

Series: God & Cain #1025

Title: Genesis 4.3-5

*The Two Offerings*

Thank you for joining me today from wherever you are and by however you listen as we meet together coast-to-coast here in the United States and all the way around the world. And we return now to our text in the first Book of the Bible, Genesis. We are in chapter 4, verses 3-5. Yesterday we defined the word “offering” and we worked on the phrase, “So it came about in the course of time...” This is how verse 3 opens (Genesis 4, verse 3), “**3 So it came about in the course of time that Cain brought an offering to the Lord...**” An offering is a gift. Think of the offering as a gift.

And “it came about in the course of time” is literally “at the end of days.” That indicates, reasonably, at the end of the days of the week. As God worked for six days, and then rested on the seventh day, so too Cain and Abel worked for six days, and then worshipped God on the seventh day by bringing to the Lord their offerings; their gifts. These men participated in the Sabbath Day. They had a Sabbath with the Lord.

We will see why this is important as we proceed through these verses. What I want to do now is to pick up on the end of verse 3 and the beginning of verse 4 and just point out a few insights. Let me read all of verse 3 and the beginning of verse 4 for context. “**3 So it came about in the course of time that Cain brought an offering to the Lord of the fruit of the ground. 4 Abel, on his part also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions...**”

Notice, first, that each offering is given to God out of the work that each man does. Cain brought from the fruit of the ground, because Cain (as we have established) was an agriculturalist. He grew vegetables and fruit and on this occasion he selected some of the fruit he had grown and brought it along with him to worship God. Abel brought the firstlings of his flock and their fat portions. Abel (as we have established) was a shepherd. He herded sheep, goats, and small cattle. And so Abel selected some of his very best, the first of his flock, nice and fat and brought them along with him to worship God.

Today, when we think about giving an offering to the Lord, we tend to think immediately of slipping a check or cash into an offering plate or bag as it is passed around before us in a worship service, say Sunday morning at church. Or perhaps we give on-line by credit card. We think, “Let me toss some of my hard earned cash in here. Let me tithe. Let me give an offering.” Ah, but an offering or a gift for God is more than money. I submit to you that God also desires the offering of our work. Listen to just a couple of New Testament Scriptures.

Over in Colossians chapter 3 there are three verses that speak to this. I am reading now from Colossians chapter 3 and verse 17. (Colossians 3.17.) The Apostle Paul writes, “**17 Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.**” That certainly speaks to making our whole lives an offering for God. Whatever we do in word and in deed, do it all for Christ. You and I spent most of our waking week where? Yes, at work. Let it be that in the workplace we take what we do and we give it to God. We honor Him with our work. As Cain brought the fruit and Abel brought the first of the flock, so too we bring what we do.

And then drop to verses 23 and 24 of Colossians chapter 3. “**23 Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men, 24 knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve.**” (Colossians 3.23-24.)

Whoa! These are two verses that we should have sitting in a prominent place at our job. Work heartily as for the Lord. That’s using our work to honor God. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve. Most of us do not think we work for God rather than for our human taskmasters. Chances are if I ask you to tell me about your boss, you will immediately launch into (what is often a negative assessment) of him or her or them. It is common to complain about our supervisors.

But for Christians, we must learn to accept and embrace that God is always watching over us. And the Apostle Paul exhorts us to not leave our worship for Sunday mornings in the church building. Oh, no. We are to worship God 24/7 and there is no better example of that than in our work (whatever that is). Like Cain and Abel, we bring an offering for the Lord that comes out of our occupation (our vocation). Friends,

do not fall into the unbiblical trap of thinking that only pastors and missionaries “work for the Lord.” You also work for the Lord.

I would like to say more about this, but time is marching on. My first insight into verses 3b and 4a of Genesis 4 has been this: each offering is given to God out of the work that each man does. And now my second insight: you will notice in the text that Cain is first. The question is why? Is Cain the first to give an offering because he was the firstborn son of Adam and Eve? Maybe. Cain is older so Cain went first? Or is Cain mentioned first because he simply brought his offering first? Is Moses giving us the order in which each son and their offerings arrived?

My answer to these questions is that I do not know. So, if I do not know, then why bring it up? Ah ha, good point! Do I just want to show off what I do not know? Well, not particularly! I raise this to then say the following: just because Cain comes first, that does *not* mean Cain is the more devout of the two brothers. So we can be sure Moses does not mention Cain first, because Cain’s offering is of a greater delight to God. No! In fact, it is just the opposite. As we will learn next week, it was Abel’s offering that took first place in God’s mind and heart.

And now my third insight: this fruit that Cain gave to God – the fruit itself – is not the reason God will reject it. It is *not* that God dislikes the produce. As we are going to soon find out, God rejected Cain’s gift for other reasons. Do not assume something was inherently wrong with the fruit of the ground.

My final insight (at least I think these are insights, you might be thinking, “Ah, not so insightful there, Swallow...these are all so obvious”)...OK...I am glad these are obvious to you. But what I am calling my final insight is this. In Hebrew for the name Abel to be at the start of verse 4 is a deliberate, strong emphasis that indicates the gift that Cain brought will now be *contrasted* with the gift that Abel brought. Moses is highlighting what is *different* between the two men in relation to God.

Do not worry. The Scripture will be quite clear with us as to why God accepts Abel’s offering but rejects Cain’s offering. Certainly Abel gave his best. “Firstling” means first born. And “of his flock” means Abel was giving what was really the finest of his flock. These are prize sheep, goats, and cattle. They would win a blue ribbon at the country fair. And the “fat portions,” well that is the juiciest part of the meat. Who wants a dry piece of lamb? Not I. Even we want the meat to be dripping in juice, and the fat provides that.

I am getting hungry again. Yesterday we had chocolate cake and today we go savory with lamb!

As we come down the stretch towards the weekend days, I think what has been said today puts us in good shape to tackle the rest of verses 4 and 5 next week. We will do this when we begin again, Lord willing, on Monday. I recommend that you take some time on the weekend to reflect on what we are learning. Some days I pack a lot into this short period of time, so if you ever feel like, “I want to hear that again” or “I need to listen again,” just pop over to the God Is website and listen to the free podcast. Each podcast is clearly marked with a title that captures what we talked about that day. As well as each podcast being marked with the text of Scripture we are in.

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And I hope to meet you back here again on Monday as we continue to discover (together) who God Is!  
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