

Saints In Heaven

Hebrews 11:4

TEXT: *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.*

In Jesus' name, my fellow redeemed:

The times are surely evil! Jesus' prophesy regarding these days is being fulfilled: *There will be ...wars and rumors of wars ... Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. ... Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold...* Mt 24 It's not unusual to hear someone say something like: "Boy! If Grandpa could see what's happening now he would roll over in his grave!"

Well, the fact is that Grandpa CANNOT see, nor does he know what's going on in this world. And what is in the grave cannot "roll over." Everything Scripture tells us about those who are already in heaven discredits anything that would suggest that they are looking down upon this world cursed by sin and its consequences. I know that there are some who have that sentimental longing Mom or Dad is "up there" looking down and perhaps even watching over us. When you consider the implications of that idea then know that if it were true, the saints in heaven would truly be sad and miserable! For our loved ones in heaven to be looking down upon us now, observing the behavior of us sinners, seeing our children and grandchildren as they sin, watching some whom they once brought to the Lord in Holy Baptism losing their faith and falling away from the Lord, there would be no end to their sorrow and fear. How does that human idea fit with what Scripture reveals about the saints in heaven who are now enjoying the fullness of joy! The Bible says of those who are in heaven: *... they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them. Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.* Re 7 Absolutely no room for anyone in heaven to be looking down upon this sad and sin-infected world and those of us who must still live here!

This last four Sundays of the Pentecost Season of the Church Year are often called the End Time Sundays because they focus on the last days of the world. Today we begin this blessed season with what Scripture tells us of the believers who are already in heaven. They are dead, but still alive. They are alive and waiting for the resurrection of the dead.

Scripture declares it so simply and succinctly: *... the wages of sin is death...* Ro 6 How powerfully that truth hit home when Adam and Eve's first and favorite son, Cain, murdered his brother Abel! What was it like for them to witness a lifeless body for the first time! What horror filled their hearts and minds as they saw his life-blood poured out on the ground! Would the picture of the murder scene ever leave their memories? Who was there to comfort them by saying, "I know what you're going through..." as they touched his lifeless body and felt what once was a warm body now cold as the clay? What emotions surged through their bodies as they questioned their son, Cain? Why?? It was because they ate the forbidden fruit. It was because Cain had lost his faith to

arrogance and self-righteousness. It was because Abel also was a sinner that this violence ended in his death. ... *the wages of sin is death...* Ro 6 Even now, some 6-8 thousand years later, this simple truth remains. While we have gotten used to death and dying, it's no less painful and disturbing.

Meanwhile, there is this simple passage: *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.* The first man murdered is obviously still alive! For as it clearly says here, Abel still speaks! He speaks even though he is dead! How can this be? Is this just wishful thinking? Or is it a revelation of God?

There is more to that passage from Romans 6. Yes, ... *the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.* Ro 6 Can this be true? Cain killed Abel and left home. Scripture tells us that Cain left and raised up a nation of unbelievers. Abel whom he killed died in faith. Scripture says: *By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was commended as a righteous man, ... And by faith he still speaks, even though he is dead.* This faith by which God commended Abel to be righteous in God's judgment is the righteousness that comes to all who believe in Jesus. While Abel never met Jesus Christ personally, he knew Jesus through faith in God's Promise revealed when the Lord said in the ears of Adam and Eve that Eve's Descendant would come and crush Satan's head. Abel knew he was sinful and trusted God's Promise of the Savior and God credited that righteousness of Jesus Christ to Abel through faith. So what Jesus Christ Himself declared was true for Abel as it is true for us: *I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.* Jn 11 The world has known many religious hucksters and scam artists throughout history. From Satan's first lie to the extravagant lies of the Koran and the Book of Mormon, there is nothing so simple and comforting than this, *that God was in Christ, reconciling THE WORLD to Himself...* 2 Co 5 So when Jesus declares *I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die...* Jn 11 who are you going to believe?

Abel still speaks because he believed this and he is still alive and in heaven. But what is this first man to have entered heaven been doing all these years? Scripture says that Abel and all who through faith in Jesus have already joined him are waiting for the resurrection of you and me and all the dead.

Yes, they are waiting. That means that eternal life includes that marvelous creation God calls "time." While God is eternal and outside of time, He created us to be within the framework of time. Within this framework of time, from the moment time began when in the beginning God created heaven and earth, until that moment in time when the eternal God took on human flesh and entered time, born of the virgin Mary, until the time when at your own conception in the womb of a woman you were knitted together as body and soul, until the time when the Lord Jesus breaks through the heavens to announce the Day of Judgment and the end of this world, the believers in heaven have been alive and speaking. My own father who left this world nearly 14 years ago, and my mother who also died in Christ just last year, are now enjoying their time along with Abel. What are they doing? They are looking forward to that moment in time that is known only to God. It is the time when Jesus will announce the resurrection of all the

dead. Jesus declared: *A time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out—those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned.* Jn 5 In the Revelation, the Holy Spirit had John paint this picture with words: *I saw ... the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained. 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?" Then each of them was given a white robe, and they were told to wait a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and brothers who were to be killed as they had been was completed.* Re 6 While our fellow Christians who have preceded us in death are not paying any attention to what is going on here on earth, this word picture of heaven reveals that they are surely looking forward to the rest of us joining them. They are looking forward to the resurrection of their own bodies so that they along with us will then enjoy time without end in the glorious place God calls "Paradise" where, as the Lord says *He will fill (us) with joy in (His) presence, and with eternal pleasures at (His) right hand.* Ps 16

In the meantime, what should we be doing with our time here on earth while our fellow saints are enjoying Paradise waiting eagerly for us to join them in the glorious resurrection? Will we not want to spread the precious word of what God has done for us in Jesus' death and resurrection? That with sins forgiven in Jesus' name and the promise sealed with His blood, we have eternal life awaiting us in Heaven? Will we not make this the highest wisdom to be known and embraced by our children and us?

Time on earth is fleeting, and the end is near. May we spend our waking moments speaking of these things that we all may join our fellow saints who are still alive and waiting for us in heaven! Amen.