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Series: *Heroes of Faith*

Title: *Cain and Abel – The Faith of Giving*

Preacher: Mark Adams

Scripture: Genesis 4:1-9; Hebrews 11:7

Good Morning Redland!

As you can see, I'm in the coat closet this week, next to the filing cabinet where we store our offering plates. The reason I'm here is because today I want us to look at the story of some of the first offering givers. I'm referring to Cain and Abel and I want to see what we can learn about the faith of giving from these two brothers. Take your Bibles and follow along as I read Genesis 4:1-9.

**1 - 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."**

**2 - Later she gave birth to his brother Abel. Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil.**

**3 - In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the LORD.**

**4 - But Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The LORD looked with favor on Abel and his offering,**

**5 - but on Cain and his offering He did not look with favor. So, Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast.**

**6 - Then the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast?"**

**7 - 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."**

**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.**

**9 - Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?" "I don't know," he replied. "Am I my brother's keeper?"**

These passages of Scripture comes right after Adam and Eve were banished from the Garden of Eden. Shortly after that first ever eviction, Eve became pregnant with the first CHILD ever conceived. And, no parents have ever had more HOPE for a child than Adam and Eve did at the birth of Cain. Remember, right before God expelled these two from Paradise, He promised them a Deliverer, Who would come from the **"seed of a woman."** This deliverer would crush Satan's head; destroying both him and his works.

Well, when they realized a baby was growing in Eve's womb, I believe they began to HOPE that THIS child could be that promised Deliverer---the One Who would enable them to return to Eden. I mean, look at the NAME they gave him. They called him **"Cain,"** which means, **"Here he is!"** Plus, a literal translation of Eve's statement in verse 1 could read: **"I have brought forth a man---even the Deliverer!"**

Well, in due time a second son was born to the world's first parents and he was named, **"Abel"** which means, **"frail."** This is probably why Cain, the stronger, became a FARMER, doing back-breaking agricultural labor whereas Abel, the weaker, became a SHEPHERD, quietly tending the flocks.

Now, it would be natural for Adam and Eve to favor their firstborn. I mean, not only was he their first, in their minds he also was the deliverer, the **"Here he is!"** CHILD. And Abel; Able was just the **"frail---other child."**

Well, verse 3 says that a time came when both brothers, now fully grown, came to present an OFFERING to the Lord. God must have given specific instructions when it came to offering sacrifices. I mean, the phrase, **"at**

*the end of days*” infers that God had appointed a particular time period at the end of which sacrifices were to be offered. I also think there was a special appointed place for this act of worship. I say that because many centuries later, when God told Moses how to make the tabernacle, He instructed him to include a mercy seat with cherubim whose wings would meet right over this seat and that is where offerings were to be placed. Well, we know that God set the winged cherubim with a flaming sword at the gateway to Eden. So, to me at least it makes sense to assume that this practice in Exodus originated in Genesis. I mean, it is very likely that the gateway of Eden was itself the FIRST mercy seat, where once a year Adam and Eve and their children were to come with an offering for the Lord.

Verse 3 says that on one of these appointed times Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil, the fruit and produce he had harvested, as an offering for God. But as verse 4 says Abel brought **“fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock.”** The Bible also says the Lord looked on HIS sacrifice with favor, He accepted it; probably seen by God sending fire to consume it, but He rejected Cain’s offering. And this is where we find our first faith lesson.

### **(1) Faith is seen in our gifts to GOD.**

It’s obvious from the story that the best model for this; the offering with the most faith, was that of Abel. Hebrews 11:4 says, **“By faith Abel brought God a better offering than Cain did. By faith he was commended as righteous when God spoke well of his offerings.”**

Now, why was Abel’s offering better? How did it show FAITH? I can think of a few contributing factors.

#### **A. First, Able seemed to have had the right ATTITUDE about his sacrifice.**

I sense a humility and a respect in his gift that I don’t see in his elder brother. I mean, Cain must have known that, as Genesis 3:17 tell us, God had cursed the ground due to Adam and Eve’s sin. So, to give an offering from the cursed ground would have been an insult to God. It would be like our serving dinner to a guest on dirty dishes. Cain’s offering also reflected the pride and conceit that could have come from his favored child status; his pride, that due to his hard and careful work in his own strength HE had produced something from the cursed ground.

This reminds me of the old Jimmy Stewart movie, *Shenandoah*. Stewart plays a farmer during the Civil War and every time his family sat down to a meal he prayed the same prideful prayer:

*“God, as You know WE worked the fields. WE sowed the seed. WE weeded the crops. WE kept the varmints away. WE harvested the crops. WE cleaned it, WE cooked it---why, if WE didn’t work so hard WE wouldn’t have any of this food...but we thank You for it anyway. AMEN.”*

I think one reason God rejected Cain’s gift is because like Stewart’s character in this movie, Cain was overly pleased with HIMSELF. His offering was given in PRIDE and as James 4:6 tells us, **“God opposes the proud.”** This should remind us that whenever WE give to God, we do so as a reminder of the fact that we would BE nothing and HAVE nothing if it weren’t for God’s gracious provision. In other words, an offering given in faith is given in humility as a reverent act of worship.

#### **B. And another reason Abel’s offering was better was the QUALITY of his gift.**

Verse 4 says that Abel brought **“the first-lings of this flock and of the FAT thereof”** and in that day and age fat was considered to be the choicest part of an animal. My point is that this text tells us that Abel brought the BEST he had to God. But, on the other hand, nothing is said about Cain’s offering, just that he brought some of his produce. To me, this seems to infer that, unlike his brother, Cain kept the best for himself and gave God second-rate produce or the leftovers.

Reminds me of a true story told by the late Paul Harvey about a woman and her frozen Thanksgiving turkey. This woman had purchased a Butterball turkey, but had put it in the bottom of her freezer and forgot about it--for 23 years! One day she discovered it and called The Butterball Turkey Company hotline to find out if it would be okay to eat. The Butterball expert said the turkey would probably be safe to eat if the freezer had been kept below zero for the entire 23 years. But he warned her that even if the turkey was safe to eat, the flavor would probably have deteriorated to such a degree that she would not recommend eating it. The lady said, *"That's what I thought. We'll give the turkey to our church."* Very "Cain-like" gift, wouldn't you agree? Abel's example teaches us that the best way to give is to give our best.

So, a good question for us all to ask ourselves is this: *"When it comes to my tithes and offerings, the gifts of my time to further God's Kingdom, am I more like Abel or Cain?"*

### **C. And then a final reason Abel's gift was better was the GIFT ITSELF.**

Cain brought the fruit of the ground but Abel brought the fruit of the FLOCK. One brother brought VEGETATION. The other brought ANIMAL life. And, in my mind this is the main reason Cain's offering was rejected. You see, God had already begun to teach mankind that the purpose of these offerings was to atone for sin and that atonement for sin required a SUBSTITUTE. Something had to die; a life for a life. Remember? In the Garden, an apron of leaves was insufficient to cover Adam and Eve's shame, so in Genesis 3:23 God provided them with animal skins, implying the death of an innocent victim.

Well, by the same token, the fruit of the ground was insufficient to cover Cain's sin; and both Cain and his little brother would have known this. Their parents would have told them. In fact, I believe God Himself would have told them. Referring to the first set of clothes, He would have told them that they needed to understand that sin was no little thing. God used these skins as the first of many object lessons down through the centuries to help them and their descendants realize that sin leads to death; and because it does a sinless victim must die in order that sinners might be pardoned. I mean, even these first sacrifices pointed forward to Christ; the spotless Lamb of God Who would come to die on the cross and in that one sacrificial act, take our sins on Himself. So, when Abel came with the offering of BLOOD he was honoring God's instructions; but like a rebellious pupil Cain's prideful offering showed that he ignored them. God's rejecting Cain's offering should remind us that, as Hebrews 9:22 says, ***"without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin."*** That's why Jesus came. He didn't come to earth just to teach us good things. No, He came to die, to shed His precious blood for us because that was the price of atoning for our sins and God loved us too much not to pay it. Abel's example shows us that our FAITH gifts to God should be sacrificial.

Let's continue with the story.

Verse 7 says that God patiently, graciously gave Cain a second chance to get his offering right and Cain could have done that. He could have traded some of his produce for one of his brother's lambs and sacrificed it. But his arrogance and conceit prevented him from doing so.

Instead he became angry; angry enough to want his brother dead, angry enough to act on that desire and lure his brother into the fields where he, the first child born to humanity, committed the first MURDER---a premeditated, cold-blooded killing. God of course knew what had happened; His eyes see all things, His mind knows all thoughts, but in His grace he gave Cain a chance to CONFESS his crime by asking, ***"Cain, where is your brother?"*** And Cain sarcastically replies, ***"How should I know? Am I my brother's keeper?"***

This leads to a second thing I want us to learn about faith from these brothers.

### **(2) Faith is seen in our gifts to OTHERS.**

I mean, the answer to Cain's question is YES---as Christians, in every sense of the word, we ARE indeed our brothers' and sisters' keepers! James 1:27 says, ***“Religion that God the Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress.”***

1<sup>st</sup> John 3:10 and 17 says, ***“Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother. If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?”*** It goes on to say that as Christians we are to, ***“love not with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.”***

James 2:15ff says that if we see a brother or sister without clothes or food and, ***“do nothing about their physical needs”*** our faith is a dead faith.

Isaiah 58 says that God approves of people whose faith in Him moves them to ***“loose the chains of injustice---set the oppressed free---share food with the hungry---provide the poor with shelter---clothe the naked.”***

I could go on and on, because as Deuteronomy 10:18 says, God, ***“defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the alien, giving him food and clothing.”*** And, as His children, He calls us to do the same. Think of it this way. As Christians, our business is to do God's business and God's business is people!

We've all heard about the way the Covid-19 Coronavirus devastated Italy. This week I read about two Italians, Pina Andelora and Angelo Picone. They are street musicians accustomed to engaging the passers-by on Spaccanapoli, the historic central street in the middle of Naples. Once the coronavirus hit Italy it left people like them without a means to contribute to the vibrancy of their city. Or so they thought, until another opportunity unveiled itself. When Pina and Angelo realized that the lockdown also prevented local soup kitchens from serving the homeless community, they resurrected an old tradition to meet an immediate need. They began preparing meals from their home to give to those in need, but instead of standing on the street, they used an alternative delivery system. Picone said, ***“We realized there's the issue of safety and social distance. So, we relied on an old Neapolitan custom — lowering food baskets from our balcony.”*** Included in the baskets was a slogan from a legendary Neapolitan doctor known for treating the poor: ***“Those who can, put something in, those who can't, help yourself.”*** The baskets have helped to spur a reawakening of generosity in the city. Not only have citizens contributed food to the baskets, but Pina and Angelo were contacted by a local cheese artisan who wants to ship some of his Parmesan to the couple, so they can include it in their food baskets. Angelo hopes this wave of generosity will continue because the need will not abate soon. He says, ***“This crisis will be long. Artists like us have to pay rent and bills, but many people depend on our assistance.”*** This couple realized they were their neighbor's keepers so they gave sacrificially to help.

I'm wondering, does your attitude about the needy in our county need to change? Is there a specific way God is calling you to be your brother's keeper?

Or maybe you “tuned in” this morning and are not a Christian. You realize that you are a sinner and that your sin separates you from God like it did Adam and Eve, and every human born since. You know, later in Genesis God tells Cain, ***“The blood of your brother is crying to Me from the ground.”*** And in a similar way our sins cry out to God for justice. But the glorious news is justice has been done. Jesus has paid the price for our sins. In fact, Hebrews 12:24 says that, ***“Jesus' sprinkled blood speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.”*** And that word is ***“FORGIVE! Father, FORGIVE!”*** Abel's blood cries for vengeance but Jesus' blood cries out for our forgiveness. This morning you can have that forgiveness....God can wash your sins away and forgive you and come into your heart and life. All you have to do is ask Him. If you have questions, please contact me.

This coming week, our staff will lead daily devotionals, each of which will focus on one of the stained glass windows in our Sanctuary. So tune in each morning!