

**M**any Christians view the call to follow Jesus as some sort of out-of-body, other-worldly affair that shouldn't occupy itself with this-worldly concerns. The Christian life is largely arranged around the concept of escape—we will one day leave this world for good, go to heaven when we die and forever live in some kind of angel-like existence.

Those who frame and understand salvation this way believe the gospel looks something like this:

I am a sinner. Jesus died for my sins. I asked Jesus into my heart to

forgive my sins. When I die I will be removed from this world and will live in heaven for all eternity.

Within this framework, the world is seen as a really awful place that God hates and salvation is viewed as **God's evacuation plan** to one day get his followers out of it.

More than we realize, this understanding of the gospel not only does a grave injustice to God's cosmic redemptive story, a story that seeks to redeem and renew all of creation, but more closely resembles the second-century heresy of *Gnosticism* than Christianity.

## **Gnosticism and the New Testament**

Gnosticism has many facets worthy of discussion, but one of its main features, and one that is particularly relevant to this conversation, is the idea that all matter is essentially evil. Our bodies are evil, the world is evil and both are without value, destined to be destroyed. The only important part of us that really does matter is our immaterial soul. Soul good, body and all matter, evil.

In the past, people who embraced Gnostic teaching treated their bodies poorly

# **This World IS My Home and I**

**by Jeff K. Clarke**



through malnutrition, even self-mutilation, on the assumption that it didn't really matter what they did to their flesh because, after all, our bodies are essentially evil and destined for destruction.

For many, the body was something they needed to escape from, not something to be honored as a God-given gift, and certainly had no place in God's future plan. The body was a temporary home and the earth was a place they were just passing through. Matter, in all of its forms, was evil, temporary and assigned for destruction.

However, the biblical storyline is quite clear that our bodies and the earth are **not** evil and

something that God, through Christ, by the Spirit, will one day renew and re-animate to reflect the kind of body and creation he envisioned from the very beginning.

We will have our bodies forever. Yes, they will be like Christ's glorified, post-resurrection body, the same, yet different from the body he had during his public ministry, but a body nonetheless.

We will live on the earth forever. It will be a renewed and restored earth, but it will be the earth nonetheless.

### **Continuity and Discontinuity**

This discussion is really about continuity and discontinuity. In the

to annihilate, has not only misunderstood the entire witness of scripture that clearly communicates a different message, a message rooted in Jesus' life, teaching, death and resurrection, but has also misread the end of the story and God's plan to restore the earth.

God's plan has always been and will always be centered in the redemption, restoration and renewal of this broken world and to make it into the place where we will live for all eternity—in a city John referred to as the New Jerusalem.

N.T. Wright put it this way, *The great drama will end (Revelation 21-21), not with 'saved*

# am NOT Just Passing Through!

destined for destruction—and that our bodies and world are **not** places from which we will one day escape.

God created the earth and called it **good**. God created human beings and called them **good**. God didn't change his mind half-way through his project and decide to call all matter evil. In fact, if we believe this way, I think we've misread, misunderstood and misinterpreted God's story altogether.

### **God's Cosmic Restoration Project**

My point in saying all of this is simple—matter is not evil, the body is good and the earth is good. God has not abandoned his cosmic restoration project, a project that Jesus inaugurated and which he will one day bring through to completion in the form of a renewed and restored creation. The world and our bodies are not things we will escape from, but

first instance—our bodies and the earth will remain—continuity. In the second instance—both will be different—discontinuity. Both will remain, yet will be renewed and restored.

As Stanley Grenz wrote in his book "Created for Community," *God promises to make all things*

*new, not to begin anew*. His creation will undergo a transformation, not a complete destruction, as God is not about to abandon his good work.

Any idea that says our bodies are temporary and that they do not have a place within God's plan of cosmic redemption reflects Gnosticism more than it does Jesus and his message of restoration.

Any idea that sees the world as inherently evil, something destined for utter destruction, something that God has destined

*souls' being snatched up into heaven, but with the New Jerusalem coming down from heaven to earth.*

What does this mean? It means

***Jesus came to teach and demonstrate, embody and enact, showcase and reveal, the kingdom of God.***

this world is our home and we're not just passing through. Yes, God has a plan to redeem and renew it, but the world will remain. Continuity and discontinuity.

Any idea that says otherwise is rooted in a **Gnostic-way of seeing things** more than a **God-way of seeing things**.

As the apostle Paul wrote in Romans 8:19-23,

*The creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the*

one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.

Why? Because it's longing to be destroyed? No. Because it's longing to be restored and redeemed like the entire universe will one day be, like those in Christ.

### Embodying and Enacting God's Redemptive Story

Our bodies are important. The earth and universe are important. For those in Christ, our bodies are with us forever. And, the earth and universe are with us forever.

The gift of eternal life doesn't begin when we die, it began the day we committed our lives to God in Christ and joined his Kingdom project.

We're not just passing through "man's ultimate destiny is an earthly one" (George Eldon Ladd).

God has some unbelievable plans for all of us. Jesus didn't come to set up some sort of **divine escape plan**.

No, Jesus came to teach and demonstrate, embody and enact, showcase and reveal, the kingdom of God. A kingdom that is already here and a kingdom that will one day be here in full. A kingdom we are called to embody now as we point to the completed kingdom on the horizon.

Jesus came to teach and demonstrate, embody and enact, showcase and reveal, the kingdom of God.

As ambassadors, we point people to this kingdom and its King. In all we do and say, we lead

people to our King and to his goal of cosmic redemption and restoration.

As Brian Zahnd once said, "Salvation is a restoration project, not an evacuation project."

I couldn't agree more.

The earth and our bodies are precious to God. And God has destined both to be redeemed and restored to reflect Jesus' own post-resurrection body, the first fruits that showcased God's plan for the entire universe.

**This world is my home and I'm not just passing through.**

What a **hope!** What a **vision!** What a **story!** □

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