

BY FAITH, ABEL STILL SPEAKS

Because God commended him as a righteous man -- Because he is 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 Story of Cain and Abel is a most terrifying account. The Bible says: *In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the LORD. But Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The LORD looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast. ... 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.* Ge 4 Burning with jealousy, Cain murders his brother. But look a little further into the account, we note that the Lord made a distinction. He *looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor.* Why? Look a little closer and you will note that *Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the LORD...* but *Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock.*

What if God would reveal what He thinks of the offerings we are about to give to Him today? Would we prefer that He would just keep quiet? Would His assessment of my offering be "he gave SOME..." or, "he gave FAT PORTIONS..."? And if God would define "some" and "fat portions" for me in relation to what He has given me, would I be happy with my gift to Him? Would I be embarrassed? Would I be angry that God be so judgmental about what I give?

This Scripture would be a scary story for me were it not for this precious passage that serves as our text. Hebrews 11:4 looks into the heart of these two men and explains to us exactly why God treats these brothers as He did. He did not judge them on the basis of their offerings, but on the basis of faith. *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.* Some might suggest that this murder was God's fault. If God would have just kept quiet, Cain's jealousy may not have erupted into violence. But it was out of love that the Lord revealed that Cain's heart was not filled with humble faith, but with self-righteousness. If God would not warn Cain, who would? And so it's important for our own warning, as well as for our own comfort and assurance, note that it is BY FAITH, ABEL STILL SPEAKS. Because, by faith God commended him as a righteous man; and By faith, he is in heaven.

Cain figured that it was enough for him to be a good husband and father. He worked hard alongside his father Adam, in whose footsteps he followed as a crop farmer. He was the first born. He worshipped (went to church), and gave an offering: some of his crops. What more could God expect from human beings?

But then, one day, the Lord revealed His displeasure with Cain. The Bible says: *The LORD looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor.* Ge 4 God did NOT look with favor on Cain. Abel is favored, and Cain is disfavored. Therefore, Abel's offering pleases God, for no other reason than that God is pleased with Abel. But Cain's offering is unacceptable because God is displeased with Cain. NOTHING Cain does pleases the Lord because God was displeased with Cain. No one can buy God's favor! However, when the Lord is pleased with the man, as Jesus says, "*Whatever he does for the least of these, he does for me!*" Mt 25.

Here, heaven and hell are divided, and the thin dividing line involves nothing that any man can do, but what is buried in the heart. *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.* Abel had faith, and Cain did not. This faith is not in God's existence, for Cain had that kind of faith. But Cain's faith was in his own good works, and not in God's Savior. Abel, on the other hand, looked for the Savior promised by God's grace to his father Adam, who was to be the Descendant of his mother, Eve.

What does the Lord do in response to Abel's faith? He COMMENDS, that is, He declares, this repentant sinner RIGHTEOUS! Whatever God declares, happens and it. God declares Abel to be a RIGHTEOUS MAN, and whatever a righteous man does pleases God. Therefore, Abel's offering, no matter what it is, is good and God-pleasing because it comes from a man who is righteous through faith in God's

promise of the Savior.

How can God do this? Paul explains: *God presented (Jesus) as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished- he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.* Rom 3 God doesn't just declare sinners to be sinless without taking their sins away. He did this when Jesus suffered, died, and rose again from the dead. Here is the demonstration that God is both JUST in this work, and the Justifier who commends all who believe to be righteous.

Abel believed this. So it is that by Faith, Abel still speaks even though Cain murders him. He still speaks because he is in heaven.

Cain thought he was right with God. He thought that heaven was his home. So when the Lord told Cain that he was lacking, he pouted and was upset with God, just like when people get upset with their parents, or with the pastor when told that they are living in sin and refuse to repent. In fact, Cain "quit the church," and went to another country where he lived quite well. His descendants were numerous and very successful. But since Cain did not teach salvation by faith alone in the promised Savior, they did not know the Lord and so they are in hell. You can read about this in Genesis 5.

But Abel went to heaven. That's what it means when Scripture says: *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.* There will be no pouting in heaven. That will take place in hell. But Abel still speaks. Cain and all who die in impenitence and unbelief do not speak. They scream in pain and terror. But Abel still speaks because even though he was the first human to experience death, he is not dead. He speaks and sings and rejoices with all the saints who through faith in Jesus have died and gone to heaven. In the Revelation, John sees a vision of heaven: *After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."* Re 7 Those who are in heaven continually erupt in simple and on-going praise and glory to the God of our Salvation and to Jesus.

That Abel *still speaks, even though he is dead* is a nice way of saying that he still lives in heaven. But if Abel would be allowed to return to us to speak to us today, what do you think he would say? Would he tell us not to worry about the matters of saving faith? Would he tell fathers to neglect these things and to let their children go on living without fear of their sins and that God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son to pay for them with his innocent suffering death?

Or would Abel say things that you have not already heard from this pastor or from another pastor that is true to God's Word? Would he tell us to listen to God's Word and to repent of our sins and trust Jesus' forgiveness? Would he marvel at Holy Baptism and the power that Jesus has given this blessed Sacrament? Would he marvel at the Lord's Supper and tell us never to neglect this blessing given to us for the forgiveness of our sins? This Abel would tell us, just as it is written: *Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.* Ro 10 And again: *Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.* Ro 10 Genesis chapter 4 is the sad account of the murder of Abel at the hand of his brother, Cain. After Cain quit the church and went off with his wife and raised up a family, we are told that Cain's descendants followed in his unbelief. They prospered on earth, but did not know Jesus, so they are now in hell. But the last words of that chapter speak briefly about Adam's family. They say this: *At that time men began to call on the name of the LORD.* Ge 4 Isn't that what I just read from Paul's letter to the Romans? *Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.* Ro 10

The Lord has declared you righteous through faith in Jesus. Someday you will speak to Abel in heaven. He's waiting to speak to you! Until then, may we ever hold fast to that faith by which we are commended by God for salvation, and let none of us ever hesitate to speak to others about this while we are still living here on earth! Amen.