

Scripture Reading: Genesis 4:1-7

"1 Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, and said, "I have acquired a man from Jehovah." 2 Then she bore again, this time his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. 3 And in the process of time it came to pass that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to Jehovah. 4 Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. And Jehovah respected Abel and his offering, 5 but He did not respect Cain and his offering. And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell. 6 So Jehovah said to Cain, "Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? 7 If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it.!""

"The Sacrifices of Cain & Abel"

This morning we continue on in the 4th chapter of the Book of Beginnings and Lord willing we will learn much about faith and sacrifices! Our text is brief and to properly understand what is going on we will have to look back and forward in the Scriptures as we often should.

At verse 3 we read, "3 And in the process of time it came to pass that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to Jehovah." We do not know exactly when these events happened but we are NOT just a few days out of the Garden. We will see Cain after he is cursed having children with his wife and building a city, so there were lots of people around by this time and we will look at all of that in more detail when we come to that portion of chapter four.

- Our task for today is to consider the sacrifices brought by Eve's boys, the attitude in which they brought them and the results.

Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground and in verse four we read that Abel "brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat."

From God's perspective there was quite a difference in these sacrifices:

"And Jehovah respected Abel and his offering, 5 but He did not respect Cain and his offering."

- Our children have produced some interesting pictures of what took place here and the commentators have much to say as well.

However, it is one of those places where we must be cautious about dogmatically going beyond what the text reveals and being careful to respect what the text actually says.

Let me take some obvious questions in reverse order: First just how did God "respect" one sacrifice and not the other? Well going forward in the Bible we often see God showing His favor around a sacrifice or altar by sending fire from heaven to consume the acceptable sacrifice.

This may well be what happened which would have made the distinction pretty clear. However, it is possible that God simply revealed His pleasure with Abel's sacrifice and He could even have spoken through Adam who would have likely been the one to give his sons the instructions they needed about sacrifice. The text is silent so we must not rush to judgment about any of these possibilities.

The bottom-line is that God is clearly pleased with one and not the other!

This brings us to the question of just what did Cain and Abel bring?

They both brought gifts from their vocations and both had items that are used in later sacrifices so we cannot emphatically say that Abel brought the right item & Cain did not...

- Now with that said, Abel did bring a lamb which is at the center of God's grand story of salvation with Jesus coming as the Lamb of God and being seen in heaven as a lamb that was slain!

IF Cain and Abel had been instructed to bring a lamb, and Cain just did what he wanted, that would certainly account for God's disfavor.

This brings up the question of whether there was blood shed on this day... Again with what we saw in the garden and in the rest of the Scriptures it would seem proper, but the reference to 'the fat' of the lamb can mean the best of his flock and the word used for sacrifice here is what is usually used for bloodless sacrifices. So these may have been simple thank offerings brought from their bounty or it may have been a sacrificial scene near the entrance to the Garden of Eden looking forward to the coming of the Lamb of God who would give them access again to the Tree of Life. If it is the later we have a simple lesson of following God's command that Cain's rebellion clearly would teach.

- If it is the former then we have a question of their motives in bringing the gifts that they brought!
- I suspect there are elements of both involved and thus we can learn important lessons about our obedience AND having the right attitude in our obedience.

Even though our information here is sketchy, the one mistake that we must not make is thinking that all this sacrifice stuff in the Old Testament is not very relevant for our lives today. I hope we are not in much danger of that here at Church of the King because we have learned that our worship is very much informed by these Old Testament practices AND we read almost every week the admonition of Paul to be living sacrifices!

But since one of our major goals in studying Genesis is to see Jesus throughout the book; I think it would be a good time to review just how much these sacrifices relate to the work of Jesus! I mentioned last week that a peek at the Book of Leviticus would provide some insights into our text before us...

So let's go to chapter nine of that book which is one of the best summaries that we have of the sacrifices God commanded.

Leviticus 9:1 "It came to pass on the eighth day that Moses called Aaron and his sons and the elders of Israel. 2 And he said to Aaron, "Take for yourself a young bull as a sin offering and a ram as a burnt offering, without blemish, and offer them before Jehovah. 3 And to the children of Israel you shall speak, saying, 'Take a kid of the goats as a sin offering, and a calf and a lamb, both of the first year, without blemish, as a burnt offering, 4 also a bull and a ram as peace offerings, to sacrifice before Jehovah, and a grain offering mixed with oil; for today Jehovah will appear to you.'""

So right there we see the sin offering which relates to our confession of sin, and the burnt offering, which is more properly translated the ascension offering, which relates to our consecration where we are changed and made presentable to God through the preaching of the Word [explain]

We also see the peace offering which relates to our participation at the Lord's Table [the one offering the priests and sometimes the people were allowed to eat] and the grain offering which relates to our gifts and prayers during the service [and a reminder that Cain may not have just brought the wrong stuff.]

Moses then tells them to follow the Lord's instruction and He will appear.

"7 And Moses said to Aaron, "Go to the altar, offer your sin offering and your burnt [or ascension] offering, and make atonement for yourself and for the people. Offer the offering of the people, and make atonement for them, as Jehovah commanded."

- The writer of Hebrews goes to great lengths to show how all of this pointed to Jesus who would present Himself and the great sin offering and ascend into Heaven as the Lamb who was slain!

Back in Leviticus Moses then gives all the details that God instructed him to give regarding how all the sacrifices were to be made.

22 "Then Aaron lifted his hand toward the people, blessed them, and came down from offering the sin offering, the [ascension] offering, and peace offerings.

Here we see the benediction given as we do each week as the people leave the Temple and go forth to serve God. Then we see that God is pleased with what was done, in a manner that may have happened with Abel...

23 "And Moses and Aaron went into the tabernacle of meeting, and came out and blessed the people. Then the glory of Jehovah appeared to all the people, 24 and fire came out from before Jehovah and consumed the ascension offering and the fat on the altar. When all the people saw it, they shouted and fell on their faces."'"

➤ Obviously Moses and Aaron came before God with the right sacrifices AND the right attitude!

There is a WHOLE lot more about sacrifices in the Book of Leviticus and the rest of the Old Testament.

➤ A good exercise to study this is to be reading through Leviticus and Hebrews at the same time!

We don't have time in a single sermon to do that at great length, but let me just tease you a bit with part of Hebrews chapter 10: This of course comes after the author has spent about four chapters showing how Jesus is the fulfilment of all this.

"1 For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect."

OK, time to ask the children one of those obvious questions: When we are baptized and put our trust in Jesus so that our sins are forgiven and we have the perfect righteousness of Jesus...

➤ How does God the Father see us?

Those sacrifices in the Old Testament could not take away sin, BUT for those who faithfully practiced them and looked forward in faith to the work of Jesus on the cross, God saw them as perfect in Christ! This is why Abraham or David or even Simeon in the Christmas account could be referred to as righteous people: They were not perfect, but they confessed their sins knowing they were forgiven through the work of Jesus even before He came because God had revealed the importance of His sacrifice through the various sacrifices we see in the Old Testament as the writer of the Hebrews has been pointing out. The writer continues in verse 3:

"But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. 4 For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins. 5 Therefore, when He [Jesus] came into the world, He said: "Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, But a body You have prepared for Me. 6 In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You had no pleasure.... 9 then He said, "Behold, I have come to do Your will, O God." He takes away the first that He may establish the second."

➤ This is the change from the Old Covenant which always ended in death under Adam to the New which ended in life with the resurrection power of Jesus!

A hope the Old Testament Saints could only look forward to in the future, as through a glass darkly...

A hope that we see clearly proclaimed in verse 10:

➤ "By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all."

This is why the reformers called the Catholic Mass a cursed idolatry when they taught that they were recrucifying Jesus at the Lord's Table!

- Jesus was NOT like the Old Testament priest who had to offer the sacrifices over and over...

"12 But this Man [Jesus], after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God, 13 from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool. 14 For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified."

Here we see how our perfection or righteousness is like those in the Old Testament Saints...

- Jesus has perfected us forever and yet we are still being sanctified!
- We must bring our sins to Jesus in honest confession remembering that we are only righteous because of what He has done!

The writer tells us that the Holy Spirit is our witness of all this and concludes:

19 "Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, 21 and having a High Priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. 23 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. 24 And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, 25 not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching."

Hebrews goes on to give us a warning that troubles many but it is one that we are informed about from the Old Testament if we have eyes to see. We are to come before God in right worship, just as the Old Testament Saints were commanded to do, but we must always do so in faith.

- The practice itself is meaningless without faith!
- In fact, such practices can be an abomination!

We reviewed some of the commands about sacrifices earlier and we know that the Old Testament is full of such commands for sacrifices and feasts and holy days, all of which the people were expected to keep.

So listen carefully to what the Prophet Isaiah says in chapter one: Through the prophet God says that His people have become a "sinful nation,

A people laden with iniquity, A brood of evildoers, Children who are corrupters!" using very strong language. But listen carefully to what we see beginning at verse 10:

"Hear the word of Jehovah, You rulers of Sodom; Give ear to the law of our God, You people of Gomorrah: [*this is Judah!*] 11 "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices to Me?" Says Jehovah. "I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed cattle. I do not delight in the blood of bulls, Or of lambs or goats. 12 "When you come to appear before Me, Who has required this from your hand, To trample My courts? 13

Bring no more futile sacrifices; Incense is an abomination to Me. The New Moons, the Sabbaths, and the calling of assemblies-- I cannot endure iniquity and the sacred meeting. 14 Your New Moons and your appointed feasts My soul hates; They are a trouble to Me, I am weary of bearing them."

- Do you see what God is hating here?
- The very things He had commanded the people to do... But they did them in rebellion, without faith!

Israel was in open rebellion at this time and God says not only will all those sacrifices and holy days NOT help them, they kindle God's wrath.

Going back to Hebrews, this is what the author is addressing at verse 26 of chapter 10: "For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, 27 but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries.

28 Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses.

29 Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace? 30 For we know Him who said, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. And again, "The Lord will judge His people."

➤ 31 It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

I mentioned that these verses trouble some, especially those in our reformed camp who wonder how they can be reconciled with the security of our salvation! Sure sounds like you could lose it in these verses!
[mention the example of the young believer]

➤ I can assure you that Jesus loses none that are His and we are safe while we are in his arms!

However, just as with the nation of Israel if someone decides to go whoring about with other gods, falling into grievous sins like sacrificing their own children and continues in such rebellion then they are not part of the people of God they are Sodom and Gomorrah as the prophet called them!

As Pastor Wilkins has rightly said, the gift of salvation is not a present that we can put in our pocket and then go wherever we want and do whatever we want...

If someone sees us cussing & swearing and sleeping around and cheating at school or work, we cannot just pull out the present and say, or don't worry I am a Christian!

No, instead as we just read at verse 31: "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

Again, this does not mean that God's people have to go around all the time wondering if they have committed the unpardonable sin...

We can claim the promise given at the end of chapter ten and go on to enjoy the glories of Hebrews chapters 11 & 12 *[which can be your homework!]*

Listen carefully to the comfort of this promise that follows such a stern warning: Hebrews 10:

"38 Now the just shall live by faith; But if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him."

39 But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul."

We walk in God's grace just as the Old Testament Saints were expected to do because look at what God says to His people in that same chapter of Isaiah:

Isaiah 1: "16 "Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; Put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes. Cease to do evil, 17 Learn to do good; Seek justice, Rebuke the oppressor; Defend the fatherless, Plead for the widow. 18 "Come now, and let us reason together," Says Jehovah,

"Though your sins are like scarlet, They shall be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They shall be as wool. 19 If you are willing and obedient, You shall eat the good of the land; 20 But if you refuse and rebel, You shall be devoured by the sword"; For the mouth of Jehovah has spoken."

➤ We must be an obedient people doing the right things with the right attitude, including the confession of our sins when we fall short over and over again!

Now I am sure you think I have wondered far from Cain and Abel but such is not the case:

I believe that the text is intentionally vague about the details of those sacrifices so we would see application down through the Old Testament and into the New Covenant.

- We don't know how God showed His favor for Abel but we know that He did.
- We don't know if Cain brought the right sacrifice or offered it in the right way, but we know God was not pleased with him.

There is one thing that we do know and that is the fact that Abel offered his in faith, and by implication Cain did not.

- And we know this because the writer of the Hebrews makes it plain in the very next chapter.

In Hebrews 11 we read

“1 Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. 2 For by it the elders obtained a good testimony. 3 By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God,

so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible.

4 By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; & through it he being dead still speaks.”

The lesson that Abel still speaks to us is one of faithful obedience, knowing that our sins are forgiven in Jesus.

Let us continue in this New Year with a renewed understanding and commitment to the command of Paul in Romans 12:

“1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. 2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good & acceptable & perfect will of God.

Communion Meditation: Proverbs 9

“1 Wisdom has built her house, She has hewn out her seven pillars;

2 She has slaughtered her meat, She has mixed her wine, She has also furnished her table. 3 She has sent out her maidens, She cries out from the highest places of the city,

4 "Whoever is simple, let him turn in here!" As for him who lacks understanding, she says to him,

5 "Come, eat of my bread And drink of the wine I have mixed.

6 Forsake foolishness and live, And go in the way of understanding.”