

Transcript 95

Shea Houdmann

Welcome to the Got Questions podcast. In this episode, we're going to be continuing to go through our top 20 questions of all time. Just got a few left, so we're excited to be almost done, and some of the ones we have left are some pretty interesting topics. So today's topic is actually the question of do pets go to heaven and alongside that, do animals have souls? I remember the first time we received this question. And first, I honestly I thought it was kind of silly is why does this matter to someone? I mean don't get me wrong I I love pets. I had cats all growing up and since I've been able to choose my own pets, I've had dogs. I've owned three German shepherds and absolutely love the pets that I've had, and it's to be honest, I would think it'd be great if in heaven all my pets were resurrected and can join me there, but to me, my ability to enjoy heaven or to experience the glories of eternity are not contingent on my pets being there. Would I like it to be true? Yes, do I think it is? Probably not.

Shea Houdmann

But with that said, we're going to be discussing this. I do think it's possible that that might be the case, but let me tell you it's a quick story. Someone very early on asked the question, do pets go to heaven? And we responded with I thought was a fair and biblically balanced answer and she wrote back to us and said, OK, so I submitted this question at several different websites and you were the only one that bothered to respond and I really appreciate your answer with honesty and how you approached it. And so I came back to your website. I read your article on what does it mean to accept Christ as my personal Savior? And from that I understood the gospel and I've now placed my faith in in Christ.

Shea Houdmann

So by us answering a question which really in the grand scheme of eternity, is not that important, but to her it was a very, very important question. She came back and then had the ultimate question answered. So to me that is always a powerful reminder to us as a ministry to take every question seriously if at all possible to treat people with love and respect.

Shea Houdmann

Not knowing what's the background of this question, why this question is so important to this particular person in this situation, she just had a beloved cat die. This cat had lived like 20 years. She loved the cat and it was. She was devastated by its passing, so by responding with compassion and biblical truth, be able to comfort her and then therefore she was more willing to listen to what we had to say on more important issues. So at Got Questions, we strive to take every question seriously, including this one.

Shea Houdmann

So joining me today we have Jeff, the managing editor for bibleref.com and Kevin, the managing editor of Got Questions Ministries. So, so Kevin might you take it from here. Give us your thoughts on maybe some reasons why it might be possible that pets go to heaven and why you might have some doubts regarding pets going to heaven.

Kevin Stone

I'm sure and first I just want to say praise the Lord for that story that you shared a new life, a new person born again, rejoicing in the presence of the Angels, just praise the Lord for that, and that's what it's all about when it comes down to the ministry of Got Questions. Getting the gospel out and pointing people to Christ. So this is one of those you know tangential questions that that come up, but we we do take it seriously. Are animals in heaven? Are our pets going to be in heaven?

Kevin Stone

I'm going to share some reasons why some people would say yes. Yes, they are going to be in heaven and I should probably preface this by saying there's nothing explicit in the Bible that says yes, your pets are going to be in heaven or animals in general are going to be in heaven. We don't have any clarity on that, so these are just kind of some piecing of things together, taking a look at some various passages, and so we would say first of all that animals were in Eden that God created these animals and put them in the garden of Eden. And they were part of that creation that God called very good, and assuming that everything that was in the Garden of Eden was designed to help Adam and Eve have a happy and fulfilling experience there, happy life, then that would include the animals that they were created by God as part of Adam and Eve's happiness and fulfillment. Would that carry through into eternity? Some people would say yes.

Kevin Stone

Also, we could point to the fact that animals were on the ark. That God obviously values animals. Well, he wouldn't have created them in the first place if he did not have a purpose for them and a reason for them. But you know, even after sin came into the world, and when things got so bad that God had to judge the whole world through the flood of Noah's time, God made sure that there was a pair of every kind of animal on board that ark to preserve those those kinds. So God cares about the animals, and wanted those animals saved one of those animals preserved.

Kevin Stone

Also, we would take a look at the Book of Revelation and there is a picture there in Revelation 19 of Jesus second coming. And we read this in verse 11. I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider was called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and wages war the armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses, and dressed in fine linen, white and clean.

Kevin Stone

So in this passage, Christ and those who are coming with him are all pictured as riding horses. So this to some people would be proof positive that that yes, there are animals in heaven because Christ is coming from heaven to earth and he's on this horse and so are all his followers, and so there are at least horses up there. There's a heavenly stable up there and heavenly ostlers you know, taking care of those horses and the caveat for this passage at least is that it is a very symbolic passage. There are symbolic elements in it.

Kevin Stone

For example, Christ has a sword proceeding from his mouth. That's obviously symbolic, so how far do we take it? Are these literal horses, or do they represent something else? That question is still out there. Also, though a fourth reason why people would say yes there are animals in heaven would be that there are definitely animals it sure seems like it in the Millennium Kingdom when Christ reigns for that thousand years. There are animals present. This is from Isaiah chapter 11 starting in verse 6. We read this. The wolf will live with the lamb. The leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together, little child will lead them, a cow will feed with a bear. The young will lie down together. The lion will eat straw like an ox. The infant will play near the Cobras then. Young Child will put his hand in the Vipers nest. They don't either harm or destroy and all my holy mountain.

Kevin Stone

So I count like 12 or 13 different animals mentioned there in the in the Kingdom, and it's a time of peace and and nothing is hurting anything else. So does this mean that there will be animals in heaven? Well again, the Bible doesn't specifically say. There will be animals in the age to come it looks like based on this passage in Isaiah 11 and by extension we would say maybe in the new earth when God creates the new heavens and the new Earth, it would just make sense that there were animals there as well. Those are all reasons why people would say yes, there there will be animals in heaven. We have all these passages that seem to indicate this and and it would just make sense for God to, in his goodness, give us some animals, and that is some of where some people were coming from about why they would say yes. There will be animals or maybe even our pets in heaven.

Jeff Laird

It's good that we see that there are options in Scripture that tell us that that's a possibility, like we've been saying, we don't have anything in the Bible it explicitly says that that's going to be the case. We've also got some reasons to think that it might not be. One of the things that I lean to when I have conversations on this particular topic is because Scripture isn't overly specific. We want to be careful not to be overly specific in either direction. When we give the answer, Shea's story is a good example of that. When you give somebody an honest answer, you have to be honest about what Scripture does or doesn't say, but you can be careful about the way that you present that.

Jeff Laird

I'm one of those people who loves dogs. I like all animals in general, but dogs in particular really resonate and connect with me. And I've had the experience of the intense grief that comes with losing a pet dog. It's it's real, it's meaningful and there's a lot of reasons for that that the animals that we interact with, they present us with relationships that we don't have parallels to in human relationships. They're they're sort of simpler in a lot of ways. They're more innocent. They're not complicated by a lot of the other things that get complicated with our human relationships and we tend to think of these relationships with our pets as being absolute unconditional love and perfect loyalty and perfect acceptance. And so on and so forth.

Jeff Laird

And we can debate whether or not animals are really feeling those same things, or if they're just responding to instinct. But it doesn't really matter. That's the way that we feel. That's what we perceive. That's the kind of relationship that we have with those animals, so there's a good reason why

people are intensely interested in the question of do animals have souls? Do we see animals in heaven because we have these really meaningful deep bonds.

Jeff Laird

So even as we talk about this, we want to make sure that people understand that if if you're grieving the loss of the pet, that's a legitimate thing, that's that is a real trauma that people experience because we do emotionally connect with these animals. They do serve that purpose in our lives of being a place that we have that kind of connection. So I I deeply understand where people come from on this.

Jeff Laird

The the the dogs in particular that I've I've had in my life, I would love to think that I would be able to be reunited with that animal at some point in eternity. That would be a tremendously positive thing. I would hope for that. You know we sometimes say if I had a vote, that's what I would vote for, right? You know, I would like that to be the case, but that doesn't mean that I can say with certainty that that actually is the case.

Jeff Laird

I know that when I'm in eternity when I'm in heaven, I'm going to see Christ as he is. I will be like him in some of those ways. That's going to adjust my perspective. That's going to change the way I think, so no matter what answer he comes up with, I'm going to be satisfied with it. And that's one of the reasons why I like to lean towards the Romans Christian Liberty sort of idea of not putting a stumbling block not arguing over doubtful issues. If somebody is really sincerely truly. Just they cannot in this side of eternity get over the idea of pets or animals not being in heaven. It's just not something worth worrying about. All we need to really believe is you're going to have the right perspective when you get to eternity. That's what you're going to think.

Jeff Laird

If right now you think that you have to see your pets in heaven. Well, theologically, logically we can we can discuss. We can debate, but for now just know that you're going to be happy and whatever that means for you is what it means.

Shea Houdmann

Yeah, I'm with you Jeff, and I've grown very attached to the three dogs that I've had and not being there for one of their passing, being there for the 2nd and thankfully, 3rd is still alive and healthy. It's when you're in the moment where you've lost the pet. That's when the answer, if our happiness and eternity in any way is contingent on our pets being there, they will be there. But also having that mindset that you know God knows me. God is preparing eternity for me. It will be absolutely perfect. And if my pets are not there, I'm going to be perfectly content with that then. But the answer in the here now erring towards the side of compassion, is often the the right thing to do.

Shea Houdmann

So like Kevin was talking about earlier, I mean I am fully convinced that there will be animals that on the new earth as they recreated Eden, it makes perfect sense for the animals to be there as well. So we can experience what God even intended the animal kingdom to be like, and all of it's wonder, but different

question is, will any of those animals that are on the new Earth for eternity, will they be our pets resurrected?

Shea Houdmann

So let's dive into that quickly because that's animal animals in heaven on the new earth, yes. Are any of those animals are resurrected pets? That's a much harder case to make, so Kevin, why don't you jump in here and I know you've got a few points that make you maybe doubt a little bit whether the animals in the on the new Earth will be our pets, some resurrected.

Kevin Stone

Yeah, well yeah. Then the flip side of this then is some passages and some biblical truths that seem to point to the fact that maybe there won't be animals in in heaven or in the in the eternal state, and probably not the the particular animals that we loved here in this world. For one reason, mankind is unique and different from the animals. We see that all through scripture. Mankind was made in the image and likeness of God. That's never said of any animal. And when you get to Genesis chapter 9 verse 3 right after the the flood of Noah's day, God makes that covenant with Noah and the the differences between humankind and animal kind are stark. Because God basically says, and Noah and your family, you can eat everything that moves.

Kevin Stone

So there's basically, mankind created in the image of God and then mankind's food, which is everything else. And so there's a there's a sharp distinction there between between man and animal. Also, we would we would point to the fact that Christ died for humans. He came as a human to die for humans. He did not die for the animals. It doesn't look like, although Bible does talk about restoring all things and and you know that new creation is coming.

Kevin Stone

Also in Scripture we see very clearly that upon death humans go someplace. They go to the place of the dead, paradise, Sheol, heaven. And different terms used in Scripture, but people go someplace. But that's never said of of animals. It says in Psalm 49, verse 12 at the beast parish. And that's really all that we know. That's all the scripture really says about it.

Kevin Stone

And and I don't know, I'll throw this out here too, but doesn't it seem to you guys sometimes that we're very selective in choosing which animals are going to be in heaven? Seems like when we talk about pets that go to heaven, it's always, it's always the fluffy ones. It's the cute ones, it's the adorable ones. There seems to be a lot of sentimentality that goes into this particular belief.

Kevin Stone

But what about people who have snakes for pets? Or I know people who have hissing cockroaches for pets, so there going to be cockroaches in Heaven? Are there going to be snakes and lizards or tarantulas in heaven because they were somebody's pet? I don't know. I don't know the answer to this, but it does seem like we we kind of pick and choose sometimes what type of animals we want to see in heaven.

Shea Houdmann

Exactly, I mean, so I look at my the three German Shepherds I've owned, Wagner, Parker and Logan, and again, like I said earlier, I would love for all three of them to be my pets for eternity. But imagine if my life goes on. I own a few more German Shepherds do I do I want 6-7 German shepherds? Ah, that's that's a lot of German Shepherds and then earlier in my life my we owned cats. I had those L shadow there was Sampson. There was powder puff. My sister owned a ferret for a while and we had a rabbit named Zaviar.

Shea Houdmann

All those pets. They were great but I really don't know if I need them around for eternity, so yeah, I I totally get what you're saying Kevin, that it's the pets that we love. The fluffy ones so to speak that we we think. Yeah, I think it would be great, but I'm if Gods going to be resurrecting, what about someone who had a a bad pet? Or do I get to choose which pets get resurrected and I get to play with in eternity?

Shea Houdmann

Some of these more practical questions kind of really make you think is like yeah. I'm really not sure that this is something that God's going to make a reality or a priority in eternity for us to have the animals we had as pets during earthly lives.

Jeff Laird

One of the things that comes into that is also exactly what you're talking about, which is we have to follow the logic, the system through to its natural conclusion. If dogs, if cats, why not mice? Why not flies, you know? Is there some point in time where animals are aren't sophisticated enough anymore to have a soul if some of them do or do not. If animals are capable of going to heaven, does that mean that some animals are capable of going to hell? Is there a big difference in there? What's the distinguishing feature between those and that's why for me, I think the thing that's most important is not necessarily even how we think about this when it comes to eternity. That's sort of a conclusion. That's the end point of where we think of this. I think the thing that's really important is how do we consider the relationship between God and men and animals now? Obviously all those things are going to work themselves out, but I think the danger like Kevin was talking about we have a sense of sentimentality towards animals, and that's not a bad thing. The Bible talks about connecting righteousness with how we treat animals. Book of Proverbs 12:10 says that righteous people care for their animals, but there's a difference between caring for our animals and treating them as something more than what they really are.

Jeff Laird

We can do the same thing with money. We can do the same thing with food or sex, or anything else like that. We can take a good thing and turn it into a excessive thing. So I think what we have to do is we have to start from understanding where these come from and that matters for the here and now. If we want to get to the conclusion that says that animals absolutely categorically must be in heaven and they have to be the exact same pets that we saw before, now we start broaching that question of treating chipmunks and mice and rats and tuna with the same sort of evangelistic interpersonal systems that we use with people.

Jeff Laird

And I don't think that that's the way that we're intended to use these. We're supposed to care for animals, steward them, care for their welfare, but we're not supposed to treat them like they're morally equivalent or identical to people.

Kevin Stone

Years ago I read CS Lewis's book, Letters to an American Lady, and one part of that book really stood out to me and I remember it to this day and I'm going to have to paraphrase it a little bit here. But Lewis said something along the lines of that he would never criticize anyone for grieving over a loved pet that had died. He doesn't think that we should love our animals less, only that we should love people more and of course love love God more and I thought that was a great perspective.

Kevin Stone

You know we have. Uh, a great capacity for compassion and love and showing love to our pets and and this is a good thing and it's not that we should love our pets less just love people more and of course, love God most of all. I thought that was great.

Jeff Laird

There's a lot of parallels we see between the way we interact with our animals and the way God interacts with us. And I don't think those are necessarily meant to be explicit, but when you see in Genesis that God created man and gave him authority and control, he named animals he was supposed to care for animals he was supposed to take care for them.

Jeff Laird

One of the things that that always struck me in in the animals that I had raising them was constantly being reminded of the vast difference between their perspective and my perspective. The dog, for example, does not really understand why they're getting things like shots or being made to take nasty medicines. Or why can't I urinate in this particular spot? Why can't I chew on this thing? Why can't I chase this? They don't have a full understanding of those things, I do, and as human beings we never like to be compared to anything other than adults and then perfection.

Jeff Laird

But the fact of the matter is God as much further above me than I am above my dog and it was a reminder to me very constantly at the times when I was maybe a little too harsh with one of my pets or too frustrated, or I could see that interplay in the relationship. There were times it it really struck me. It reminded me of the vast difference between my perspective and God's, and how much more patient and how much more loving and understanding he was. And it made me grateful to understand that God was using that as a lesson to help me remember just how much better he is to me then I'm even capable of being to the pets that I love.

Shea Houdmann

Excellent thoughts Jeff and and Kevin. So if I were to try to put a a summary on this, do pets go to heaven? While we think a strong biblical case can be made for their being animals in the millennial Kingdom and on the new Earth, I don't think a biblical case can be made for those animals being our pets resurrected for our pleasure and eternity.

Shea Houdmann

Now, in saying that, am I saying it's impossible? That's absolutely not, no. I'm not saying that. God is perfectly capable of resurrecting our pets, and if he chose to do that, that would be well within his sovereignty as creator to do so, and I personally like Jeff said earlier, if I have a vote, yeah, I think I would vote for it, but ultimately our ability to experience the joy and the wonders and the perfection of heaven will not be contingent on our pets being there. We may feel that way now, understandably so. But in eternity this is not something that will matter to us, should God make a different decision than what we currently would prefer.

Shea Houdmann

Now a little more practically speaking, if someone you know has lost a beloved pet and they're grieving, grieve with them. And if the thought of being reunited with this pet in eternity brings that person joy and comfort, that is not the time and place to squash that idea with a theological explanation of the difference between being created in the image of God and and so forth.

Shea Houdmann

So this is a question there's not an explicit biblical answer. If you were to force me to give an answer, do pets go to heaven? My answer would be no. But with that said, with a little bit of hope that this is something God would do, but I think it would be wonderful.

Shea Houdmann

So Jeff and Kevin, thank you again for joining me. Hope this conversation has been beneficial and encouraging to you. And as always, please study God's word in these matters. Look at some of the scriptures we reference. Then ask God for wisdom and come to the conclusion that he leads you to by studying his word.

Shea Houdmann

So this has been the Got Questions podcast. Got questions? The Bible has answers. And we'll help you find them.