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WILL OUR PETS GO TO HEAVEN Michael B. Beagh
Isaiah 65:17, 25; Romans 8:18-23; Rev 5:13 February 8, 2009
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When I did my research on the question of pets in heaven, I discovered that this is a very emotional subject. You can find books written about and debates online with almost heated opinions. So I seek to tread carefully, though biblically.

I found the following on a website, pictures of a Catholic and a Presbyterian yard sign where a debate about dogs in heaven took place.

Our Lady of Martyrs Catholic Church: All dogs go to heaven.
Beulah Cumberland Presbyterian Church: Only humans go to heaven.
Read the Bible.
Catholic: God loves all His creations, dogs included.
Presbyterian: Dogs don't have souls. This is not open to debate.
Catholic: Catholic dogs go to heaven. Presbyterian dogs can talk to their pastor.
Presbyterian: Converting to Catholicism does not magically grant your dog a soul.
Catholic: Free dog souls with conversion.
Presbyterian: Dogs are animals. There aren't any rocks in heaven either.
Catholic: All rocks go to heaven.

Will our pets go to heaven? Some famous people think so.

"If there are no dogs in Heaven, then when I die I want to go where they went." *Will Rogers, 1897-1935*

"Heaven goes by favour. If it went by merit, you would stay out and your dog would go in." *Mark Twain*

If I have any beliefs about immortality, it is that certain dogs I have known will go to heaven, and very, very few persons.
James Thurber

Lots of unfamous people think so, too. A pet dies and something dies within us. It is like a family member has died, so I have been told. As someone put it to me, "My pet is the only one who gives me unconditional love day in and day out. Not even my husband does that! If my pet is not in heaven, then I don't want to go there." Fortunately, this person laughed as she spoke, but pretty strong emotion! We do feel strongly about our pets. To the tune of spending \$43.4 billion on pets in this country in 2008 as the economy was spiraling down. It occurred to me, we better see them in heaven!

But for all that, the Bible doesn't say. Surely, it comes as no surprise that the Bible focuses on humans made in the image of God and made for eternal life with God. The Bible is the story of God's redemption of humans who are won back to God through the death and resurrection of Jesus. For humans who die in the Lord, there is the promise of eternal life. As far as we know, animals don't seem to have an appreciation or understanding of any of that. Animals don't need redeeming. So the story is not about them.

Before you walk out on me, let me say that doesn't necessarily mean that our pets won't be in heaven.

After all, God likes animals. Genesis 1:20-25 says God made them and called them good. Even those animals you don't like or that strike fear in you. God made them all.

Then God gave humans dominion over them and the right to name them and to use them for human good. And with dominion came the responsibility to care for them.

Animals must be important to God. Later in Genesis, He had Noah to save them in the ark. I suspect one or two of the animals must have been Noah's pets.

Further along in the Bible, in the New Testament, we find a fascinating passage in Romans 8:18-23. The Apostle Paul says that since the sin of Adam and Eve, all of creation has been groaning in futility, just waiting for the redemption of the children of God. According to Paul, it is our sin that ruins the natural order of things. Sin affects the environment and interferes with the harmony God intended among animals. In other words, the redemption of humans will lead to the restoration of creation to what it was before sin entered the world.

This was also the vision of the Prophet Isaiah in Isaiah 65. When God creates the new heaven and new earth and humans are right with God, animals will be relieved. They will even act differently. The wolf and the lamb will eat together. The lion will eat straw like the ox. *"They shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain, says the Lord."*

But here is where I want to focus. There is this amazing verse in Revelation 5:13. You actually have to begin with chapter 4 to get the impact of it.

In chapter 4, John has a vision of heaven, and what does he see? Well, a lot of weird stuff. But he sees a worship service like no other. At the center of it is God on his throne, and beside him the Lamb who was slain for the sins of the world. This is not your quiet worship of the Lord in silence. Lightning is flashing, thunder like the rumble of conga drums rolls out,

burning torches light the throne. Multi-eyed and six winged creatures hover about and 24 elders seated on 24 mini-thrones fall on their faces when the worship begins. This is worship with all stops pulled out. And on it goes through chapters 4 and 5 until we get to verse 13 in chapter 5, and there is this song of praise like never heard before. And guess who is singing it? "Every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them." "All creatures of our God and King, lift up your voice and let us sing."

Now I am going to stretch your imagination. Can you imagine your pet singing praises to God? In heaven, every pet is a Mr. Ed. All of creation is relieved when humans are finally redeemed by Almighty God, and the whole creation breaks out in song in praise of God.

I cannot find a biblical reason why pets won't be in heaven. But neither can I imagine them rising from the dead. The Bible is silent about that. I can imagine that if I get to heaven, God will surround me with those through whom God loved me on earth, even if it is a pet.

And perhaps this is the way we could answer our children.
"Heaven will be the most wonderful place you have ever seen. God will surround you with all those through whom God loved you on earth. If Buddy, or Fritz, or Choo Choo, or Smokie, or Siegfried, or Bogie, or _____ is there with you, he or she will be there singing praise to God right alongside you. And the song will go something like this:

*To the one seated on the throne and to the Lamb
be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!
(Revelation 5:13)*

It will be the silliest thing you ever heard of, but in heaven it will all make sense. It will all seem right.

But the main thing I want for you is for you to give your life to Jesus Christ and live for him. Then you can be sure that heaven will be yours."

You see, what concerns me is that we let a lot of things take the place of God in our lives. If we love our pets more than we love God, then that's a problem. If we give our pets more time and attention than we give to God, then that is a problem. If we gladly give all it takes to keep our pets happy and healthy, but grudgingly give to God, then that's a problem. How many times have we told our children that they must feed their pets everyday and play with their pets to keep them happy and healthy? On the other hand, how often do we tell them that they must feed their faith every day and keep in touch with God? How often do we make sure they are in church and Sunday School where they learn how to relate to God?

There is no doubt that God wants us to enjoy creation and the gifts of grace we receive through it, but God is trying to reach us to turn our attention to the One who died for us and gave himself for us. If our pets cause us to praise God, then thanks be to God for our pets.