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Cain turned his back on the presence of God, that place of sacrifice with the cherubim. Instead of turning away from God he should have fallen on his face begging for mercy and forgiveness like David, He should have grabbed hold of the Lord and held on for dear life crying out for blessing like Jacob. But instead, he walked away from God.

Like a naval ship in enemy waters that could begin sinking at any moment into the depths of the pit, into the blackness of darkness forever Cain left God! This morning our lesson is a biography of Righteous Abel. To get inside God's thinking on this matter, back up to **Genesis 3:21**. In this verse we learn a great deal about what God considers important for us His creations. Note four truths about how fallen, sinful humans must approach God:

- We as sinners must be COVERED to come to God.
- We as sinners can not use SELF-MADE COVERINGS to come to God.
- We as sinners must accept the fact that ONLY GOD PROVIDES PROPER COVERINGS for us.
- We as sinners must believe that ONLY SUBSTITUTIONARY DEATH COVERS sin.

The word for atonement is kaphar and it means "to cover". We run into this word in the Flood account as God tells Noah to "cover" the Ark with pitch. The idea is to shield Noah from the fury of the Flood he had to find a covering for the wood of the Ark. So God says to us His creations who sin, we must find a covering to shield us from God's wrath. And God says the only shield or covering or atonement HE ACCEPTS is in the form of a substitute.

Hebrews 11:1-6

He still speaks. He says three things:

- Man comes to God by faith, not works

- Man must accept and obey God's revelation above his own reason and self-will
- And sin is severely punished.

This is Abel's timeless three-point sermon to the world, which he has been preaching for thousands of years to those who will hear. It could be titled, "The Righteous Shall Live by Faith." [1]

Now, let watch an Old Testament saint bringing their sacrifice to God. Remember that for Cain and Abel, offering an animal was equal to confessing to be a sinner. If Cain would have done that, God would have accepted the rest of his offerings as offerings of love. But when the blood of a substitute was not offered, God would not look on the rest of the offering nor the offeror. Because it is only on the basis of Christ's offering that God may be approached.

In each of the seven steps Righteous Abel followed, and all who like him come to God, we see the marvelous, gracious plan of salvation.

- A person who brings a sacrifice to God is **acknowledging** that they have sinned.
- A person who brings a sacrifice to God is **identifying** with the substitute they bring.
- A person who brings a sacrifice to God is **declaring** God is offended by their sin.
- A person who brings a sacrifice to God is **providing** a substitute to take their place of punishment for sin.
- A person who brings a sacrifice to God is **demonstrating** that death is the penalty for sin.
- A person who brings a sacrifice to God is **meeting** God's demands for sin.
- A person who brings a sacrifice to God is **receiving** God's forgiveness for sin.

So that is just what Abel did at the altar that day, step by step. Now think of Cain. Cain's offering was screaming exactly the opposite of each step.

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- Cain denied he was the child of fallen parents
- Cain denied that GOD HAD DECLARED THE ONLY WAY.
- Cain denied God only would accept substitutionary blood.

Once again, let's go back to the LOST WORLD and examine Cain and Abel. Let's start at **Genesis 4:6-7**

So the Lord said to Cain, "Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? 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."

So the way of Cain we saw last week is the way of the self-righteous, the way of the religious, and the way of the morally superior who come to God on their own, not covered by Jesus. But note the love of God. God saw Cain just where he was. He saw him running, angry, and withdrawing. And this morning God sees us just where we are, no matter where we go. God did not silently reject Cain, rather He sought him, reasoned with him, and offered him a way back.

Cain did not have to be so frustrated and angry at God. The fault that drove Cain from God was not around him or beyond his reach, it was within him. And that problem could be changed, only it was Cain who had to make the choices. Yet Cain blamed others, Abel and most of all God! There is a famous line in literature that captures what Cain never saw, Pogo says, "We have met the enemy, and he is us!"

So Cain was being warned by God that Righteous Abel learned that either we master sin or it will overpower us. God was announcing that to refuse His terms was to flirt with eternal doom, endless ruin, and infinite loss. Righteous Abel by his sacrifice saw that only Jesus could master his sin, for only Jesus can cleanse and make us perfectly whole.

But the tragedy is that those who go in the way of Cain think humans are born essentially good. People who follow Cain say:

"Something in my hands I bring, simply to my works I cling."

They sing the song of:

"I paid it all Jesus didn't need to; I owe nothing to Him, sin has not left a dreadful stain, Jesus doesn't need to wash me white as snow."

So unlike righteous Abel, Cain declared that he was not incurably wicked, Cain declared he was not cursed by his sin and unable to please God, so he tried to offer God the fruits of his sin cursed life.

Today all of the sons and daughters of Cain that fill the churches, synagogues, Temples, stakes, Kingdom Halls, Mosques, and Cathedrals of this world come offering the sin cursed fruits of their lives, just like Cain did. They offer their morally upright character, their unselfish deeds, and their acts of charity. But as they do so they are ignoring the God who tells them in **Isaiah 64:6**, just as He told Cain, "ALL your righteousness is like FILTHY DISEASE SODDEN BANDAGES." Why? Because we are incurably ill, totally depraved, completely fallen and absolutely incapable of covering our own sins.

Note **Genesis 4:8** as Cain gets out of the sight of others, but is never out of the sight of God.

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.

And the first lie follows the first murder as Cain lies to God. **Genesis 4:9-11**

9 Then the Lord said to Cain, "Where is Abel your brother?" He said, "I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?" 10 And He said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood cries out to Me from the ground. 11 "So now you are cursed from the earth, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand.

So righteous Abel stands out clearly as the first in a long line that stretches to this place this morning. It is the long line of saints who come to God by faith.

Righteous Abel is a living portrait of true and saving faith. Saving faith that acts in obedience upon the Word of God. He heard the way of sacrifice and he obeyed it. Saving faith is responding to God's Word in obedience. Remember **Luke 5:4-5**?

When He had stopped speaking, He said to Simon, "Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch." 5 But Simon answered and said to Him, "Master, we have toiled all night and caught nothing; nevertheless at Your word I will let down the net."

That is why Righteous Abel is the first of the faithful prophets in **Luke 11:49-51**

Therefore the wisdom of God also said, "I will send them prophets and apostles, and some of them they will kill and persecute," 50 that the blood of all the prophets which was shed from the foundation of the world may be required of this generation, 51 from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah who perished between the altar and the temple. Yes, I say to you, it shall be required of this generation."

That is why righteous Abel was the first to enter Paradise! And the driving out of Cain by his sins from God's Holy presence is a foreshadowing of the vengeance of eternal punishment. 2

Thessalonians 1:9

These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power,

Faith is not merely the assent of our minds, it is the commitment of our wills to obey! So that is why Righteous Abel heads the list of God's Hall of Faith in Hebrews 11.

Each of us today belongs to one family or the other. You are choosing your own future. Watch the choices made by Cain and Abel. St. Augustine understood it and penetrated to its very core in his famous *City of God* when he explained:

Cain was the first-born, and he belonged to the city of men; after him was born Abel, who belonged to the city of God. Augustine correctly saw that each was representative of radically different approaches to religion and to God.[2]

The Righteousness Way of Abel

The Wicked Way of Cain

Righteous Abel was the first spiritual Man

Cain is the first natural man

Righteous Abel was the first broken-spirited man

Cain is the first self-righteous man

Righteous Abel was the first of those taking God's side against themselves

Cain is the first self-sufficient man

Righteous Abel was the first saved man

Cain is the first lost man

Righteous Abel was the first genuine believer and possessor

Cain is the first formal professor

Righteous Abel was the first of those possessing Christ's finished work	Cain is the first of those trusting only their works
Righteous Abel was the first partaker of divine grace	Cain is the first trusting in human merits
Righteous Abel was the first accepted and blessed by God into Paradise	Cain is the first rejected and cursed by God to Hell
Righteous Abel was the first of those who acknowledged they were personally sinful ones	Cain is the first of those deniers of their lost and ruined condition
Righteous Abel was the first among the believers of God's testimony, placing faith in the substitute and accounted righteous	Cain is the first who refuses the divine remedy
Righteous Abel was the first genuine man of faith	Cain is the first religious man
Righteous Abel was the first who looks for help outside of himself to please God	Cain is the first to look for help from within himself to please God
Righteous Abel was the first who accepted the way of bloody offering	Cain is the first to present an unbloody offering
Righteous Abel was the first to face God after the curse removing blood was offered in his place	Cain is the first to face God with no curse removing blood offered in his place
Righteous Abel was the first who sought God as his refuge	Cain is the first who sought earthly security
Righteous Abel was the first who found a grave stained with blood on his way to the heavenly city	Cain is the first who founded an earthly city
Abel was the first citizen of heaven	Cain is the beginning of the earth dweller

When Abel did what God said, he revealed his obedience and acknowledged his sinfulness. Cain, on the other hand, was disobedient and did not acknowledge his sin. Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain because God had prescribed a blood sacrifice. Abel, and Cain as well, knew what God wanted. The difference between the two was that Abel gave what God wanted, whereas Cain gave what he himself wanted. Abel was obedient and Cain was disobedient. Abel acknowledged his sin. Cain did not. Cain believed in God, else he would not have brought Him a sacrifice. He acknowledged a supreme being

and even that he owed Him some sort of worship. He recognized God, but he did not obey God. He believed in God, but he did not believe God. He thought he could approach God in whatever way he wanted, and expected Him to be impressed and satisfied. In so doing, Cain became the father of all false religion.

False religion is trying to come to God by any other way than the way God has prescribed. It says, "I can get to God by thinking myself into Nirvana," or, "I can please God by meditation," or, "I can satisfy God by my works or by following the teachings of Mary Baker Eddy, Joseph Smith, or Charles Taze Russell." God's Word says, "There is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved" (**Acts 4:12**). False religion says that there is another name, another way. False religion is any way to God that God Himself has not ordained. **Proverbs 14:12** marks this truth: "There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death."

Cain failed to acknowledge his sin and refused to obey God by bringing the sacrifice God required. He did not mind worshiping God, as long as it was on his own terms, in his own way. And God rejected his sacrifice and rejected him.

Abel offered a better sacrifice because it represented the obedience of faith. He willingly brought God what He asked, and he brought the very best that he had. In Abel's sacrifice, the way of the cross was first prefigured. The first sacrifice was Abel's lamb-one lamb for one person. Later came the Passover-with one lamb for one family. Then came the Day of Atonement with one lamb for one nation. Finally came Good Friday - one Lamb for the whole world[3]

Jesus tells us of two guilty sinners He met in His ministry. One who was unrepentant and selfish goes to join Restless Cain in the place of endless wandering and pain. **Luke 16:22-24**

"So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died and was buried. 23 "And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. 24 "Then he cried and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.'

The other was repentant and returning to God. He died and joined Righteous Abel in Paradise, the place of endless bliss. Luke 23:40-41 But the other, answering, rebuked him, saying, "Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation? 41 And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong."

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Instead of turning away from God he should have fallen on his face begging for mercy and forgiveness like David, He should have grabbed hold of the Lord and held on for dear life crying out for blessing like Jacob. But instead, he walked away from God.

If you are still like Restless Cain this morning, still wandering, angry, empty and afraid, then you are what the Navy calls being "in harm's way."

Like a naval ship in enemy waters you could begin sinking at any moment into the depths of the pit, into the blackness of darkness forever. Why would you want that?

Flee to Jesus, seek the safety of His arms. Turn to Him this morning for mercy, cling to Him as the Lamb who was slain in your place, ask Him to be your substitute, cry out to Him for forgiveness and cleansing, for He is your only hope!

What would keep anyone from such a blessed place as safety in the arms of Jesus? Well listen to what Restless Cain chose[4]:

- Cain chose the way of his own reasoning instead of following the way of God's divine revelation.
- Cain exerted his way over yielding to God's will.
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- Cain descended into human hatred instead of rising into divine love.

- Cain offered his excuses instead of accepting God's grace.
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TAGS: 000123AM

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O flee to Jesus today!

Rev. John Hart Stockton

Come, Ev'ry Soul by Sin Oppressed

1 Come, ev'ry soul by sin oppressed,
There's mercy with the Lord,
And he will surely give you rest,
By trusting in his word.

Chorus: Only trust him, only trust him,
Only trust him now;
He will save you, he will save you,
He will save you now.

2 For Jesus shed his precious blood
Rich blessings to bestow;
Plunge now into the crimson flood
That washes white as snow.

Chorus: Come to Jesus, come to Jesus,
Come to Jesus now;
He will save you, he will save you,
He will save you now.

3 Yes, Jesus is the Truth, the Way,
That leads you into rest;
Believe in him without delay,
And you are fully blest.

Chorus: Don't reject him, don't reject him,
Don't reject him now;
He will save you, he will save you,

He will save you now.

4 Come, then, and join this holy band,
And on to glory go,
To dwell in that celestial land,
Where joys immortal flow.

Chorus: I will trust him, I will trust him,
I will trust him now;
He will save me, he will save me,
He will save me now.

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[1] MacArthur, John F., *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary*, (Chicago: Moody Press) 1983.

[2] Hughes, R. Kent, *Preaching the Word: Hebrews Vol 1&2—An Anchor for the Soul*, (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books) 1998, c1993.

[3] MacArthur, John F., *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary*, (Chicago: Moody Press) 1983.

[4] Adapted from Barnhouse, *Genesis*, p. 38-39