

A THEOLOGY OF PETS

Does the Bible say anything about pets?

Actually, it says a lot about animals—and that includes our pets.

Animals are gifts from God. The pets we love, that bring so much joy to our lives, are gifts from God. He loves to give good gifts and does not withhold good things from his children. His blessings come to everyone, whether we recognize them or not. It is right to give thanks to God for the good gift of our pets. (Jas 1:17; Lk 11:13; Mt 5:45)

Animals help us know God. Countless stories illustrate the unconditional love and devotion of pets. Service animals aid and guide their human companions. Some animals protect or save human lives, even sacrificing their own in the process. When animals act in these ways, they can help us to understand the steadfast love of God, who is slow to anger, merciful, gracious and faithful. How does your pet help you to know God? (Ex 34:6-7)

God created animals before people. He formed all kinds of animals out of the ground and gave them the breath of life even before he created humans in his image. When God looked at the animals he had made, he called them good. Animals lived together peacefully in Eden. Only after humans sinned were animals forced to suffer and live in a broken world. (Gen 1:20-25, 2:19, 3:14, 19; Ps 104:30)

Animals belong to God. He is their ultimate owner. Our pets are on loan to us from him. Psalms says that God owns the cattle on a thousand hills. (Ps 50:10-12)

God cares about animals. God watches over all his animals. Even the swallow builds her nest by his altar. God saved animals from destruction in Noah's ark and afterwards made a covenant promising animals would never suffer judgment in the same way again. (Job 39; Ps 84:3; Gen 6:19-20, 7:21, 9:9-17)

Animals look to God to feed and provide for them. God makes grass grow for livestock, and the young lions roar to him for prey. Sometimes humans are God's instruments of care. For example, oxen treading out grain were not to be muzzled but allowed to eat. When we feed and shelter our pets, we are caring for them in ways that please God. (Ps 34:9, 104; 136:25; Deut 25:4)

God entrusts care for animals to humans. Actually, he entrusts care for the entire world to humans. The first human named the animals. We have authority and responsibility to ensure animals are properly cared for. (Gen 1:28, 2:19)

God does not condone animal abuse. Balaam's donkey saved her owner's life by turning aside from the angel she saw in the road. Balaam could not see the angel and beat his donkey for her disobedience. God opened her mouth and the donkey asked Balaam why he beat her when she was always faithful. The angel defended

the donkey to her owner. Not only should we always be kind to our pets, but it may be that animals can perceive the spiritual realm in ways we do not. (Num 22:22-35; Prov 12:10)

God cares about the death of animals. Jesus said that not even a sparrow falls to the ground without God's notice. While animals could be killed for food or sacrifice, killing someone else's animal required paying back the owner "life for life." (Mt 10:29; Acts 10:9-16; Lev 24:18)

God commanded animal sacrifice—but only temporarily until Jesus came. Animals were important to the sacrificial system because they are innocent of the sin that breaks the world but are damaged by it anyway. Sacrificial animals could not have any flaws, which pointed toward the sinless sacrifice of God's Son. Jesus is "the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world." Since Jesus died for the sins of the world, animals do not need to be sacrificed any longer. (Lev 1; Jn 1:29, 3:16-17; Heb 7:26-27)

Animals need redemption too. Animals did not sin—humans did—but animals suffer the effects from our sin. As a result, animals do not need forgiveness, but they do need redemption, as with everything in creation. In our world broken by sin, animals can cause harm. Animals that killed people were accountable (as were their owners). As pet owners, we are responsible for our pets' actions. (Rom 8:19-23; Ex 21:28-29)

When animals die, God takes their spirit and their flesh returns to dust. Like everything that dies, animals die because humans sinned and death entered God's perfect world. We were created to live forever, so death feels wrong. It is natural to mourn the loss of a beloved pet. Jesus shares our sorrows, and we can comfort one another. (Ps 104:29; Rom 5:1-14; Eccl 3:11; Prov 14:13; Heb 2:14-18; Rom 12:15; 2 Cor 1:3-4)

Jesus makes all things new—including animals. Jesus came to fix our broken world. Through his cross and resurrection, he defeated sin and death. Someday he will return and make creation perfect again. He will enact a special covenant for the animals that promises they will live in safety forever. Who knows, maybe they will even be able to talk like Balaam's donkey! (Rev 21:5; Php 2:5-11; 1 Cor 15:20-28; Col 2:13-15; 1 Thess 4:13-18; Hos 2:18)

Animals will be in heaven. The new heaven and new earth will be a place where predators and prey lay down together and live with God's forgiven people in peace and harmony for all eternity, with no death, hunger, or pain. Next time you see a dog and cat snuggling with a human baby, that is a sneak peek into what heaven will be like. (Is 11:6-9, 25:6-9, 65:25; Rev 21:1-4)

Pope John Paul VI said, "One day we will see our animals in the eternity of Christ. Paradise is open to all God's creatures."

Will I see my pet again in heaven? The Bible does not answer this question directly, but we can take comfort and infer "yes" from knowing that animals will be in heaven, nothing in heaven will make us sad, and God does not withhold anything good from those he loves.

Billy Graham said, "The answer isn't clear, but we know that God knows us better than we know ourselves. If He thinks we need our dogs to be happy in Heaven, then they'll be there."

Martin Luther, in talking about his own dog at the point of death, said, "Be thou comforted, little dog, thou too in Resurrection shall have a little golden tail."

The question isn't whether we'll see our pets in heaven, but rather if they'll see us.

Our ministry to pet families. Because Christ the Saviour believes pets are gifts from God and cherished members of our families, we offer:

- Blessing of the Animals to honor the Feast Day of St Francis of Assisi
- Special events at local dog parks
- Prayer, grief support, and words of comfort at services in memory of a pet

Christ the Saviour Anglican Church
"Connecting Our Community to Jesus"
(855) 987-7729 | (855) XTS-PRAY
<https://xtsaviour.com>
PO Box 167, Mount Vernon VA 22121

Worship with us on Sundays at 4:30 pm
2501 Beacon Hill Rd, Alexandria VA 22306



A Theology of Pets

