



"Do animals go to heaven?"

This is a question I received recently and is one that I've been asked quite often. Obviously the question comes from a hope that this will be the case. Chances are you have (or had) a favorite pet that you'd love to see in eternity.

The short answer is: "The Bible really doesn't tell us." A little bit longer answer: "I can't give you a definite answer one way or the other as to whether specific animals - like our pets for example - will be with us in eternity. I've heard good explanations for both 'yes' and 'no' answers."

Here's what I can tell you, though. I have no doubt that there will be animals in eternity. God in Revelation gives us a glimpse of what eternity holds in store for us. Here's an example from Revelation 21:1-5

1 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. 2 And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. 4 He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."

5 And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." 6 And he said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment."

For starters, the this passage (and others) indicates that after Christ's return and our spirits are reunited with our resurrected bodies, we will inhabit a "new" earth (as opposed to floating on clouds strumming harps, as the popular notion depicts). The word "new" here has the meaning of "restored to it's original condition." So we can expect this new earth to be a perfectly restored version of the one we currently live on. A place that has not and will never be defiled by evil and sin and their effects. For an example of what that "new earth" will be like, we look back to the first couple chapters of the Bible to see what this earth was like before sin messed everything up. The most important thing we see is that there was a perfect relationship between God and humans. We were created to live in the visible presence of God. We can look forward to that again.

What about animals? Were there animals on earth before sin came along? Of course. Therefore, we can expect that animals will also be on the "new" (restored to it's perfect, original condition) earth that we will inhabit for eternity. Speaking of the perfection of eternity God tells us in Isaiah 11:6-9

The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together; and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze; their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.

The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

Not only will there be animals on the new earth, but we can expect we will have a perfect, fearless relationship with them - just as we will with God.

But the question remains: Will those animals on the new earth include resurrected, perfectly restored versions of our favorite ones on this earth? The Bible simply doesn't tell us.

Long ago Martin Luther's daughter asked him this same question. His answer has stood the test of time and applies here too: "*When you get to heaven, if you want your pet to be there... it will be.*" (The idea being that in eternity there is perfect bliss, thus we will have everything we want). Then he continued, "*The real question is... when you get to heaven will you still want your pet to be there?*" (The idea being that the things we desire in a perfect eternity may be totally different than the things we desire in the imperfect world we live in now).

Rather than speculate an answer (I'd *like* to believe the answer is "yes"), it's best to put this question in the "We'll just have to wait and see" category - knowing that whatever the answer is, it will be the perfect one.

Thanks for asking,
Pastor David

Send your questions to pastor@livingwordlutheran.net