

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Abel: A Primitive Faith

Scripture: Hebrews 11:4

Code: 90-382

We're going to return to our look at Hebrews chapter 11...Hebrews chapter 11, as we have...embarked upon the study of the power of faith, a very foundational study in every sense. In fact, this chapter was written originally under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to help some people who perhaps did not fully understand salvation by faith to understand it better. It was written to some Jews who constituted a congregation somewhere in Israel. They had come to faith in Christ but perhaps didn't fully understand the reality of faith and the role that has always played in salvation. And then, of course, the congregation also had some people there who were a part of the congregation, hanging on the edges who had not yet embraced Christ fully, were still trying to consider this matter of salvation by faith.

The reason that was such a dramatic change for them was because Jewish people had been raised, literally, for centuries in a perversion of Old Testament Judaism, a system of religion that taught them that salvation came to those who earned it...who earned it. And so it's important for them to realize that salvation is by faith alone, not by works, "For by grace are you saved through faith, that not of yourselves, it is a gift of God not of works lest any man should boast," Ephesians 2:8 and 9 says.

So chapter 10 ends with a quote, famous quote from the Old Testament, "The just shall live by faith," or "My righteous ones shall live by faith," verse 38. We then, verse 39 says, are not of those who shrink back to destruction. We don't come all the way to the edge of this understanding of the gospel and salvation by faith, and then feel the pull of Judaism and legalism and fall back into destruction, but rather we persevere in faith to the salvation of the soul.

So clearly the writer of Hebrews has told us that the New Covenant which is the Covenant of salvation, presents salvation by faith and not by works, and he's now going to illustrate that in chapter 11. And the first illustration, after a definition that we looked at last week, the first illustration comes in verse 4 and it is Abel. Look at verse 4, I'll read it to you, "By faith, Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain through which he obtained the testimony that he was righteous. God testifying about his gifts, or receiving his gifts, his sacrifice and through faith though he is dead, he still speaks."

Here we meet the first man who came to God by faith. This is the man who is called Abel. The whole point of the chapter is to let the Jewish people know that salvation by faith is not something new, it is something very, very old. In fact, it goes all the way back to Abel. He is the first one who exercised faith in this way.

You say, "What about Adam and Eve?" Well Adam and Eve aren't examples of faith because they had the privilege before the Fall of sight. You remember it says in 2 Corinthians 5 that we walk by faith and not by sight, but the fact of the matter is that Adam and Eve walked by sight. They walked and talked with God in the cool of the day. They had the presence of God, the Shekinah glory of God with them in the Garden.

Abel, on the other hand, was conceived and born outside Eden. He was conceived and born after the Fall. He was expelled...his family being expelled from the presence of God, he himself was raised in that expelled situation. He had not seen a manifestation of the invisible God. Adam and Eve had seen and believed and I believe were saved, Abel had not seen and yet believed and that is why Abel is the first on the list of faith examples, the first man of faith.

Now we look at this verse that's just one verse, verse 4, and there are three progressive identifications here that are tied to Abel. First of all, he offered a more excellent sacrifice than Cain. Secondly, he obtained testimony that he was righteous, testimony from God who gave that testimony and through faith though he is dead, he still speaks. So he is a model of faith in the sacrifice that he brought. He is a model of faith in the righteousness he received and he is a model of faith as a preacher of faith, even though he is dead, he still speaks. You can call this a sermon from a dead man.

Because he believed, he offered a better sacrifice. Because he offered a better sacrifice, God testified that this was evidence that he had been made righteous. Because he had been made righteous, declared righteous, he is for all ages a living voice, affirming the great truth of chapter 10 verse 38 of Habakkuk 2:4, "The just shall live by faith."

So let's look at those three things. He offered a better sacrifice. He was declared righteous by God...that's a better word than saying he was made righteous, he was actually declared righteous. There was evidence that there was more than just a declaration, but the declaration was complete as righteousness was imputed to his...credited to his account. And he then becomes a model of faith, a preacher of faith to all who know his testimony.

Now in order to see the elements that make up this model of faith, we have to go back to Genesis 4. So let's do that. Back to Genesis 4, we'll dig a little deeper into the story which is told at the outset of this fourth chapter and we'll go back to Hebrews as necessary.

Now I think you're pretty much aware of the account of Genesis 4. We'll hope to fill in a few details as we go. We're not going to take a long time with this tonight, it's a straightforward lesson that the writer gives us.

Chapter 4 begins, "Now the man...that would be Adam...knew his wife." The man knew his wife Eve. I wish the translators had left that alone because in the original it says, "He knew his wife, Eve." It doesn't say, "He had relations with her." Those are different words than the Hebrew words. Hebrew says he knew her. Obviously what that means is that he had sexual relationships with her, but that's for the commentator, not for the translator. It's much better to leave the translation of the actual terms in place.

"So Adam did know his wife in an intimate way and she conceived and gave birth to Cain. And she said, 'I have gotten a man child with the help of the Lord.'"

So here we're introduced to the first child born whose name is Cain, *Qayinis* the root of his name, it means to get...to get. I have gotten a man child. Pretty simple name, indicating that she had gotten a child.

Remember now, Adam and Eve had been thrown out of the Garden. But there was a promise given to them before they left back in chapter 3 verse 15. "Behold...it says there, or rather it says...And I will put enmity between you and the women and between your seed and her seed. He shall bruise you on the head and you shall bruise Him on the heel." This is the promise that the woman would have a seed who would bruise the serpent's head. The promise essentially is that the seed of the woman would come, defeat the enemy who had interrupted fellowship with God and the implication and would then win back the right for men and women to have fellowship with God. The seed of the woman would be used for reconciliation, restoration and recovery.

So before God ever acted in judgment, God displayed mercy before He banished sinners from Eden, He gave them this blessed promise that a woman would have a son who would crush the serpent's head and bring about reconciliation, the very restoration of fellowship that had been forfeited through Satan. Satan had brought the Fall of man and God promises that one would come that would bring about the fall of Satan. By a woman had come sin, by a woman would come the Savior. By a woman paradise was lost and by a woman paradise would be found. There would come the seed of the woman. This is a prophecy concerning Jesus Christ, of course, and the virgin birth because no woman ever had a seed, the seed is in the man. The seed of a woman is a very, very unique promise that there would be a woman who would have in her a seed. We know that to be Mary and the seed being our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

But I'm sure Eve didn't understand all the full implications of that. And it's very possible that when she was pregnant, she assumed that this was the fulfillment of that prophecy. This was the one who would be the seed of the woman who would crush the serpent's head.

The reason we think that could be true is because when the son was born, she gave him the name Cain...the name Cain, I have gotten. Or another way to translate that, "He is here," some commentators suggest. So she may have been thinking he's here, I've gotten the promised seed.

Didn't happen to be true, did it? Far from it. Cain turned out to be the first criminal. Cain turned out to be the first murderer and Adam and Eve, of course, could never have produced the ultimate deliverer. The ultimate deliverer had to be God and that's why the only one who could fulfill this would be the virgin-born Son of God conceived by the Holy Spirit, carried in the womb of Mary, none other than the Holy Child, the Lord Jesus Christ. So it wasn't Cain after all, although she may have thought this was the one that was promised.

Again verse 2, "She gave birth to his brother, Abel." Again, Abel is an interesting name to give to a child. It really reflects a simple word, it's the word breath...breath. Certainly metaphorically it would mean brief, weak and sometimes is translated that way, it is the word *Hebel* and it is a fitting name, for this man's life was like James said, "A vapor that appears for a little time and vanishes away." It was but a breath.

Job spoke of life, Job 7:16, as but a breath. The Psalmist in Psalm 144:4 speaks of life as but a breath. And Abel is a model of that. His life was just a very, very brief breath.

Abel, it says in verse 2, was a keeper of flocks. That word flocks is big enough to include other than sheep. Cain, on the other hand, was a tiller of the ground. So we could conclude one was in animal husbandry, the other was in farming. Both were sinners, both were conceived by fallen parents, Adam and Eve. Both were born after the Fall. Both were born outside the Garden. And this is a...this is human being number 3 and 4. The third and fourth people to live on the earth and I just want to remind you that they are functioning in the full capacities of full humanity.

You say, "Why are you saying that?" I just want you to know that they weren't missing links. It's amazing how evolutionists and even so-called Christians tamper with the account of the book of Genesis and deny that Adam and Eve are real people or that Cain and Abel are real people as we would know them...real human beings as we would know them. But they would like us to believe that they are some form of our animal ancestry. It has been suggested that Genesis can't possibly be true, you can't trust the book of Genesis because the first man, Adam, and the first woman, Eve, would be blubbering barbarous animal-like oafs. They would be incapable of developing tools or skills. They would be living by wild berries and perhaps killing animals or ripping them apart for food. They would be going around banging into each other, grunting and saying, "Ugh," while the man would be smacking the woman in the head with a rock and dragging her off to a cave by the hair. That is utterly incompatible with the text of Scripture which tells us that in six days God created everything and He created it good and He created it complete. And Adam, of course, was eminently intelligent. He was intelligent enough that he could, according to chapter 2 verse 16, eat from anything in the Garden and

in order to make that wonderful food supply everything it should be, verse 15 says, he had the ability to cultivate the Garden and to keep it. He was also intelligent enough to name every single animal that God created with a name that was in some measure consistent with that form of life.

These are intelligent beings, fully human. In fact, I'm convinced that they were far more intelligent than we are. I mean, the accumulated effects of the Fall over these thousands of years since Adam has to be a diminishing effect. The law of entropy says everything is breaking down. Evil men grow worse and worse. We probably have diminished brain faculties. What do they tell us? The most erudite person uses less than ten percent of his or her brain. What in the world are we doing wasting the other ninety percent? And perhaps in this culture people are using about one percent of it. We were watching the dumbing down...the intentional dumbing down of culture, humanity. But it's very likely that they were extremely intelligent. When you stop to think about the fact that those people lived to be almost a thousand years old, their accumulated knowledge would be beyond our comprehension...beyond our comprehension, knowledge accumulated by years and years of experience, empirical pragmatic experience.

These two sons lived in a civilized home. These two sons had the knowledge of tools. They could domesticate and care for animals, slay animals, provide food, make sure they perpetuated their herds, flocks. They had the skill to make tools and to plant and harvest and grind and produce grain and make food products. There are critics who have said that Abel could never have had vessels to carry milk, nor means of shearing or killing sheep, nor means of spinning wool. Cain could never have had a hatchet. Hatchets didn't come until far down the evolutionary process, never could have cut or fashioned timber. By the way, no animal does that except in a very primitive sense. Cain, the critics say, could never have developed tools for plowing, could never have developed a mill to grind corn, or skill to preserve it when harvested, store it, turn it into all kinds of food. But that in fact was exactly what they did. One of them cared for animals and the other was a farmer. And they did it the way it's done today, only probably did it a lot better.

When Cain and Abel arrived in the world, just as when Adam and Eve arrived in the world, they knew all they needed to know...fully developed human beings with all their faculties in the image of God. I sometimes think that that faculty which is most unique to God is creativity, a faculty that doesn't belong to anything in the plant or animal kingdom...belongs exclusively to human beings. They were not howling, drooling, hairy, peanut-brained, wild people grunting around Eden, or even outside of Eden.

Scientist Hardy from Canada said, "The search for the missing link is Mr. Hyde at its best. If the evolutionist was using a scientific approach, he would be looking for at least three million missing links for that's the estimate of how many are needed to prove his theory. Dead or alive, they can't produce a single scientifically acceptable trace of intermediate life."

Oh they've tried, haven't they? You went to school, did you hear about the Nebraska man? Found out that the Nebraska man was the composite from a pig's tooth. Or maybe you read about the Colorado man, it was the composite from a horse tooth they finally admitted. Or maybe the Colorado ape man who was the man composed of the head of somebody's pet monkey. Or the Piltdown man, Mr. Piltdown, it turned out, had borrowed the skull of a modern ape.

Or maybe you heard about the Heidelberg man who was three million years old and it was finally conceded that it was a jawbone of a quite human man. Or maybe you heard about the Java man who was a half a million, or Neanderthal man, or have you been listening lately to the findings about Lucey and all the other people that they supposedly offer as missing links? There are no missing links. These are fully functioning human beings.

That takes us then to verses 3 and 4 is where we get in to the real story. "So it came about in the course of time," literally it says, "at the end of days." And it's a kind of definite expression and I'll comment on that in a minute. "It came about in the course of time that Cain brought an offering to the Lord of the fruit of the ground. 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."

Now the testimony of Hebrews chapter 11 and verse 4 is that Abel is a model of faith. He is a model of faith. And now we're coming to where that obedient act of faith occurred. He comes to worship God and he worships appropriately, demonstrating faith. That is what Hebrews 11:4 says, he by faith offered a better sacrifice.

Before we look at the reason that is an act of faith, let's kind of back up a little bit and get the full picture. In regard to the act of worship that is described here, there are some components to it that I think are very interesting. First, there was a place where God was to be worshiped. There was a place. "So it came about in the course of time that Cain brought an offering to the Lord. And Abel also brought his offering." They brought an offering to the Lord. There had to have been a place identified. Where exactly is this place? We don't know. We know they are somewhere east of the Garden of Eden, verse 24 of chapter 3, and they are kept out of the Garden of Eden. Having been expelled from the Garden, however, God has established a place. I guess you could say this is the first Mercy Seat...the first Mercy Seat. You know, it may well have been that it is being described to us in verse 24, "He stationed the cherubim and the flaming sword which turned every direction to guard to the way of the Tree of Life." It may well have been at the east edge of Eden where the Lord set up the Cherubim with the flaming sword was the Mercy Seat, was the place of meeting. Maybe the sword, the flaming sword was the symbol of divine presence. Maybe that's where they went and God had provided an altar there. But somewhere, that's the likeliest place, God had provided a place where the sinner could meet Him.

It is interesting that there was also a time for worship. Verse 3 gives a very specific phrase, "It came about in the course of time...at the end of days." Perhaps it was the end of a certain week or the end of a certain month a certain set day for atonement to be made. God is a God of order. And apparently He had prescribed a specific period of time for them to come to the Mercy Seat, to the place where they would meet God and offer their sacrifices.

So, there is a place and there is a time and there is a way. There is a way to worship. Abel understood the way and obeyed it. On his part in verse 4, he brought the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions and the Lord had regard for Abel and for his offering. On the other hand, but for Cain who, according to verse 3, had brought an offering to the Lord of the fruit of the ground, he felt no regard. So there is a place and there is a time which God has identified as the time of atonement. And there is a way to worship. God is to be approached only by sacrifice.

These two sons of Adam and Even had been definitely instructed that there was a place and there was a time and there was a way. How would Abel have known to bring an animal sacrifice if it had not been revealed? And why was Cain rejected when he brought other than that if it was not an act of self-will and disobedience? Neither Cain nor Abel could have known anything about sacrifice unless God had revealed that to them. And when Hebrews 11:4 says, "By faith Abel offered an acceptable sacrifice," faith in what? Faith in the revelation of God. Faith comes by hearing, does it not? You believe what God has said.

This is not some kind of nebulous faith. This is the faith that says, "I have heard God speak and I believe it is true and I will obey." It was not a whim. It was not a self-styled sacrifice. He had been told by God that God required a sacrifice. He believed that and he evidenced his faith by obeying God's revealed will. And that is why he is a model of faith. He heard the truth, he believed the truth, he obeyed the truth. He worshiped the way God had ordained worship to be done.

There was a little preview of this that perhaps had come down to both these boys. You remember that back in chapter 3 when Adam and Even were naked in the Garden and had no permanent covering, verse 21 says, "The Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them." This was the first death in history. This is the first death in history, it's the death of an animal. And the one who slew the animal was none other than God and God slew the animal in order to take the skin and cover the nakedness of the two sinners.

So here is the model of sacrifice. Here is a model of covering. Certainly would have been well known to these two boys. So it may well have been it isn't some kind of late information that the sacrifice needs to be brought to God, rather than an offering of vegetables or fruit. They may have known it for a long time. Perhaps the story of God covering them had been told by their parents on many occasions.

Now this is not to say that God rejects all fruit offerings, grain offerings, vegetable offerings. You have in the book of Leviticus a number of them. In fact, Leviticus 19:24 says, "In the fourth year, all the fruit thereof shall be holy with which to praise the Lord." There were times when fruit and grain was to be brought to the Lord. There were grain offerings, as you well know, in Leviticus, bloodless offerings. But the first and primary offering and the only one which could atone for sin was the blood sacrifice.

So we see that Abel did what God required. That's the first thing about his act of faith, he brought the right sacrifice that was required by God. This is an act of obedient faith. By faith then he brought a more excellent sacrifice than Cain. It was better because it was blood and it was better because it was required as a sacrifice for sin.

In a real sense, it was a picture, of course, as we all know of the greater sacrifice that would be offered by Christ. Hebrews 12:24 says, "Jesus is the mediator of a New Covenant, sprinkled blood which speaks better than the blood of Abel." The blood of Abel was the right sacrifice at the time. The blood of Christ is far superior to the blood sacrifice offered by Abel.

I want you to notice also that Abel's was not just a blood sacrifice, but he brought, according to verse 4, the firstlings of his flock and their fat portions. This is long before the Mosaic Law comes and God says, "I want the lamb without blemish and without spot, I want the best that you have." But from the heart, Abel acting in obedient faith does what God has told him to do and brings the very, very best of the animals that he has.

Abel believed God, approached God on God's terms in the divinely appointed way. On the other hand, Cain didn't do that. He didn't believe that he needed to bring a sacrifice, though it had been established by God that that was required. He thought he could approach God on his own terms, his own self-styled sacrifice could be brought, that which reflected his farming trade and skill. He didn't recognize apparently the need for atonement, and that's the bigger issue. He didn't recognize the need for atonement. I think these boys knew that death and atonement and covering were required by God. And I think, as I said, it went back to the sacrifice that God had made to cover their parents and I think their parents probably told them the theology of that many times. I think Abel understood that he was sinful. I think Abel understood that he needed an atonement, that he needed a sacrifice, that blood needed to be shed in order to cover his sins.

On the other hand, Cain didn't acknowledge his sin, didn't acknowledge the need for blood sacrifice and atonement. Thought he could approach God without sacrifice, without atonement on his own terms. Jude 11 calls this the way of Cain...the way of false religion. Cain is the first purveyor of false religion. He's the father of all false religion, invented ways to God, invented schemes to please God, and they all fail...they all fail.

It's interesting to think about. There's not a commentary here about the general character of Cain as over against the general character of Abel. It doesn't tell us anything about whether Cain was really a bad egg and Abel was a good guy. It doesn't give us some kind of record of their activities and just how good or bad they were. It doesn't tell us anything about that. Because, you see, no matter how good you are, you can't be saved by any of your own efforts and your own work. It can only come if you recognize you're a sinner and desperately require a blood sacrifice and an atonement. So it's really immaterial whether Abel was a little bit of a better guy than Cain. No one is good enough.

So, Cain is the father of false religion. Abel is the father, if you will, of true religion, recognize the sin, the need for sacrifice, comes to God desiring atonement, understanding blood which then, of course, looks forward to the coming of Christ and His shedding of His blood on the cross as an atonement for our sins. Cain then fails to acknowledge the fact of sin. He fails to acknowledge the need for sacrifice for sin. He fails to obey God and consequently he is rejected. He is rejected. Verse 5, "For Cain and his offering, God had no regard." Absolutely no regard.

He went out from God. He dwelt, it tells us toward the end of the chapter, verse 16, in the land of Nod, east of Eden, out from the presence of the Lord. That's where all the people of false religion end up...out of the presence of the Lord. And he built a city, Cain did, the first city of man, the beginning of the world system. False religion is in league with the world system. He chose to go his own way, apart from what God had required.

It takes us down to verse 6. "The Lord said to Cain who is angry," end of verse 5, we should pick that up, "So Cain became very angry, angry at God, angry at his brother, and his face fell." It showed up on his countenance. "In his fury, the Lord comes to him." All this may be going on right at the Mercy Seat, right on the eastern edge of Eden, right under the guarding Cherubim and the flaming sword. And Cain shows his fury on his face. "And the Lord said to Cain, 'Why are you angry? Why has your countenance fallen?'"

The Lord's not looking for information. He wants to hear from Cain. He wants to touch his heart. And so in verse 7 He actually extends an invitation to him. "If you do well, will not your countenance be lifted up? Or if you do right, surely you will be accepted." Another way to translate that...if you do right. Why don't you just do what is right? Why don't you just bring an animal sacrifice? Go to your brother, negotiate with him, purchase an animal, he may give you one, bring that animal. God gives Cain the invitation to obey. This is the Mercy Seat after all, this is an invitation to forgiveness, this is an invitation to joy, this is an invitation to life. If you do well, you'll be accepted. If you do what is right, if you do what you've been told.

On the other hand, if you do not do well, if you continue in the path you're in, sin is crouching at the door and its desire is for you, but you must master it. You either master sin and do what's right or sin is

going to eat you alive. It is crystal clear in this verse that these men knew what God required. God doesn't have to explain what they were to do, He just says do what you know is right. There is no ignorance here. Abel's sacrifice of an animal was not some kind of accident. Cain's was not some kind of accident in which neither of them knew what God wanted. Abel acted righteously because he acted obediently to the Word of God in faith, believing the Word of God and believing that if he came with a penitent heart, acknowledging his sin and knowing he needed a blood sacrifice for his sin, he would be accepted.

Cain, on the other hand, was evil and wouldn't admit it, didn't think he needed a sacrifice for his sin, didn't believe the Word of God was important, didn't obey the Word of God, was rejected. But even at that point, it's amazing that God gives him this invitation and invites him to think it through and do what's right.

Listen to 1 John 3:12, "Not as Cain who was of the evil one and slew his brother. And for what reason did he slay him? Because his deeds were evil and his brother's were righteous."

Cain was of Satan. Cain's life was evil. His deeds were evil. And this is a reflection of the evil of his heart.

Does that mean when it says Abel was righteous in that passage that somehow on his own he could please God? No. Relatively he must have been a better guy, but that in itself, as I said, was not enough. He still needed to recognize his sin and need for a blood sacrifice as an atonement.

I guess you could say the message was this, you're sinners, sinners need to be covered. Sinners cannot cover themselves. God must provide the covering and the covering will be provided by death. That is what was revealed. And so God in His mercy at that Mercy Seat says to Cain, "Why don't you just do what is right? If you don't sin which is already like a lion crouching at the door is going to pounce on you and destroy you."

"Dear friends," Dr. Barnhouse used to say, "At this point in the Bible, the highway to the cross began to be built." The highway to the cross began to be built right here. It would be one lamb for one man. Later at the Passover it would be one lamb for one family. Then on the Day of Atonement it would be one lamb for the nation. And then at Calvary it would be one lamb for the world. This is where the life of faith really begins. It begins with the acknowledging of sin and the need of an atoning sacrifice.

Abel bows to the truth. The truth is he's a sinner. The truth is he's under the sentence of death. The truth is God has designed a substitute for His place. The truth is bring that offering and God will provide forgiveness. And that's exactly what he did.

Cain, on the other hand, is the first hypocrite, the first religious phony, refuses to obey the revealed will of God, cloaks his rebellion, however, in a religious activity, shows up in the presence of God with an offering. Sought to patronize God again. This is the way of Cain in Jude 11, the way of false religion. This is the way of the Pharisees and all other false religionists.

The first thing we learn about Abel is that he brought a more excellent sacrifice because it was what God required. The second thing we learn about in Hebrews 11 verse 4 is that God testified that he was righteous. God testified that he was righteous. And this is so very foundational in the gospel because it is when we come to Christ who is our sacrifice, when we recognize that we are sinners and that Jesus paid in full the penalty for our sin and we embrace that by faith, we believe that and we act on that, and, as it were, we come to the altar and embrace the sacrifice of Christ as our own sacrifice, being offered to God, it is at that moment that God gives testimony that we are then declared righteous. And that is exactly what happened.

If you can find your way all the way back to Hebrews chapter 11, just for a moment, any way, you read there that because he offered to God a better sacrifice, a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, he obtained the testimony that he was righteous. Testimony from whom? God testifying about his gifts. And this would indicate perhaps that there was more than one. Maybe there was more than one such occasion of such offerings. That would make sense, wouldn't it? Since the only single sacrifice that satisfied God was the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ. Every other sacrifice had to be repeated and repeated and repeated.

God did not respect Abel for what was in Abel. God did not respect Abel because there was something personally attractive about him. God respected Abel because of his offering, because he believed God's revelation about the necessary blood sacrifice. Abel was as much a sinner as Cain. He was as liable to eternal judgment as Cain. But he believed God, he obeyed God and that faith was counted to him for righteousness. And here you have the first time that we have a record in Scripture of righteousness being credited to the account of an obedient sinner. This is such a monumental thing. It is credited to his account. God gives testimony that this man, Abel, has attained righteousness. His act, an act of faith, was an act which brought a very righteousness of God to cover him. It is the stunning foundation, isn't it, of understanding the doctrine of justification. Abel honored God, brought the right sacrifice. God honored Abel, imputed righteousness to him. Imagine having God give testimony that you are righteous.

I would like to encourage you by saying if you've put your trust not in an animal sacrifice like Abel did because that was what God designed for then, but if you put your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, the perfect sacrifice, God will give open testimony that you are now righteous. He will impute His righteousness to you, credit it to your account, cover you with the very robe of His own righteousness as Isaiah put it. I love that, 2 Corinthians 5:21, "He became sin for us that we might be made righteous in Him, that His righteousness might become ours, the righteousness of God in Him."

So, first of all, he offered the right sacrifice. Secondly then, he is credited with righteousness. First Samuel 2:30, God says, "Them that honor Me, I will honor." And what greater honor could God ever grant to anyone then to bestow upon that person His own righteousness. Again we should be reminded of Philippians 3, I won't take time to go there, where Paul says he spent all his life trying to achieve a righteousness of his own, and then he met Christ, he embraced Christ as his substitute, as his blood sacrifice. He embraced Christ as his offering on the Mercy Seat on the altar and he received a righteousness, he says, "not of my own, the very righteousness of God given to me."

He received witness, is another way to translate that in 11:4. Affirmation from God, more than affirmation, declaration from God, proclamation from God. God affirms openly before all the hosts of heaven that righteousness has now been granted to this penitent sinner.

Well the other side of the story, of course, is Cain. Cain's given an opportunity, as I pointed out in verses 6 and 7, to do what's right. He has really no interest in doing that. God is offering him mercy. God is saying, "Cain, come again to My altar. Offer the right sacrifice in obedient faith and you'll be accepted if you don't sin, which is crouching at your door like a beast is going to devour you."

He makes his choice, verse 8. "Cain," the NAS says "Told Abel his brother," simply means talked to. He went to Abel to talk to him. "And it came about when they were in the field..." The time is past. They've left this place of sacrifice and they're in the field. "That Cain rose up against Abel, his brother, and killed him." As I said, this is the first human death, first crime, first murder. He knew exactly what he was doing.

Some people have suggested, "Well he didn't even know what he was doing because nobody had ever seen death." Oh yeah, they had seen death. They had just seen death. He knew exactly what happens when you deliver a certain kind of wound to a living being because one had just been delivered at the place of sacrifice. This is not some "Oops, what happened here?" He knew exactly what he was doing. He knew what life was and he knew what death was. He had just seen it. If not, on other occasions. Cain yielded, however, to Satan. He is of the evil one, as I just read you from 1 John 3:12, so he yields to the evil one. He is of his father, the devil, who is a murderer from the beginning, John 8:44. He yields and he knows exactly what he was doing and he kills his brother.

And the Lord steps in. And these are such familiar expressions to us. "The Lord said to Cain, 'Where is Abel, your brother?' And he said, 'I don't know.'" Now he's compounded his murder with...what?...a lie. "I don't know, am I my brother's keeper?"

"He said, 'What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to Me from the ground.'" The most important two words in there are "to Me." God is personally, profoundly grieved, exercised, angered over this murder. And the voice of the very blood itself is crying to Him from the ground.

Capital punishment has not yet be introduced. It doesn't come until chapter 9. For here the punishment is perhaps worse. "Now you're cursed from the ground. You've prided yourself on your farming, the tilling of the ground, you're cursed from the ground which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. When you cultivate the ground, it will no longer yield its strength to you." In other words, you're never going to be able to far successfully again the rest of your life. You'll never show up at another worship opportunity with any more of your own produce, you'll never have anymore. You will be a vagrant and a wanderer on the earth, homeless, alone, a wanderer. And you'll never get away from what is chasing you.

"Cain said to the Lord, 'My punishment is too great to bear. Behold, You have driven me this day from the face of the ground and from Your face I will be hidden. And I will be a vagrant and a wanderer on the earth and whoever finds me will kill me. Every rock would hide an enemy, every shadow, an avenger.'" He would have this aimless, wandering, useless life.

The sad reality here is there's no penitence. You don't hear any penitence, you just hear, "My punishment is too great to bear." No sorrow for sin. Nothing like, "Is it too late? Can I...can I come again with the right sacrifice?" There is remorse. He wants to avoid the consequences. There's remorse, there's no repentance. And so, his guilt is just going to bite him and bite him and chew on him the rest of his life. And he's not going to be able to die, verse 15, "The Lord said to him, 'Therefore, whoever kills Cain, vengeance will be taken on him sevenfold.'" Pass that around. "And the Lord appointed a sign for Cain so that no one finding him would slay him."

So there's a degree of mercy in this, isn't there? Because there's always the hope that along the way somewhere this guy would come to his senses. He's the first apostate. He's the first purveyor of false religion. Did he recognize the existence of God? Absolutely. Did he recognize the power of God? Yes. Did he recognize the sovereignty of God? Yes. Did he recognize that God was to be worshiped? Yes. Did he recognize the God of the harvest? Yes. He did not recognize the God who required a blood sacrifice because he did not want to recognize his own sin. And as I said, his wickedness takes its final step in verse 16 when he goes out from the presence of the Lord, as far as we know never to return and settles as a wanderer in the land of Nod, east of Eden.

What a lesson for these Hebrews in this congregation to hear if they're struggling with his faith the way or is it works....this would be pretty powerful, wouldn't it? I mean, if you're struggling with a do I establish a relationship with God that will get me into heaven by faith or by works? This is all you need, isn't it? This is enough. If you don't recognize your own sin and dependence upon the sacrifice that God has established in Christ as the only way of salvation, you're...you're hopeless. You can't do it by your own effort.

So by faith Abel offered a more excellent sacrifice. By faith God credited to Abel's account righteousness. On the other hand, by works Cain offers an unacceptable sacrifice, false religion and

is damned.

There's one final comment to make about Abel and it's there in Hebrews 11. And it is simply that he is a preacher of the value of faith, of the necessity of faith, of the excellence of faith. Through faith, though he's dead, he still speaks. In what sense does he speak? He speaks to us about the necessity of faith, believing God. I guess the irony is this. He...Cain thought that he had silenced his brother, huh? Cain thought that he had silenced his brother. Cain thought that he had stilled his brother's voice. But he hadn't. In fact, his brother's blood was speaking and it was speaking to God. So there is a sense in which Abel is even a preacher of judgment. Abel's blood is crying out to God for vengeance. Abel warns us that there is an avenger.

And then he speaks to men...to all who read his story and it's a three-point sermon. If you want to come to God, you come only by faith in His Word and obedience to what He asks and not by your own works. That's point one. You come by faith which means, point two, you can't ignore what God has said. You have to believe it and act upon it.

Thirdly, you have to recognize the need for sacrifice to cover your sin. Though dead, Abel is a preacher. As I said, it's a sermon of a dead man. Preacher of a timeless sermon, the just shall live by faith and those who try to come to God in any other way will be destroyed.

Let's pray.

Lord, thank You for a wonderful evening together in Your Word and really riveting look at these two brothers and especially the model of Abel. This is just the first of many, many in this chapter. Help us to understand salvation comes by faith alone, confession of sin, repentance, and the embracing of an acceptable sacrifice which is now namely Jesus Christ, the Mediator of a better Covenant, the one whose blood, as we read, is better than the sacrifice Abel offered, the one who with one offering perfected forever them that are sanctified. By one offering purged our sins and sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high. What lessons we learn about faith from this man, the first model of faith.

I pray, Lord, if there are any here tonight who are still counting on their own works, their own efforts, who have not yet recognized their sin and the need by faith to embrace Christ as the only sacrifice for sin and come in obedience to proclaim Him as Lord, that it would happen tonight. Do that mighty work in hearts, we pray in Christ's name. Amen.

Available online at: <http://www.gty.org>

COPYRIGHT (C) 2013 Grace to You

You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (<http://www.gty.org/connect/copyright>).