

## **John Dickson (Studio)**

Hey, John Dickson here. Right now, I'm in Italy, taking a group of my new besties on a tour through earliest Christian Europe, from Philippi to Rome. This morning, we're taking a walk along a section of the Appian Way. The Apostle Paul, Luke, and some others walked this very road as Paul came to Rome to stand trial before crazy Emperor Nero.

You can read all about that in Acts chapter 28. That reminds me, we've got a whole episode coming soon about the Book of Acts in the New Testament. And we've got N. T. Wright to guide us through that. Look out for it just after Christmas. Season 13 kicks off next week, so I hope you join us. Anyway, the team is all back at home, hard at work, except for Director Mark, who's here with me in Rome.

So we asked Friend of the Pod, Author, Pastor and Speaker, Sam Allberry, to take the mic in my absence. Enjoy this single, and I'll talk to you soon. Thanks, Sam.

## **Sam Allberry**

It's not every day you're threatened with hospitalisation by a circus clown. I was a teenager and an environmental activist. And some friends and I were protesting outside a circus that we'd been informed was mistreating a captive elephant. So there we were, four or five of us, stood by the roadside next to the entrance with signs and placards.

We weren't doing anything illegal or uncivil, but our presence naturally gave some members of the public reason to rethink whether they wanted to actually go. And before long, one of the performers, the head clown he informed us, and thankfully not yet in costume, Made it very clear that if one more car turned away, he'd personally send us to the emergency room.

As if any of us needed further reason to be scared of clowns. We had to decide then and there whether to continue or call it a day. Did we care

enough about the issue of animal cruelty to risk harm to ourselves? Not really, it turned out. So we made our way home. We weren't quite the committed eco warriors we'd imagined ourselves to be, but in our defense we were only 16.

I'd long wanted to be an environmentalist. I'd joined Greenpeace and been involved in many of their campaigns and activities. I cared about the planet. This was the early 90s and we were still talking about things like acid rain and the ozone layer. Global warming was an issue but climate change, as a matter of international urgency wasn't yet at the forefront of everyone's consciousness.

But when I turned 18, I became a Christian. In the space of just a few weeks I'd come to realize that if God was real I didn't know him, and was probably supposed to. And that Jesus had come to, quote, seek and save the lost. Like me. I remember talking to one of my fellow wannabe environmentalist friends about my recent conversion.

And he was discouraged. As far as he was concerned, me becoming a Christian was going to be a loss to the green cause. Was he right? Does the gospel pull us away from environmental concerns and towards the more weighty and eternal matters? Does the health of the earth matter less to us when we come to know Jesus?

As a teenager, I'd planned to be an environmental activist. Instead, I ended up becoming a pastor and a preacher, had I let the planet down.

There are many voices who would say becoming a Christian is bad for the planet, that the Christian faith itself is one of the drivers of environmental exploitation and degradation, that the creation mandate incentivizes abuse of the physical world. There are Christians, too, who would seem to support this view.

Arguing that this world is perishing, and that the only thing that really matters is the world to come, not the world we're in.

By contrast, the secular world increasingly insists we should express environmental concern with near hysteria. That nothing is more important. Parts of the Christian world insist the world doesn't matter at all, and we may as well drive as big a car as we can because it's all going to end up in smoke anyway.

I've never found these two views compelling. And for the same reason, Jesus, it's his relationship to the physical world that is to shape his peoples. Colossians 1, 15 says this, The sun is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created, things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible.

Where the thrones or powers or rulers or authorities, all things have been created through him and for him. So Jesus is not simply God over creation in some oblique way. As if it was one thing among many things in his portfolio. He's not merely the creator, the one through whom all things were made. He is the purpose of creation.

All things were made for him. For him.

The same idea is expressed by calling Jesus, quote, the first born over all creation. This does not mean that Jesus was the first thing to be created. Jesus is the creator. To be the first born is a way of saying he is the one who will one day inherit all of creation. It will be his. In the ancient world, the first born received the inheritance, rather than it being split equally between all children.

As a youngest child, I'm grateful this isn't the common practice today. In other words, creation is his. It all belongs to Jesus. It's been made for him. And this changes everything.

Whatever responsibility and agency we have when it comes to the physical environment, we need to realize that the natural world around us isn't neutral. Sometimes even the word environment implies that the physical

world is nothing more than the setting in which we happen to find ourselves. No, it's not neutral, nor is it ours.

It's his. As if we can do with it whatever we choose. It's not ultimately being created for us, though our God given responsibilities for it are significant. It's being created for Jesus.

The physical world we find ourselves interacting with and affecting belongs, according to Colossians, to Christ. And so, for those of us who would say we're Christians, nothing should make us more mindful of it. The fact is we can't be consistent Christians, if that's what we claim, if we're indifferent to the health of the physical environment.

No one can claim to love Jesus and be indifferent to what is his. How you treat something that belongs to someone else says a lot about how you regard them. So a Christian shouldn't say it's only the environment, it doesn't matter, if in fact the planet belongs to the one that person claims to love above all else.

But at the same time, Colossians 1 challenges all of the rest of us too, because it says we can't hope to truly care for the physical world if we ignore the one to whom it belongs. We won't properly understand the environment or be able to fully account for why it truly matters. Unless we know the one who is lord over it all.

Maybe even our well intentioned efforts at environmentalism will profoundly misunderstand what creation is. It will become a matter of utility. We need the planet to be well for our own survival. As if we were the ultimate bottom line, or it will become a God to us, being ultimate itself, and with humanity seen purely as a threat to it that needs to be curtailed.

I want to suggest if you really want to care about the environment, you need to know Jesus. And if you say you know Jesus, you really need to care about the environment. For me, becoming a Christian hasn't overridden my

concern for the physical world, it's breathed new life into it. In fact, I've never had more reasons to care for the planet.