

“Faith Demonstrated Through Worship”

Heb. 11:4

- INTRO. - Two weeks ago we examined Heb. 11:1-3 and the answered the question, “What is biblical faith?” In v. 2 the author of Hebrews declared that “by it the men of old gained approval.”
- Now, beginning in v. 4, he is going to demonstrate that through his “example list” – his series of biblical examples of those who responded to God in faith centuries before the coming of Christ into the world.
- As each one is introduced with the formula “by faith,” they are presented as “the just” who lived by faith. These are all people whose lives were characterized by genuine faith in God.
- As we begin to go through this list, we will see several aspects of genuine, biblical faith highlighted. First, we will see that faith always involves some confident *action*.
- What we will see is that each of these people of faith demonstrated their faith through some concrete *action*. Abel offered a better sacrifice, Noah built an ark, Moses left Egypt, etc. In other words, biblical faith always *does* something by faith.
- Secondly, true faith is action taken in response to the promises of God. Faith urges a person to act in accordance with God’s truth. In other words, faith finds its reason in the unseen God.
- Thirdly, faith works in a variety of situations and have a variety of outcomes. Sometimes faith produces an immediate positive outcome, like the walls of Jericho falling down before the Israelite armies.
- But the reward of faith can also be *delayed* or can even result in a negative outcome, like those in this chapter that were tortured, beaten, sawn in two, etc.
- Now, those kinds of things do *not* fit in well with the “God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life” type of evangelism today – but it is just as much a part of biblical faith as all the positive results.
- Whatever else we say about biblical faith, we must be faithful to warn that sometimes God’s promises are delayed (like when Abraham had to wait for the son of promise) and sometimes being a person of faith results in severe persecution and suffering.
- George Guthrie says, “Our application of this passage must point out that faithful people sometimes do *not* see ‘results’ in this life.” As most of the people in this chapter never saw the promises of God come to fulfilment, so we too may

not always see all God has promised come to fruition while we are still alive.

- Fourthly, faith is ultimately always rewarded by God. One resounding point of Heb. 11 is that God's pilgrims always look beyond the immediate to grasp the significance of the ultimate. Faith always involves believing "that He rewards those who earnestly seek him."
- So, with all that in mind, a good summary definition is given by Guthrie. He says, "Faith is confidence that results in action carried out in a variety of situations by ordinary people in response to the unseen God and his promises, with various earthly outcomes but always the ultimate outcome of God's commendation and reward."
- This is what we will see in this chapter. And we begin with Abel. I'm calling this "Faith Demonstrated Through Worship" because Abel's faith answers the question, "How does a person approach God?"
- Abel is the first in a long line of faithful people who can teach us about a life of faith. We talked about Sola Fide a week ago, and that is really what this chapter is all about.
- Abel (and the others mentioned in this chapter) illustrate a pure kind of faith that is sharply distinguished from works righteousness. Yes, Abel

did something, but the emphasis is on his faith that led him to do it.

- And this is something the Jews of the first century needed to hear because they were so oriented around the concept of works righteousness. They needed to understand, that from the very beginning, faith was the only thing that was acceptable to God.
- Abel was the first man of faith, and it is important for us to see that his faith is what led to his personal salvation.
- MacArthur writes, "Abel's faith led to three progressive things: true sacrifice, true righteousness, and true witness. Because he believed, he offered a better sacrifice. Because he offered a better sacrifice, he obtained righteousness. Because he obtained righteousness, he is for all the ages a living voice saying, 'Righteousness is by faith [alone].'"
- Of course, we know from Genesis that (after the Fall) Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden of Eden because of their sin. And yet, even as they were judged in this way, grace was promised to them. The grace of God provided a way back into fellowship with God.
- In Gen. 3:15 we have the proto-evangelium (the first mention of the gospel of grace). Through the

seed of the woman Satan's head would be crushed, even though he would bruise the heel of the one to be born of the woman. And (of course) that is speaking of Christ, who would be put to death, but would rise from the dead to defeat Satan and sin and death.

- So even while judgment was being executed, grace was being offered. And (by the way) only one woman could ever be the one who fulfilled this promise, because there has only been one virgin birth in the history of mankind.
- There is only one who could be considered the "seed of the woman" because all others are the seed of man. But with the mother of Jesus, the HS of God placed the seed in her womb, and she gave birth to the only One who could be the Promised One.
- And it is interesting, that in her comments after the birth of Cain – it is likely that Eve thought *he* was this promised deliverer. The name "Cain" means "to get" or "to get something." And here statement in Gen. 4:1, "I have gotten a manchild with the help of the LORD" *could* be rendered "I have gotten 'He who is here'."
- Of course, if she thought Cain was the promised deliverer she was mistaken, because he actually became the first murderer.

- But (as MacArthur explains), "Even apart from Cain's wickedness and faithlessness, he could not have been the savior, nor could any of Adam and Eve's physical descendants. Flesh can only produce flesh. In Adam all died, and the sons of Adam could *not* give a life which they themselves did *not* have."
- So (again) the Lord fulfilled the promise of the proto-evangelium in the only way it *could* be fulfilled – and that is through the virgin birth of Christ.
- Now, we know from the Genesis account that Abel was the younger brother of Cain. The Bible doesn't tell us their age difference, but Abel was born sometime after Cain.
- The meaning of the name Abel is "breath, weakness, or vanity." It carries with it the idea of brevity – and may symbolically refer to the fact that his life was cut short.
- Abel was "a keeper of flocks" while Cain was "a tiller of the ground." In other words, Abel was a shepherd while Cain was a farmer. Both were born with a sin nature passed down from their parents after the Fall.
- And, by the way, they weren't primitive Neanderthals (as the evolutionists would have us believe). They were highly intellectual and

sophisticated. They understood animal husbandry and agriculture. But (as we move into this text) we see three things about Abel that made him unique. First of all, we see:

I. WHAT ABEL OFFERED (v. 4a)

- Look at v. 4 again, “By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain...” This takes us back to the Genesis account. In fact, turn with me to Gen. 4 and let’s look at vv. 3-5, “So it came about in the course of time that Cain brought an offering to the LORD of the fruit of the ground. And Abel, on his part also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and for his offering; but for Cain and for his offering He had no regard. So Cain became very angry and his countenance fell.”

- Now, we have some very important details here. The implication of this passage is that God must have given them some earlier instructions about worship and about the offering of sacrifices that we don’t have in Scripture.

- For example, this assumes that there was a *place* for them to bring their offerings. There had to have been some kind of altar somewhere, because the way this is worded, they brought their offerings to a certain place.

- Secondly, there had to have been an appointed *time* for them to bring their offerings. The phrase “in the course of time” literally means “at the end of days.” In other words, at the end of a certain period of time.

- This implies that God had set a certain time for them to bring their gifts to worship Him. And the fact that they both brought their offerings at the same time bolsters this assumption.

- Thirdly, there had to have been instruction from God as to the specific *way* He was to be worshipped. These men (on their own) would *not* have known about the proper way to worship God, so He must have given them instructions about this (probably through their parents).

- One commentator says, “It is especially significant that the first recorded act of worship was sacrifice, a sin offering, the supreme act of worship in all of God’s covenants with His people.”

- In other words, in every biblical covenant God made with men, the first order of business was to deal with man’s sin. It was true with the Abrahamic covenant, with the later covenant of Law through Moses, and ultimately with the New Covenant.

- We have already seen the theme of this book is the perfect sacrifice of Christ to take away our sin forever – and we know of the elaborate sacrificial system under the Old Covenant – but the point is, that there is no way Cain and Abel would have known anything about the necessity of a blood sacrifice apart from the instruction of God.

- And the fact that (in this case) God only accepted one of the sacrifices and *not* the other, indicates that God had

made it clear that there was only one way of approaching Him (and worshipping Him).

- Now, we're specifically told (in Heb. 11:4) that "Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain" but we're *not* told in Scripture *why* that was the case. Scholars have debated this for centuries.

- Some see the difference in the types of offerings that were given, others see the difference in the quantity that was offered, and still others understand the difference to be the heart of the men as they offered their gifts.

- I (personally) do not believe it had anything at all to do with the quantity that was offered, but I do believe it includes *both* the type of offering *and* the heart in which it was offered.

- If you go back to the Genesis account, it says that "...the LORD had regard for Abel and for his offering." It goes on to say, "but for Cain and for his offering He had no regard." It was *both* the man and his offering.

- So we have to look at both aspects. As for the man, Abel was a man of faith and Cain was *not*. As for the offering, one was an acceptable sacrifice and the other was *not*.

- Why is that? Both men brought an offering that was appropriate for his vocation. There is nothing intrinsically wrong with an offering of grain or fruit or vegetables. In

fact, there would later be these kinds of offerings under the Mosaic covenant.

- What's the problem? The problem is that God had clearly instructed His people that a *sin* offering always required a blood sacrifice. It's what the author of Hebrews had said earlier (in 9:22) "without the shedding of blood there is no remission (no atonement or covering) for sin."

- Cain's offering was *not* accepted by God because it was *not* a blood sacrifice. But this goes to the *hearts* of these two men, because there is no doubt God had made it clear to them, but Cain refused to bring that which God had specifically said is required.

- Abel demonstrated a heart of faith by obeying what God had instructed while Cain showed a heart of rebellion. He turned to his own way and brought what he *chose* to bring instead of what God said was necessary.

- And here is where the life of faith begins. It begins with a blood sacrifice to atone for sin. It begins with acknowledging our sin before God and knowing that we have no way of paying for that sin. It begins with trusting in God's plan of atonement and salvation.

- Abel brought a blood sacrifice – and (of course) that pointed to the ultimate blood sacrifice that would permanently and forever atone for sin – the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross of Calvary.

- Ron Phillips writes, “Abel’s blood offering displayed that he recognized his guilt. Deserving death, Abel offered a substitute for his sin.” In chapter 12 the author of Hebrews will declare that this speaks of “Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to [His] sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel.”

- Abel’s blood sacrifice was a prefigurement of the ultimate sacrifice of Christ. On the other hand, Cain represents all who reject God’s plan of salvation through faith in the atoning work of Christ.

- Phillips writes, “He was too proud to offer a blood sacrifice, yet his wicked heart did *not* hesitate to shed the blood of his own brother.”

- So the difference was in the offering itself and the heart in which it was given. Abel gave what God said was necessary – Cain gave what he chose to give. One was given in faith (believing God); the other was given in rebellion and unbelief.

- Prov. 15:8 says, “The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD, but the prayer of the upright is acceptable to him.”

- Cain had the same knowledge of God’s requirements, but he chose to worship in his own way. You say, “Well, Cain must *not* have believed in God.” Of course he believed in God (or he would *not* have brought *any* kind of offering).

- The problem was *not* that he did *not* believe in God – the problem is that he chose to go his own way. He thought he could approach God in any old way he wanted.

- And please understand this – in doing so Cain became the father of all false religion! False religion is trying to come to God in some other way than what God has prescribed. Rather than coming to Him with repentance and faith alone in Christ alone, religious man tries to come to Him through some sort of works righteousness.

- False religion says things like, “I can get to God by thinking myself into Nirvana,” or “I can approach God through meditation,” or “I can satisfy God through religious rituals.”

- But God has declared that there is only one way to Him, and that is through faith in His Son. It is only on the basis of the shed blood of Christ on Calvary. False religion is trying to get there some other way than the way God has ordained.

- False religion is what the Bible describes in Prov. 14:12, “There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.” No, there is only one way, (as Jesus Himself declared), “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me.” (John 14:6)

- Cain’s disobedience and rebellion against God’s revealed will was the beginning of Satan’s world system.

Gen. 4:16 says he “went out from the presence of the Lord,” which is a way of saying that he continued on in his unbelief and rebellion.

- By his own decision – by his own volition – he turned away from God and God’s way, and turned to his own way. You say, “Well, he didn’t have a choice.” Of course he did. Gen. 4:6-7 says this, “Then the LORD said to Cain, ‘Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will not your countenance be lifted up? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it.’”

- If Cain had gained victory over the sin that was “crouching at his door” he could have repented and offered the proper sacrifice and have been accepted by God like his brother. But he didn’t do that.

- Listen, we should *not* feel sorry for Cain because he chose to go his own way. He chose to allow sin to control his life. He knew what God wanted and he was able to do that, but he chose instead to do what he himself wanted.

- Interestingly, in the book of Jude, we see false teachers described, and v. 11 says, “Woe to them! For they have gone the way of Cain...” Cain became the symbol of false religion. He is like those of whom Paul wrote in Rom. 10:2-3, “...they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge. For not knowing about God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own,

they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God.”

- Abel offered a better sacrifice because it was from a heart of obedience and faith. His blood sacrifice prefigured the cross.

- MacArthur says, “The first sacrifice was Abel’s lamb—one lamb for one person. Later came the Passover—one lamb for one family. Then came the Day of Atonement—with one lamb for one nation. Finally came Good Friday—one Lamb for the whole world.”

- Well, we *must* move on. Not only do we see the significance of what Abel offered, but secondly we see:

II. WHAT ABEL OBTAINED (v. 4b)

- Go back to v. 4, “By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts...”

- What did Abel obtain? The confirmation from God that he was “righteous.” God testified to him that his gifts were acceptable and that he himself was righteous in His sight.

- You say, “How did God do this? Did he speak to him verbally?” That is certainly possible. The verbal speaking of God seemed to be fairly common in this time period. But I personally believe it was through the consuming of

the offering with fire (even though we are *not* told that in the text). There are at least five other occasions in Scripture where God's acceptance of a sacrifice was confirmed by His sending fire to consume it.

- But whether that is the case or *not*, I believe there was some tangible confirmation given to Abel by God. In fact, there was also some sort of indication from God that Cain's offering was *not* acceptable.

- In other words, God did *not* leave them in doubt as to their standing before Him. He made it clear to both of them, that one of them was righteous in His sight, while the other was rejected and condemned.

- And it's interesting that we see the righteousness of Abel emphasized elsewhere in the NT. In Matt. 23:35 our Lord referred to "the blood of righteous Abel," and the Apostle John says that Abel "was attested as a righteous man." That's 1 John 3:12.

- So here we see the biblical principle of justification by faith, we see the principle of Sola Fide, and we see the principle of imputation. Both Cain and Abel were sinners, but there was a big difference, in that one of them exercised biblical faith while the other did *not*. One was justified in the sight of God and declared righteous while the other was *not*.

- And (of course) Abel was counted as righteous, *not* because he had any inherent righteousness, but because he believed God. He was declared righteous because of

his faith. Although living thousands of years before Christ, he had the righteousness of Christ imputed to his account through saving faith. And that leads us to the final aspect, which is:

III. WHAT ABEL OBJECTIFIED (v. 4c)

- Abel became a symbol of saving faith in a unique way. After Cain killed his brother Abel, the Lord confronted him and said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to Me from the ground." That's Gen. 4:10.

- The author of Hebrews picks up on that in the last part of 11:4. Look at it, "though he is dead, he still speaks." No man stops speaking when he dies. His life continues to have an impact for those who are still living.

- James Moffatt wrote, "Death is never the last word in the life of a...man. When a man leaves this world, be he righteous or unrighteous, he leaves something in the world. He may leave something that will grow and spread like a cancer or a poison, or he may leave something like the fragrance of perfume or a blossom or beauty that permeates the atmosphere with blessing."

- Dead men *do* tell tales. They are *not* silent, but continue to speak to all who will listen. John MacArthur says, "From many thousands of years ago, Abel [still] speaks to 21st century man. This man who lived when the earth was new, who was of the second generation of mankind, has something to teach modern, sophisticated,

technologically-savvy men. He lived in a far distant age, in a far different culture, with far less light from God than we have. But what he has to tell us is more relevant than anything we are likely to read in our current [media].”

- Another pastor wrote, “Some of us will go on speaking words of poison, of anguish and agony. Some of us will go on speaking vile and vicious words that are the result of our rebellion against God and our refusal to allow God into our lives. Cain was like that. [But] some of us will go on speaking words of love and trust, of faith and blessing. Abel was that kind of man.”

- Through the Word of God Abel’s voice still speaks to us. Though he died thousands of years ago, his example of faith in God continues to inspire Christians today. In the same way, Cain becomes a voice of warning to all who are in unbelief and rebellion.

- In Gen. 4:11-12 the Lord said to Cain, “...now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. When you cultivate the ground, it shall no longer yield its strength to you; you shall be a vagrant and a wanderer on the earth.”

- Every bit of soil upon which Cain placed his foot upon cried out to him and reminded him of his wicked deed. The earth, in effect, rejected Cain in the same way that Cain rejected God and his brother. And although his brother was dead, Abel’s blood continued to cry out to him from the ground, and to convict him of the guilt of his sin.

- What’s the message? Don’t be like Cain. Don’t rebel against God and reject His ways. Instead be like Abel. Trust God. Demonstrate true biblical faith.

- The voice of Abel continues (even today) to proclaim three things: 1.) Man comes to God by faith alone, and never by works. 2.) Man must accept and obey God’s revelation above his own reason and self-will. And 3.) Those who reject God’s plan of salvation will be severely judged.

- You might call this, “Abel’s timeless three-point sermon.” He’s still preaching it today – and we still need to heed it. This is a sermon that has been preached for thousands of years, and it is still absolutely relevant. It could be titled, “The Righteous Shall Live by Faith.”

- MAKE APPEAL

- PRAYER