

The Pastor's Pages



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The next question comes from one of the younger members of our congregation, **“Do pets go to heaven?”**

I really do like this question because it is one that comes from love for God’s creation and a good understanding of what is meant in the book of Genesis when humanity is given “dominion” over creation, for we are to care for God’s creation in all we do.

When I was young I was taught that animals do not have a soul and therefore, they couldn’t go to heaven. However, there were many things that I was taught at that time that I have come to find was actually wrong. In saying this, I note that there is nowhere in the scripture that I have ever found that it states that animals do not have souls. So I am not sure where this teaching originates, but it’s not in the Bible.

One idea that people think excludes animals is that humanity is made in the image of God, and that image indicates a soul, but in Genesis God breathes into Adam and he becomes a “nephesh” in Hebrew, a living being. Yet, that same breathe that we still breathe today is shared by all animals for in Genesis 7:15 it states, “And they went in unto Noah into the ark, two and two of all flesh, wherein is the breath of life.” (KJV)

Another point to consider is that Christ intends to redeem not only humanity, but also all of creation. This is found in the eighth chapter of Romans where the apostle Paul writes, “For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.” (ESV) That word “creation” is where the word creature comes from for all creatures were created by God.

Ecclesiastes famously proclaims that “humans have no advantage over animals” for they “all go to the same place; all come from dust, and all return to dust.” (Ecclesiastes chapter 3) And in Luke 12:6 it states, “Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God.”

So we have many statements comparing animals and humans, which are all creations of God, but does that definitively tell us what will happen?

Perhaps we should ask if there will be animals in heaven, paradise, or the restoration of creation. We get an answer to this in the book of Isaiah chapter 11 where we read, "The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox." Therefore, we see animals in the restoration of the order of creation as God intended, but are these resurrected animals? We simply don't know.

Finally, one verse that I came across in Psalms was additionally hopeful, but inconclusive. Psalms 36:6 states, "Your righteousness is like the mountains of God; your judgments are like the great deep, man and beast you save, O Lord." So is this word speaking of salvation or preservation during life. Regardless, the Scriptures do say that God cares for all of creation and that creation will be restored. Additionally in John 3:16 it tells us that God so loves the world or "cosmos" in the Greek. Cosmos actually includes all of creation.

So, in conclusion, the Bible does not tell us definitively what happens to the animals that we love and that love us. This is simply because the Scriptures tend to focus on humanity as it was written by and for humans. This does not mean that God does not save animals, we simply don't know. But this question makes me think of others that are asked that we also don't have answers to. Will all people be saved? 2 Peter 3:9 tells us, "The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish..." (ESV) Therefore when we think of salvation and if all would or could be saved, perhaps our response should be that truly this is our prayer, that all would be saved. After all, wouldn't that be nice. We can also say the same thing about our pets in heaven. We know we have a loving, caring and merciful God, so when we think of our animals possibly adding to our eternal happiness, wouldn't that be nice. After all, the thing that motivates our question is simply love, and love comes from God who teaches us to love.

Keep the questions coming...

Shalom,

Pastor Faron