



Jeff Sweeten

Thus Saith the Lord

DUMB ANIMALS

By Jeff Sweeten

The expression, “dumb animals,” is interesting. Now, there are at least two ways it can be understood. One: an animal is inherently “dumb” (2. a. “lacking the human power of speech” Websters). Two: an animal does something stupid (1. a. “lacking intelligence” Websters). Remember, most dictionaries define terms as they are commonly used, not necessarily as they should be used. So, in this case, to assign stupidity to a creature that hasn’t the capacity for rational thought might be more of a reflection on the person using the expression this way; it is unintelligent to assign intelligence to “dumb animals.”

Yet, we are often given examples in the Bible of living creatures that are “smart,” not in the sense that they think things through and make conscience choices based upon objectivity, a moral compass or the prospect of some abstract consequence (like Heaven or Hell). No, the Creator made these non-thinking, “dumb animals” with an “instinct” (2. a. “a largely inheritable and unalterable tendency of an organism to make a complex and specific response to environmental stimuli without involving reason” Websters, emp. JDS). So, let’s look at some examples.

“Go to the ant, you sluggard! Consider her ways and be wise” (Proverbs 6:6; lesson: don’t be lazy, it’s not smart). “As a dog returns to his own vomit, so a fool repeats his folly” (Proverbs 26:11; lesson: continuing to do the wrong thing is not only gross, it’s gross stupidity). “The wrath of a king is like a roaring of a lion; Whoever provokes him to anger sins against his own life” (Proverbs 20:2; lesson: don’t taunt law enforcement officers; show due respect or suffer the consequences). The list is quite extensive but none of these assigns ratiocination to these creatures; God made them that way. However, humans are made differently.

“Let us make man in our image” (Genesis 1:26-27) was not referring to the physical appearance of humanity but to the human capacity for reasoning beyond the sentient and into the abstract. Humans have a sense of “oughtness” that compels them to act beyond and apart any physical results, good or bad. We have a conscience, not that it cannot be warped (cf. 1 Timothy 4:2), but that it naturally and normally bothers us to do wrong things (note: even the concept of right and wrong is beyond all creation except humanity).

So, when God reprimanded the children of Israel in order to avert their self-imposed destruction, He used the “common sense” of His creation to make His point. “The ox knows its owner and the donkey its masters crib; but Israel does not know, My people do not consider” (Isaiah 1:3). The comparison made here highlights the similarities between these “dumb animals” and those humans who were being as dull as an ox and stubborn as a donkey. When a civilization, a culture or a church forgets their Master, who is really the dumb animal? Just a thought.

Thus Saith the Lord
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Park Heights Church of Christ

1300 E. Boynton St.
Hamilton
254-386-3953

Schedule of Services

SUNDAY

9:30 a.m. Bible Class
10:25 a.m. Morning Worship
1:30 p.m. Afternoon Worship

WEDNESDAY

7:00 p.m. Bible Study

Please call or email if you
have a question or comment
254-386-3953

jeffdsweeten@gmail.com or
chelejones24@yahoo.com

Website:
www.parkheightscoc.com