

Genesis 4 (1-9) – What Did Cain Do Wrong?

Our text today is right near the very beginning of the Bible story, and the beginning of human history. And here you see the first mention of worship in the Bible. It was worship by the giving of offerings. It was given by the first two children ever born. Cain and Abel, who were now adults. And here, in the first act of worship, we see the first issue of false worship. And it wasn't the worship of a false god. It was the false worship of the true God.

Here's the scene. Both Cain and Abel gave an offering to the One True God. So, they both knew and believed in God, the right God, the real God. They both brought proper offerings according to their occupations. Abel was a shepherd, so you would expect an animal offering. Cain was a farmer, so you would expect his offering to be of his produce. So far, so good. But while Abel's offering was accepted, Cain's offering was rejected. Why?

Now, you may have heard that God accepted Abel's offering because it was a blood offering, a foreshadow of Christ's death, God's offering to atone for our sin. And prior to the cross of Christ, sin offerings always involved the shedding of blood, because, as Hebrews 9:22 says, "*without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.*" Today, we live after the cross, and we rely on the shed blood of our Savior alone as the final sacrifice for sin. But Cain and Abel lived in ancient history. And they had an example taught to them. In Genesis 3, after Adam and Eve fell into sin, they tried to cover themselves with leaves, and God covered them with animal skins. So, there is the pattern, and Adam and Eve no doubt told this story to Cain and Abel.

So, maybe Cain made the wrong kind of offering. However, the text doesn't mention that God had told Cain and Abel to make a sin offering. And it doesn't say that Cain's type of offering wasn't as good as Abel's. And the Bible tells us about offerings of grain and produce that are acceptable to God. There is nothing in this text or in the Bible that proves the type of offering was the reason for God's rejection of Cain or acceptance of Abel. And the type of offering isn't the point of this text. It's about something else.

Still, God did reject Cain's offering, and he did accept Abel's offering. So, the question remains, why? The answer is that although Cain had faith in God, his offering was not given from a heart of faith towards God. God rewards those who diligently seek him, as Hebrews 11:6 says. But Cain was seeking the reward, not God. What this means is what we will unpack today, so that you can clearly see a case of false worship of the true God. Then you can guard your heart against this type of worship in your life.

Hebrews 11:4 says – *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.* This makes it clear that Abel gave something that represented his faith. But Cain gave something that represented something other than faith. It wasn't the type of gift, or the quality of the gift, but the condition of the heart that made the difference. The reason for giving the gifts matters.

I want to make sure that you understand that this wasn't some sort of "worship competition". It wasn't as if God was pitting Cain vs. Abel, and only one would be accepted. No, in vs.7, God clearly tells Cain that his offering would be accepted if he offered it rightly. But he didn't.

The issue becomes obvious when we see the results. The text doesn't tell us how God communicated his displeasure. But Cain knew that God had accepted Abel's sacrifice and not his. And when God rejected Cain's offering, Cain became angry (Genesis 4:5). And he became so overwhelmed with anger that he murdered his brother (Genesis 4:8).

How could this happen? It was because, as 1 John 3:12 says, *Cain's deeds were evil and his brother's righteous.* This points not only to what Cain did after his offering was rejected. It also points to what was going on before the offerings were even made. Cain was wicked. And as Proverbs 21:27 says, *"The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination; how much more when he brings it with evil intent."* Cain was living a wicked life. And he was worshiping God with wicked intent. He didn't seek God truly; he was seeking God falsely.

How so? Cain wanted to live according to his own wicked desires, and thought he could placate God with his offering. How many people do that very thing today? Cain wasn't interested in giving up his sin. Cain wanted to continue to live as he desired, not as God desired, and to worship God in his own way, not God's way. Cain didn't come with a humble, honest, repentant faith. So, God rejected Cain's offering.

The problem was not what Cain brought to God, but how and why he brought it. The problem was Cain's heart and motivation. Cain didn't keep a short account with sin, and then he expected to just be able to give an offering and everything would be ok, with no real repentance required. His worship wasn't humble, it wasn't honest, it wasn't repentant, it wasn't faithful, it was false. And God said Cain was in danger of getting worse.

Listen to this instruction from God about how sin works. In Genesis 4:7, God tells Cain that when he does something bad, and then he is exposed, the temptation is to give in further to sin. And God pictures this sin as an animal waiting to pounce upon its prey. If you don't repent of the sin, and resist the temptation to further rebel, then sin will cause greater damage in your life.

You need to keep a short account with sin. All the worship in the world won't excuse your unrepentant rebellion. It might make you feel good, but it won't please God. And that's the point. We think worship is meant to please us, but it isn't authentic worship unless it pleases God.

Cain gave an offering for reasons that were not pleasing to God. But God gave Cain a remedy. God tells Cain that instead of going further down the road of rebellion, Cain can fix the situation by mastering the sin that is controlling him. When God reproves you, exposes you, exhorts you, it's for your good. Don't turn away from God and turn to sin. Rather, repent of the sin, and resist further rebellion by turning to God.

Cain's offering was rejected, but God made Cain a promise. God says he is ready to accept what Cain offers, if Cain will do it like God asks. Part of true

worship is true repentance. You accept what God says, and you turn to him to tell you what to do about it. Part of false worship is false repentance. You avoid what God says, and you turn to self-justification.

Unfortunately, Cain did not learn his lesson, and his sin multiplied and amplified. Cain was angry at God's rejection and response. He does not repent or resist, and his rebellion manifests as anger at his brother. Those with evil actions will naturally hate those with righteous actions. And the evil in Cain's heart was further revealed when the Lord asked him, "*Where is your brother Abel?*" to which Cain replied, "*I don't know, am I my brother's keeper?*" (Genesis 4:9). In this response Cain lies to God and shows an amazing level of disrespect and irreverence towards God. Imagine this, Cain being snarky with God. False worship warps your view of God, and your value of God. The longer you do it, the worse you will get.

Cain's heart wasn't after God. He gave his offering as a means of buying the favor of God. That's not true worship. That's false worship. That's living any old way you want and then trying to atone for your sins in your own way, rather than doing it God's way. That's trying to make a deal with God, as if you traffic in his currency, as if your value and worth are in the same league as his. As if you have something he needs. God doesn't need your worship. He demands it for your own good. You pervert it to your own demise.

Abel gave in faith because he knew God was worthy and God was worth it. And don't miss this fact; Abel's worship pleased God, and yet, what he got in return was death. Yet Abel's faith still speaks to us today, as Hebrews 11:4 says. That was his return, his reward, an eternal testimony to his faithful worship and the greatness of God. Our God is worthy of your worship.

We all have sins, and no good deeds or sacrifices in God's name can atone for sin. Only the blood of Jesus Christ can pay the price for your sins. And our worship is a result of that, our response to that. When people don't do worship in the way God prescribes, it is false worship. And God prescribes a humble, honest, repentant faith. He is worthy and he is worth it.