

Text: Hebrews 11:4

Title: "By faith Abel offered to God"

Time: 3/6/2016 am

Place: NBBC

Intro - I grew up in Northeastern Ohio, which was not much of a tourist attraction during my childhood days, except for the fact that in Canton, Ohio there was the Pro Football Hall of Fame. Though I lived about an hour away, I never visited the Pro Football Hall of Fame.

A hall of fame like that is really a hall of history. These attractions celebrate the history of a sport. That history is especially meaningful to other pro football players. When they tour the hall, they do so with the desire to be inducted there themselves one day. Well, Hebrews 11 has been called the hall of faith by some, and what we have here is really a celebration of the history of God's faithful people. That history is our history. We are called to follow in their steps.

It is at times comical and at the same time very troubling to hear how little many young people today know about American history. The Bill O'Reilly show features a reporter name Waters who asks people on the street questions about the history of our country. They have that segment because people get the answers completely wrong, and at a certain level that is entertaining and funny.

But on the other hand, the Bible indicates that there is nothing funny about a people who cannot remember their history. Better than one if four people in our state voted for an open socialist in the last primary election. That statistic does not comport well with a thoroughgoing understand-

ing of American history, and it does not bode well for the future of freedom in our country.

But Bible history is not American history; it is the history of believers. The Old Testament is unique among the works of ancient Near Eastern history. On the whole, those works were used to praise the feats and hide the failures of powerful rulers. One scholar has said, "The Old Testament is the only exception to the general patriotic untruthfulness of other nations" [Niebuhr quoted in Saphir, 2.729]. More importantly, another asks, "Where is there a national record which narrates and censures the national sins with such unsparring severity, which is thoroughly free from national conceit and self-righteousness, which lays the axe at the root of all pride and self-exaltation? I do not know any history except this one which announces on every page, 'We are a stiff-necked and rebellious people; and it is only owing to divine mercy and long-suffering that we are preserved'" [Saphir, 2.729].

History is important in the New Testament as well. When Stephen, the first martyr of the Christian church, gave his defense before the Sanhedrin, he traced the history of God's people to his own willingness to die for the same cause as they – the faith of the faithful. This is the goal of our author here. Stephen began with Abraham, but our author goes back even further to the second son born to Adam and Eve, Abel. He tells us "By faith Abel offered to God" as he encourages us to live lives of faith, and I want us to notice four things about that offering this morning.

I. The offering was a sacrifice of faithful worship (v. 4, "By faith Abel offered unto God a . . . sacrifice"; Gen. 4:1-4).

Ill: Today is Sunday, and many of us are going to enjoy some delicious meals today that involve various meats. Come this evening to our soup supper, and we will fill you up with chicken and rice soup and cheeseburger soup. When Adam, Eve, Cain, and Abel sat down for a meal, however, that meal never included meat. They would have had simply rice soup and cheese soup. The Bible tells us that it was not until after the flood and the days of Noah that God ordained that men begin to eat the meat of animals (Gen. 9:2-3). I am thankful I live in post-Noah and not pre-Noah days.

Appl: I say that to point out that the when the shepherd Abel brought the best portions of the best lambs of his flock to the Lord, he would not have done so as one who typically killed animals for food. His animals would have been killed from time to time, but not for food. Instead, he would kill them for clothing (Gen. 3:21). The slaughter of an animal to make a set of clothes to cover man's nakedness would have reminded Abel of what caused the need for that covering – the shame of their sin. The day Adam and Eve needed clothing through the death of an animal was also the day God promised to crush the serpent who had caused all this. He would do so through Eve's descendant, whose heel the serpent would bruise (Gen. 3:15). Abel's offering by faith was a sacrifice of worship because he remembered what it took to deal with the shame of his sin.

Appl2: So all faithful worship begins with a recognition of the high sacrificial cost of dealing with the shame of our sin. Worship recognizes that cost and responds to it in willing obedience and love. Baptism is a recognition of this. We celebrated the Lord's Table this morning needing to be reminded of the cost of that sacrifice. Making clothes remind-

ed Abel of the same thing. When we worship the Lord, we do not do so celebrating how much we sacrifice for Him. Rather we do so remembering how much He has sacrificed for us. This was Abel's faith—God's sacrifice would deal with my sin. Is it yours this morning? Do you believe that Christ's sacrifice has dealt with your sin? If so, can you say that you have come to worship God on the basis of that sacrifice this morning, or is it more accurate to say your focus is more on the great sacrifice you are making to be here today? Abel's offering was a sacrifice of faithful worship.

II. The offering was a better sacrifice than Cain's (v. 4, "By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain"; Gen. 4:5-9).

III: A week ago Saturday, my wife made some waffles for me, my son, and some of our guests. She put the ingredients for the waffles in her mixer machine but forgot that she was storing one of the machine's implements in the bowl too. When she turned the machine on, she found out really quickly that the implement was in there with the other ingredients, and the result was that many of the necessary waffle ingredients were thrown out of the bowl. Because those ingredients were missing, the waffles were not what they normally are.

Appl: The bowl of Cain's worship had some missing ingredients, and the end result was that the Lord did not have regard to his sacrifice. The key ingredient that was missing was likely what we have already mentioned as the key quality of Abel's sacrifice. Cain had no sense of his own unworthiness to worship, no sense of what God had to promise to deal with his sinfulness. As a result of this missing ingredient, Cain's worship fell short in a number of ways. I will note three this morning:

1. Cain's worship may not have been of his first fruits (vv. 3-4). We are told simply that Cain brought his offering from the fruit of the ground, whereas we are told that Abel brought the firstlings of the flock and the fat thereof. This is part of the essence of the contrast presented to us in the account. You see, when a man worships in faith recognizing that it cost our Heavenly Father His Firstborn and Only Begotten for us to do so, we will never come to worship with anything less than our best. We will bring Him the first fruits, give Him the priority, and confess that He deserves the preeminence. Cain seems to miss that.

2. Cain's worship was more for his own glory than for the Lord's (vv. 5-7). Were Cain's offering truly for the Lord's glory, he would have responded very differently when he learned that God was not pleased. It was not Cain's desire that God be glorified as much as it was that he be accepted on his own terms. When he found that he would not be accepted on those terms, he became angry and his countenance fell. If we are angry with a fallen countenance, chances are we are not worshipping with a concern for God's glory (Ex: "I will worship as long as the preaching is only 15 minutes!"). That prideful attitude is sin, and we have to deal with it before it destroys us as it did Cain (v. 7). That sin is the hidden implement in the bowl that kicks out of our hearts all the good ingredients of our worship.

3. Cain's worship showed no concern for his brother (vv. 8-10). That Abel was Cain's brother is emphasized in the Genesis account (vv. 2, 8 (2), 9 (2), 10). We are called to worship with our brothers, and with a godly love and concern for our brothers (1 John 3:10-12). We should worship with a love for one another. If you are hindered from worship because of hatred for a brother, it is the devil and wickedness that are in control of your life. Such an attitude is a manifestation of the children of the devil or the world (v. 13). We

should not have a lack of concern for one another. This is one reason why we are committed to assembling – we love one another and we need to minister to one another. Does our worship include that desire? Is it any better than Cain's? Abel's was.

III. The offering said something about Abel (v. 4, "by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts").

III: Certain features of a work of art will attest its value. Perhaps a painting will have the author's signature on it, or a piece of china will have a certain marking from the manufacturer on the bottom.

Appl: Genesis 4:4 records: "And the Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering." It was not only that the Lord had respect unto the offering; He had respect also unto Abel. It was not only the offering that was acceptable to the Lord; it was first and foremost Abel himself who was acceptable to the Lord. The offering said something about Abel. His worship of God attested that he was a righteous man by faith. God sees our worship this morning. Does He find it acceptable? More importantly, God sees our hearts this morning. Does he find my heart acceptable? Is it righteous by faith in the Savior like Abel's was? It cannot be righteous by works. We read nowhere here, "By works . . ." It was not the offering that made the heart righteous, it was the righteous heart that made the offering, and the offering attested that righteous heart. Does our worship attest that we are justified by faith?

IV. The offering still speaks though Abel died (v. 4, "and by it he being dead yet speaketh"; Gen. 4:10).

Appl: Abel speaks today. He has spoken to us this morning. What has he said? He has said at least two very important truths.

(1) Sin requires atonement. It was cruelly unjust for righteous Abel to be murdered in cold blood by wicked Cain. That injustice cried from the ground in the Genesis account (v. 10). Hebrews will refer to that cry for justice (12:24). Abel says to the sinner here this morning, "What hast thou done?" "What can wash away my sin?" "How shall my wrong be made right?" "How long before justice is finally served?" Abel still speaks, and he tells us that our sin requires an atonement.

(2) He also tells us this morning that a sacrifice has provided that atonement for our sins. Like Abel of old, Jesus Christ, the great Shepherd of the Sheep (Heb. 13:20), was hated by His brothers and murdered at their hands. You and I are those wicked brothers. We are the Cains whose sins killed our brother Christ. But He died in this way willingly. Hebrews has taught us repeatedly that Jesus is the Lamb of God who offered Himself the way Abel offered his lambs. He did so to provide atonement for our sins (Heb. 9:14, "How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?"; 9:28, "So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation"; 10:12, "But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down on the right hand of God").

Conclusion: Abel still speaks. He says sin requires salvation. He says Jesus' sacrifice provides that salvation. And he says finally, "Trust Him by faith." Will we by faith lis-

ten? Will we by faith offer unto God our worship the way Abel did? What of Cain do we find in our hearts this morning that needs repentance and confession before our Lord?

“A man came – I think it was actually in Philadelphia – on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction – the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

– David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

*Preachers and Preaching*