

WHAT A WORLD!

Genesis 1:1-28

What a world! What a world for people! What a world for you! In it is everything for your well-being, your enjoyment, and your use! Everything all set for the good life!

Something happened somewhere along the way. You come upon a spot in quiet hill country where a clear stream used to flow. Pollution got so bad that now it stinks. People in the neighborhood complain of intestinal upsets from drinking the water. In that area the government had to step in, take nine of its townships to court, and obtain an injunction: those nine communities must not issue any more building permits until they have an adequate sewage treatment plant.

Some of us remember lakes where swimming used to be a joy. Now all that meets the eye is a green swath of algae, the cancerous growth of water pollution. Along the shore is a sign that has been planted firmly. It reads: "Unsafe for swimming by order of the Department of Health." In one of the national parks in the United States there is a sign: "Polluted water! No swimming or wading!" -- National Park Police.

It was one of these hot, humid, stuffy, uncomfortable days. A motorist was approaching a large metropolitan area, listening to the radio. A special bulletin came over the air announcing: "Air pollution is now at the danger level due to an atmospheric inversion condition. You are urged not to use carbon monoxide producing machines unless absolutely necessary. There is to be no burning of garbage, and industries are urged to keep fuel consumption at a minimum until the danger is past," and it was signed by the mayor of the city.

Now, who is causing all this trouble, anyway? It is not God, although some people are trying to look around for ways in which to blame Him for this too. If they could blame God for the situation in the world, and solve the pollution problem at the same time, they would think that they had killed two birds with one stone.

But I want to tell you something. God is not the problem. People are. People have polluted human relationships in much the same way they have polluted the atmosphere and the environment. They just do what comes naturally, and the result is pollution. This sign would be appropriate almost anywhere: "Warning: pollution of human relationships at the danger level due to poisonous attitudes." No matter what you talk about, the poison is there, whether it is family, business, law enforcement, religion, or just the community itself. In fact the word community has become almost a joke, because there is very little unity in it.

Out of the goodness and grace of His heart, God gave this world to man. And what a world it is! Proof that it is a wonderful world is indeed abundant when we take note of the chirping of the birds outside our bedroom windows at the break of day, the fragrance of the many beautiful flowers wafted in on the morning breeze, the fleecy clouds changing from one color to another in the early dawn. Then there are the fertile valleys stretching far in the distance with all their excellent crops, and the hundreds of beautiful hills with the thousands of cattle grazing upon them. The quiet lakes, the rippling rills, the rushing rivers, the restless seas, the mighty forests, the towering mountains, the glorious sunset, the silvery moon, the twinkling stars -- all speak to us of the power and goodness of God which are manifested for our good and His glory. God's Word tells man to use this world, rule over it, manage it, and develop it. He has given what He has made to man.

It would have been interesting and informing to know how man would have used God's good world if man had never become polluted and a polluter at the same time.

If man had never become selfish, thinking mostly about himself and forgetting about God and others; if man were not continually on the defensive, baring his teeth toward God and clenching his fists toward his neighbors. It is safe to say, however, that the "development" of the world would have had an entirely different look under these circumstances where man was doing what he was supposed to do from what it is today.

Man is the problem, and not the world. It is the one problem people don't want to face. We start talking about ecology, which has become the "in" word of our time. Actually, what we have to talk about is ourselves, and what it means to be a man in God's world. If we overlook that, we can talk about ecology until we are blue in the face, and nothing will happen.

In Marseille, France, a pair of big aluminum refineries each day discharge six thousand tons of red sediment into the Mediterranean Sea. Though eighty per cent of it funnels into a deep trench, the remainder settles elsewhere on the bottom. "The problem," says famed French marine biologist, Alain Bombard, "is that this waste, though not toxic in itself, blankets and kills all living things. Moreover, this is an area where it is essential to have living water to purify the sewage of Marseille."

Some ecologists fear that pollution of the atmosphere will prevent the earth from radiating heat, and that the temperature of the planet will warm up, the ice caps will melt, oceans will rise by sixty feet, drowning the world's coastal cities. Other ecologists fear that the sun's rays will not be able to get through the polluted atmosphere, and that the temperature of the planet will drop. Even now about thirty-one per cent of the world's surface is covered by low clouds. Increasing this covering to thirty-six per cent through pollution would drop the temperature about four degrees Centigrade -- enough to start a return to the ice age. In other words, no one really knows what might happen.

The resources of this earth are being used up on a prodigal scale, and the waste problem is tremendous. In seventy years of life, the average American uses twenty-six million gallons of water, twenty-one thousand gallons of gasoline, ten thousand pounds of meat, twenty-eight thousand pounds of milk and cream, as well as eight thousand dollars worth of school buildings, six thousand dollars worth of clothing, and seven thousand dollars worth of furniture. The result of massive production is massive filth. Every year Americans junk seven million cars, one hundred million tires, twenty million tons of paper, twenty-eight billion bottles and forty-eight billion cans. Just to collect the garbage costs two billion and eight hundred million dollars a year.

Every year United States plants discard one hundred sixty-five million tons of solid waste and gush one hundred seventy-two million tons of smoke and fumes into the air. Chemicals have replaced manure as fertilizers, and pollution is everywhere. The detergents we use to clean become the means for killing life when they pour out of the sewers into the streams.

In January, 1970, Newsweek said: "Seen from the black depths of space, the earth is a lovely blue and white striped island in the archipelago of the planets. It is unique, with its surface wetted by water, cushioned by greenery and fanned by air.

Close up, the earth -- and particularly that part of the land mass occupied by the United States -- presents a far different picture. For example, fishermen in Colorado cast for trout among the beer cans and the debris filling into the Eagle River from an open dump on the bank; American women carry in their breasts milk that has anywhere from three to ten times more of the pesticide DDT than the federal government allows in dairy milk for human consumption; the Cuyahoga River in Ohio is so overrun with volatile industrial discharges that last summer it caught fire and burned two railroad trestles. Such is the home of the most technically advanced population on earth."

There is nothing complicated about this picture. It is as plain as the nose on your face. There is nothing complicated about what the Bible has to say regarding man and the world. God made this world of ours. He made it for the benefit of man. He made an intelligent being to deal intelligently with the world of things created for his benefit. We have not been very intelligent. Our lack of intelligence is matched only by our lack of insight regarding our own nature. We don't see ourselves as we are, because we simply refuse to see God as He is. If we rule God out of the picture, we become a bunch of blockheads ourselves.

The problem is not complicated at all. The problem is man. Immediately after Eve and Adam sinned they had a sense of guilt and shame. Their eyes were opened, and they became conscious of the shame associated with their wrongdoing. Having become conscious of their shame, Adam and Eve at once endeavored to hide it by making for themselves aprons of fig leaves. They tried to hide from God. Sin has always caused people to try to run away or to flee from God. God came and said, "Where art thou?" Adam was unable to hide from the all-seeing eye of God. Later, Cain arose and slew his own brother and then he fled. After his encounter with God, Cain said: "This day from thy face shall I be hid; and I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond in the earth." Then the Bible says, "Cain went out from the presence of God."

Let me ask you this question: Why, why all this restlessness in human life? There is only one answer; it is sin. Why is humanity in anguish today? Sin is the answer. Why is it that people are desperate to escape themselves and the demands of life? There is only one answer, and it is sin. The Bible says: "Your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you." There is a confrontation with God that you and I cannot escape in this life or in the life to come. Run as fast as you want to, go as far as you care, but you cannot get away from God's view.

There are not many signs that man is willing to change. He wants to keep on doing what he is doing, all the while tinkering around with something called ecology.

I don't care where you are living, it is a polluted place. All of us have helped to make it so. We are people, and we are polluters. We are polluted ourselves, and we pollute others. We pollute the things we use, and we pollute the beautiful and wonderful world that God has made. This is the situation, and we are not making a mountain out of a molehill.

If a man will not change, he must be changed. No amount of legislation is going to do that. Laws can keep people within certain bounds, preventing them from destroying themselves today or tomorrow, but no law will prevent a man from destroying himself eventually, if that is what he wants to do. If law won't change a man, what will? Only God can change a man, and only God will.

Here we get at the heart of something really big. This is not just talk, like some of the palaver that we hear in the name of ecology. I am talking about God Who made this world, and what a world it is! That same God, not willing to see His world go down the drain at the hands of man, sent His Son to be a real man just like us. He was a real man, like us and yet very different from us. He was a real man, God's man, thinking as God's men can be expected to think, and acting as God's men are supposed to act. He knew His Father, and He was obedient as the Son of the Father. With all the authority of God at His command Jesus Christ was a modest and humble man. He did not parade His power and He was not intent on serving Himself. The Son of Man, He said, came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for the masses of people who do not care about anything but themselves.

The Son of God laid His life on the line for God's world which had gone wrong. He laid down His life as a real and willing sacrifice for all of these selfish and sinful people, people like us, who think only of themselves. He paid the price for our sins, for that is what we have been doing all of our lives, namely, sinning against God, sinning against one another, and sinning against ourselves. This is sin and there is no getting away from it. Jesus Christ took the pain and punishment of sin into His own heart when He died.

One of Christ's men said, "The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanseth us from all sin." You should believe that. There is only one hope for the world and that is God's Son. He died for you, and was raised from the dead with power. He commands faith, the kind that causes a person to follow Him and to do His will.

His way may be entirely different from the one in which you have been going, but it is the only way. It is a complete changeover from your way to His way. Faith in Christ is not just saying the right things, and then going on doing as you please. Real faith in Him causes you to follow Christ. If you would follow Him, forget yourself, take up the cross, and follow Him.

What a world! God gives it to be used, but so many abuse it. God summons His children to live righteously, and many walk in unrighteous ways. God offers to rehabilitate them, and they refuse to allow Him to do so. God sent His Son, but men killed Him. God raised Him from the dead, but men rejected Him. God extends His reconciling hand, but they treat Him as an enemy. The Son says, "Come unto Me", and they go their own way instead.

What a world! Now we are having our faces rubbed into it and all of us can see. The atmosphere is polluted, the environment is polluted, and humanity is polluted. We can see it. Now, there has got to be a change. The only possibility of any real change in people is in Jesus Christ. That is the way that a change occurs, namely, through faith in Christ Who alone has the power to save and to transform.

What a world! It is a world in which Christ lives in the hearts of some. In Him, people and things fit together again. He is the Saviour of those who believe. Receive Him into your heart, and enthrone Him in your life. Accept the forgiveness which He provided and which He offers to you and enjoy a new life in Him. What a world in Christ for you! Help to make it what God wants it to be for you. Faith in Christ really works. Enjoy the new life which He gives you, and help other people to receive it through Christ.