

Bless the Beasts and the Children

The title of this devotional is from a movie and its theme song back in the 1970s. The movie was about some misfit teenage boys at summer camp who decided to set free some bison that had been selected to be culled from the herd. My purpose here isn't to discuss the appropriateness of eating bison. Scripture clearly allows the eating of animal flesh. Jesus ate lamb every Passover and we know He ate fish. So, we'll leave that discussion and focus on the appropriate treatment of animals and of children.

Some of you who are as old as I am or close to it will remember the late Karen Carpenter as she sang the theme song for the movie in that beautiful, mellow voice of hers. Here are the words of the song:

Bless the beasts and the children, for in this world they have no voice,
They have no choice.

Bless the beasts and the children, for the world can never be the world they see.
Light their way when the darkness surrounds them.

Give them love; let it shine all around them.

Bless the beasts and the children. Give them shelter from the storm.

Keep them safe; keep them warm.

I'm not sure whether this song should be interpreted as a prayer, asking God to bless the beasts and the children, or whether its purpose is to exhort US to bless the beasts and children by doing right by them. Regardless, God's word teaches that He cares about animals, cares more about humans, and so should we.

As Jonah was hoping for the destruction of the city of Nineveh and complaining because the plant that had been shading him shriveled up and died, the Lord asked the prophet, since Jonah was concerned for a plant, shouldn't God care for a multitude of people whom He had made (including many children) and about the livestock that would perish if the city were destroyed? So yes, animals are important to God. In fact, when God ordained the Sabbath at Mt. Sinai, it

wasn't only to give working people a day of rest; it was also for the benefit of the animals that pulled the plow or the cart.

But greater than God's concern for animals is His care for people, especially children. The Lord's brother, James, tells us that pure and undefiled religion is to visit (that is, to take care of) the orphans and widows while keeping ourselves unspotted from the world. Love for children is strongly taught in Titus 2:4 where the older women are to admonish the younger women to love their husbands and their children. You might think that such teaching wouldn't even be necessary, but unfortunately it is. In fact, Paul warned Timothy that even in those early years of the church's existence, perilous times were close on the horizon. Among other indicators would be the distressing fact that people would be "without natural affection" (2 Tim. 3:3). Natural affection is that warmth and love that you instinctively have for your parents, your brothers and sisters, and your children. God put that affection for family members in us as part of our nature. The only way you can be without natural affection is by hardening your heart and searing your conscience.

So be kind to animals. That doesn't mean you can't eat meat! But you're going to treat animals humanely and never abuse them. But more importantly, show that natural affection for children. The little ones depend on us. Let's care for them as God cares for us as His children.