The Blood Cries Out (Religious, but Wrong)

Hebrews 10:38, “Now the just shall live by faith; But if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him."

Hebrews 11:4, By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks."

“The Just shall live by faith.” These powerful words encapsulating the heart of Christianity are first presented in Habakkuk 2:4. They are reiterated in Romans 1:17, Galatians 3:11, and here. The righteous shall live by faith; by faith the righteous shall live. Adam and Eve believed in God, but they did not trust in God and so they could hardly be found in the great honor roll of faith. Adam and Eve have a son, though, that rightfully belongs in this great chapter. There is much we can learn from Cain and Abel, but first, we have a song…

What you will leave behind? How will you be remembered? Gutenberg developed the printing press. Salk developed the polio vaccine. Edison developed the lightbulb. Hitler and Stalin have a much different legacy. Long after death, these men impact our world. Abel, though his life was brief and obscure, wields influence still today. What is your legacy? If you want to leave a better mark behind, you may still change your legacy. This great truth is suggested as we consider the different legacies left behind by the first brothers.

Genesis 4:1-4a, “Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, and said, “I have acquired a man from the LORD.” Then she bore again, this time his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. And in the process of time it came to pass that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the LORD. Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat…."

Notice that both Cain and Abel brought an offering. Brought where? Brought when? Apparently, there was a particular time and place designated by God for offerings. If you have read the Bible, you realize God was never willy-nilly about sacrifices, about worship if you please (See Leviticus 10:1-3; 17:1-4; John 4:20-24).

Each brother believes in God’s existence and both even express themselves in worship to God. Both were clearly “religious.” So, one CAN be religious, but wrong; more than that, one can worship the true God, but offer worship in a way that God rejects. This contradicts the common myth that all that matters in worship, in religion is sincerity.

All goes smoothly between Cain and Abel until they offer worship. The first murder is tied to religion and differing expressions of worship. History repeats itself over and over again in this regard. A rabidly religious group called for Jesus’ crucifixion. War often is rooted in religion, but God is not the problem; man is.

Genesis 4:4b-5a, “And the LORD respected Abel and his offering, but He did not respect Cain and his offering.” This was not ambivalence on God’s part; He did not just draw straws and pick one brother over the other for no reason. God viewed each man based on the quality of his offering.

Genesis 4:5b, “And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell.” Cain was “Wroth” according to the King James Version. This word means “to glow, grow warm, to blaze up, of anger, zeal, jealousy…burn…be incensed.” Cain was hot and it showed on his face.
Genesis 4:6, “So the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen?" This is a great question to ask ourselves when we are irritated, angered, or outraged. Why am I so angry? God asked Jonah, you remember, “Doest thou well to be angry?” Anger is a God-given emotion and is sometimes appropriate, but ordinarily, if we ask ourselves when we last did well because of our anger most of us would have to hang our heads in shame. We usually get angry when WE are personally impacted negatively instead of being angered at true moral or spiritual injustice.

It is also a good idea to ask ourselves WHO made us angry. Why would Cain be angry at Abel? Abel has not done anything to generate Cain’s ire. Isn’t Cain ultimately angry at God? Abel has done nothing wrong; he simply worshiped God as he was directed. Cain was apparently inflamed by jealousy and envy over the honor given to Abel when God accepted his offering. Jealousy triggered anger that would not dissipate, and hence, turned to hatred. Incidentally, Satan baited Eve with envy with the first temptation, suggesting that God was depriving her of some great privilege contained within the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Genesis 4:7, "If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it."

We’re all hunters, whether with a rifle, a bow, a flyswatter or a shoe. We think little of what it is like to be hunted because we are rarely, if ever, on that side of the equation in our physical life. Genuine faith acknowledges both God and the adversary.

Keil-Delitzsch “…[S]in is personified as a wild beast, lurking at the door of the human heart, and eagerly desire to devour his soul (1 Peter 5:8).…Cain is to rule over the sin which is greedily desiring him, by giving up his wrath, not indeed that sin may cease to lurk for him, but that the lurking evil foe may obtain no entrance into his heart.”

Genesis 4:8, “Now Cain talked with Abel his brother; and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him.” The Septuagint and other translations render this passage, Cain “said to his brother Abel…let us go into the field.”

It is worthwhile to take a bird’s eye view of our lives and what we consider major issues in our lives. If I die and I am right with God, nothing else matters; my life is a success. If I die and I am not right with God, nothing else matters; my life is a failure. Abel’s life was a success; Cain’s life, apparently, was a failure. If you died today, would your life be a success or failure?

Some scholars suggest neither Cain nor Abel knew exactly what God was after, so, groping in the darkness, as it were, with hopes of someday determining what God was really seeking in worship, they merely gave worship their best shot -- almost like the roll of the dice. This sentiment ignores the clear declaration of the Hebrew writer. Hebrews 12:4, “By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, THROUGH WHICH he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks.”

We read nothing of Abel abusing or berating Cain, but merely that with Cain observing, Abel presented a superior offering based on faith – a faith obviously based on God’s testimony.

None of us can say, “I’ve never missed the mark.” When we do wrong, we must acknowledge our error, correct it and re-enter the right path. 1 John 1:9, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” This, Cain clearly refused to do. He had his own
plan for avoiding humiliation in the future; he would simply eliminate Abel. Of course, this did not improve his real problem - his damaged relationship with God.

Cain provides us an example of HOW NOT TO react when we learn we have done wrong. The Bible says in Proverbs 28:13, “He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.” We do not get angry at our brother when we do wrong; we do not retaliate. Cain’s real issue was with God, but, of course, he could not find satisfaction in lashing out against God unless he did so in destroying the man God honored. In the process, he killed his brother.

Would it oversimplify the story to say Cain had a “love problem?” Consider the church at Corinth: with all the moral and doctrinal errors present, who would think the primary issue was love? And yet, we find the great apostolic message on love dropped at the climax of THIS book in 1 Corinthians 13. And what is a lack of love other than a preoccupation of self at the expense of honoring God and/or our brothers and sisters? Consider the incompatibility of Cain’s actions with 1 Corinthians 13:4-7, Cain fails to suffer long; he certainly was not kind; he envied; he was puffed up; he behaved rudely; he sought his own; he was provoked; he did not rejoice in the truth.

David Atkinson writes, “…Cain’s attitude is the antithesis of brotherly love. ‘The Cain within us’ is seen in our jealousy of others’ gifts. Cain is seen in our resentment of others’ service to God, in our hatred of the fact that others seem more ‘spiritually successful’ than we are, and in our anger…. How hard it is to rejoice in another’s gifts, when we wish that they were our own.” (Bible Speaks Today Commentary)

We must mortify the flesh and feed the Spirit. We must be conscious of the potential of the Cain within us to swell up and take control of our hearts. The Cain within us, if we are not careful, may lead us to rise up and attack our brother when the real enemy is within us.

Consider clarification on the proper applications of this account is found in the New Testament. Hebrews 11:4, “By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks.”

God sees true greatness differently than we sometimes do. We do not read of a word from the lips of Abel, and yet his life, his faith, speak volumes. “I’d rather see a sermon than hear one any day.” The greatest sermons preached are not by eloquent speakers, but by the godly lives of men and women. I think of Dorcas and the woman who offered her last two mites. The world considers each of these nobodies, but God honors them as models for us to emulate. God commends the life of Abel simply for his righteous worship.

The story of Cain and Able marks the beginning of religion. Religion is God-ordained and central to the life of the Christ when properly observed and not to be spoken of in derogatory terms. What a shame when groups in the name of Christianity speak so flippantly of religion to ingratiate themselves with the secular crowd. I see billboards that say, “I love Jesus, but I hate religion. I love Jesus, but hate the church.”

I understand many have negative experiences with religious institutions that do not reflect the teachings of Jesus and the New Testament, but that does not entitle us to trash religion in its entirety. It indicates, rather, the need to distinguish between true and false religion. We see such a distinction in the account of Cain and Abel as well as James 1:26-27, “If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one’s religion is useless. Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.”
Alexander Campbell writes in *The Christian System*, “Religion, then, is a system of means of reconciliation-an institution for bringing man back to God-something to bind man anew to love and delight in God.” “Religio with all its Latin family, imports a binding again, or tying fast that which was dissolved.” Religion was made for man, for fallen man, and not man for religion. According to the Genesis record, true religion had its beginning in the account of the sacrifices offered to Yahweh by Cain and Abel (Gen. 4:1-15).

John MacArthur writes, “Here is the first lamb, Abel’s lamb, one lamb for one man. Later on in the Passover, one lamb for one family, later on in the Day of Atonement, one lamb for one nation, later on at Calvary, one lamb for one world.”

Jude 11 speaks of “the way of Cain.” The way of Cain is self-will, disobedience, and hatred all camouflaged by religious pretense. “The way of Cain” is reflected in bad attitudes, envy, unauthorized practices which, of course, cannot be offered by faith.

Cain is the father of false religion. Cain presented his offering fully expecting it to be accepted. McGarvey, “In this the apostle does not say, as many seem to imagine, that Abel had a more excellent faith than Cain; he does not compare the two faiths at all; but that Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain did”…. “Does faith bring us all those great blessings by simply existing within us, or by what it leads us to do and feel? The examples answer this question also. Was it by faith alone that Abel received the blessing which his sacrifice brought to him? Would he have received that blessing, if he had believed with all his heart everything he did believe, and never offered his lamb? You must see it was because by faith Able offered a sacrifice, and an excellent sacrifice, that he had testimony borne to him that he was righteous.”

The fact that Abel’s sacrifice was offered “by faith” indicates that his presentation was based on what God had communicated. Romans 10:17, “So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” Remember: God is selective about the worship that he accepts. 1 Kings 18; 1 Corinthians 11:2, 17-27.

Interesting that the Spirit uses this story to illustrate the difference between the children of God and the children of the devil.

1 John 3:10-16, “In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother. For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another, not as Cain who was of the wicked one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his works were evil and his brother’s righteous. Do not marvel, my brethren, if the world hates you. We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death. Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.”

If we have hatred for our brother, we are no better than Cain. Don’t be surprised if even Christian-professing men hate you for living right and worshipping right.

**Genesis 4:9-10**, “Then the LORD said to Cain, ‘Where is Abel your brother?’ He said, ‘I do not know. Am I my brother’s keeper?’ And He said, What have you done? The voice of your brother’s blood cries out to Me from the ground.” The blood of Abel cried out to God. Cain could not hide it from God.
The stakes are even higher today because more innocent blood than Abel’s has been shed. Hebrews 12:22-24, “But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, 23 to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, 24 to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel.”

Just as the blood of Abel cried out from the ground, so the blood of Christ cries out. We did not strike the thorn crown into Jesus’ scalp, swing the whip across Jesus’ back, nor drive the nails, but our sins put Jesus on the tree and that blood that was shed that day cries out. The blood cries out as a loving offer of forgiveness and new life. Come to Jesus in humble submission and all is well. Spurn Jesus’ great sacrifice and on the Judgment day, Jesus’ blood will cry out for justice. The choice is yours.

Contact us today to learn how to obey the gospel (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9)! For a copy of this sermon, stay with us till after our song…

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