

Series: God & Cain #1027

Title: Genesis 4.4-5

Abel Accepted, Cain Rejected (Part 2)

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. Welcome back. Yesterday we talked quite a bit about faith. And the reason we did so is because between the two brothers, Cain and Abel, it was Abel who exercised his faith when he brought his offering to God in Genesis chapter 4. Cain did not bring his offering in faith. Cain's offering came by way of his works. To the question, what kind of worship is pleasing and acceptable to God, the Bible answers: worship that is given to God *in faith*.

Let me read the Genesis text for us, and make some comments before we turn again to Hebrews chapter 11 and continue to learn what faith is. We begin in Genesis 4, verses 4 and 5. **"⁴Abel, on his part also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions. And the Lord had regard for Abel and for his offering; ⁵but for Cain and for his offering [God] had no regard. So Cain became very angry and his countenance fell.**

As we have said, here we have two brothers, two offerings, and two different responses from the Lord. In verse 4 we learn that God finds Abel's offering to be pleasing and acceptable and in verse 5 we learn that God finds Cain's offering to be *displeasing* and *unacceptable*.

Our series is *God and Cain* so I do want to emphasize what happens here between God and Cain. However, what the Scripture does is to contrast Abel's offering with Cain's offering. So, first we have to deal with why Abel's offering was pleasing and acceptable to holy God. And that will tell us why Cain's was not. This is a study in contrasts.

Now, you heard me read from Genesis 4 and not once is the word "faith" mentioned. So how in the world do I know that Abel's offering came by faith and Cain's did not? Well, that's easy. I just keep reading the Bible and eventually my reading takes me over to the New Testament Book of Hebrews and I come to that famous chapter, some call it the Bible's "Hall of Faith," Hebrews chapter 11.

And, sure enough, in Hebrews 11, verse 4 we read this: **"⁴By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain..."** Ah, so the reason Abel offered a better sacrifice to God is because Abel offered his sacrifice "by faith." What is the difference between Abel's offering and Cain's offering all the way back at the beginning of the Bible? Hebrews answers us. Abel brought his offering *by faith*. Cain did not bring his offering by faith. The difference, in one word, is *faith*!

But we want to know, what is faith? Thankfully, Hebrews 11 begins by telling us exactly what faith is. Listen to Hebrews 11, verse 1, **"Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."** What we find is that faith is defined in two parts. First, faith is the assurance of things hoped for. Second, faith is the conviction of things not seen. Let's take each part in the order in which it is written.

Faith gives the person who possesses faith a present assurance for a future reality. This Greek word used for "assurance" is significant, as we saw yesterday. It means to stand under, that which stands under, a foundation. This the firm ground on which faith stands. We can say assurance is a support, substance, and steadiness. And, I must add, the Greek word describes standing under a guaranteed agreement. This assurance is like a title deed. A title deed entitles someone to what is guaranteed, such as having the title deed to a property. The property is yours. You own it.

Likewise, our faith entitles us to what God has promised us. So faith is first of all the assurance of things hoped for. Faith is an absolute certainty in what God has promised.

Faith is *not* wishful thinking, biblical faith is never "blind." Faith, as God requires, is never a leap in the dark, taking a chance, a kind of crossing your fingers and just hoping that the future will come to pass as you want it to. That is not the kind of faith Abel had. That is not the kind of faith the people written about in Hebrews 11 had.

Sometimes when I speak with people who are not Christians about faith, they tell me – many of them straight off – that faith is non-intellectual, faith is silly, faith is stupid, faith to them is like blind chance, a sort of stepping off into a moronic nothingness. These days having faith is considered too “non-scientific.” We’ve been hearing this phrase, “trust the science.” Well, unbelievers want to constantly contrast faith with science (faith with proof). Christians, who definitely live by faith, are considered stupid, uninformed, and very simple minded. How can we have assurance of things hoped for? Where is our tangible *proof*?

For example, do we have scientific *proof* for the existence of God? Things like this. I am sure you have heard similar statements.

And yet these same people are saying this to me as they sit down on a chair, in a coffee shop when they are drinking the coffee and eating a croissant after paying for both with a credit card. Think about that. Didn't it take faith to sit in the chair? I can tell you this person did not take thirty minutes to examine the chair, to prove it was real and trustworthy. No, he just sat right down not even thinking about it. He trusted the chair to hold his weight by faith.

Then, he tore into the croissant with his teeth, and swallowed his pastry. He did so trusting that it was not contaminated, by faith. He never went out back and inspected the kitchen first. He ate the croissant by faith. *And* drank his coffee the same way. There was no testing of the tap water to see if it was clean before it was poured over the grinds to make his coffee. And then, of course, all of this was paid for by a credit card with the company who owns the café believing by faith that the money his card said was there is indeed there when they go to collect those dollars.

You see, it is easy for Christians – living by faith – to be made to feel that we have blind faith, that we have a non-intellectual, non-scientific, unprovable, kind of dumb assurance that things hoped for will come to be. Non-Christians, especially the ones who are most disagreeable to biblical Christianity, come down hard on “faith,” but that is because they do not understand what biblical faith really is. They cannot understand a man like Abel.

Again, faith in God gives Christians a present assurance for a future reality. We have firm ground on which our faith stands. Our assurance is a support, it is substantive, and steady. We have a title deed to all God has promised us. Our faith entitles us to what God has promised us. So faith is first of all the assurance of things hoped for. Faith is an absolute certainty in what God has promised.

Second, Hebrews 11, verse 4 says, “...[faith is] the conviction of things not seen.” Now this is where biblical faith really differs from the faith it takes to sit down on a chair, or eat a pastry, or receive payment by check or credit card. Because to have conviction of things *not* seen is to exercise biblical faith. This is faith in action. Down in verse 27 of Hebrews 11 the author of Hebrews is writing about the faith of Moses, and he says this (Hebrews 11.27), “[By faith Moses]...seeing Him who is unseen.”

Seeing Him who is unseen...that means Moses used his faith to see God, even though God cannot be seen, because no one can see God and live. Likewise, believers in Christ Jesus today see Him who is invisible. We see Christ even though we cannot see Christ. *What?* That is right. By faith, we are convinced (we have the conviction) that while we cannot see Christ we believe He exists and that one day we *will* see Him.

Jesus Christ is so real to us that it is as if we already see Him. We have the conviction of things not seen. Another example of this heaven. While Christians cannot see heaven, we have the firm conviction that heaven exists, and one day by faith we believe we will be in heaven. We are so sure of this that, in a sense, it is as if we already there!

So, what is faith? According to Hebrews 11, verse 1, “faith is the assurance of *things* hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” And, having understood this, we will apply what we have learned to real people, like Abel, who lived a long time ago.

I pray you have biblical faith in Jesus Christ today. And I hope that you will join us tomorrow as we continue to discover who God is.

---END---