

A MORE EXCELLENT SACRIFICE
Hebrews 11:4

Look at Hebrews 11:4 ***“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: and by it he being dead yet speaketh.”***

Let’s review this age old story of Cain and Abel.

Look at Genesis 4:1-5a ***“And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain, and said, I have gotten a man from the LORD. 2 And she again bare his brother Abel. And Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. 3 ¶ And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the LORD. 4 And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the LORD had respect unto Abel and to his offering: 5 But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect.”***

In the message today we will consider four reasons why Abel’s sacrifice was “more excellent” than Cain’s.

As you can see, Abel was “a keeper of sheep”. His offering was “a lamb from his flock”.

Abel’s sacrifice was “more excellent” FIRST because it pictured and typified “the Substitutionary/Sacrificial death of the Lord, Jesus Christ. Abel knew Him as the “woman’s seed”. He was the promised Savior, whose ONE sacrifice would end all sacrifices.

You might ask, “How did Abel know about this Promised Seed?” He heard about him from the first declaration of the Gospel in the Bible.

Look at Genesis 3:14-15 ***“And the LORD God said unto the serpent, Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life:
15 And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.”***

God pronounced a curse upon the serpent because he had deceived Eve and led Adam into rebellion against God. He pronounced hatred between Satan and “the woman”, between Satan’s “seed” and HER (the woman’s) seed.

This is the first declaration of Christ and His victory over sin and Satan. Christ would be born without the aid of Adam (without any connection to Adam). “Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son.”

“It, (the woman’s seed, Christ), shall bruise (crush) thy head.” Christ would render a death blow to Satan, (which He did at the Cross). And, Satan would “bruise Christ’s heel”, (which he did by tempting Him, tormenting Him throughout His life and by influencing those who put Him to death).

Something else you might be wondering, “How did Abel know to bring a BLOOD sacrifice?” He learned about it from Adam and Eve’s experience after the fall.

Look at Genesis 3:21 *“Unto Adam also and to his wife did the LORD God make coats of skins, and clothed them.”*

When Adam and Eve ate of the forbidden tree and their eyes were opened, they knew they “naked”. They knew they were exposed to the wrath of God. But, they did not come to God and admit their mistake. Instead, they “sewed fig leaves together” (to cover their nakedness). And, they “hid themselves among the trees of the garden”. They tried to cover their sin. And, they tried to hide from God.

But, God came to them. He restored them to the fellowship their sin had broken. He killed an animal (probably a lamb) to show that sin MUST BE punished. And, to show that sin WOULD BE punished in a God appointed Substitute, (a lamb without spot or blemish). And, He took the skin of the slain animal and made them “coats”. That is a picture of the robe of Righteousness which resulted from Christ’s obedience unto death.

The blood sacrifice Abel brought declared that he had NOTHING (of himself) to offer that would gain him acceptance. It spoke of his UNWORTHINESS. It declared that he was TOTALLY dependent on the innocence (the Righteousness) of another. He was looking to the One PICTURED in his sacrifice. He was not looking to anything IN himself. “In my hand no price I bring, simply to thy cross I cling.”

Cain, on the other hand, was a “tiller of the ground. He brought “of the fruit of the ground”. He brought the BEST (his) hands had produced.

Cain’s sacrifice (his offering) wreaked of self-righteousness. It declared, “I have done something WORTHY of your acceptance”. “I have produced something that qualifies me to come into your presence.”

Cain’s sacrifice declared NOTHING of his need for a substitute. That is what every sinner declares who comes to God pleading anything but the blood and imputed Righteousness of Christ for all their acceptance.

Cain was like the Pharisees in Luke 18 who “trusted in themselves that they were righteous”. The Pharisees in that parable went away UNJUSTIFIED. Likewise, Cain and his offering were REJECTED by God.

The FIRST reason Abel offered the “more excellent sacrifice” was because it PICTURED and TYPIFIED the obedience unto death of the Lord, Jesus Christ.

Look back at Hebrews 11:4 ***“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: and by it he being dead yet speaketh.”***

The SECOND reason Abel’s sacrifice was “more excellent” is because it was offered “by faith”. BY FAITH means two things: First, it means that it was offered in obedience to the revealed will of God. Second, it means it was offered by the CONFIDENCE of one who has been given faith.

FIRST, Abel's sacrifice was offered in obedience to the revealed will of God. Abel knew how to worship God. He knew what God required. He knew what God commanded of those who sought to approach Him in worship. He knew God's mind on this matter. And, he knew because he had been taught.

God taught Adam the RIGHT way to approach Him in worship when He sacrificed a lamb and made coats of skins. And, Adam taught his sons. He taught Cain AND Abel. We know he taught them because Abel came the way God required (I.e. Abel came according to the revealed will of God). It is not reasonable that Adam taught Abel (his younger son) the RIGHT way of worship, but left Cain (his elder son) in the dark on this matter. Both sons were taught.

Abel believed God. He followed the instructions of God. He came BY FAITH. He came in obedience to God's revealed way of worship.

Cain, on the other hand, rejected God's instructions. He rejected his father's teaching on this matter. He rejected the way he was taught and came HIS OWN way. He did not come BY FAITH. He rebelled against God's revealed way of worship.

Coming BY FAITH (first) means coming in obedience to the revealed will of God. But, it ALSO means coming in the CONFIDENCE of one who has been given faith.

If you look back our text, you will see I have underlined this phrase, "by which he obtained witness." "By which" refers back to the "more excellent sacrifice" Abel brought. "Obtained witness" means he received a testimony. The sacrifice Abel brought was being a "witness" for him. It was bearing a TESTIMONY for him. His sacrifice was TESTIFYING on his behalf.

This is the language of a courtroom. When a defense lawyer needs to strengthen his case, he brings in an EXPERT witness. This witness is probably a doctor (maybe) of child psychology or criminal behavior or whatever EXPERT he needs. This EXPERT has (probably) written a book or two. The testimony of this EXPERT will carry a lot of weight. This witness is brought in to CONVINCe the jury that his client could not be guilty of the crime he is charged with.

The sacrifice Abel brought was his EXPERT witness. His sacrifice gave CONVINCING (undeniable) testimony that Abel's worship would be, (not MIGHT be), accepted by God. And, it WOULD BE accepted NOT because of the sacrifice, NOR because of Abel's diligence in bringing what God commanded. Abel looked beyond the blood and the sacrifice he offered. He looked to the One his sacrifice PICTURED and TYPIFIED.

His worship WOULD BE accepted because his sacrifice PICTURED the One whose Righteousness enabled God to be just and justify (declare righteous) UNWORTHY sinners like himself. Abel's sacrifice gave EVIDENCE that his hope was in the righteousness of the "woman's seed". According to God, He will save ALL who come this way.

Look at Hebrews 7:25 "Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them."

ALL who come BY HIM will be saved to the uttermost. Abel came BY CHRIST. He came pleading the blood of His Surety. That is why he came with CONFIDENCE that He WOULD BE accepted. The TESTIMONY of his sacrifice gave him this confidence.

Cain was not a man of faith. He did not believe God's testimony. He rejected God's way and came his own way. He did not see his nakedness.

He did not see his WORTHINESS of God's eternal wrath. Therefore, he saw no need for blood. He saw no need for a substitute. Cain could not see beyond the blood. He could not see what Abel's sacrifice PICTURED. All Cain saw was a bloody mess. So, he brought what he thought was better.

Cain was rejected. "But unto Cain and to his offering God had not respect." Rejection is all any sinner will find who attempts to worship God by the works of their hands.

Abel's sacrifice was "more excellent" than Cain's because it was offered BY FAITH. It was offered in obedience to God's revealed will. And, it was offered with CONFIDENCE that Abel and his sacrifice WOULD BE accepted.

How could Abel; how can ANY regenerate sinner have such CONFIDENCE? It is because of WHAT their sacrifice TESTIFIES. The THIRD reason Abel's sacrifice was "more excellent" is because it TESTIFIED (i.e. It gave CONVINCING evidence) that Abel WAS RIGHTEOUS.

Look back at Hebrews 11:4 ***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: and by it he being dead yet speaketh.***

Abel brought the blood of a lamb. His sacrifice PICTURED the Substitutionary death of Christ. His sacrifice declared that his hope of salvation was in the imputed righteousness of his Substitute.

Abel's sacrifice was his EXPERT witness. And, his EXPERT witness TESTIFIED of Abel that he WAS RIGHTEOUS.

And God (the Judge) confirmed the testimony of Abel's witness. God (Himself) testified of Abel's gifts.

And, how did He do that? How did God testify of Abel's gifts?

Look back at Genesis 4:4 ***And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the LORD had respect unto Abel and to his offering:***

God "had respect" unto Abel AND unto Abel's offering. God accepted Abel's PERSON (first). THEREFORE, He accepted Abel's offering. He would not have accepted Abel's offering if He had not ALREADY accepted Abel's Person.

How could Abel's Person ALREADY be accepted BEFORE Abel brought his offering? It is because Abel's acceptance did not depend on his offering.

God has to overcome our natural way of thinking here. We think we bring the offering. Then, God accepts us. But, it is just the opposite.

Abel's acceptance was in the beloved. Abel, (like each of God's elect), was accepted IN CHRIST before the world began.

Look at Ephesians 1:3-6 ***“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: 4 According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: 5 Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, 6 To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.”***

Those whom God has accepted will (in time) plead the merits of Christ's blood and righteousness. All that the Father has given to Christ will (in time) come to Christ. He will be their sacrifice. He will be their offering to God.

And, they will come to God, a Just God and Savior. And God, having accepted them in Christ before the foundation of the world, will have respect unto (He will accept.) them and their offering, just like He did Abel's.

BECAUSE Abel was ALREADY accepted, he brought the sacrifice that PICTURED Christ, the One in whom he found his acceptance. And, the sacrifice He brought TESTIFIED on his behalf that HE WAS RIGHTEOUS.

There is something we need to be CLEAR on here. Abel's sacrifice did not MAKE him righteous. His sacrifice made up NO PART of his righteousness. His bringing what God commanded did make him righteous.

Abel's sacrifice only PICTURED the One by which God declared him righteous. God accepted Abel because he was ALREADY righteous. He was righteous because God had made him righteous. By the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.

God accepted his offering because his offering declared that his hope was in the blood (the imputed righteousness) of Christ alone and by that his offering DECLARED (It testified.) that Abel WAS RIGHTEOUS.

Cain, on the other hand, was far from righteous. God rejected Cain. He rejected his Person. And, He rejected his offering. That rejection angered Cain. He got mad at God and killed his brother. And, according to the scriptures, he did so because his works were evil.

Look at 1 John 3:11-12 ***“For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. 12 Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous.”***

The only works recorded about Cain are his religious works. He came to worship God. And he brought the works (the best) of HIS hands. Contrary to our thinking by nature, all grew up under the message of Cain. We have ALL walked in the evil of Cain. We were all TAUGHT the ways of Cain.

Look at Jeremiah 13:23 ***“Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil.”***

The word ðaccustomedö is taught. We have ALL been taught to do ðevilö.

Now, by nature, we don't like to hear that we are like Cain. We like to side with Abel. We like to think we are like Abel. In reality we were TAUGHT to bring the works of OUR hands.

ðThere is none righteous; there is none that seeketh after God; there is no fear of God before our eyes.ö That is a summary of Romans 3: 10-18. And, these things are spoken about ALL without exception.

God has to teach sinners His way of salvation. Until He does, all walk in the ways of Cain. That is why we can be thankful for the last point of our lesson.

Abel's sacrifice was ðmore excellentö than Cain's because his sacrifice TESTIFIED that he WAS RIGHTEOUS. Cain's sacrifice testified that he was ðevilö.

Last of all, Abel's sacrifice was ðmore excellentö because by his sacrifice Abel STILL speaks.

Look back at Hebrews 11:4 ***ðBy 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: and by it he being dead yet speaketh.”***

Abel's message is STILL being heard. It is STILL going out. It is STILL being proclaimed. And, Abel STILL ðspeaksö through the message he RANG OUT because the message he RANG OUT was the Gospel. It was the ðgood newsö of how God could accept into His presence a sinner like him (like you or me) and yet be Righteous/Just in doing so.

Abel is STILL proclaiming because according to God's Testimony, Abel's way is the ONLY way a sinner can worship God.

Look at Hebrews 11:6 ***“But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.”***

ðmust believe that He isö You cannot come to God until you come to Him BY FAITH. You cannot come to God until you know (are persuaded) that He justifies the ungodly based on the imputed righteousness of Christ ALONE. That is what distinguishes Him from the idols of men's imaginations.

Abel's sacrifice PICTURED the One by whose Righteousness imputed God declares otherwise ungodly sinners righteous in His sight. Abel came BY FAITH. He came in obedience to God's revealed way of worship. He came CONFIDENT that God would accept his worship. And, He was CONFIDENT because his sacrifice TESTIFIED that he WAS RIGHTEOUS. He STILL speaks through his sacrifice every time a Gospel message goes forth.

Look back one last time at Hebrews 11:4 and IØl close ðBy 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: and by it he being dead yet speaketh.ö

I would encourage all to learn Abel's way of worship. Learn of the Christ Abel looked to. Learn of the Righteousness Abel rested in. Learn all you can about Abel's MORE EXCELLENT SACRIFICE.

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