

GOD SEES SOMETHING WE CANNOT SEE

He sees the faith that produces our good works -- He sees the faith that repents of our evil works.

Genesis 4:1-16

TEXT: *Adam lay with his wife Eve, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Cain. She said, "With the help of the LORD I have brought forth a man." Later she gave birth to his brother Abel. 3. Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil. 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. Then the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it." 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. Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?" "I don't know," he replied. "Am I my brother's keeper?" The LORD said, "What have you done? Listen! Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground. Now you are under a curse and driven from the ground, which opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. When you work the ground, it will no longer yield its crops for you. You will be a restless wanderer on the earth." Cain said to the LORD, "My punishment is more than I can bear. Today you are driving me from the land, and I will be hidden from your presence; I will be a restless wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me." But the LORD said to him, "Not so; if anyone kills Cain, he will suffer vengeance seven times over." Then the LORD put a mark on Cain so that no one who found him would kill him. So Cain went out from the LORD's presence and lived in the land of Nod, east of Eden.*

In Jesus' name, my fellow redeemed:

How did God reveal His acceptance of Abel and His rejection of Cain? Was it through their respective offerings? An artist's rendition of this Scripture shows the smoke of Abel's offering going straight up to the heavens, while Cain's angry stare is focused on the smoke of his offering going downward toward the ground.

A more important question is, why did God accept Abel and not Cain? Do they not both come to worship God? Do they not both bring offerings? Are they not like any one of us here today who have gathered to worship, and who have in our pockets a generous offering of our love and trust, ready to give as our expression to the Lord of this love for the Gospel and our trust in His care? On what basis is this judgment revealed: ***The LORD looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor.*** It's because GOD SEES SOMETHING WE CANNOT SEE. He sees the faith that produces good works, and He sees the faith that repents of evil works.

When Scripture says these words: ***In the course of time...*** it is telling us that nothing notable or significant happened since the time this first-born child of men and his brother are born, raised, married and regularly involved in worship. Think of what that means. There is nothing about how they are raised, no heroic deeds of faith, no description of their worship. Except that on this particular occasion, the Lord revealed His displeasure with Cain and his offering. God could see something we cannot see.

Hebrews 11:4 unlocks the mystery: ***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.*** Heb 11:4 This New Testament obituary of Abel, the first man to taste the wages of sin, the first man murdered, is the first one to go to heaven. And it is all because he had faith. Not just any kind of faith, but the faith that Scripture says apprehends the righteousness of God: ***By faith he was commended as a righteous man.... And by faith he still speaks, even though he is dead.***

But there's another fact revealed in this account. It is the fact that saving faith produces good works -- not "good" per man's assessment, but good in the sight of God, which means that they are indeed truly good! ***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...*** From the man who through faith in Jesus is declared righteous come activities that please God.

In the course of time, many things have been accomplished on this earth. The world would judge all these things as either good or bad. But their judgment is based upon what it sees, not on what it cannot see,

namely faith. While the world is impressed with great deeds of charity, great deeds of heroism and sacrifice, great monuments of time, energy and talent, God looks only for simple faith, and praises whatever should flow from the heart and hands of those who possess it. While the Pope burns in hell, little children who believe in Jesus do their homework, mow their lawns and baby-sit to the great pleasure of their Lord and Creator.

In the course of time, there is going to be a Judgment Day. Then the Lord will reveal to the universe what He sees in the hearts of men. Until that day comes, we live by faith in Jesus -- faith that is invisible to the eyes of men, but not only produces good works of faith, also repents of evil works that our sinful hearts also produce. Again, only God can see this heart of repentance. We can only see the sin from which the repentant heart turns away.

Cain did not have faith or a repentant heart. The Lord reveals this to us in His Word, and we can observe what is the typical behavior of the unbeliever. And please mark these behaviors because each of us has an Old Adam that behaves the same way.

First, there is the COVER UP. ***Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast...*** Rather than admit that God is correct in His warning about his arrogant heart, he lives the hypocrite: ***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.*** When the Lord reveals the cover-up, Cain preaches to God a new and false doctrine: ***Am I my brother's keeper?***

Next, there are excuses, blaming others, and the whining of being the victim. We see Cain becoming angry with God and blaming others: ***Cain said to the LORD, My punishment is more than I can bear. Today you are driving me from the land, and I will be hidden from your presence; I will be a restless wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me.*** Cain whines and feeling sorry for himself. He fears that consequences of his sin, what others might do to him, and blames God for “driving him away.”

Finally, he himself despises God's grace. Even though the Lord lovingly assures this stubborn sinner that He is close by him, if and when there ever should be a repentant heart, the Bible says: ***So Cain went out from the LORD's presence and lived in the land of Nod, east of Eden.*** This is so very typical of all who lose their faith to sin and impenitence. First, they cover it up. Secondly, they defend their sin after it has been revealed. They want to teach us about God's forgiveness and grace with the false doctrine that they can love their sin and Jesus at the same time. Thirdly, they whine and cry and blame God and their parents, the pastor, and the congregation. It's all our fault that they live in their sin, and it's all our fault that they must finally leave the Church and go away to live outside the congregation. Nothing has changed in regard to the heart that refuses to repent.

But where there is faith in Jesus, there is a change of mind regarding these behaviors of Cain and our own Old Adam. Instead of coverup, there is a sincere sorrow, more than that, a helpless and hopeless feeling over the sin that so easily besets us. But because of Jesus, hope is restored with an honest confession and a joyful trust in the absolution, that is, the declaration of God's forgiveness.

While we cannot see that faith that God sees, we can see that heart that kneels before the grace of God with our confession. We can hear that heart pray for the strength to turn from sin, and without any excuse for the horrible struggle that it is, we see it its effort to turn away from sinning again. Such a heart does this, not because it has to, but because it WANTS TO. Only God can see this. But all we can see and feel is the struggle, the daily struggle that is called “repentance.” In each and every one of us, there has been another heartfelt confession this morning.

Only God can see the faith that makes your offerings today a gift of love and trust and not an obligation. Only God can see the faith that drives you toward him daily, hourly, with the confessional plea: Lord, have mercy! But what will be seen is the determined effort to leave this worship service in the peace of God's forgiveness in order to go back home to live as moms and dads, sons and daughters, in obedience to the commandments our Savior would have us obey.

That was the faith that God saw in Abel's heart, and as the Bible 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.*** Heb 11 This is the New Testament obituary of Abel, the first man to taste the wages of sin, the first man murdered, is the first one to go to heaven. May it be the obituary of each and every one of us! Amen.