

“Are Men and Animals the Same”
Ecclesiastes 3:18-22
(Preached at Trinity, June 4, 2023)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. Solomon has been pondering the problem of injustice. We live in a world of injustice. We can find great comfort in knowing that God's justice will prevail in the end, even if it doesn't happen until eternity.
Ecclesiastes 3:17 NAU - "I said to myself, "God will judge both the righteous man and the wicked man," for a time for every matter and for every deed is there."
But what if there is no life after death? If not, we are left in despair.
Ecclesiastes 3:21 NAU - "Who knows that the breath of man ascends upward and the breath of the beast descends downward to the earth?"
2. Once again, Solomon turns his attention to the matter of human existence. Keep in mind, his main focus has been the state of man upon the earth without God. Now he begins to compare man with the animals.
His premise is that there is little difference.
Ecclesiastes 3:18 NAU - "God has surely tested them in order for them to see that they are but beasts."
3. One might argue that from a purely humanistic perspective we are the same.
 - Both share creature hood.
Man was created on the same day as the other mammals.
Genesis 1:25-26 NAU - "God made the beasts of the earth after their kind, and the cattle after their kind, and everything that creeps on the ground after its kind; and God saw that it was good. ²⁶ Then God said, "Let Us make man"
 - Human beings share the basic traits that separate mammals from the rest of the animal world. There are eight shared characteristics.
 - Hair or fur
 - Mammary glands in females for nursing young
 - Three bones in the middle ear for transmitting sound.
 - A one-time tooth replacement.
 - Single-boned lower jaw.
 - Four-chambered heart.
 - Warm-blooded metabolism.
 - Diaphragms for expanding and contracting the lungs.
 - But are human beings animals? Is **Verse 18** an accurate statement. Are human beings the same as brute beasts?
4. If you are an evolutionist you would answer in the affirmative. In a Godless world this is the most logical conclusion. There is little distinction. The evolutionist believes all multicellular organisms have evolved from single-celled organisms. From an evolutionary worldview humans are just highly evolved animals.

5. From a Biblical worldview human beings are unique and vastly different from the animals.

I. Human beings are the crowning glory of God's creation

A. The universe is focused upon the existence of man

1. Much is debated over the existence of extraterrestrial beings. God can do what He wants but life beyond the earth misses the important point of God's creation.

The creation of the entire universe is directed to the earth. Stars lightyears from earth were created to be immediately viewed from the earth and were created with a purpose related to the earth.

Genesis 1:14-16 NAU - "Then God said, "Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night, and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years; ¹⁵ and let them be for lights in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth"; and it was so. ¹⁶ God made the two great lights, the greater light to govern the day, and the lesser light to govern the night; *He made* the stars also."

2. Man was the grand finale of God's creation. He was set apart as unique. God's eternal purpose was for His Son to take on the flesh of humanity – He would become man. As glorious as the angels are, they cannot compare with the glory of man, particularly of Jesus Christ.

Hebrews 1:3-4 NAU - "And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, ⁴ having become as much better than the angels, as He has inherited a more excellent name than they."

B. We were uniquely created in the image of God. Theologically, we refer to this as the Imago Dei –

Genesis 1:26 NAU - "Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness"

1. 1689 LBC Chapter 4:2 – “After God made all other creatures, He created man, male and female, with reasonable and immortal souls, render them fit unto that life to God for which they were created; being made after the image of God, in knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness, having the law of God written in their hearts, and the power to fulfill it, and yet under a possibility of transgressing, being left to the liberty of their own will, which was subject to change.

2. God created us in righteousness and holiness.

Ephesians 4:23-24 NAU - "that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, ²⁴ and put on the new self, which in *the likeness of* God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth."

3. Human beings are relational. We are spiritual.

Man was created with the ability to commune with God; to know Him and fellowship with Him. Of course, this was marred by the fall and we are now alienated from Him, but that image was not annihilated.

4. We were created to find meaning for our existence only in loving Him, glorifying Him, and doing His will.
- C. God created human beings as moral beings.
1. Animals have no sense of right and wrong. You can teach a dog proper behavior but it is only motivated by reward and punishment, not right and wrong. They have no sense of justice.
 2. God gave human beings a conscience and He gave them a righteous law – The Moral Law written upon their hearts; the Moral Law as summarized in the Ten Commandments.
Romans 2:14-15 NAU - "For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, ¹⁵ in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them,"
 3. This is the same Law described in the New Covenant.
Jeremiah 31:33 NAU - "But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days," declares the LORD, "I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people."
 4. We know right from wrong but in our fallen condition we behave like animals. We treat our fellow man with evil and injustice.
- D. Human beings were created as the vice-regents of God.
1. God has given us dominion over the earth. The animals are subject to man.
Genesis 1:26 NAU - "Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."
Genesis 1:28 NAU - "God blessed them; and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth."
 2. This rule was not an independent rule, but a stewardship over God's creation.
- II. God created human beings with eternal souls.
- A. Both man and beast die
Ecclesiastes 3:19-20 NAU - "For the fate of the sons of men and the fate of beasts is the same. As one dies so dies the other; indeed, they all have the same breath and there is no advantage for man over beast, for all is vanity. ²⁰ All go to the same place. All came from the dust and all return to the dust."
1. Both man and animal are flesh and blood. Both are fragile, subject to sickness and disease and injury.
 2. Both age. Both have life expectancies.
Both men and animals have a beginning, and both must die.
Both you and your dog will return to dust.
Ecclesiastes 3:20 NAU - "All go to the same place. All came from the dust and all return to the dust."

- B. But human beings alone are endowed with an immortal soul
1. Human beings have an eye on eternity. We look beyond the grave.
Ecclesiastes 3:11 NAU - "He has also set eternity in their heart"
 2. The choices we make in life have eternal consequences.
 3. Because human beings are moral creatures who have fallen from their original righteousness, all will stand before the judgment seat of Christ.
 4. Because human beings are precious in God's sight. He took upon Himself human flesh in order to accomplish the redemption of the elect.
- C. Because human beings are created in the image of God they have intrinsic dignity
1. In our fallen state men can behave as brute beasts.
2 Peter 2:12 NAU - "But these, like unreasoning animals, born as creatures of instinct to be captured and killed, reviling where they have no knowledge, will in the destruction of those creatures also be destroyed,"
1 Corinthians 15:32 NAU - "If from human motives I fought with wild beasts at Ephesus, what does it profit me? If the dead are not raised"
 2. The sinful corruption of man mars but does not annihilate the image of God. We need to maintain the right attitude towards all men. All should be treated with dignity.
Psalms 8:4-6 NAU - "What is man that You take thought of him, And the son of man that You care for him? ⁵ Yet You have made him a little lower than God, And You crown him with glory and majesty! ⁶ You make him to rule over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet,"
 3. We know this innately. When we see a dead rodent in the road we steer around it and go on. But this would never be true if we saw a human being in the road. We would notify the authorities. We would seek their identity and notify their family. We would provide a proper interment. We would determine the cause of death and if it came about from the hand of another we would hold him accountable. All of this is because we know there is a vast difference between man and beast.
Of course, in our sinful world of confusion and injustice this distinction is sometimes blurred.

Conclusion:

1. Solomon was not certain about the eternal state. In fact, his position was more along the lines of an agnostic. "Who knows. . ."
Ecclesiastes 3:21 NAU - "Who knows that the breath of man ascends upward and the breath of the beast descends downward to the earth?"
 His point is, no one has ever died and then come back to report on eternity. In this sense we are the same as animals—we die.
2. This left his hope of justice in question.
 When God is not the focus of our worldview our confidence in the future is in doubt and all meaning in this life loses significance. We return to the original conclusion:
Ecclesiastes 1:2 NAU - "Vanity of vanities," says the Preacher, "Vanity of vanities! All is vanity."
3. But, of course, we know life has meaning. We know that through the Lord Jesus Christ there is life after death. Jesus died and was buried, but on the third day he was raised. And His resurrection is the basis of our own resurrection. He has gone to prepare a place for us.
John 14:2-3 KJV - "In my Father's house are many mansions: if *it were* not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, *there* ye may be also."