**'⁷ - namely after Jesus' return. So let us now turn our attention to this.

2. The sons of God

There is a definite 3 fold prediction about the appearance of the 'sons of God'.

In Ephesians 1:5 we are told that their appearance is part of God's eternal plan. '**(God) predestined us to be adopted as his sons thru JC**'. Paul writes that this occurred even before creation was brought into being⁸ - it was part of God's master plan for all of His creation. The second part of the prediction we see Romans 8:14. This deals not with past events but the current position where believers are included now as 'children of God'. '**Those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God**'. However this all culminates in a final legal act in the future when we will be formally 'adopted, through grace, as 'sons of God.' As Paul writes, '**we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies**'. The transformation is clear. While we are being changed now through the work of the HS, we will be physically and wonderfully changed and given resurrection bodies that will never die. You can see, therefore, that the removal of death and restoration are key facets of both the future of creation and all believers.

Conclusion

Well so what, you may say. Well think of what Jesus said in our Gospel reading. There he speaks of the relative unimportance of the things which so many see as central to this life – food, clothing, possessions etc. If our life now is but a very poor picture of what we will one day inherit, then these things we strive after are also of minor importance compared to what we will one day be given. Indeed and equally important is the fact that our life now is not all that should matter – contrary to what so many say.

If you lived in San Francisco, you would be planning for the arrival of the inevitable earthquake. It may come tomorrow, it may be several decades away but come it will. If you are wise you will retrofit your home and move away from the older buildings in the port area. You would understand evacuation drills and train your children in them. Likewise we should be planning for Jesus' return. It may be before or after we physically die – we simply don't know, but come it will. So let us live and plan now in light of this future certainty and let us look forward eagerly with Paul and all the saints to that day when death is banished and we will enjoy the presence of God forever. Amen

⁵ Isaiah 65:17ff, 2 Peter 3:13 & Revelation 21:1ff

⁶ Isaiah 65:25

⁷ Romans 8:19

⁸ Ephesians 1:4