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Sermon Notes

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## **The Faith of Abel: Offering a Better Sacrifice**

### **Hebrews 11:4**

The Principle of Sacrifice:

Throughout the Book of Hebrews we have studied the end of the animal sacrificial system...

Some basic principles have emerged from that study:

- 1) Without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness for sins
- 2) The blood of bulls and goats can never take away sin
- 3) Animal sacrifice was established by God to picture the final sacrifice of Jesus Christ
- 4) Christ's sacrifice on the cross was once for all time, infinitely superior to animal sacrifice
- 5) Animal sacrifice is now obsolete, and will be forever

BUT... these lessons all center on the issue of SALVATION... the removal of human sin

There is another issue still relevant to sacrifice... the issue of RELIGION, of human LOVE OFFERINGS to God as an expression of worship, love, devotion, thanksgiving

So the constant offering of animal sacrifice in the Old Testament represents an aspect of a faith-filled walk with God that is still before us... that God expects His children to offer costly sacrifices to Him still... those sacrifices are to be offered by faith... and in this Abel is a prime example from Hebrews 11:4

In Jesus Christ, we have the END of animal sacrifice... in Abel, we have the beginning of it

From Abel we can learn still even now how we may offer to God pleasing sacrifices, even though the time for animals is over forever

## I. Basic Principle of Relationship with God (vs. 6)

***Hebrews 11:6 And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.***

- A. Basic Goal: Pleasing God
- B. Second Statement of Basic Goal: Coming to God
- C. Third Statement of Basic Goal: Being Rewarded by God
- D. Summation: “What is required for me to be pleasing to God, to come to God, to be rewarded by Him?”
- E. Double Negative Assertion
  - 1. Without faith... this is IMPOSSIBLE
- F. Making it Positive: Faith is REQUIRED in order to please God... in order to come to God... in order to be rewarded by God
- G. Applying this to Abel, Enoch, and Noah
- H. HOW Do We Know This Is True?
- I. The Hiddenness of God and the Goodness of God
- J. What is the REWARD?
- K. What are the Rewards?

## II. Abel: Faith’s Worship (vs. 4)

***Hebrews 11:4 By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was commended as a righteous man, when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith he still speaks, even though he is dead.***

- A. The Beginning of the History of Faith
  - 1. Abel’s sacrifice was a first in two significant ways...
  - 2. It was the first animal sacrifice offered to God by a human being
  - 3. It was the first act of faith-filled worship... the first example of a faith-directed action
- B. The Beginning of Animal Sacrifice

1. God covered naked Adam and naked Eve with animal skins... of course, that meant an animal had to die
2. But Genesis 4 records the beginning of human patterns of worship, and at the core of it was animals sacrifice

***Genesis 4:2-4 Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil. <sup>3</sup> In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the LORD. <sup>4</sup> But Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock.***

3. What moved Abel to do this??? Surely not natural reason...

A.W. Pink: "Neither carnal reason nor personal inclinations could have moved Abel to present a bleeding lamb for God's acceptance."

4. it is absolutely certain that Abel was acting in obedience to the command of God

a. evidence from the text:

***Genesis 4:6-7 Then the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? <sup>7</sup> If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it."***

b. evidence from the theology of faith

***<sup>ESV</sup> Romans 10:17 So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.***

- c. God must had told Abel all about sacrifice... what he was to do, what it was for, what it signified
  - d. Abel HEARD and BELIEVED
5. Five things Abel must have understood by faith about the animal sacrifice
    - a. God was righteous in driving fallen man out of the Garden of Eden
    - b. He (Abel) was a guilty sinner, and that death was what he truly deserved
    - c. God is holy and must punish sin
    - d. God is merciful and is willing to accept the death of an innocent substitute in his place
    - e. Sinners like Abel must ultimately look to Christ—the true Lamb of God who was to come later—for acceptance with God

C. Was Abel Looking to Christ??

1. Moses was looking to Christ (Hebrews 11:26)
2. Jesus said Abraham was looking to Christ
3. John says Isaiah saw Jesus' glory and spoke about him
4. Hebrews 11:4 says Abel offered his sacrifice BY FAITH
5. Conclusion: God had already revealed to Abel in some basic way the connection between animal sacrifice and Christ

D. Faith Transforms the Heart, Produces Obedience... and Obedience is Worship

***Genesis 4:4 The LORD looked with favor on Abel and his offering***

1. FIRST... God looked with favor on Abel; Abel HIMSELF as a man was pleasing to God
2. What can make a sinner PLEASING to God? What can transform our standing with God so that He views us as righteous? What can work in our hearts so that we are offering our worship in a manner pleasing to God?
3. Answer in every case: FAITH IN CHRIST
4. Once Abel himself was pleasing to God, then his offering would also be pleasing to God

E. The Comparison with Cain

***Hebrews 11:4 By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did.***

***Genesis 4:3-5 In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the LORD. <sup>4</sup> But Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The LORD looked with favor on Abel and his offering, <sup>5</sup> but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor.***

1. Abel's offering was called a "better" one than Cain's... or (KJV) more excellent
2. In Cain, we see the example of the FIRST RELIGIOUS HYPOCRITE
  - a. He refused to comply with the commandments of God
  - b. BUT cloaked his rebellion by coming to God to offer a sacrifice of his own making, of his own imagination

- c. Cain's was the first FALSE RELIGION or CULT... at the center of all false religion is human invention
- d. God did not tell Cain to offer vegetables... Cain took that upon himself
- e. The ultimate end of this self-styled worship was human sacrifice to Baal

***Jeremiah 19:5 They have built the high places of Baal to burn their sons in the fire as offerings to Baal-- something I did not command or mention, nor did it enter my mind.***

- 3. THUS... Cain and Abel stand as two representative men
  - a. Cain represents those who honor God with their lips and their outer religion, but their hearts are far from him
  - b. Abel represented Christ's true people... instructed by God's word, justified by faith, obedient from the heart, pleasing to God
- 4. Attributes of Abel's offering compared with Cain
  - a. Abel's offering was done IN OBEDIENCE to God's revealed will; Cain's was not
  - b. Abel's offering was made BY FAITH; Cain's was not
  - c. Abel's offering was made from a TRANSFORMED HEART resulting in a willing mind and love for God; Cain's was not
    - i) Abel offered God his BEST... the "fat portions from some of the firstborn of the flock"
    - ii) These were the most precious and valuable things he had to offer
    - iii) Contrast that with the grudging offering made by the priests of Malachi's time...

***Malachi 1:6-11 "A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If I am a father, where is the honor due me? If I am a master, where is the respect due me?" says the LORD Almighty. "It is you, O priests, who show contempt for my name. "But you ask, 'How have we shown contempt for your name?' "You place defiled food on my altar. "But you ask, 'How have we defiled you?' "By saying that the LORD's table is contemptible. "When you bring blind animals for sacrifice, is that not wrong? When you sacrifice crippled or diseased animals, is that not wrong? Try offering them to your governor! Would he be pleased with you? Would he accept you?" says the LORD Almighty. "Now implore God to be gracious to us. With such offerings from your hands, will he accept you?"-- says the LORD Almighty. "Oh, that one of you would shut***

*the temple doors, so that you would not light useless fires on my altar! I am not pleased with you," says the LORD Almighty, "and I will accept no offering from your hands. <sup>11</sup> My name will be great among the nations, from the rising to the setting of the sun. In every place incense and pure offerings will be brought to my name, because my name will be great among the nations," says the LORD Almighty.*

- iv) This is the spirit of Cain... grudging God, burdened by the need for the religious ritual, Cain was NOT PLEASING to God

***Genesis 4:5 on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor.***

- d. Abel's offering prefigured Christ, and Cain's did not
  - i) Hebrews taught us an important lesson about sacrifices

***Hebrews 9:22 ... without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.***

- ii) Cain's offering of vegetables did not prefigure Christ

#### 5. Lessons from a comparison of Cain and Abel's sacrifices

- a. To serve God acceptably, we must set aside all human inventions and ingenuity, lean not on our own understanding, and cling closely to what He has commanded in His word
- b. All obedience, service, and worship must proceed from faith, or it is displeasing to God
- c. We must serve God with the BEST we have; the best of our abilities, the best of our possessions; out of LOVE for God, we must serve wholeheartedly
- d. In all our religious actions and duties, we must do it continually by FAITH IN CHRIST... a constant focus on the person and work of Christ, for only by His sacrifice for us can any of our sacrifices be pleasing to God

#### F. The Commendation of Abel's Faith

***<sup>ESV</sup> Hebrews 11:4 By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts.***

1. BY MEANS of the sacrifice he offered by faith, Abel was commended as righteous
2. The commendation came in Scripture... but the deeper issue is GOD'S STANCE toward Abel

3. This is again the doctrine of justification by faith alone... no sinner in history has ever been commended by the Holy God except on the basis of Christ's perfect sacrifice and our faith in that sacrifice
4. God gave a firstfruits testimony by accepting his gifts
5. How do we know God accepted Abel's gifts? Perhaps God simply spoke from heaven in a heavenly voice and said "I accept your gifts"
6. A.W. Pink thinks this:

"It may be that the Lord evidenced His acceptance of Abel's offering (and thereby testified that he was righteous) by causing fire to descend from heaven and consume the sacrifice."

***Leviticus 9:24 Fire came out from the presence of the LORD and consumed the burnt offering and the fat portions on the altar. And when all the people saw it, they shouted for joy and fell facedown.***

***1 Kings 18:38-39 Then the fire of the LORD fell and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones and the soil, and also licked up the water in the trench. <sup>39</sup> When all the people saw this, they fell prostrate and cried, "The LORD-- he is God! The LORD-- he is God!"***

***Judges 6:21-22 With the tip of the staff that was in his hand, the angel of the LORD touched the meat and the unleavened bread. Fire flared from the rock, consuming the meat and the bread. And the angel of the LORD disappeared. <sup>22</sup> When Gideon realized that it was the angel of the LORD, he exclaimed, "Ah, Sovereign LORD! I have seen the angel of the LORD face to face!"***

BUT there is no certainty on this point.

7. In any case, Abel walked away from that offering with assurance of God's favor, and Cain did not

**Key Lesson: Our Person's Must Be First Justified Before Our Works of Obedience Can be Accepted by God.**

G. How Abel Continues to Speak Even Though He Is Dead

***Hebrews 11:4 And by faith he still speaks, even though he is dead.***

1. We all know how Abel died...

***Genesis 4:8 Now Cain said to his brother Abel, "Let's go out to the field." And while they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him.***

2. We know the significance of that death

***1 John 3:12 Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother's were righteous.***

3. Hebrews focuses on Abel NOW AFTER DEATH!!

- a. The verse tells us HE STILL SPEAKS, even though he is dead
- b. And it says he does so BY FAITH

4. Two ways to understand this

- a. His example still speak in Scripture because it was recorded for all time and all generations of people

***Matthew 26:13 I tell you the truth, wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her."***

- b. He himself still speaks, though he is absent from the body
  - i) Murderers can kill the body but not the soul

***Matthew 10:28 Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul.***

- ii) God is not the God of the dead but of the living...

***Matthew 22:31-32 But about the resurrection of the dead-- have you not read what God said to you, <sup>32</sup> 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not the God of the dead but of the living."***

- iii) Heaven is made up of people who are disembodied spirits

***Hebrews 12:23 You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect***

- iv) Scripture testifies to martyrs speaking in heaven

***Revelation 6:9-10 When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained. <sup>10</sup> They called out in a loud voice, "How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?"***

5. In any case... faith-filled lives LIVE FOREVER and SPEAK FOREVER

Next week: we'll look at Enoch, who walked with God by faith; and Noah, who by faith and holy fear built an ark to save his family

### III. Application

A. Come to Christ NOW... BY FAITH

B. Meditate Daily on Hebrews 11:6

1. Understand that, first and foremost, God wants you to live BY FAITH
2. Set your heart on PLEASING GOD BY FAITH
3. Seek Him vigorously, every single moment of the day
4. Seek God and make Him your treasure and your pleasure
5. Don't get sucked into the god-substitutes Tim Keller listed...living for a relationship or family or pleasures or a career or a "noble cause" or societal approval or possessions
6. Live totally focused by faith on God

C. FEED YOUR FAITH by the word of God

D. Understand True Worship in the Pattern of Abel

1. Based on the finished work of Christ... the time for animal sacrifice is OVER
2. BUT we come in the name of Christ, trusting that His sacrifice on the cross has atoned for our sins
3. By faith we offer to God a BETTER SACRIFICE than Cain did
4. Based on the finished work of Christ, we make OUR SACRIFICES to God by faith
  - a. Romans 12:1 We offer our bodies as living sacrifice, holy and PLEASING to God (and without faith it is impossible to please God)

***Romans 12:1 Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God-- this is your spiritual act of worship.***

- b. 1 Peter 2:5 we see ourselves as a royal priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God BY FAITH

***1 Peter 2:5 you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.***

- c. Ephesians 5:2 we live a life of love as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God

***Ephesians 5:2 live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.***

- d. 2 Timothy 4:6 we are willing to be poured out as a drink offering even to death for the cause of the gospel

***2 Timothy 4:6 For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure.***

- e. Philippians 4:18 we make our money a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, PLEASING TO GOD (and without faith it is impossible to please God)

***Philippians 4:18 I have received full payment and even more; I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God.***

- f. Hebrews 13:15 we offer through Jesus continually a sacrifice of praise, the fruit of lips that confess His name

***Hebrews 13:15 Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise-- the fruit of lips that confess his name.***

- g. Hebrews 13:16 we do good and share with others, for with such sacrifices God is PLEASED (and without faith it is impossible to please God)

***Hebrews 13:16 And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.***