

“Will Dogs Be Redeemed” Romans 8:18-25

INTRODUCTION

I'd like to begin by asking you a significant question. Will dogs be redeemed? I talk a lot about the finished work of Jesus. He came to earth in the flesh, lived a perfect life, died on the cross for our sins, rose from the dead, and ascended into heaven as Lord of all things. He did that to redeem human beings. But did He do that to redeem only human beings? The answer is “no.” He did it to redeem dogs as well.

Some of you, I know, think that's ridiculous but it isn't. The passage I read in fact, Romans 8:18-25, teaches us just that.

CREATION FALLEN

Look first of all at a word that Paul uses in verses 19, 20, 21, and 22, “creation.” Creation is the primary subject of this passage. It refers to the universe and everything that's in it. The universe and everything that's in it is called creation because God made it. He conceived every atom of it in His mind and willed it into existence. It includes stars, planets, asteroids, soil, beaches, rivers, oceans, human beings, dogs, cats, possums, snakes, flowers, trees, and everything else.

When it comes to creation, Genesis teaches that God made it good. But then something unspeakably awful happened to it. Paul says in verse 20 that it *“was subjected to futility.”* He says it differently in verse 21 but the meaning is the same. It is in *“slavery to corruption.”*

Those verses teach us that when Adam and Eve fell in the Garden of Eden, so did the rest of creation. There is some kind of spiritual link between human beings and nature. That link is so defined that nature's destiny, from the very beginning, was and still is tied up with the destiny of human beings. When human beings sinned and were cursed, so was nature. The result is that as beautiful as it is, there's something evil about it. It is futile and corrupt.

We see that in everything but the fall is most evident in animals. It's evident in two things that God never intended. The first is their

meanness. Hawks swoop down and rip open the necks of mice and squirrels. Adorable lion cubs with bloody faces chew at the carcass of a zebra their mother killed. Meanness. There's a second thing in animals that God never intended, fear: the rabbit frozen in its path, the wildcat with its back hunched, the rattlesnake poised to strike, or even your dog, ears back and slinking to the ground. Those are postures of fear.

That shows us that Paul's description of creation in verses 20 and 21 isn't exaggerated. It is subjected to futility. It is in slavery to corruption. It is in a fallen state that God never intended it to be in.

CREATION REDEEMED

But it won't always be. That's because, at the Second Coming of Jesus, Father God is going to redeem it. That's the word, in its noun form, that Paul uses in verse 23. The Greek word translated redemption here means to be set free from the control of something. In this case that something is sin and its consequences. At the Second Coming of Jesus, human beings, verse 23, and creation, verse 21, will be set utterly free from sin and its consequences. For creation, that means that God will transform it into the condition or state that He intended when He made it. Think of its condition or state before the Fall, when the lion and lamb laid down together. Its redeemed state will be qualitatively far better than that. That's why Revelation 21:1 calls it what it does, "*a new heaven and a new earth.*"

Now, according to verse 21, we as followers of Jesus wait eagerly for our final redemption. But according to verse 19, so does creation. It "*waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God.*" That's because when they're redeemed, so is it. In his outstanding commentary on Romans, Andrew Nygren explains that verse this way, "*The redemption of mankind is also to be the redemption of creation.*"

Do you realize what that means? It means that God has an eternal destiny for the stars, planets, animals, vegetation and everything else that we see around us. And that eternal destiny is linked with ours.

Simply put, creation will be part of the eternal life that we live with God in heaven. It will be that in two ways.

First, the universe will be our habitation. Heaven is a place and that place is the redeemed universe. We won't live on earth because just one planet would be far too confining and small for the resurrection powers we have. We will live in solar systems and galaxies instead.

Creation will be part of the eternal life we live in a second way. There will be dogs in heaven. I say "dogs" in particular because that's what people ask about most. Will there be dogs in heaven? The answer is "yes." All the dogs and other animals who have lived will be resurrected and live again forever in heaven.

You may think that I've flipped my lid but I haven't. A lot better and brighter people than me have believed that. I think of three in particular – John Wesley, C.S. Lewis, and R.C. Sproul. Listen to what Wesley wrote in his book Sermons on Several Occasions. At the Second Coming, animals *"will be restored, not only to that measure of understanding which they had in paradise, but to a degree of it as much higher than that . . . They will be delivered from all irregular appetites, from all unruly passions, from every disposition that is either evil in itself, or has any tendency to evil."*

The bottom line is that the eternal destinies of human beings and creation are linked. Through the finished work of Jesus, Father God is going to finally redeem not just human beings but creation as well. So, it's literally true. Dogs will be redeemed.

EVANGELISTS AND ECOLOGISTS

What I've just preached has profound implications, one of which is this. True evangelists are true ecologists.

You know what evangelists are and I'm not talking about preachers who hold revivals. They're those who want to "save souls," as we used to say it, and act to do so. They're ones who want to help the people that they know and meet come into a saving relationship with Jesus.

You also know what ecologists are. They're those who want to save creation and act to do so. "To save creation" means to preserve, sustain, or restore it. Ecologists are ones who want and act to do that.

When most of us think of evangelists, we think of Bible believing people like ourselves. We know that God wants each of us to save souls. But when most of us think of ecologists, we think of theological liberals like the National Council of Churches and new agers like Shirley Maclaine. There's a dichotomy in our minds, in other words, between evangelists on the one hand and ecologists on the other.

But there shouldn't be. On the contrary, Bible believing Christians like us should be the most fervent ecologists of all. That's because we know and believe about creation what theological liberals and new agers don't. God has an eternal destiny for it that's linked with ours. Because He does, it deserves to be saved – to be preserved, sustained, and restored. So, as followers of His, we want and act do just that.

Denton Lotz, general secretary of the Baptist World Alliance, expressed it well. He wrote: *"There seems to be a conflict between those who emphasize saving souls and those who emphasize saving trees. This is a ridiculous conflict. Let's not confuse evangelism with ecology, but let's also show that true evangelists are true ecologists."* He's absolutely right. True evangelists are true ecologists. God wants us to save souls first of all and creation second of all.

So, let's save creation. We do that in two ways.

CARE FOR ANIMALS

First, we care for animals. That's exactly what the Bible calls us to do in verses like Exodus 23:12; Deuteronomy 14:21; Deuteronomy 22:6-7; Proverbs 12:10; and Jonah 4:11. Those verses teach that God loves chickens, possums, dogs and all the animals He made. And that, as followers of His, we should too.

It's a matter of character that we do. In his Lectures on Ethics, Immanuel Kant wrote, *"We can judge the heart of man by his*

treatment of animals.” He was half-right. Disregarding or mistreating animals is a sure sign of unrighteousness. The wise man concurs by implication in Proverbs 12:10. He writes, ***“A righteous man has regard for the life of his beast.”*** Truly righteous people care for animals.

One of my heroes of the faith, William Wilberforce, is a classic example of this. Wilberforce is best known for abolishing first the slave trade and then slavery itself in 18th and 19th century England. But did you know that he was also one of the founders of the Royal Society of the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals? The same kingdom heart that cared for people, cared for animals as well.

That is so revealing isn't it. The wise man was right. Truly righteous people do care for animals. They regard them highly and treat them kindly. God made each species of animals for a specific kind of good life. Righteous people do as much as they can to give them that on the one hand and not take it away on the other. That has significant and practical implications to us as consumers and hunters. We need to learn and prayerfully reflect on those implications.

CARE FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

There's a second way that we save creation. We care for the environment. Just like animals were, soil, beaches, rivers, streams, oceans, mountains, trees, flowers, plants and more were made to express the glory of God. But they do that only when they're beautiful and clean. So, we should do our part in making them beautiful and clean.

But what is that part? I mean let's face it. The world's environmental problems are staggering. So what can we do that possibly matters? The answer is “a lot.”

There was a newspaper cartoon that depicted a huge mass of people that stretched out as far as the eye could see. And over each person was one of those little balloons that cartoonists use that denote speaking. It said, ***“What can one person do?”*** The point is that we can change the world with a majority of one. Maybe one Christian can't change the world

but millions of one's together can.

The one thing that we can't do is give up. The Bible disallows it. So, let's commit ourselves to learning and doing whatever we can to make the environment beautiful and clean. Whatever we can do is a lot.

In his book How to Rescue Earth without Worshipping Nature, Tony Campolo gives us some practical suggestions in that regard. First, make sure our lawn is safe. Second, save water in the name of Jesus. Third, buy products whose packaging is made with recyclable or biodegradable materials. Fourth, cut down on junk mail. Fifth, use latex not oil-based paint or paint products. Sixth, make sure our tires are properly inflated. And seventh, cut down on the use of batteries. These are just samplings of things that we can do. There are many more. Campolo and Gordon Aeschliman in fact wrote a book together that reveals and discusses those. It's titled 50 Ways You Can Help Save the Planet.

I'd suggest one more thing that is a conviction of mine. Most people don't like hearing this but need to. Cut back on our standard of living. Most of us, including me first of all, need to consume less. I think that on Monday evenings when I put the trash out. How can two people, my wife and I, possibly generate so much trash? It make me realize that I need to do two things. First, consume less than I do. And second, consume more wisely than I do. I need to cut back on my standard of living.

CONCLUSION

Now, I realize in closing that many, if not most people, aren't interested in what I've preached about. Studies show that the more theologically conservative church members are, the less likely they are to show interest in saving creation. But I hope that changes with us as a result of what Romans 8 has taught us today.

At the Second Coming, God is going to redeem all of creation including dogs. He has an eternal destiny for it, one that is closely linked with ours. May you and I live, from this point on, as if that's so.