

imPOSSIBLE – Abel and a Worthy Faith

5/10/20

Hebrews 11:1-2

Sunday AM

I recently read a story about a nun who worked as a nurse for a Catholic home health service. One day, while driving to see a patient, her car ran out of gas. Having just passed a gas station, she walked there in hopes of borrowing a gas can, only the store didn't have a gas can available. So, the nun returned to her car to see if she could find anything that could be used to hold some gas – and all she found was a bedpan. So, she walked back to the station, filled the bedpan w/ gas, and carefully returned to her car. Just as she began pouring the gas into the tank from the bedpan, a couple of Baptist preachers were driving by and one of them said to the other, “*Now that's what I call having faith!*”

I'm not exactly sure I'd call this faith, but it does raise the question – *what exactly is faith?*

While the dictionary defines faith as – *complete trust or confidence in someone/something* – the writer of Hebrews sees faith thru a different lens – *Faith is the assurance of things we hope for and the conviction of things we cannot yet see.* Hebrews 11:1

**Meaning:** As it pertains to God, faith isn't some wistful hope that something may come to pass in an uncertain tomorrow or that it can be explained thru a person's natural senses of what they can see, smell, hear, taste, and touch.

**SEE?** When it pertains to God, faith isn't some mysterious force; nor is it thinking positively/being optimistic. Essential to faith is trust – which we all exercise in some way every day. So, should you ever hear someone say, “I just can't have faith.” They're wrong. B/c every one of us exercises some level of faith every time crank up/drive in a car, every time we cross a bridge, every time we sit in a chair, take a pill, or eat a meal – we're exercising faith.

What's different for a Christian is the **OBJECT** of our faith. When we drive in a car across a bridge or sit in a chair, we're trusting in something we can experience empirically; but when we trust in God, we're trusting in **SOMEONE** we can't see w/ our human eyes, but only w/ eyes of faith – and yet He's more real than anything we can see w/ our natural eyes.

I'm reminded of the blind man's testimony in **John 9** after Jesus healed him – *I once was blind, but now I see and Jesus is the reason.* Not only were his physical eyes opened, but so too were His spiritual eyes.

Faith is trusting in what you can't see (God) b/c deep w/in, you know He's true, present, and trustworthy.

Biblical faith is living in the hope of God's promises, presence, and provision that's so real; it gives you an absolute assurance for today and the future. It has relevance in the present tense and in a future sense.

**But there's more** – Hebrews 11:6 says, *w/out faith it is impossible to please God.*

**Meaning** – faith is the essential ingredient to knowing and following God. It's believing in God not b/c we see Him, but b/c we see the evidence of God all around us – helping us to understand that we can trust Him b/c we know He loves us and can handle every detail.

Today, I want to begin a new series in what some scholars call the **Hall of Faith** found in Hebrews 11. In this series, I want us to walk alongside of some of the giants in the faith to glean from them what it means to **walk by faith in the faith** – my hope is that we will all see what's POSSIBLE w/ God.

*Faith is the assurance of things hoped for and the conviction of things not yet seen. For by it the men of old gained God's approval. By faith we understand the worlds were prepared by the Word of God, so what is seen wasn't made out of things which are visible. By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain, thru which he obtained the testimony he was righteous, God testifying about his gifts, and now thru faith, though he is dead, he still speaks. Heb. 11:1-4*

As we begin this series, the first *giant in the faith* we get to walk alongside of is **Abel**. Abel means *breath* or *vanity* speaking of brevity – possibly in reference to God knowing how brief Abel's life would be. We don't know for sure, but here's what we do know.

*While Abel didn't live a **long** life, he did live a **strong** life* – and it had everything to do w/ his faith. As it pertains to faith, Abel teaches us what it means to have a **WORTHY** faith. Let's read his story in **Genesis 4**.

*Adam had relations w/ his wife Eve, and she conceived and gave birth to Cain, and she said, "I have gotten a man-child w/ the help of the Lord." Again, she gave birth to his brother Abel. Abel was a keeper of flocks, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. It came about in the course of time that Cain brought an offering to the Lord of the fruit of the ground. Abel, also brought an offering of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions. The Lord had regard for Abel and for his offering; but for Cain and his offering, God had no regard. So, Cain became angry and his countenance fell. The Lord said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will not your countenance be lifted up? If you don't do well, sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it." Afterwards, Cain told Abel his brother. It came about when they were in the field, Cain rose up against Abel and killed him. Genesis 4:1-8*

**Recap** – Adam/Eve gave birth to Cain/Abel. One day, they each brought an offering to the Lord. Cain made an offering from the harvest, while Abel brought an offering of flesh – a perfect, spotless, lamb. The Bible says God **received** Abel's offering but **rejected** Cain's offering. As a result, in anger, Cain murdered Abel.

**The obvious question is** – Why did God accept Abel's offering but reject Cain's offering?

**Simple Answer** – Cain offered his sacrifice out of **obligation**; Abel offered his sacrifice in **obedience**. Cain felt **forced**; Abel responded in **faith**. Cain was **inconvenienced**; Abel was **privileged**. Cain's sacrifice was **weak**; Abel's sacrifice was **worthy**.

#### Abel's Faith Sought to **HONOR** God

Hebrews 11 alludes that the difference was **faith**. Faith that God was worthy/deserving of the sacrifice. Abel believed God was worthy so he brought to God his first and best, while Cain likely brought his least/leftovers.

**Here's what you can be sure of...** as the 1<sup>st</sup> generation to have existed w/out having seen/experienced God up-close/personal like Adam/Eve did – these brothers had to **believe** not in what they saw w/ their own eyes and touched w/ their own hands – but in the eternal Creator their parents talked about.

Adam/Eve couldn't have been persons of faith in the same way as their descendants b/c they had already seen God face-to-face in all of His glory. They had communed w/ God personally, talked w/ Him, and abided w/ Him in the Garden of Eden. They had also experienced firsthand the grace of God in the blood sacrifice God offered on their behalf to cover their guilt, sin, and shame. (God's made only 2 sacrifices)

But not so their children. Cain, Abel, and Seth grew up in a fallen, cursed world where God was present, but not visible. All they knew about God came from their parents and from God's providence. Certainly, they'd heard the stories of God and the requirements of God for a blood sacrifice for the atonement for sin – yet Cain seemingly rejected this way, resented it, and was reluctant to offer it. **Not b/c he didn't believe in God but b/c he wanted to do it his way**. Thus, He offered not what was required but what he preferred. But Abel humbled himself before the Lord to honor God's will.

**Here's what we can't miss.** In the Bible, offerings and sacrifices are a picture of worship. And so, it's evident we're being taught by Cain/Abel something about what makes worship worthy of God.

In all honestly, this is the essential teaching of life as we're referred to the 1<sup>st</sup> commandment of having *no other gods before Him* and to Jesus' reiteration of all the commandments when He said that *we're to love the Lord w/ all of our heart, mind, soul, and strength*. B/c honoring God is our highest purpose/calling.

Which brings us back to Cain/Abel. The reason Abel's sacrifice was accepted was b/c in faith he sought to honor God by coming to God on God's terms instead of on His terms. But not Cain. Cain thought he could work the ground and thru his works produce something acceptable to God on his terms.

The reason God couldn't receive Cain's offering was b/c the Lord knew Cain's heart wasn't set on honoring Him. This is seen in that he chose neither to give his best portion nor a proper sacrifice of blood. Thus, Cain's offering was in defiance of God no matter how well intended – as was ultimately exposed by his response to God in killing Abel.

Bonhoeffer, I think rightly answers his own question about Cain when he asked – *Why did Cain murder?* His answer – *Out of His hatred of God.*

I think this aligns w/ David's words in Psalm 51 when he wrote – *God does not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring. God delights in a broken and contrite heart...*

This is the mistake far too many people make, including some of us here today. We think we can bring an offering of a morally good life and it'll be accepted. We think going to church, giving, going, and serving can hopefully make us acceptable to God. But Isaiah 64:6 begs to differ saying that *all our righteous deeds are like filthy rags.*

**If our faith is to be worthy of God, then we have to come on His terms or not at all.** And His terms are simple – we can come only thru Christ! We come by way of the cross! We come thru the blood.

You can be mad at God all you want – but it doesn't change the fact we must humbly come to Him in faith. **As a friend of mine said** – *Cain learned the hard way that you can't get blood from a turnip* – God requires and is satisfied only by the blood from a spotless lamb!

That's what Abel did and that's why God accepted him. He didn't try to come on his own merit, he came through God's mercy. He didn't try to come thru the works of his hand, he came thru the blood of the lamb. He came on God's terms – and God accepted Him.

*When the kindness of God our Savior, He saved us, but not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration/renewing of the H.S., whom He poured out upon us richly thru Christ our Savior. Titus 3:4-5*

Many people still live out of a Cain approach to life today. Acknowledging God's existence, yet resisting God's way for a way that suits themselves b/c they struggle to see it. Whether it's by expecting God to meet them on their terms, or seeking to way to earn God's favor apart from God's provision – or believing all roads lead to God – it's the Cain attitude/approach that fails to see God as one who can be trusted. Not so w/ Abel – Abel saw in faith that God could be trusted, and sought to honor Him in every way.

I'm reminded of a story of faith involving a father/son. One night their house caught on fire, and the son was forced to climb up to the roof. His father was on the ground below him yelling, "Jump Son! I'll catch you!" But the boy was too afraid and protested, "But daddy, I can't see you!" The father replied, "I know... but I can see you and that's all that matters."

Folks, we might not be able to see God w/ our physical eyes, but He can see us. And so, in faith, we can jump knowing we can trust Him w/ our today and w/ all our tomorrows! **And it is in this act we place our trust in Him alone that we exercise a worthy faith.**

I think Solomon said it best – *Trust the Lord w/ all of your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways, acknowledge Him, and He will direct your steps.* Proverbs 3:5-6

Simply put, the only faith worth walking is a faith worthy of bringing honor to God.

## Primary Sources

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