

## You Are Here, pt.5 – Are We Special?

1. Our passage today has one idea but it is expressed in two different ways. The first part continues where we stopped last week and has the same message: trust God. And, when in doubt, trust God. That means to trust that God knows what He is doing. For some of you, that is a super easy thing to do. For some of us, it is not. Look at this: **3:15-17**.
2. Is there anyone here who has not looked at this world and shrugged, wondering where justice lives? Rich and powerful people live by a different set of rules and, with rare exceptions, they seem immune to the punishments and limits that are placed on the little people – us. To be fair, those of us who are white middle class get a lot more breaks than those who are poor or a minority or both. We can wonder if God sees what we sees, if He feels what we feel...and if we really matter to Him...or matter at all.
3. That leads us to the next passage: are we just animals? Is there really nothing that separates us from cats and salamanders and wasps? According to the world – no. Some of the stories we are told insist that we are nothing but the unplanned results of a random explosion. And there are entire associations dedicated to saying that human beings are a cancer upon the planet. While God says we are here to guard and tend the earth, these political action groups say that WE are the problem and that the earth would be far, far better off if we did not exist.
4. PETA goes so far as to say **“A rat is a pig is a dog is a boy.”** If you go to their website, you will find them quote the “Cambridge Declaration on Consciousness” where it says “humans are not unique in ways that matter.” Animal species flirt with each other, use tools, have some mathematical abilities and, according to this declaration, monkeys have been shown to be more moral than humans (a ludicrous statement based on nonsense). [if you would like to know more about this movement and its dangers, look for a book by this title by Wesley Smith. He details the human cost of the animal rights movement]

5. The Teacher asks where we fit into the entire scope of life on earth. [3:18-21] Measured by the measuring sticks listed here, there is no difference: we are born, made of dust, and die, returning to dust. It is only a matter of faith to believe that part of us rises at death while an animal's spirit does not.
6. A quick primer might be in order. Language changes constantly and varies in word usage and definition (same word, different meaning depending on who says it and where). As the Bible was written over 1600yrs in a variety of languages and locations, with parts of it edited by scribes to make it a unified whole, there are variations in the words it chooses and what they mean. That said, the word "spirit" almost always means "life force" and that force we do, indeed, share with animals and plant life. The word "soul" means that part of us that was made in God's image and that has the potential to have eternal life. While some older versions of the Bible use the word "soul" here, the fact is that the word is correctly translated "spirit."
7. So – like animals, we are born, struggle, and then we die. Faith that something of us remains is one of the differences between us and animals. That faith is important. What is the result of believing that we are nothing but animals and that our lives don't matter? Abortion, homicide, crime, slavery, loss of civil rights, loss of sexual boundaries, loss of behavioral boundaries: license to destroy ourselves and others.
8. What is the result of believing that all of us are made in the image of God? Civil rights, law, limits on our behavior (which gives us freedom to live a life without fear). We will either live with the law of the jungle or the law of God. There is no third option.
9. While animals certainly have a level of intelligence and while some of them can love (probably), play, laugh, solve some problems, use rudimentary tools, and more there are huge differences between humans and the rest of the animal world. Humans are the only beings that can see a problem and then solve it, sometimes before it even happens. They will solve a problem even when they will not benefit from its solution. We can and do plan for a future in which we will not be alive. We build buildings, plant gardens and trees...but we also put in place laws. We challenge the mores of the time and demand

greater justice, more protections for the weak, and greater freedom for the oppressed. There are no animal species that share any of these characteristics.

10. While porpoises and whales can seem intelligent, they don't build hospitals, donate to charitable causes, hunt for the cure for diseases, establish laws and punishments for misbehavior...only humans sacrifice their present so that another can have a better future.
11. The Teacher puts a verse here very much like he does back in 3:12, [3:22]. He doesn't want you to despair – he is leading us somewhere and he knows where we are right now is a really dark place. And he understands why! [4:1-4] If there is no God, no ultimate justice, then what is the point of our lives? But I do NOT believe that we are called to just step aside and say “God will sort it out all by and by.” That attitude caused many Christians to go and preach to the slaves that they should be content with their lot because God would give them peace and freedom in heaven. They meant well (probably) but their message lacked all earthly hope.
12. Should we give up? Stop? Just wait for the inevitable. The teacher says, no [4:5]. Instead, there comes a time when we need to understand that what we need is enough, even though it is less than what we want [4:6]. What is the alternative? A never ending hunger that cannot be satisfied and, yet, we keep feeding it the same old stuff. [4:8]
13. What is the solution? Help is on the way! We need community and we need outside help. We get both. [4:9-12] Wait...who is the third party? God. God steps in and gives our lives meaning. God hears our cries for justice and promises He will take care of us and end evil forever. Once again, the difference in our lives depending on whether we believe we are just animals or we believe that we are children of God with eternity in our hearts...is massive.
14. I'll end today with words given by the Holy Spirit to Paul as he wrote a young man he considered his son in the faith. [1<sup>st</sup> Tim. 6:6-11] This is the solution the human condition: learn how to be grateful,

kind, giving, righteous. Work, not for stuff, but for the things which will outlive this world.

15. May God teach us what we are really hungry for. May God help us place our eyes on the right things. And may the lives we live and the goals for which we reach outlive us, our children, our grandchildren, and the universe itself.