



Theme: The Ark – God and the Animals

“Animal Heaven”

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Weekly Memory Verse:

“The wolf will romp with the lamb, the leopard sleep with the kid. Calf and lion will eat from the same trough, and a little child will tend them.” – Isaiah 11:6 (The Message.)

Meditation Moments for Monday, September 14 – Read **Acts 1:1-8** and **Matthew 28:18-20**. Jesus, raised from the dead, was preparing to leave earth. Before ascending, according to Acts 1:3, he spent about forty days preparing his followers to carry on his work. Though his “marching orders” were clear, they must have sounded breathtaking and daunting to the little company of disciples. They’re still our orders, and still breathtaking: “make disciples of all nations ... to the end of the earth.”



Jesus’ commission was not primarily about organizational charts or articles of incorporation. Though things like that are often helpful as tools to carry out Jesus’ mission, his basic commission (“make disciples”) involves a response that can only come from people. How do Jesus’ marching orders make it clear that, in the end, our mission as individuals and as a church are all about people?



Surely the creator God could have written the news of Jesus in the clouds or spoken it from the skies. Instead, God’s primary way of carrying out the mission was also about people: “You will be my witnesses.” What factors made it more effective for God to use people as witnesses? Whose witness has shaped your life? In what ways have you been able to live out Jesus’ commission for you to be one of his witnesses?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, give me a heart open to your Spirit's power, and a willingness to answer your call, wherever you and your mission may take me. Amen.

Tuesday, September 15 – Read **Luke 4:16-21 and Luke 19:1-10**. At the end of Jesus' three years of public ministry, the outcome might have seemed like a real letdown to human eyes. He had only 120 or so followers and determined hostility from the religious leaders of his nation. Yet from our vantage point, we can see that those three years of ministry changed the world forever. And a key to Jesus' ability to do that was his crystal clear, resolute sense of what his mission was, what he was here to do.



Jesus adapted Isaiah 61:1-3 in the synagogue in Nazareth to define his mission. "To preach good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the prisoners and recovery of sight to the blind, to liberate the oppressed, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" has a nice poetic ring. What can you do each day to live into the meaning of those words in the gritty, unpoetic, day-to-day realities of life?



Zacchaeus, "a ruler among tax collectors, was rich." His wealth didn't come from hard, honest work. Tax collectors paid Rome a secret, fixed amount—everything else they collected was theirs. In other words, they got rich by cheating people. What did it say about Jesus' mission that he would go out of his way to reach out to an unlovely man like Zacchaeus? How did verse 10 express Jesus' unshakeable sense of his mission?

Prayer: Lord, thank you that even as I seek you, you have been seeking me, as you did Zacchaeus. Help me respond as Zacchaeus did, setting aside anything that might get in the way of loving and serving you. Amen.

Wednesday, September 16 – Read **Isaiah 11:6-9 and Isaiah 65:17 & 25**. Most mainline scholars believe the book we call "Isaiah" is a composite work, joining material from two or three prophets. Dr. Patricia Tull writes in the *CEB Study Bible*, "While a few scholars maintain that the whole book originated with Isaiah, most scholars speak of the book's primary divisions as First Isaiah (Isa 1-39); Second Isaiah (Isa 40-55); and Third Isaiah (Isa 56-66)." If so, today's second passage echoes a vision of God's future first voiced by "Isaiah of Jerusalem" in the first passage from today which was written perhaps 150 to 200 years earlier.



The lyrical picture of God's eternal "holy mountain" in today's passages pictured a whole collection of animals living in peace with one another, and with humans, in God's eternity. "Animals in heaven?" is not a silly or trivial question. It takes us back to creation. Saying that animals we love will miss out on eternity would suggest that God is only interested in human beings, not in all creation. How does God's creation of animal life strongly suggest that animals will be part of eternity?



[Mark 1:12-13](#) said at Jesus' temptation, "he was among the wild animals." Mark is the only Gospel that uses the phrase, "wild beasts," as he seemed to use this as a way of pointing to Jesus as the Messiah. Many prophecies pictured the age of

the Messiah as a time when the wild beasts become tame and docile, such as in Isaiah 11:6. Jesus launched God's future kingdom, but not fully. How will your world be better when Isaiah's vision of God's love fully defeating all that hurts or destroys comes true?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, in this troubled world, it seems daring (even unrealistic) to think of the world Isaiah pictured. Yet your purpose is to lead me to the reality of that world for all eternity. Help me to count on it. Amen.*

Thursday, September 17 – Read **Hebrews 10:19-25**. It was tough to be a Christian in the first-century Roman Empire. Early Christians needed each other's support and strength to stay spiritually on track. John Wesley echoed Hebrews in stressing the importance of living our faith in community—we are to encourage one another, “sparking love and good deeds.”



We all need encouragement to keep us going at times. That's what the writer to the Hebrews had in mind in verse 24: “Let us consider each other carefully for the purpose of sparking love and good deeds.” What factors in the world you live in make you want to seek out fellow Christians? When have you needed someone you trust to give you a boost in your life of faith? When have you done that for someone else?



“Let's draw near,” in verse 22, was a common early Christian expression related to worship. We believe that when we gather for worship, the saints join us, which is why you might seem to hear that loved one's voice that has joined the saints eternal while singing or praying. Have you ever felt closer to a loved one, furry or otherwise, when you come to worship or go to their favorite spot?

Prayer: *Lord, thank you for inviting me to draw near to you. And thank you for giving me the community of believers who can encourage and support me as we draw near to you together. Amen.*

Friday, September 18 – Read **Psalms 69:32-34, Revelation 5:9-13**. Even though they were written centuries apart, the poetry of Psalm 69 and the heavenly music of Revelation 5 built God's praise higher until they included not only human voices, but “every creature in heaven and on earth,” praising the Creator and Redeemer. Scholar N.T. Wright says in his commentary *Revelation for Everyone*, “The first song [in Revelation 5], then, praises the lamb for rescuing a people by his death so that they could then take forward God's royal and redemptive purposes (‘kingdom and priests’) for the wider world. The second song, in which thousands upon thousands of angels join, turns from what the lamb has *achieved* to what he has *deserved*, namely, all the honour and glory of which creation is capable.... so to the third song, in which every creature in every part of God's creation joins in, much as in Paul's vision in [Philippians 2:9-11](#). This time the praise of the lamb has been joined together with the praise of God the creator, as in chapter 4. In thunderous worship the whole creation praises ‘the One on the throne and the lamb’.”



We've looked for subtle clues to answer the question, "Will there be animals in heaven?" Remember: poets and prophets pictured God's ultimate praise arising from more than just human voices. This scene ends with every created thing in every realm of the universe joining together in praise and confession of God's and the Lamb's supreme authority. Does taking seriously the idea of God as creator of all life bring you peace about animals in heaven?



That has a serious spiritual implication we may not have thought of. N.T. Wright continues in his commentary on Revelation, "Sadly, many Christians think of Jesus purely in terms of their own comfort and hope ('he has rescued us; he is with us as a friend') and who fail completely to see the sheer scope of his majesty, the sweep of his glory. Many rest content to have Jesus around the place for particular 'spiritual' purposes, but continue to assign riches, power, glory and the rest to earthly forces and rulers." God and Jesus created all and are the Lord of it all. How does that shape the ways you treat all their creation?

Prayer: *Jesus, under the nose of Roman emperors who claimed to be divine, John and the first Christians said you are truly Lord. I join in their allegiance to you and your creation, embracing hope. Amen.*

Saturday, September 19 – Read **Matthew 22:34-40**. Photographer and writer Roger Caras said, "*Dogs are not our whole life, but they make our lives whole.*" The idea is that there is something about God's creatures that we have as pets can help us experience life to the full and feel loved in ways we sometimes don't get from humans. When a legal expert asked Jesus about the Greatest Commandment, he answered that we are to love God and love people and love ourselves. When we love our neighbors as ourselves, we show the love of Christ to those around us. Love is contagious and God wants us to show it to all we know. Just like our pets can bring that contagious love, we are invited to do that in our daily lives and as a church. Our hope and prayer is that our church might live out being Jesus Christ to the world by helping others to feel whole and made new as we live out the Gospel of Jesus.



Novelist Paulo Coelho once said, "One is loved because one is loved. No reason is needed for loving." Loving your neighbor as yourself can be challenging. God calls us to love others the way God loves us—unconditionally. Loving our neighbors as ourselves means showing unwarranted love with no hesitation. What has stopped you from loving someone relentlessly today? How can you love them unconditionally tomorrow?

Prayer: *Gracious God, thank you for loving me unconditionally. Help me to recognize the moments in my life when I can relentlessly love those around me. Amen.*