

Hebrews 11:4

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Preacher: Nathan Raynor

[0 : 00] I invite you to join me in your copy of God's Word in Hebrews chapter 11. On your bulletin this morning is a quotation from a Puritan preacher by the name of John Trapp, the context of this letter that we've been working our way through now for so many months is that, as far as we know, this letter is written to a small church on the outskirts of Rome, a group that's been sent out of Rome of Greek-speaking Hellenistic Jews.

That's the title of the letter, Hebrews. And they had suffered much for their faith. Chapter 12, verse 4 says they had not yet suffered to the shedding of their blood.

No one had died in their church. They had been publicly ridiculed. They had been imprisoned. Their material possessions had been taken. And the temptation for this church was to go back to the ways of Judaism, to return to the old covenant worship, thinking that it would be good enough. We could worship as we once did and not suffer in this way. And the author of Hebrews writes to them to say, no, Christ is better.

Press on. Persevere. You have not done this in vain. There's something that awaits you beyond this world. Have, take up this living hope.

[1 : 55] Show yourselves to belong to Christ. To preserve your souls by your faithfulness. He has been hard on them at times.

And he has been encouraging to them at times. And this is where we find ourselves now as we concluded chapter 10. And in verse 39, he said to this church he's writing to, and I hope to us this morning, but we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls.

And then he begins to give a description of what faith is. So what does he mean by this? This type of persevering faithfulness.

And he says in verse 1 of chapter 11, now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

So he says it's the surety in the promises of God. Those things that God has spoken to us, that we believe them.

[3 : 11] And then in verse 2 he says, for by it the people of old received their commendation. Now the rest of chapter 11 is the author of Hebrews' tour through the Hebrew Scriptures, our Old Testament, concerning the people of old who received their commendation.

Now when thinking commendation, think approval. This is how the people of old received their approval from God. It was by their faith.

And the first in his tour through the Hebrew Scripture is also the first martyr of the Bible. A man named Abel.

A man who was killed for his faithfulness. And I just absolutely love when the providence of God is made apparent.

God always is ruling. Whether we recognize it or not, he's always in control of all things at all times. I just absolutely love it when I go, thank you for being in control of all things at all times.

[4 : 25] I made a schedule for us to preach through the book of Hebrews that got thrown off course. That got thrown off course by an illness that Clay had when he was scheduled to preach. What a wonderful thing that we're not talking about Enoch this morning, who didn't even die, who was taken up on the International Day of Prayer for the persecuted church.

I don't know what I would have done with that. Praise God this morning that we get to look at the faithfulness of the Bible's very first martyr.

So our text for today is Hebrews chapter 11, verse 4. And beloved, this is God's word to us, written for his glory and our good.

We would all do well to listen to it in order to believe its promises and obey its commands. Hebrews 11, verse 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. And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks. [5 : 42] Now upon an initial reading of the account of Cain and Abel, Genesis chapter 4, one can find themselves rather confused.

Why is it that Abel's sacrifice was accepted and Cain's was not? It feels a little arbitrary when you first look at the text. The whole matter is a bit enigmatic, right?

Without some deeper, some more closer examination. So this morning, I want to do that with you. I want to look at that text a bit. And then we'll look at the commentary that the author of Hebrews gives us as well to observe the faithfulness of Abel.

So mark Hebrews chapter 11 and turn in your copy of God's Word to Genesis chapter 4. And we'll read the first 16 verses, which is this account of the story of Adam, or excuse me, of Cain and Abel. The second word in verse 1 is Adam, which I was staring at. Beginning in verse 1 of Genesis chapter 4. Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, I have gotten a man with the help of the Lord.

[6 : 59] And again she bore his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a worker of the ground. In the course of time, Cain brought to the Lord an offering of the fruit of the ground.

And Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions. And the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering. But for Cain and his offering, he had no regard.

So Cain was very angry, and his face fell. The Lord said to Cain, Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted?

And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is contrary to you, but you must rule over it. Cain spoke to Abel his brother, and when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him.

Then the Lord said to Cain, Where is Abel your brother? He said, I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper? And the Lord said, What have you done?

[8 : 03] The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground. And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. When you work the ground, it shall no longer yield to you its strength.

You shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth. Cain said to the Lord, My punishment is greater than I can bear. Behold, you have driven me today away from the ground, and from your face I shall be hidden.

I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me. Then the Lord said to him, Not so. If anyone kills Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold.

And the Lord put a mark on Cain, lest any who found him should attack him. Then Cain went away from the presence of the Lord and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden.

And the episode ends there. But what does it all mean? Augustine wrote on the matter in his famous work, The City of God, which I commend to you, where he explained Cain was first born, and he belonged to the city of men.

[9 : 14] After him was born Abel, who belonged to the city of God. Augustine saw that Cain and Abel approached God and the things of God with radical difference.

Jude wrote in Jude verse 10, and the first part of verse 11, These people blaspheme all that they do not understand, and they are destroyed by all that they, like unreasoning animals, understand instinctively.

Woe to them, for they walk in the way of Cain. There's a juxtaposition being made here between these two brothers.

It is this difference that we want to understand this morning, that the author of Hebrews intends for us to understand, the way of Cain and the enduringly faithful way of Abel.

He wants us to find ourselves identifying with Abel, being those who have faith and preserve their souls.

[10 : 23] In order to do so, we will put them against each other, juxtapose them with particular attention to Abel in the following outline. So here's the outline for our text this morning.

Number one, Abel's worship by faith. Number two, Abel's wholeness by faith. Number three, Abel's witness by faith.

If I printed notes for you on the back of your bulletin, you could see the cleverness of the alliteration. Worship, wholeness, with a W, and witness. Number one, Abel's worship by faith.

The very first part of verse four says, by faith, Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain. To do something by faith, it must be connected to a word from God.

We are not faithful willy-nilly. We are faithful in God's promises and in God's commands. Paul writes in Romans chapter 10, verse 17, so faith comes from hearing and hearing willy-nilly.

[11 : 39] That's not how the verse ends, is it? And hearing through the word of Christ. So, there must have been something that undergirded Abel's faithfulness and Cain's faithlessness.

God must have given instructions for sacrifice. Otherwise, how does the text in Genesis 4 make sense in light of Hebrews 11, 4, who is here, the author, saying that it's by faith that Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice.

It must be that God told Adam and Eve and therefore Cain and Abel that their sacrifices were to be made with animals.

In Genesis, death enters into the garden. Genesis chapter 3, we see the rebellion of Adam and Eve and the curse that follows.

And because they were working to hide their nakedness and their shame with fig leaves, God instead makes for them more suitable clothing. And what does He do in order to make more suitable clothing?

[12 : 56] He sheds the first blood. The first death enters into the garden because of the sinfulness of man. It would seem, as a result of this, that sacrifice began at this time.

It's likely that Cain and Abel understood their need of atonement, of replacement death for them to be found acceptable before God.

At the first reading of this text, and I have for many years, thought that this was the first time that Cain and Abel had attempted to worship the Lord. This was the very first time they ever had brought sacrifice before God.

Like, look at these two just suddenly getting the idea that they should offer a sacrifice. Right? And they came up with what they had, and God commended one and was unhappy with the other.

However, at this time, if you look through genealogies, Cain was 129 years old. likely lived lives of worship toward God.

[14 : 07] And then Genesis chapter 4, verse 3 reads, In the course of time, Cain brought to the Lord an offering of the fruit of the ground. And in the course of time is more literally translated, at the end of days.

At the end of days. Indicating the end of a specific period of time. Likely, we can't know for sure, but likely, a time that God had designated for a regular sacrifice.

It was probably a time that God had given for them to come and offer a sacrifice. At the end of that time period, they came to offer their sacrifice.

So God had given instruction as to how they were to worship. And Abel worships faithfully according to the prescription that God had given him.

Cain does not. Cain comes to God in his own way. Cain is thinking he has a superior way than the way that God had commanded them to come.

[15 : 16] Cain may have reasoned in this way and I'm just going to read this to you quickly because I think it was well written, better than I would write myself, from a commentary by Kent Hughes.

That Cain may have reasoned like this, what I am presenting is far more beautiful than a bloody animal. I myself would prefer the lovely fruits of a harvest any day and I worked far harder than able to raise my offering.

It took real toil and sweat and it is even of greater market value. Enough of this animal sacrifice business, God.

My way is far better. It's with this kind of attitude that Cain comes and makes his offering.

Cain's offering was the evidence of his self-righteousness and pride. He thought he knew better. Abel humbly believed God and obeyed his command.

[16 : 21] He came to God with a submissive penitent heart trusting that God would accept him through his prescribed means. Further, Cain, upon having his offering rejected, became angry.

He thought that he had some right to worship God on his own terms. And when that way was not accepted, he stamped his foot. God is being unjust towards me.

I thought I was doing a thing that was good and proper. And God in his great mercy goes to him. This astounds me in my reading of this story.

He becomes angry at God because God doesn't accept his unacceptable sacrifice. Genesis 4 5 says, so Cain was very angry and his face fell and God comes to him and he speaks to him, verse 6 and 7, why are you angry and why has your face fallen?

If you do well, will you not be accepted? Cain has the opportunity here to repent. You were right, God of heaven and earth.

[17 : 39] You told me the way in which I should come and worship you. the doing well of verse 7. But what does Cain do instead? He remains angry.

He does not repent. His mom had to be talked into sinning. He couldn't be talked out of it. And his anger finally and fully finds its vent in the murder of his brother.

God will to God on his terms and not our own. We are to submit ourselves humbly to his good commands, trusting that we will be delivered by the atoning work of Jesus Christ on our behalf.

God. We are to come to God on his terms. And there is no other way to properly worship God than through the sacrificial work of Jesus Christ.

There's no other way. If you don't place your faith in Christ, if you're not found in him, clothed in his righteousness, then anything you attempt to do for God, toward God, will not be accepted by him.

[18 : 58] But if you are in Christ, if you belong in him, in his righteousness, you've been buried by baptism into his death, you've been raised to life in him, then we can do no wrong.

In all of our feeble efforts, God accepts us because he accepts us in Christ. Don't lose sight of what the author of Hebrews has said in the previous chapter.

We walk through these texts so slowly. Just back in Hebrews chapter 10 and verse 14, the author wrote, for by a single offering, he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified, set apart by the single offering of Christ himself.

Offered once for all. And then in verse 18 of Hebrews 10, where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin.

Praise God we have no need of an altar in our gathering place. There is no altar here. If you're in a Christian church that claims to have an altar, it should make you cock your head a little bit.

[20 : 11] I don't know what's happening in this place. We don't make sacrifice again and again. once for all. Jesus accomplished this work. And it's by faith in Christ that we properly worship God.

That's Abel trusting in the sacrifice, the atoning work of this worship that God had prescribed that commended him as righteous.

Which brings us to our next point. number two, Abel's wholeness by faith. Abel's wholeness by faith. This is the middle part of verse four of Hebrews 11.

Through which he was commended as righteous. God commending him by accepting his gifts. Proper worship comes by faith.

Righteousness being declared right is also the result of faith. We do not know exactly how it is that the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering.

[21 : 21] Jewish tradition holds that a fire came down and consumed it but didn't consume Cain's offering. But we don't know for sure. But the author of Hebrews under inspiration of the Holy Spirit tells us that God commended Abel as righteous.

Commending him by the acceptance of his gifts. saving faith is accompanied by works.

The works do not save us but saving faith is evidenced by works. James write in James chapter 2 verse 17 and 18 so also faith by itself if it does not have works is dead.

Verse 18 but someone will say you have faith and I have works show me your faith apart from your works and I will show you my faith by my works.

Abel believed in God. He believed in God's commands he believed in God's promises and he showed that he believed by doing what?

[22 : 35] By obeying. He evidenced his belief in the fact that he obeyed. It wasn't the work that saved him it was his faith evidenced by his work.

This is so very important for us to understand in our age. Again from Kent Hughes I like this little analogy he wrote faith and righteous works are like the wings of a bird there could be no real life no flight with a single wing!

Whether works or faith but when the two are pumping in concert their owner soars through the heavens authentic faith produces an authentic life that flies high like the Abel of old.

It was through the evidencing of Abel's faith that God declared him righteous whole Abel's wholeness by faith.

And then third and finally Abel's witness by faith. The last part of verse 4 of Hebrews 11 says and through his faith though he died he still speaks.

[23 : 54] And I hope that the end of verse 4 just resonates with you as we have previously considered those who are suffering around the world even in this day for the name of Christ and Pastor Han.

In Genesis chapter 4 verse 10 Abel's blood cries out from the ground for justice. Today his blood cries out for faithful perseverance.

That's what the author of Hebrews is doing all through chapter 11. He's saying to us look look at the faith of Abel and press on to the end.

Your end may come soon like Abel's it may come long like others but press to the very end.

Don't be one who shrinks back and is destroyed. Be one who has faith and preserves their souls.

Abel speaks to us from the very page of scripture as this author pens this letter.

[24 : 59] He is not silent although Cain thought he was silencing him. He and so many more after him have taken their place with our Lord and glory and they want to see us ushered into their number.

They are longing for the day to come when the number of the church will be complete. And it's to this end that the author of Hebrews is encouraging!

us right? Worship by faith. have wholeness by faith and witness by faith. Live faithful lives and preserve your souls.

Hebrews chapter 12 and verse 1 he brings chapter 11 to an end as he says therefore since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses!

Let us also lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.

[26 : 05] Let's pray together.