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Sermon Notes

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## **Saving Faith Displayed Before the Flood, Part 1**

**Hebrews 11:4-7**

What do you live for?

We were created to live for the glory of God, for the pleasure of God. Hebrews 11:6 gives us a strong indicator of what the central drive of our lives should be:

***Hebrews 11:6 And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.***

The verse tells us that our goal should be to PLEASE GOD... to COME TO GOD... to BELIEVE THAT HE EXISTS... to SEEK THE REWARDS He alone can give

This one verse gives us everything we need for purpose... for direction... for the living of a happy, fruitful, productive life

But there are many “God-substitutes” that this world has to offer... all of them are based on created things rather than the Creator... the Bible calls them IDOLS... and all of them will destroy us in the end if we live for them. Tim Keller, in his book *The Reason for God* lays out eight “God-substitutes” and shows the inevitable outcome of each destructive path:

- If you center your life and identity on your spouse or “significant other”, you will be emotionally dependent, jealous, and controlling. The other person’s problems will be overwhelming to you
- If you center your life and identity on your family and children, you will try to live your life through your children until they resent you or have no self of their own. At worst, you may abuse them when they displease you.
- If you center your life and identity on your work and career, you will be a driven workaholic and a boring, shallow person. At worst, you will lose family and friends and, if your career goes poorly, develop deep depression.
- If you center your life and identity on money and possessions, you’ll be eaten up by worry or jealousy about money. You’ll be willing to do unethical things to maintain your lifestyle, which will eventually blow up your life.

- If you center your life and identity on pleasure, gratification and comfort, you will find yourself getting addicted to something. You will become chained to the “escape strategies” by which you avoid the hardness of life.
- If you center your life and identity on relationships and approval, you will be constantly overly hurt by criticism and thus always losing friends. You will fear confronting others and therefore be a useless friend.
- If you center your life and identity on a “noble cause,” you will divide the world into “good” and “bad” people, and demonize your opponents. Ironically, you will end up being controlled by your enemies. Without them, you would have no purpose in life.
- If you center your life and identity on religion and morality, you will, if you are living up to your religious and moral standards, be proud, self-righteous, and cruel. If you don’t live up to your standards, your guilt will be utterly devastating.

[Tim Keller, *The Reason for God*, pp. 290-1]

The Book of Hebrews lays out a better life than this... it is the life of FAITH.

***Hebrews 10:38-39 But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him.”<sup>39</sup> ¶ But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved.***

Hebrews 11 describes in majestic and clear tones the way a life of faith looks in this world in which we’re living. It traces out in one example after another how faith moves a man or woman to live in this present age... lives of courage and purpose and clarity and hope and love...

Amazingly, we are told that this life of faith has been essentially the same throughout all of human history

Yes, we live in an amazingly technologically advanced world... an electronic world in which every 18 months to two years, some new sensational electronic device revolutionizes the way we live. And no, we don’t live in tents, or count our wealth in livestock or the number of wells we’ve dug. But the clear implication of Hebrews 11:4-7 is that the ancient people who lived before the Flood pleased God the exact same way we are to please Him... BY FAITH

This week and next week, we will study these primordial examples of faith... Abel, Enoch, and Noah...

We will peer through the brief mentions of them in this chapter and in the Genesis account and find the transferable principle of faith that God wants us to learn... and the key is Hebrews 11:6

So, what was life like before the Flood? We have very little idea. The world at that time may have been astonishingly complex, or rudimentally simple... we really don't know. Peter calls it by that exact phrase... "The world at that time" or the "world that then was":

***2 Peter 3:6 By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed.***

Imaginative artists who respect the biblical account have tried to draw pictures that show amazing buildings and incredible technological achievements. More commonly, other authors may draw these folks as little better than stone age primitive people walking around in animal skins and living in caves. The fact is we really have NO IDEA what the world of that time was like.

BUT the author to the Hebrews tells us something very important... from the very beginning of history there have been people who have pleased God, who have delighted Him in some way, who have walked with Him and glorified Him; based on Jesus' statement about the resurrection, ***I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob; He is not the God of the dead but of the living***, we can surmise that God is still the God of Abel and the God of Enoch and the God of Noah to this day.

And clearly, the author to the Hebrews is presenting Abel, Enoch, and Noah as examples of faith. The LIFE OF FAITH thus unifies the human race in every generation, or specifically, the elect from the human race. In every generation, on every continent, among every tribe or people or language, one thing has ALWAYS BEEN THE SAME: those who pleased God did so ONLY BY FAITH... and those whom God rewarded were rewarded ONLY BY FAITH.

Hebrews 10:38 says

***The righteous will live by faith.***

Paul makes it clear in Romans and Galatians that this verse is speaking of the central doctrine of Christianity... JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH ALONE apart from works of the Law; this is the discovery we celebrated this past week on Reformation Day. When Martin Luther nailed his 95 Theses to the Wittenberg Door, he was beginning a journey of personal and church reform by which the gospel of Jesus Christ was rediscovered. And at the center of it was this idea: JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH ALONE apart from works of the Law

One of the most amazing teachings that relates to this is that this is the way EVERY SINNER that has made it to heaven in every generation has been saved... JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST...

Abraham:

***John 8:56 Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad."***

***Galatians 3:8-9 The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: "All nations will be blessed through you." <sup>9</sup> So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.***

Moses:

***Hebrews 11:26 He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward.***

***John 5:46 If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me.***

David:

***Acts 2:30-31 David was a prophet... Seeing what was ahead, he spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to the grave, nor did his body see decay.***

***Romans 4:6-8 David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works: <sup>7</sup> "Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. <sup>8</sup> Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him."***

Isaiah:

***John 12:41 Isaiah said this because he saw Jesus' glory and spoke about him.***

Hebrews 11:4-7 gives us a rare and valuable glimpse at what unifies the people of God in every era of Redemptive History... from the earliest dawn of time, when Adam and Eve and Cain and Abel lived, through to this present day it has always been the same:

***The righteous will live by faith.***

## I. Basic Principle of Relationship with God (vs. 6)

***Hebrews 11:6 And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.***

### A. Basic Goal: Pleasing God

1. This should be the basic goal of our entire existence
2. "I want to PLEASE GOD... my Creator, my Judge, my Lawgiver, my King"

3. “What can please you, O Lord? What can bring pleasure to you?”

***Ephesians 5:10 find out what pleases the Lord.***

4. NOTE: the lost person never really asks this question... but this becomes the central issue of our existence as saved people

5. In heaven, all we will yearn for at every moment is to PLEASE THE LORD

6. BUT love implies my own pleasure in this... if I am not delighted in God’s pleasure, I am not really loving Him; God has no pleasure in ANGRY, RELUCTANT people who hate His will and have NO DESIRE to please Him... that is how He rules over most of the world... He is the “King of reluctant kings, and the Lord of reluctant lords”... but His Kingdom is made up of people who LOVE HIM and are delighted to do His will

7. I have learned to say “I get my greatest pleasure, O Lord, out of bringing YOU pleasure”

**B. Second Statement of Basic Goal: Coming to God**

1. The idea is of a desire to travel a distance and be near God

2. We are naturally AWAY from Him, but desire to be close to Him

3. So key Scriptures testify to the deep yearning all believers have to be close to God

***ESV Psalm 73:28 But for me it is good to be near God; I have made the Lord GOD my refuge, that I may tell of all your works.***

***Psalm 84:1-4 How lovely is your dwelling place, O LORD Almighty! <sup>2</sup> My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the LORD; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God. <sup>3</sup> Even the sparrow has found a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may have her young-- a place near your altar, O LORD Almighty, my King and my God. <sup>4</sup> Blessed are those who dwell in your house; they are ever praising you***

***Psalm 27:4 One thing I ask of the LORD, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to seek him in his temple.***

4. This is Christ’s primary work... to bring us to God

***1 Peter 3:18 For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.***

***John 14:6 Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.***

C. Third Statement of Basic Goal: Being Rewarded by God

1. Clearly this verse holds this out as a firm desire... something to live for, something we should yearn for
2. The author says in order to please God WE MUST believe that He rewards people
3. Nothing wrong and everything right with seeking rewards
4. Clearest statements from Jesus: sermon on the Mount

***Matthew 5:11-12 Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. <sup>12</sup> Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.***

***Matthew 5:46 If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that?***

***Matthew 6:1-4 "Be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness' before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. <sup>2</sup> ¶ "So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. <sup>3</sup> But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, <sup>4</sup> so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.***

D. Summation: "What is required for me to be pleasing to God, to come to God, to be rewarded by Him?"

E. Double Negative Assertion

1. Without faith... this is IMPOSSIBLE
2. No sinful human being can ever be pleasing to God or come to God or be rewarded by God WITHOUT FAITH

F. Making it Positive: Faith is REQUIRED in order to please God... in order to come to God... in order to be rewarded by God

G. Applying this to Abel, Enoch, and Noah

1. None of the accounts from Genesis mentioned their faith

2. The first mention of faith in the Bible was concerning Abraham

***Genesis 15:6 Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.***

3. BUT the Author to Hebrews is showing His logic by which he grounded the assertions he is making in Hebrews 11
- a. “By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did...” [STOP: you may ask “How do you know that? The text doesn’t say that!!” The Author will say “I am glad you asked... I’ll tell you in a minute!!”]
  - b. “By faith, Enoch was taken from this life” [STOP: you may ask “How do you know that? The text doesn’t say that!!” The Author will say “I am glad you asked... I’ll tell you in a minute!!”]
  - c. “By faith Noah built an ark” [AGAIN, the text doesn’t say that! How can you make the assertion?]
4. Simply put, it is clear that ALL THREE MEN lived lives that were pleasing to God; they were COMMENDED by God as obedient men, and there is a simple logic here:

***Without faith it is impossible to please God***

5. Logic works out simply here:
- a. Fact 1: “Without faith it is impossible to please God”
  - b. Fact 2: “Abel’s offering pleased God”
  - c. Therefore: “Abel’s offering was made by faith”
6. Again:
- a. Fact 1: “Without faith it is impossible to please God”
  - b. Fact 2: “Enoch was commended as someone who pleased God”
  - c. Therefore: “Enoch lived by faith”

H. HOW Do We Know This Is True?

- 1. How did the Author come to the conclusion that “Without faith it is impossible to please God?”
- 2. At one level: as a writer of Scripture, God may simply have revealed this to Him
- 3. But the Author gives us two reasons why it is so:

- a. Because anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists
  - b. AND because anyone who comes to Him must believe that He rewards those who seek Him
4. At another level, the Author is reasoning from the very nature of God Himself here
- a. Because of the nature of God and His revelation to us, we MUST HAVE FAITH to please God because without faith we will not even believe that He exists
  - b. AND without faith we will not believe that He rewards those who diligently seek Him

#### I. The Hiddenness of God and the Goodness of God

- 1. God's basic existence must be taken by faith
- 2. God's determination to reward those who diligently seek Him must be taken by faith
- 3. WHY? Because God wills to HIDE HIMSELF, and to REVEAL HIMSELF only as He pleases

***Isaiah 45:15 Truly you are a God who hides himself, O God and Savior of Israel.***

***1 Timothy 6:16 who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see.***

***1 John 4:12 No one has ever seen God***

- 4. God is invisible... so therefore only the eyes of faith can perceive Him
- 5. If anyone would approach God, He must believe that He EXISTS before that person makes any effort to seek Him
  - a. Why set out on a journey for a destination that you don't believe exists?
  - b. No one packs up their possessions, sells their home, and journeys westward to find "Shangri-La"; but they will do it to find a beautiful homestead in Oregon or a gold field in northern California
  - c. If a person doesn't believe that God exists, that person will not call on Him, will not seek Him
- 6. Furthermore, if a person doesn't believe that the seeking is worthwhile, they will not begin the journey

- a. If a person believed that certain misery, torture, and death would result from a journey, THEY WILL NOT BEGIN that journey
- b. If a person sees no benefit to himself, he will not leave his present favorable circumstances to go on a perilous journey... people only go on a journey for some BENEFIT they believe will come to them
- c. 1849: If a moderately successful merchant in Philadelphia heard about the gold discoveries in northern California, and his brother and two neighbors had already gone to make their fortune and all three had died as a result... and if he absolutely believed that the same would happen to him if he ventured forth, WOULD HE GO??? NO!! He MUST BELIEVE that some benefit will come to him if he ventures forth
- d. So it is with God... if you believe that God will reward you if you diligently SEEK him, and you believe that reward far outweighs any loss

#### 7. Why the “Journey” language?

- a. The verse speaks of those who “COME TO GOD” and “DILIGENTLEY SEEK HIM”

The Greek implies a diligent SEARCHING for God... yearning for Him, wanting to find Him

- b. Naturally NO ONE DOES THIS:

***Romans 3:11 there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God.***

- c. Faith is an incredible GIFT of God by which He reveals Himself IN PART to a dead soul and creates a YEARNING to seek and find MORE of God... the soul begins a lifetime quest for God
- d. Again, this relates to the hiddenness of God... God is not obvious, not perceivable to our five senses
- e. Faith believes there is a God... but that we don't have as full an experience of Him as we might
- f. Faith believes that SEEKING GOD will be well worth that effort... that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him

#### J. What is the REWARD?

- 1. A person will not please God... because that person will not believe that He exists AND/OR that He will reward someone who diligently
- 2. What IS the reward of seeking God? GOD HIMSELF is the reward

***Genesis 15:1 After this, the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward."***

***Jeremiah 29:13 You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.***

3. Rewards come BOTH now and in eternity
  - a. NOW: an experience of God by faith through the Holy Spirit that is called a “deposit” guaranteeing the full inheritance
  - b. In eternity:

***Revelation 22:3-4 No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. <sup>4</sup> They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.***

4. Thus the life of faith is a life of constant SEEKING after God... searching for Him and seeking to find Him that He might reward you with Himself

***Psalm 27:8-9 My heart says of you, "Seek his face!" Your face, LORD, I will seek. <sup>9</sup> Do not hide your face from me***

***Psalm 63:1-3 O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water. <sup>2</sup> I have seen you in the sanctuary and beheld your power and your glory. <sup>3</sup> Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you.***

5. AND the life of faith is KNOWING WHEN YOU DIE that the greatest reward is yet to come:
  - a. We don't get our FULL REWARDS now in this life
  - b. We get them after we die and go to see God face to face
  - c. Now... and THEN!!!

***1 Corinthians 13:12 For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.***

***Philippians 1:21 For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.***

K. Doing This “By Faith”, Doing That “By Faith” vs. Doing this or doing that with NO FAITH AT ALL

1. Life is filled with activities... some of them great and life-changing, epoch-making events... some of them astonishingly mundane
2. It is possible to do any of them by faith... or any of them not by faith

3. For example, you can eat by faith

***1 Corinthians 10:31 So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.***

4. Or you can eat not by faith

***Romans 14:23 But the man who has doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and everything that does not come from faith is s***

## II. Abel: Faith's Worship (vs. 4)

***Hebrews 11:4 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.***

### A. The Beginning of the History of Faith

1. Abel's sacrifice was a first in two significant ways...
2. It was the first animal sacrifice offered to God by a human being
3. It was the first act of faith-filled worship... the first example of a faith-directed action

### B. The Beginning of Animal Sacrifice

1. God covered naked Adam and naked Eve with animal skins... of course, that meant an animal had to die
2. But Genesis 4 records the beginning of human patterns of worship, and at the core of it was animals sacrifice

***Genesis 4:2-4 Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil. <sup>3</sup> In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the LORD. <sup>4</sup> But Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock.***

3. What moved Abel to do this??? Surely not natural reason...

A.W. Pink: "Neither carnal reason nor personal inclinations could have moved Abel to present a bleeding lamb for God's acceptance."

4. it is absolutely certain that Abel was acting in obedience to the command of God

a. evidence from the text:

***Genesis 4:6-7 Then the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? <sup>7</sup> 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."**

b. evidence from the theology of faith

*<sup>ESV</sup> Romans 10:17 So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.*

c. God must have told Abel all about sacrifice... what he was to do, what it was for, what it signified

d. Abel HEARD and BELIEVED

5. Five things Abel must have understood by faith about the animal sacrifice

a. God was righteous in driving fallen man out of the Garden of Eden

b. He (Abel) was a guilty sinner, and that death was what he truly deserved

c. God is holy and must punish sin

d. God is merciful and is willing to accept the death of an innocent substitute in his place

e. Sinners like Abel must ultimately look to Christ—the true Lamb of God who was to come later—for acceptance with God

C. Was Abel Looking to Christ??

1. Moses was looking to Christ (Hebrews 11:26)

2. Jesus said Abraham was looking to Christ

3. John says Isaiah saw Jesus' glory and spoke about him

4. Hebrews 11:4 says Abel offered his sacrifice BY FAITH

5. Conclusion: God had already revealed to Abel in some basic way the connection between animal sacrifice and Christ

D. Faith Transforms the Heart, Produces Obedience... and Obedience is Worship

***Genesis 4:4 The LORD looked with favor on Abel and his offering***

1. FIRST... God looked with favor on Abel; Abel HIMSELF as a man was pleasing to God

2. What can make a sinner PLEASING to God? What can transform our standing with God so that He views us as righteous? What can work in our hearts so that we are offering our worship in a manner pleasing to God?
3. Answer in every case: FAITH IN CHRIST
4. Once Abel himself was pleasing to God, then his offering would also be pleasing to God

#### E. The Comparison with Cain

***Hebrews 11:4 By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did.***

***Genesis 4:3-5 In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the LORD. <sup>4</sup> But Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The LORD looked with favor on Abel and his offering, <sup>5</sup> but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor.***

1. Abel's offering was called a "better" one than Cain's... or (KJV) more excellent
2. In Cain, we see the example of the FIRST RELIGIOUS HYPOCRITE
  - a. He refused to comply with the commandments of God
  - b. BUT cloaked his rebellion by coming to God to offer a sacrifice of his own making, of his own imagination
  - c. Cain's was the first FALSE RELIGION or CULT... at the center of all false religion is human invention
  - d. God did not tell Cain to offer vegetables... Cain took that upon himself
  - e. The ultimate end of this self-styled worship was human sacrifice to Baal

***Jeremiah 19:5 They have built the high places of Baal to burn their sons in the fire as offerings to Baal-- something I did not command or mention, nor did it enter my mind.***

3. THUS... Cain and Abel stand as two representative men
  - a. Cain represents those who honor God with their lips and their outer religion, but their hearts are far from him
  - b. Abel represented Christ's true people... instructed by God's word, justified by faith, obedient from the heart, pleasing to God
4. Attributes of Abel's offering compared with Cain

- a. Abel's offering was done IN OBEDIENCE to God's revealed will; Cain's was not
- b. Abel's offering was made BY FAITH; Cain's was not
- c. Abel's offering was made from a TRANSFORMED HEART resulting in a willing mind and love for God; Cain's was not
  - i) Abel offered God his BEST... the "fat portions from some of the firstborn of the flock"
  - ii) These were the most precious and valuable things he had to offer
  - iii) Contrast that with the grudging offering made by the priests of Malachi's time...

***Malachi 1:6-11 "A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If I am a father, where is the honor due me? If I am a master, where is the respect due me?" says the LORD Almighty. "It is you, O priests, who show contempt for my name. "But you ask, 'How have we shown contempt for your name?' 7 "You place defiled food on my altar. "But you ask, 'How have we defiled you?' "By saying that the LORD's table is contemptible. 8 When you bring blind animals for sacrifice, is that not wrong? When you sacrifice crippled or diseased animals, is that not wrong? Try offering them to your governor! Would he be pleased with you? Would he accept you?" says the LORD Almighty. 9 "Now implore God to be gracious to us. With such offerings from your hands, will he accept you?"-- says the LORD Almighty. 10 "Oh, that one of you would shut the temple doors, so that you would not light useless fires on my altar! I am not pleased with you," says the LORD Almighty, "and I will accept no offering from your hands. 11 My name will be great among the nations, from the rising to the setting of the sun. In every place incense and pure offerings will be brought to my name, because my name will be great among the nations," says the LORD Almighty.***

- iv) This is the spirit of Cain... grudging God, burdened by the need for the religious ritual, Cain was NOT PLEASING to God

***Genesis 4:5 on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor.***

- d. Abel's offering prefigured Christ, and Cain's did not
  - i) Hebrews taught us an important lesson about sacrifices

***Hebrews 9:22 ... without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.***

- ii) Cain's offering of vegetables did not prefigure Christ

5. Lessons from a comparison of Cain and Abel's sacrifices

- a. To serve God acceptably, we must set aside all human inventions and ingenuity, lean not on our own understanding, and cling closely to what He has commanded in His word
- b. All obedience, service, and worship must proceed from faith, or it is displeasing to God
- c. We must serve God with the BEST we have; the best of our abilities, the best of our possessions; out of LOVE for God, we must serve wholeheartedly
- d. In all our religious actions and duties, we must do it continually by FAITH IN CHRIST... a constant focus on the person and work of Christ, for only by His sacrifice for us can any of our sacrifices be pleasing to God

#### F. The Commendation of Abel's Faith

*ESV Hebrews 11:4 By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, **through which** he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts.*

1. BY MEANS of the sacrifice he offered by faith, Abel was commended as righteous
2. The commendation came in Scripture... but the deeper issue is GOD'S STANCE toward Abel
3. This is again the doctrine of justification by faith alone... no sinner in history has ever been commended by the Holy God except on the basis of Christ's perfect sacrifice and our faith in that sacrifice
4. God gave a firstfruits testimony by accepting his gifts
5. How do we know God accepted Abel's gifts? Perhaps God simply spoke from heaven in a heavenly voice and said "I accept your gifts"
6. A.W. Pink thinks this:

"It may be that the Lord evidenced His acceptance of Abel's offering (and thereby testified that he was righteous) by causing fire to descend from heaven and consume the sacrifice."

*Leviticus 9:24 Fire came out from the presence of the LORD and consumed the burnt offering and the fat portions on the altar. And when all the people saw it, they shouted for joy and fell facedown.*

*1 Kings 18:38-39 Then the fire of the LORD fell and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones and the soil, and also licked up the water in the trench. <sup>39</sup>*

***When all the people saw this, they fell prostrate and cried, "The LORD-- he is God! The LORD-- he is God!"***

***Judges 6:21-22 With the tip of the staff that was in his hand, the angel of the LORD touched the meat and the unleavened bread. Fire flared from the rock, consuming the meat and the bread. And the angel of the LORD disappeared. <sup>22</sup> When Gideon realized that it was the angel of the LORD, he exclaimed, "Ah, Sovereign LORD! I have seen the angel of the LORD face to face!"***

BUT there is no certainty on this point.

7. In any case, Abel walked away from that offering with assurance of God's favor, and Cain did not

**Key Lesson: Our Person's Must Be First Justified Before Our Works of Obedience Can be Accepted by God.**

G. How Abel Continues to Speak Even Though He Is Dead

***Hebrews 11:4 And by faith he still speaks, even though he is dead.***

1. We all know how Abel died...

***Genesis 4:8 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.***

2. We know the significance of that death

***1 John 3:12 Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother's were righteous.***

3. Hebrews focuses on Abel NOW AFTER DEATH!!

- a. The verse tells us HE STILL SPEAKS, even though he is dead

- b. And it says he does so BY FAITH

4. Two ways to understand this

- a. His example still speak in Scripture because it was recorded for all time and all generations of people

***Matthew 26:13 I tell you the truth, wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her."***

- b. He himself still speaks, though he is absent from the body

- i) Murderers can kill the body but not the soul

***Matthew 10:28 Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul.***

ii) God is not the God of the dead but of the living...

***Matthew 22:31-32 But about the resurrection of the dead-- have you not read what God said to you, <sup>32</sup> 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not the God of the dead but of the living.'***

iii) Heaven is made up of people who are disembodied spirits

***Hebrews 12:23 You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect***

iv) Scripture testifies to martyrs speaking in heaven

***Revelation 6:9-10 When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained. <sup>10</sup> They called out in a loud voice, "How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?"***

5. In any case... faith-filled lives LIVE FOREVER and SPEAK FOREVER

Next week: we'll look at Enoch, who walked with God by faith; and Noah, who by faith and holy fear built an ark to save his family

### III. Application

A. Come to Christ NOW... BY FAITH

B. Meditate Daily on Hebrews 11:6

1. Understand that, first and foremost, God wants you to live BY FAITH
2. Set your heart on PLEASING GOD BY FAITH
3. Seek Him vigorously, every single moment of the day
4. Seek God and make Him your treasure and your pleasure
5. Don't get sucked into the god-substitutes Tim Keller listed...living for a relationship or family or pleasures or a career or a "noble cause" or societal approval or possessions
6. Live totally focused by faith on God

C. FEED YOUR FAITH by the word of God

D. Understand True Worship in the Pattern of Abel

1. Based on the finished work of Christ... the time for animal sacrifice is OVER
2. BUT we come in the name of Christ, trusting that His sacrifice on the cross has atoned for our sins
3. By faith we offer to God a BETTER SACRIFICE than Cain did
4. Based on the finished work of Christ, we make OUR SACRIFICES to God by faith
  - a. Romans 12:1 We offer our bodies as living sacrifice, holy and PLEASING to God (and without faith it is impossible to please God)
  - b. 1 Peter 2:5 we see ourselves as a royal priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God BY FAITH
  - c. Ephesians 5:2 we live a life of love as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God
  - d. 2 Timothy 4:6 we are willing to be poured out as a drink offering even to death for the cause of the gospel
  - e. Philippians 4:18 we make our money a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, PLEASING TO GOD (and without faith it is impossible to please God)
  - f. Hebrews 13:15 we offer through Jesus continually a sacrifice of praise, the fruit of lips that confess His name
  - g. Hebrews 13:16 we do good and share with others, for with such sacrifices God is PLEASED (and without faith it is impossible to please God)