

WEEK 1 >>

WHY SHOULD WE WANT TO CHANGE THE WORLD?

 **WATCH:** Creation and the kingdom – Peter Lynas

In the beginning God formed and filled what was previously formless and void. God created the heavens and the earth and brought order from the chaos and life from the emptiness. And it was very good. And on that sixth day God made the first human being in His image, a representative here on earth created to bring Him glory and to continue the work He began. He commanded them to fill the earth and rule over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky and every living creature that moves on the ground. Humanity was endowed with dignity from the start, created with purpose and with the capacity to wonder and to work.

But things did not remain all well and good for too long. The world we know still resembles that creation, but it is marred, broken by the choices taken each day since Adam and Eve followed the serpent. Our actions in this world, while frequently good and reflecting God's desires, are hampered by the tendency to reject God's authority and seek our own way. Every act of abuse against another human being is an act of high treason against God. We still see glimpses of wonder in creation, we see the potential of human flourishing, but we also know only too well the hardness caused by the times we choose to serve ourselves.

God's kingdom breaks into history and brings shalom, restoring relationships, bringing completeness. The world is turned upside down, or more accurately right way up. We are living in the light of this intervention but in a world still gripped by pain and suffering, we live giving due weight to the kingdom which has been inaugurated, but also to the final victory for which we wait.

We live with a vision of the "new heaven and a new earth" spoken of in Revelation 21, and we hope for the time when God will make a dwelling place among the people. The good news we have is not just about getting us out of hell and into heaven but about God getting out of heaven and into humanity.

In Exodus, God shows His solidarity by coming down, working through Moses to resist Pharaoh, calling out "let my people go" and working an act of liberation delivering them from Egypt to a good land. Chris Wright reminds us that this redemptive act was about political, economic, social and spiritual liberation. It was God's total response to Israel's needs. The law that was given to Israel held in tension God's sovereignty with humanity's ability to choose: God is the most powerful one, able to deliver people when they cry out to God, and yet God chooses to allow humans a significant role and responsibility in shaping their life.

We are not bystanders. We are commissioned to work within the story, and this means there are not some areas for Christians and other areas better avoided. Perhaps those areas plagued by difficulty and challenge, with threats of compromise looming large, are the places we are needed most.

It is easy to look upon culture and society and see everything that is wrong. It is much harder to make this a better world. But that is what we are called to do. We are called to be a part of creation. To be in it, though not of it. We know that our world needs to change – we see those glimpses of wonder but also the scars across humanity. God calls us to be a continuing part of that change, as workers for the King and for His kingdom.

 **READ & REFLECT ON SCRIPTURE**

READ: GENESIS 1:26-31 What was the mandate given to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden? How does it apply to our lives?

READ: ISAIAH 58 What is God's rebuke to the people of Israel in Isaiah 58? Were they living out the mandate given to Adam and Eve? Are we?

READ: MATTHEW 5:1-16 How should the call to be 'salt and light' affect our involvement in public life? What did Matthew mean by 'the Kingdom of Heaven'? What would it look like for God's kingdom to fully come to our world?

DISCUSS

The story we inhabit, the story that forms us, is a story in which we have a part to play. It is God's story: the story of our world. A story of creation, fall and redemption; of God's love for us. The Bible is the unfolding drama of God's action in history for the salvation of the whole world. As NT Wright puts it: "The whole point of Christianity is that it offers a story which is the story of the whole world. It is public truth."

- What can we learn from the overarching story of the people of Israel throughout the Old Testament about God's plan for this world?
- Think about the callings of Joseph, Moses, Jonah, Jeremiah, Isaiah, Daniel and many others. How did they interact with the world around them?
- How do people like Naaman in 2 Kings 5 or the Babylonian and Persian kings in Daniel react to their positive interactions with the Israelites? What do these stories say about the role of God's people in the world?

PUT IT INTO PRACTICE

Have a look at some recent news stories. What opportunities can you see for Christians to be a part of these stories? How could you engage with the cultural narratives these stories represent?

LISTEN TO GOD

Take some time out in silence and solitude to listen to what God has to say to you. Are you living as part of God's "overarching story"? When have you felt God's kingdom come through to earth, or when have you heard God saying: "This part of the story is yours." What can you learn from these times? If you're struggling to hear Him, try saying this short prayer:

Lord, thank you for allowing me to play a part in your creation. Help me to understand how I can be salt and light in this world, and to recognise that part of your creation where I can make a difference.

Amen.

TAKEAWAY CHALLENGE

Consider these quotes:

"A mature understanding of the unity of the body of Christ allows us to care about everything Christ cares about, but to carry only what he has given us to bear."

Greg Carmer, dean of the chapel at Gordon College

"The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet."

Frederick Buechner, 'Wishful Thinking: A Theological ABC' (New York: Harper Row, 1973), p.95

Take some time to think about your dreams and hopes for the parts of creation you inhabit –your community, town, workplace, family, church, etc. Map out your goals and passions for these areas and work out how they link together. Where is God calling you to be part of the story? Make a list of all the areas where you need courage to stand up and be counted.

LEARN MORE

For links to these articles, go to thepublicleader.com/ctw1

Ways to change the world: advice from 7 leaders on how to make a difference, Relevant Magazine, Issue 70, July/August 2014

Empowered to Act: Why Christians Should Change the World, S. Michael Craven, March 2011

Changing Culture: The Grid, Peter Lynas, five-part video series