

## **ANIMALS AND PLANTS IN HEAVEN**

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*Lessons: Genesis 1:20-25, Apocalypse Explained 1212:2-5*

Children around the world love to have pets. The most common are dogs and cats, but many children love to keep fish or gerbils or birds in a cage. The braver ones sometimes even have pet snakes kept enclosed in their bedroom. Those children on farms often have rabbits, chickens or their own pony or horse.

If children were asked why they like to adopt animals, we would probably get a variety of answers. Little kittens or puppies make us smile because they are so playful and curious and, in a sense, helpless when they are very young. Children and adults enjoy holding a little kitty in their laps, or play for hours with a puppy in the yard outside. They provide entertainment, they follow you around the house, they're cuddly, they're warm, and they can't help but bring delight when we are near them. The most common answer for having pets is that they are "lovable."

Cats, when they are full-grown, will sit for hours in your lap while you are reading or chatting with someone; purring and snuggling in the security of the warmth of your body. It is even fun to watch them when they are walking or stretching or chasing, because they are so smooth in their actions. When a cat is hungry or thirsty in the morning, it curls around your legs and meows, as if asking for your full attention. The owner of such a pet feels needed and wanted.

Those who have dogs for pets take similar delight in caring for them and feeding them. When you've been out of the house, the faithful dog will greet you at the door, perhaps jumping on you or licking your face. They give the appearance of a protector by barking at intruders and warning you if danger is near. Dogs are fun to take on walks, because they are so curious and investigate everything along the pathway. When you whistle, they come back and are obedient. A faithful dog, who is well-trained, always seems to give love and affection to its owner. If you are lonely or tired, they have a wonderful way of comforting you. If you are cheerful, they seem to be happy, too.

It is always a sad moment, however, when a cat or dog grows old and finally dies. Even worse, sometimes they suffer an accident and are killed. It is always a terrible time when a child loses his favorite pet. And it is perfectly normal to prepare a special burial service and to shed tears when a pet is placed beneath the ground.

At such times it is perfectly normal, too, for children to ask their parents whether their pet will go to heaven? "Will I see my pet when I wake up in the other world?" Or an even more difficult question - "Why did the Lord take away something I loved so much?" Fortunately, the teachings of our church provide answers to these questions, some of which are hard to hear and others that are most beautiful and comforting. To understand these answers, however, we need to see why the Lord made the animals for us to live with while on this earth. The Lord placed all boys and girls on this earth to grow up and to learn two important things how to love the Lord and how to love and serve their neighbor. The Lord provides us all through life with answers and instruction on how to prepare ourselves for heaven and become angels, living with the Lord to eternity. It is through His Word and all the teachings contained in it that we find the pathway to heaven. Every child knows, from his earliest training, that God loves him and protects him and wants him to be happy. Those who turn against these wonderful teachings from the Lord given to us in the Word find themselves very unhappy. They think only of themselves and what they can get; they are never truly satisfied. But if they learn the great lesson, to love others as themselves, and to return their love to the Lord, then they have discovered the great secret of life.

But the Lord has created men and women to make this decision on their own. He allows them to choose between good and evil acts throughout their life. He tests them to find out which will make them happiest. He gives every man and woman the ability to see the truths in His Word and to recognize in their hearts that there is a God and that that God loves them. But only human beings have this ability from the Lord. Animals and plants are not able to recognize who made them, or to recognize the Lord's love and return it. And this is a great difference between the animal kingdom, the vegetable kingdom, and people.

Therefore, the Lord has told us through His Word that only those who, on their own, choose to be good and to return their love to the Lord, can enter into the Kingdom of Heaven and dwell forever. Those pets that we have come to love as children are unable to become angels who live to eternity.

On the other hand, we are told that there are animals and plants in heaven. Emanuel Swedenborg, whose eyes were opened to look into that spiritual world, describes for us the wonderful sights he saw. He writes of beautiful gardens and lovely flowers and handsome trees and colorful fields, even more beautiful than we've seen on this earth. He describes varieties of flowers that our eyes have never seen before. And on many occasions his words, he said, were unable to describe the beauty and the splendor in the heavens.

He further describes for us the great variety of animals that appear in the spiritual world. Angels are in the presence of handsome dogs, beautiful cats and all of the animals that we know of in this world. Even those animals we

consider wild or ferocious appear in the heavens, but there they are very gentle and tame.

Then how do we explain the fact that there are animals in heaven, and yet our pets that we have in this world do not go there? The answer is quite simple if we but think about it. Ask yourself, "Why do we love pets?" The answer is that they are representations or examples of how we are feeling inside. We love a playful kitty because that is what we are feeling inside at times - playful and free. We are reminded of moods when we are quiet and peaceful and restful, when our favorite cat slumbers in our lap. There are times when we feel adventurous and just want to run and explore the world around us. We see this with our favorite dog who is doing it while we are on a walk together. When we feel lonely and are greeted by our favorite dog, it represents a warmth and affection we feel inside ourselves. Sometimes we are so excited and happy we feel like soaring in the air, as can our favorite bird. No matter what our pet is, it often seems to bring out feelings and loves that we are experiencing at the moment.

It is in this same way that the Lord creates our surroundings in heaven. Angels who are feeling happy want to see beautiful things around them. And the Lord mercifully provides them. The joy inside of angels is represented in everything that their eyes see around them. The exact feelings and love we hold for our pets while on this earth are the same loves we take with us to the other world as angels. And there, to eternity, we are surrounded by all the pets reflecting those good loves.

To state it another way, the animals and beautiful flowers always remind us of something, even as children on this earth. The same is true in heaven - the flowers and animals surrounding us there remind us of the feelings we are experiencing in our minds.

The Lord also provides wonderful pets and flowers in an instant, when we want them in the heavens. There is no waiting for a favorite pet to arrive. It is there in a moment by our side.

The Lord also teaches us about many things in the heavens by means of the animals and the buildings and the flowers. Swedenborg, when asking about beautiful marriages between angels in heaven, was given to see the kinds of loves involved between one man and one woman who love each other dearly. The illustration that is enclosed describes something of this love between a husband and a wife. The three sets of rooms, one upon the other, describe the levels of the mind. And the beautiful birds that are flying in and out of the three levels describe special kinds of loves between a husband and a wife - the pair of doves at the highest level, the birds of paradise at the middle level, the swans at the lower level. All of these creatures represent special kinds of loves.

So, just as the Lord allows us to share our loves with our favorite pet, so does He teach us, by means of these animals and plants in the spiritual world. The comforting lesson from the Lord is that even though a special pet we have in this world must finally die, it does not mean that we will not have pets in the other world. The wonderful feelings that we have toward our kitten or puppy or fish or bird in this world goes with us to the next. The loves between children and their pets stay with them to eternity. And it is these very loves that make heaven for all the angels. The care and attention that we give our pets in our youth are the very loves that will develop into heaven for us in the next world.

So if we can learn to give the same kindness and warmth and affection to our neighbor as we do to our pets, we are told that we are being prepared for an eternity of happiness. We can then be surrounded not only by dear neighbors, but a multitude of pets whenever we desire them. In that sense, not only our best friends, but also our favorite animals will be by our side whenever we want. That is one of the reasons that heaven is so wonderful!