

Ecclesiastes 3: 19-21; "The spirit of man and the spirit of animals",
A Bible Study prepared by Pastor Paul Rendall, and
Delivered at the Rendall home on May the 13th, 2009

The last time that we had Bible Study together I spoke to you about verse 18. The verse teaches us that God tests men; He examines their hearts, and then He arranges the circumstances in their lives to show them that because of their sin and unbelief that sometimes they think and act like animals in His sight. God actually arranges situations in our lives that manifest this truth to us. Now, here in verses 1-22, Solomon draws a conclusion from that truth. The conclusion is an existential conclusion. It is that the outcome of a man's life is really no different than that of the beast. Now, if we read other portions of the word of God, we know that there really is a great difference between men and beasts, although Solomon is not recognizing it here in these verses. And so what are we to do with these verses? Well, I think that there are some very important lessons that we can learn from these verses, lessons which are very good for all men to learn if they are ever to come to know God and the meaning of life. We must acknowledge all that Solomon has said here is true, but we must use it to draw the right final conclusions about the differences between men and beasts. We must not rest in existential conclusions alone, or we will not glorify God who made us to differ from the beasts. We must add to Solomon's conclusions, the other light which we have from other places in the Bible. And this we will do so that you will understand the truth about man. First of all we will examine the fact that both man and the animals die, and because of that man has no advantage over the animals. And then second, we will look at whether the spirit of men goes upward to heaven or downward to the earth and why. Let us see, that in each of these points that the only thing that causes us to differ from any other person, or even from the animals themselves, is the grace of God.

1st of all - Since both man and the animals die, it is true that in this sense, man has no advantage over the animals. (Verses 19 and 20)

"For what happens to the sons of men also happens to animals; one thing befalls them: as one dies, so dies the other. Surely they all have one breath. All creatures were created by God in the beginning and they all have their physical breath; their physical life, from Him. They also have their spirit from Him. In fact, the word which is translated "breath" here could be translated "spirit" here just as it is in verse 21. Loyal Young in his commentary on this verse says, "The points of resemblance between man and beast are here presented. "If this life is the only life, one thing befalls them." "They die alike." "They have the same spirit, (breath — ruah.)" "The Hebrew word here translated breath, is translated wind, spirit, soul, and breath, according to the scope of the passage in which it is found." "Perhaps if it were here translated spirit, as in the 21st verse, it would give Solomon's true meaning." "The idea is ; men and beasts all go to one place :—the

spirit ceases with the body to live :— a man hath no pre-eminence over a beast." "All is vanity :—life is of no use." "Indeed, if there shall be no future, the lot of the beast is most to be desired, for it hath no solicitude for the future." He is saying here, that just looking at things outwardly; just looking at things from the standpoint of an earthly existence; and leaving Divine revelation out of the picture; it appears that there are no real and significant differences between a man and a beast. That is how life appears to all men who have not the revelation of God in the Scriptures given to them. You can see this truth that Solomon is elucidating if you will turn with me to Genesis Chapter 1. Here God is creating the heavens and the earth in 6 literal days. They are not ages, but days as is evidenced by the statements, "evening and morning." Verse 24 begins the 6th day of creation, and it says, "Then God said, 'Let the earth bring forth the living creature according to its kind: cattle and creeping thing and beast of the earth, each according to its kind'; and it was so." "And God made the beast of the earth according to its kind, cattle according to its kind, and everything that creeps on the earth according to its kind." "And God saw that it was good." Now look down at Chapter 2, verse 7. "And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being." Now I think that we can assume without doing any violence to the text that God made both man and the beasts of the earth from the dust of the earth. In both cases they have a body and a spirit. God created the animals for man's sake as you can see in Chapter 2, verse 19. "Out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to Adam to see what he would call them." "And whatever Adam called each living creature, that was its name." The words for "living creature" here in verse 19, in the Hebrew, are the same words used in Chapter 2, verse 7, which are translated, "a living being". Both man and the beast have a body. Both man and the beast have a spirit.

Now look over at Genesis Chapter 6. Here God has decided to judge the world because of the great wickedness of the people of that day; their violence and their sexual immorality. In verse 17 He says, "And behold, I Myself am bringing floodwaters on the earth, to destroy from under heaven all flesh in which is the breath of life; everything that is on the earth shall die." And then look over at Chapter 7, verse 15. "And they went into the ark to Noah, two by two, of all flesh in which is the breath of life." So, you can see that men and animals are alike in this physical sense and bodily sense, and they are alike in that they both have a spirit. And they both die. Why do they die? They all die because of Adam's sin, and because all men confirm Adam's sinnership by their own sins. Adam was the Federal head, you and I because we are descended from him, we are sinners by nature and practice. We all deserve to be punished for our sins. God would have every right to destroy us forever. Look over at Job Chapter 34, verse 12. "Surely God will never do wickedly, nor will the Almighty pervert justice." "Who gave Him charge over the earth?" "Or who appointed Him over the whole world?" "If He should set His heart on it, if He should gather to Himself His Spirit and His

breath, all flesh would perish together, and man would return to dust." This is what verse 20 of our text says. "All go to one place: all are from the dust, and all return to the dust." Animals die; if they die of natural causes, because of man's sin, man has no advantage over the animals physically because as it says in Hebrews 9: 27, "It is appointed unto men once to die, and after this comes the judgment." All is vanity, or emptiness, because neither man, nor animals, can prevent their life from coming to an end because of man's sin.

Then, Secondly, we must admit that just looking at life as it is; apart from further revelation from the word of God, we do not know whether the spirit of men goes upward to heaven or downward to the earth. (Verse 21)

"Who knows the spirit of the sons of men, which goes upward, and the spirit of the animal, which goes down to the earth?" The NAS says, "Who knows that the breath of man ascends upward and the breath of the beast descends downward to the earth?" The American Standard Version of 1901 says, "Who knoweth the spirit of man whether it goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast, whether it goeth downward to the earth?" The New King James and the King James are identical except for the "thees" and "thous". The implied answer is; that no one does, just looking at things with our human perception, apart from the Divine revelation of the Scriptures. The way that the verse reads implies that the spirit of man goes upward and the spirit of the beast goes downward. But we are not expressly told. But we have already been told in verse 17 that, "God will judge the righteous and the wicked, for there is a time there for every purpose and for every work." So even Solomon has admitted that beasts are not like the animals in this respect: they shall not have to face judgment, or evaluation at the hands of God. But all men will. Turn with me to Genesis 1 again and you will see why. We have already read verse 25, speaking of how God made all the beasts of the earth, after their kind. But in verse 26, we find a real difference which God Himself made between man and beast in their creations. "Then God said, 'Let us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.'" "So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female he created them." We see here that when God created man, He created them male and female and gave them dominion over all the other creatures that He had made.

So the greatest difference between man and animals, and the reason that God gave man dominion over them, was because man was created in God's own image and likeness. This means that man was created with an eternal soul. This means that he walked upright physically. This meant that he would reason and not simply live by instincts. This meant that he would speak and be able to accomplish things by speaking. God also gave man and woman the institution of marriage; a relationship which would be covenanted in His sight. There really is a very great difference between men and animals. It is only when man lives by his instincts

and sinful passions that he becomes like a beast. But the only reason that we know these things is because of the Scriptures; because of Divine revelation. Thank God for this revelation of the truth.

Now many people today, and perhaps in all generations, have wanted their animals which have become their pets to have eternal life. I believe that this is an unrealistic expectation. Although God could do this; He could give an animal the ability to live forever; we have no indication that He will do this, as we read the Scripture. In fact the truth is, according to the Scriptures, that men are immortal; their spirits will never die and their bodies will be resurrected. The Bible is clear that they will live forever, in either heaven or hell. And the Bible also intimates that the spirits and bodies of beasts will not live forever; their existence ends when they die physically. Turn with me to Psalm 49. In this psalm we see the Psalmist speaking of the righteous and the wicked. He is speaking of the wicked as being like beasts in a certain and particular way. In verse 5 he says that the righteous "should not fear in the days of evil", because a wicked rich person can by no means redeem his brother, nor give a ransom for his soul." Verse 8 says, "For the redemption of their souls is costly, and it shall cease forever--that he should continue to live eternally, and not see the Pit." Indeed he says in verse 10, that he (that is the righteous man) sees the wise men die; likewise the fool and the senseless person perish, and leave their wealth to others." "Their inner thought is that their houses will last forever, their dwelling places to all generations; they call their lands after their own names." "Nevertheless man, though in honor, does not remain; he is like the beasts that perish."

What we need to remember is that the beasts were not created with an immortal soul. They were not created in the image and likeness of God. They will not suffer eternal judgment in their perishing; neither will they know eternal blessedness. When they perish; their existence simply comes to an end. Their spirits are extinguished. They perish in an earthly sense. But verses 13 and 14 give us a different indication of what will happen to the wicked. "This is the way of the foolish, and of their posterity who approve their sayings" "Like sheep they are laid in the grave." That is how they are like beasts. "Death shall feed on them"; that is, upon their bodies. "The upright shall have dominion over them in the morning"; that is in the morning of the resurrection. That is because both the righteous and the wicked will be raised from the dead and come forth to judgment; the one to eternal blessedness and glory; and the other to eternal shame and contempt, because all of his earthly life and beauty will perish. Verses 19 and 20 say, "He shall go to the generation of his fathers; (He will have a conscious existence) they shall never see light." (That is; the light of life.) "A man who is in honor, yet does not understand is like the beasts that perish." That is; that all that he lived for upon this earth, in his life, will be taken from him and will end; it will perish. But his soul and body will continue on eternally in judgment. He will be a beast forever in this sense. Charles Bridges in his commentary on this verse says, "Though there be no animal pre-eminence of man above the beast, yet vast indeed

is the difference as to their spirits." "The one goes upward to the Father of spirits, returning to the God who gave it." (Ecclesiastes 12: 7 and Hebrews 12: 9) "The other goes downward to the earth." "It dies with the body, and perishes forever." Then he quotes Matthew Henry: "The soul of a beast is at death like a candle blown out; and there is an end of it; whereas the soul of a man is then like a candle taken out of a dark lantern, which leaves the lantern useless indeed, but doth itself shine brighter." He is speaking of the righteous in this case; those who have been redeemed by God through Jesus Christ. But the souls of the wicked are not redeemed as are the souls of the righteous; even as it says in verse 15 of Psalm 49. "But God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave, for He shall receive me." The beast's soul is extinguished while the wicked man's soul continues on forever miserable. He must bear the punishment due his sins. No innocent animal ever has to do this. When a man perishes it is for all eternity. When a beast perishes that is the end of him, body and soul. I hope that you can see the difference. There is no redemption that Christ has made for the animals, even though all are affected by man's fall. The fact that they perish means that they die physically and their spirits come to an immediate end spiritually. We should not count on our pets being in heaven. But it is possible that there will be animals and pets in a the New Earth which God through our Lord Jesus Christ will create. Only God can reveal whether this could possibly be the case; and he no doubt will reveal His purpose in this regard at that future time. Let us thank God for Jesus Christ our Lord who paid the costly price to pay the ransom which was due to God, in order that our souls would live forever; so that we will not have to think of ourselves as beasts for all of eternity.