

The Hall of Faith: Abel

Hebrews 11:4

January 22, 2022, Pastor Jeremy Cagle

Before we begin the sermon, I just want to mention, I don't want to repeat anything we've already said about the conference coming up other than to say that we are really excited about that, as you've already heard. Because it's been several years since someone from the team of Grace Advance has come to be with our church since the border has been closed for quite a while. But when our congregation was first getting started several years ago, the people realized they needed to help in the church planting process; so they reached out to Grace Advance, which is a planting ministry in Los Angeles, California. It's connected with the ministry of John MacArthur. And the first person they sent out was Carl, and he came out and really enjoyed the group, prayed with them, preached for them, liked what he saw, and gave his stamp of approval. And so in the spring of 2016, the team of Grace Advance began looking for a pastor, which led to my opportunity to come here. I came in January 17th in 2017. So, happy anniversary. It's been six years since I came to be a pastor here; it's been a wonderful time. And I even remember the first time one of the elders out there told me about this church opportunity. He said, "Yeah, would you be interested in pastoring somewhere?" And I said, "Sure." I was already pastoring, but this would be a neat opportunity. He said, "It's in Chilliwack." I said, "What's a Chilliwack?" I said, "It sounds delicious." I had no idea what he's talking about. And he said, "Well, it's in Canada, it's an opportunity in Canada," and I said, "My wife's not gonna go for that." But she said, "You know what," she said, "If it's an opportunity to preach the gospel, let's do it." And we came, and we've been so blessed since then. But all that to say, it'll be wonderful to have Carl with us. He can tell you the version of the story from Grace Advance's perspective. So if you're new to us, and you don't know much about our church, this would be a wonderful opportunity for you to hear more about how we began many years ago, well, six years ago, seven years ago.

But for this week, we are in the book of Hebrews. So we're going to put the conference in the back of our minds for now, that'll be next week. But this week, please take your Bibles and turn with me to the book of Hebrews, which is the eighth book that we've studied so far in our time together as a church. So far, in these six years together, we've studied the book of John and the book of Romans. We've looked at the book of Titus, and we've studied the book of Jonah. We've also gone into the books of 1 Peter and Ephesians and Ecclesiastes, just to name a few. We've covered a lot of ground in all that time. And this week, we're in what I would consider to be one of the most fascinating parts of the Bible, and that's Hebrews 11, which is known as the Hall of Faith. In fact, this chapter is so interesting it's been given a lot of names throughout the years. When you look at church history, you find that it's been called the Hall of Faith, or the heroes of faith, or the picture gallery of the faith. It's been referred to as the honour roll of the saints, or the march of the saints, or the great parade of the saints. Some have called it the Westminster Abbey of Scripture because it just gives you example, after example of people from the Old Testament who put their faith in God and were saved. In fact, if you read in the first couple of verses, it says this. It says,

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it, the men of old gained approval.

And I want to point out here that as you go on to read this, there's going to be a common expression that you're going to see repeated multiple times in the chapter. And that is the phrase "by faith." You'll see it more than 20 times; once almost every other verse, to say this, starting in verse three,

By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible. By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained the testimony that he was righteous, God testifying about his gifts, and through faith, though he is dead, he still speaks. By faith Enoch was taken up so that he would not see death; And HE WAS NOT FOUND BECAUSE GOD TOOK HIM UP; for he obtained the witness that before his being taken up he was pleasing to God. And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him. By faith Noah, being warned by God about things not yet seen, in reverence prepared an ark for the salvation of his household, by which he condemned the world, and became an heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.

By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise.

[And then in verse 11,]

By faith even Sarah herself received ability to conceive.

We'll stop the reading there because you get the flavour of what the chapter is about. And as you read that, you might be saying "Well, that's interesting stuff. I like that history, but why is it in here? Why did the author place it at this part of the book of Hebrews?" And the answer is found back in verse two in your Bibles. And that is that "by faith the men of old gained approval." In other words, the reason the author puts this passage in here at this point, is to show you that this is how the people from the Old Testament were saved, and that is "by faith." It had happened is they believe, because it's not like they were saved one way while you were saved another. And it's not as if they got into heaven through one road, and you got in there through another path. It's always been the same way, and that is by the grace of God. Tying this into the book of Hebrews as a whole, this means even when the sacrifices were being offered in the Old Testament, people were saved by faith. And even when the temple was still standing in the Old Testament, people were saved by faith. And even when the priests were there, and the Levites

were there, and the altar, and the ark, and the lampstand, and the table of showbread that we've been talking about for several months now, it all happened by His mercy.

Because like I showed you last time, when you do a survey of these people's lives, you find out very clearly, they were not perfect. They had a lot of flaws. In fact, when you look at them one at a time you find Abel came from a dysfunctional family because his brother killed him. I don't know about you, but you can't get any worse than that. I mean, Cain did not murder a stranger here; he murdered his own brother, someone he grew up with, because that's what sin did in one generation. And the list doesn't stop there because Noah got drunk. He stepped off the ark and drowned his sorrows in alcohol because all the death and destruction of the flood took its toll on him until he snapped. Abraham was an adulterer because he slept with his handmaiden. Sarah was a doubter because she laughed at God. Isaac was a polygamist because he had multiple wives. Jacob was a bad parent because he turned one kid against the other. Moses was a murderer. Rahab was a harlot. Gideon was a coward. Barak was too passive. Jephthah was a fool. And Samson was a bully. And yet they all found their way in here tonight. Every one of them had their name written in the Hall of Faith because they trusted in God. That's what this is about. When I read this list, I've told you before, I look at these people's lives and say, "I can't measure up to this. There's no way I can live like these people." Well, these people sinned just like you do. But they were redeemed by their hope in Yahweh.

And as we come to our passage for today, I need to mention that this chapter is actually divided up into four sections, as you can see on the handout in your bulletin. So if you look at your handout in your bulletin, there's four phases that the Hall of Faith fall into. I wanted to mention this, so you could kind of get your mind around the flow of history here.

The first one is the antediluvian or diluvian period, which covers the lives of Abel, Enoch and Noah. That's the men who lived either before the flood or during the flood. They were around right up until the time when the earth was destroyed by water. Noah actually lived right through that. The reason they're mentioned here is because this is where the Bible begins, so this is where the issue of faith begins. It doesn't wait until later to come into the picture. Faith starts right in the beginning with these guys. Then the next period is known as the patriarchal period, which covers the lives of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are known as the patriarchs or fathers of Israel. They're the great ancestors of the Jews, to show you that they had faith as well. Then the next period after them is the beginning of Israel as a nation, which covers the lives of Moses and Rahab. Then the next one is the period of the judges and kings which covers the lives of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David and Samuel. As you can tell, they're all put in there together in verse 32.

I wanted to mention all that to you because this morning, we're coming to the first person on the list, and that's Abel, who lived there in the antediluvian or the time before the flood. Like a lot of people in the chapter, the author doesn't tell you a lot about Abel here, just gives you a highlight when he says in verse four, "By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain." Now, if you think about what he's

saying there, that means that Abel offered a sacrifice. One of the first people that lived in human history, way back in the beginning of time, brought an offering to the Lord because he understood that God's forgiveness wasn't free, and it wasn't cheap. It came at a cost. You couldn't just sin and say you're sorry; your blood had to be spilled. Something had to die, and that's what Abel did. Which raises questions like who taught him to do that? Where did the idea come into his mind? And we'll get into some of that in a moment, we'll try to answer some of those questions with you.

The verse also says, "Through which he obtained the testimony that he was righteous." And that means that this is what made Abel righteous, what gave him a proper standing with the Lord, and that was his faith. It wasn't his works, that didn't save him. It wasn't his good deeds; Abel was saved by his trust in God. And then he goes on to say, "God testifying about his gifts, and through faith, though he is dead, he still speaks." Which means Abel's life is still speaking to us today. It has a lesson to teach us after all these years, and that is that the Lord will not forget us if we trust in him. Even if people murder us like they did Abel and do the worst thing imaginable, God will still bring justice.

You know, if you think about it, Abel's life is one of the saddest ones in the Bible. I mean, what his brother did to him was inexcusable. There's only just a few people on the earth at the time, and Cain murdered one of them. A lot of people today say the problem with the world is overcrowding. Oh yeah? That was not an overcrowded earth. The problem was sin, and the sin poured out on Abel. But his life is a reminder that God doesn't let people get away with it when they hurt His people. He is a God of justice. And we're going to talk about some of that this morning with four features of Abel's faith. So if you're taking notes today, this is our outline. But in Hebrews 11:4 and some other passages, we're gonna look at four features of Abel's faith.

The first one is the story of it. The first feature of Abel's faith that we're going to look at this morning is the story of it. Which means that in order to understand what the passage is saying here, we've got to go back to the Old Testament to learn what it says about Abel's life. Because the author is writing this to the Jews, and as he does that, he assumes they're familiar with this story. The Jews would have studied this before, they would have talked about Cain and Abel since they were children; they would have learned it in the synagogues sitting on their father's knee. But many of us didn't do that; some of us are not familiar with this. So what we need to do this morning is keep your fingers in the book of Hebrews and turn with me back to Genesis 4. Let's go back in our Bibles and see what this is referring to in Genesis 4, which occurs right after the fall of man. As you're going to see by looking at it, where it lands in the Bible, as Quentin just read to us. It takes place right after the story of creation in Genesis 1, the account of Adam and Eve in Genesis 2, the fall of man in Genesis 3, which makes it interesting because it shows you how far the human race fell. Because after man sinned, it wasn't long before they started killing each other. And if you read about this, in Genesis 4, it says this. It says,

Now the man had relations with his wife Eve, and she conceived and gave birth to Cain, and she said, "I have gotten a manchild with the help of the LORD." Again, she gave birth to his brother

Abel. And Abel was a keeper of flocks, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. So it came about in the course of time that Cain brought an offering to the LORD of the fruit of the ground. Abel, on his part also brought of the firstlings 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 became very angry, and his countenance fell. Then the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will not your countenance be lifted up? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it." Cain told Abel his brother. And it came about when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him.

Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is Abel your brother?" And Cain said, "I do not know, am I my brother's keeper?" The Lord said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to Me from the ground. Now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand.

Now just to explain this, as you can tell by reading that far into the story, this is not just a story of Abel. It's the story of Cain and Abel, or the tale of two brothers. Because verse one says Cain was the older brother, Abel was the second; and Cain was the firstborn and Abel was the second child of Adam and Eve, which may not mean a lot to you, but it means they were the first children ever born in the Bible. Because Adam and Eve weren't born, they were created as fully functioning adults by the hand of God. But for Cain and Abel, it was different. They were conceived the same way you are. So this is where you see the family begin in the way that we understand it today. Mom and dad having a child. Then in verse two, it says this is what they did as they grew up, Cain was the tiller of the ground; Abel was a keeper of the flocks, which means Cain worked the land while Abel worked the animals. That's also the first time you see a division of labour in the Bible. You see one person doing one job while another person doing another. That might be where some of the conflict came into play, although we're not sure. Then in verse three, it says Cain and Abel brought an offering to the Lord. That's the first time you see someone do that in Scripture. They probably made offerings before that, it's just the first time it's mentioned. Then verse five, it says the Lord had no regard for Cain's sacrifice. That's the first time you see that happen. So as a result, verse eight says Cain rose up and killed his brother; and that's the first time you see that. In other words, this is a story of many firsts.

There's a lot of things happening here that are coming at you all for the first time that it makes you stop and think. Because it tells you that this is what sin did to humanity. In the beginning, it ruined everything. There's a lot of scholars today who don't think that. They believe man is born sinless, and the only thing that makes him sin is his environment. So if you just change the environment, people will get better. Well, let me tell you something, Adam and Eve lived in a perfect world, and they sinned, didn't they? Nothing wrong with that environment. And then Cain and Abel come along, and their world's pretty good by a lot of standards, and they do too, Cain does anyway. Because sin is a heart problem. It's

not a problem of the environment. And the best way to understand this passage is just to make a few observations about it before we go back to Hebrews.

The first one is this, people have sinned since the beginning. I mean, one lesson you learn very clearly here when you read the story is that the human race has done wicked things from the very start. I mean, here you are looking at the first human beings to ever be born and one of them does the most horrific thing imaginable. Because Adam's sin was directly imputed to Cain. In other words, Cain was not a sinner because he sinned; he sinned because he was a sinner. It was in his nature; it was part of his DNA. I promise you, Adam and Eve did not tell him how to kill his brother. What parent does that? They didn't take him aside and say, "Cain, you know, if you really want to murder Abel, and he gets on your nerves, this is how you do it." He just did it instinctively; it was like a gut reaction. It's a frightening thought, isn't it? In fact, if you look back at the story, you can see the progression of his sin. Because verses four and five, say that Cain saw that God had regard for his brother's offering but not his, so he became angry; and not just angry, but very angry; not just mad, but really mad to the point of rage. And then his countenance fell, which means his sin began to show on his face, and his expression became the alter as he stewed on it. Then it says in verse six that the Lord confronted him, but he didn't listen. So that in verse eight, when they were in the field, Cain rose up against Abel and killed him. But the idea is that that didn't happen overnight. It was a series of steps that brought him there, with one compromise after another.

Which brings me to another observation to make about this passage. And that is that even though human beings have sinned since the beginning, the Lord has always provided a way to deal with that through the act of sacrifice. And this is kind of backing up a little bit in the story. But even though Adam and Eve sinned, and Cain and Abel sinned, God didn't let them just sin and go to hell. He made a way to forgive it way back in the beginning. Which was what Cain and Abel are doing here, they're bringing an offering to the Lord, so He will forgive their sin. And to be honest, we don't know exactly how they did this, at this time in history. We know later on when the Jews brought their offerings to a priest, the priest would slaughter it, he would cut the animal's throat, collect the blood in a bowl, and then sprinkle the blood on the altar before skinning the animal, cutting it up, and spreading the pieces on top of the altar to burn in the fire. But there's no indication Cain and Abel did all of that here because they didn't have a priest. There's no priest mentioned. And besides Cain brought crops; he didn't bring an animal. But it kind of makes you wonder when you're reading the story, well, where did this come from? Why did they do this? And the answer, if you look back in Genesis 3, it's kind of helpful because when Adam and Eve sinned, if you remember, they sewed fig leaves for themselves, in order to cover up their nakedness, because they felt shame. But then at the end of the story in verse 21 of Genesis 3 it says, maybe in verse 20,

Now the man called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all the living. The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife, and clothed them.

Now, you read that, a question that should come into your mind is where did the garments of skin come from? Well, they came from an animal. God killed a living creature in order to cover up their nakedness and save them from their shame. That's a picture of the gospel, isn't it? Every time you sin, this is what God does for you. He covers you up in love, and He saves you from your shame; He just does it in the death of Christ. But that started, that whole idea started way back here in the book of Genesis. And the problem in the story is that Cain didn't get that. This was lost on him on some level because he made a sacrifice for other motivations.

And that gives you one more observation to make here. And that is that some of these people did not offer sacrifice for the right reasons back then, they're not on the same page. Some people came to worship for evil motives, or sinful motives, or apathetic ones, whatever it was, which is why the Lord rejected Cain sacrifice. And that is because it didn't come from the bottom of his heart. He didn't come either asking for forgiveness or worshipping God or wanting to cover up his shame. He's just going through the motions here. There's something off with Cain in the story. In fact, some have even said, this story highlights the fact that from this time forward, there would always be two ways to look at the issue of worship, and that is the right way and the wrong way, or the way of Cain and the way of Abel. Every time someone comes into a church, no matter where it is, they come with one of two mindsets, the real thing or a hypocrite. Cain is the first person in the Bible to ever reflect that because he came to God and was rejected. Because Cain worshipped and Abel worshipped, Cain praised, and Abel praised. Cain brought a sacrifice; Abel brought a sacrifice. The difference is that Cain didn't mean it; his heart was somewhere else. In fact, if you were with us last week, we talked about the issue of hypocrisy, spend an entire sermon on that. And this is what hypocrisy looks like. It looks like a man who worships God one day and murders his brother the next. It's a person who praises Him one minute, and the next minute explodes in a fit of rage.

By the way, this is something people still do today. And they're like Cain because they go to church on a Sunday morning with their wife and kids, only to go home afterwards and yell at them. Or they go to Bible study during the week, they study the Scriptures, and they go to work the next day, and do that with their coworkers. And if that's the case with you this morning, you have to realize in this story, God hates that type of worship. He can't stand it. He hated it in the Old Testament, He hates it today. He despised it way back then, it's no different now. God wants you to worship Him from the bottom of your heart like Abel did, because He deserves nothing less.

And that brings us to another feature of Abel's faith that goes along with this, and this one is found back in the book of Hebrews. So if you want to turn back there with me in your Bibles. But a second feature of Abel's faith, and this one is going to be found right in the passage, is that by faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain did. So the second feature here, it's just found right in the text is that by faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice. Which means this is the reason why Abel sacrifice was better than Cain's, and that is because of Abel's faith. I've already told you we're going to turn back and forth a little bit between the book of Genesis and this passage, but if you look in Hebrews 11:4 this is just what

it says word for word at the beginning. It says, "By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice." Now when it says that, you can tell what the author is emphasizing here, and that is the sacrifice of Abel. In the story of Cain and Abel, there's a lot of things you could talk about, but he points out here that the one thing that separated the two men was not his job or his work or his career or his position in the family, and the fact that he was second born while Cain was the firstborn. It was the way he worshiped. That's the thing that set him apart.

I put this in your in your handout in your bulletins as well, but I read somewhere that when you put the Hall of Faith together and you look at the people one by one, you find that each of them has kind of one thing that sets them apart. For instance, Abel worshiped, and Enoch walked, and Noah witnessed before the Lord. Abraham waited, and Moses didn't waver, and Gideon Barak and Samson went to war; but it starts with the act of worship. And when it says that Abel's sacrifice was better, that's the Greek term *playon*, which refers to something that's better in quality or substance, not because it's more expensive, but because it means more to you. It's personal. That's what made his sacrifice greater. When a rich man gives you \$1,000, you say that's a nice sacrifice; but when a poor man gives you \$1,000, you say it's better, because it meant more to the poor man. There was something personal about what he gave. That's the idea here. Genesis 4:4 says when Abel presented his sacrifice, he brought the Lord something from the firstlings of his flock, which means that he gave the Lord the best he had, he didn't hold anything back. While Cain just sort of gave something else, the way the passage is worded, it makes it sound like Cain just went out into the field and grabbed something to bring before the Lord while Abel didn't. He put some thought into it, it was an animal that meant something to him.

If you look in verse four, it goes on to say that "By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained the testimony that he was righteous." And a key word here is the word "righteous." That's a term that refers to someone who is right before the law because they have gone to court and been pronounced innocent by the judge. Because if you remember, this is what a sacrifice was given for. It was done so the Lord would look at the animal and pardon your sin and pronounce you innocent. So the Lord would look at it, and give you grace and mercy because your sin had been paid for and your debt was cleared, and the stain was washed away. And the author says this is what faith did for Abel; it made his sacrifice count for all that.

There's also another way you can take the middle part of this verse, when it says that he obtained the testimony that he was righteous, God testifying about his gifts. And that is to say that the Lord testified about Abel's gifts by consuming them with fire. The Lord affirms his sacrifice by sending flames down from the sky to devour it. Now, the book of Genesis doesn't say that, so some of this is conjecture; but in his commentary on the book of Hebrews, John MacArthur points out in at least at least five different occasions in Scripture, the Lord responded to someone's sacrifice this way. For example, in Leviticus 9 when Aaron offered sacrifice as the new high priest, the Lord consumed them with fire to show that He approved of it. He affirmed of what he offered. Judges 6 says the Lord did the same thing for Gideon. 1

Chronicles 21 says He did it again for David and so forth and so on. And there are some who have taken this expression to think that the Lord did the same thing for Abel.

But the point is, either way, the main thing that made Abel's sacrifice better, was his trust in God. Because Abel gave it out of a heart overflowing with love. That's what worship is. Worship is when you approach God, and you love Him. It's when you come to Him, and you hold nothing back because you can't help it. You're so overwhelmed with His Majesty, that you want to just present Him with everything you got. John Piper says that when you worship, you don't do it with clenched fists, begrudgingly. You do it with open hands that extend themselves in praise, and as you open your hands up to God, your money and your time and your gifts just fall on the church, and they just fall on others, and they just fall on people. It's important to remember because we all have a tendency to come to church and forget this. We're all prone to show up on a Sunday and just go through the motions and sing songs we don't mean, and pray prayers we don't mean, and read Bible verses that we're not really paying attention to because our heart is somewhere else. And the story of Abel tells you that you don't want to do that. You want to worship the Lord with a sense of sincerity.

I'll never forget the time a young man handed a pastor friend of mine a bunch of money for the church. And my friend said, "That's too much. I'm afraid I just I can't accept that." And the young man said, "Yes you can because I'm not giving it to you, I'm giving it to God." That's what Abel's sacrifice reminds you of is that kind of spirit.

And it brings you to another feature of Abel's faith. And that is that through faith, even though he's dead, Abel still speaks to us. Another feature of Abel's faith is that through faith even though he's dead, Abel still speaks to us. Now, I'm going to give you some applications for all this at the end of the sermon, but this is another point we're getting directly from the text. And we're going to have to think about it a little bit because it's very mysterious in the way it's worded. But it says,

By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained the testimony that he was righteous, God testifying about his gifts, and through faith, though he is dead, he still speaks to us.

Now, what does that last part mean? That he still speaks even though he's dead. Well, just for the sake of time, I want to jump on in here and tell you there's actually two ways to interpret this part of the verse. The first one is that through faith even though he's dead, he still speaks in the sense that he's remembered. Because Abel's life is still preached like a sermon every time God's people gather somewhere in the world. That the word "speaks" here, it's in the continuous tense in Greek, to show that Abel's testimony speaks over and over again, and his voice calls out repeatedly, even though he's dead. You can go to church this week, and I promise you somewhere in the world, someone will talk about Abel. And you go to church next week, and I promise you somewhere in the world, they'll do it again. You go to church ten years from now, they'll do it; 100 years from now they'll do it, because his memory

has been recorded for all the ages. I don't know about you, but I love to read the stories of Christians from the past because one thing that amazes me is how quickly people forget them. They did great things in their day. Some of them turned the world upside down, but now they're names that hardly anybody knows anymore. And the author says here that will never happen with Abel. That's one way to understand this passage.

Another way is to say that even though he's dead, he still speaks in the sense that he will be avenged, because the Lord will not let his death go unpunished. If you remember in the story of Cain and Abel, it tells us that after murdering his brother, the Lord said to Cain in Genesis 4:9, "Where's your brother?" And Cain said, "I don't know. Am I my brother's keeper?" And that's interesting, because it shows you how hard-hearted he was. Because it's like he's saying, "I don't care where Abel is. Do you want me to watch him like a child?" That's after he murdered him. That's his first response. So the Lord just cut straight to the heart when he tells Cain, "What have you done? For the voice of your brother's blood is crying out to Me from the ground." In other words, it's speaking to me, so I can't ignore it. Abel's blood is crying for revenge, and I'm not gonna let that go. That word "blood" in Hebrew, it's actually plural, so it could be translated drops of blood. And it's a figurative expression to say that Abel's blood is just drip, drip, dripping on the ground upon my ears, and telling me to judge you for it. And the passage goes on to say that that's what God did. He cursed Cain, and so forth. And some have taken the statement in Hebrews 11:4 to refer to that, because both of them mention Abel or his blood speaking after he dies.

But either way, the principle of both of those interpretations is the same, and that is that God always remembers his people suffering. However you interpret this passage, and I think both of those views have some validity to them, the principle is similar. And that is that the Lord never forgets His righteous ones when they're in pain. He always brings them justice. I mean, this is important to remember in the story of Abel because his brother murders him, and it looks like he gets away with it. And he kills him, and it looks like there's no justice. He gets off scot free. But the truth is that he doesn't because the justice still comes; it just takes a little while. Sometimes in life when people do wicked things to the saints, the justice takes some time.

An example of this, I remember sitting in my apartment years ago, when a friend of mine called to tell me that terrorists had flown planes into the World Trade Center in New York City. Many of you remember that. And then he asked me the question everybody was asking on that day is why? Why would they do something like that? Why would God allow such an evil thing to occur? And the answer is, I don't know. But I do know this, they will not get away with it. Their sin will be punished someday, if they repented and trusted in Christ, it's punished at the cross. If they don't, it's punished in hell, but it will be punished. That's what God does. He always takes care of sin. He's a perfect and holy God, which is where the issue of faith comes in. When it says in verse four, "through faith, though he's dead, he still speaks, " it's because so many times when people hurt us, we want to take justice in our own hands, we want to seek revenge, we want it all to be the deal dealt with now. And the life of Abel tells us,

sometimes you can't do that. The Bible says, “‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord”. And that means vengeance is God's business, not yours.

In fact, this story really highlights this lesson, because in Genesis 4 it says Abel brought an offering to the Lord, and a few verses later, he died. And you're wondering, why would someone die who brought an offering? What did he do wrong? The answer is he didn't do anything. He was just a victim, but that wasn't the end of the story because God was going to deal with the sin of Cain. He always holds people accountable for sin. He didn't let people get away with it then, He doesn't let people get away with it now. There's actually a painting that demonstrates this in a museum in Italy called the “Death of Abel.” It was painted in the 16th century by an artist named Michael Coxy. And it shows Cain standing over his brother, while Abel is lying on the ground murdered, and underneath Cain's legs, there's a serpent slithering away. And right above his head is the hand of God reaching down in order to judge him. That's what God does. He never lets His righteous ones die without bringing judgment.

And it brings us to one more feature of Abel's faith here that we're going to talk about. Just to review these other ones. But the first one is the story of Abel. And the second one is the sacrifice; by faith, Abel offered a better sacrifice than Cain. Third is the issue of his speaking through faith; though he is dead, he still speaks. And that brings us to another feature to talk about here. And that is the summary of all this.

A fourth feature of his faith is a summary because I want to bring all this to a close by giving you some practical lessons that we can draw from it. Because if you look in Hebrews 11:4, he mentions “though he is dead, he still speaks,” and then it stops, right? Kind of ends abruptly. And the reason it does that is because the author is just giving you snapshots from the lives of all these people. He's got about 13 people to talk about after Abel, so he's not telling you everything you want to know about Abel; He's not going into every little detail. He's just giving you a few statements here, but I think we need to say more because we don't want to stop just yet. So let me just give you some applications from his life.

I was talking with someone the other day, and they told me this is what they like to hear when someone preaches a sermon. They want the preacher to stand up, read the texts, explain the text, then apply it and sit down. Then the next week, stand up, read the text, explain the text, apply it, and sit down. And then the next week, stand up, read the text, explain the text, apply it, and sit down. Oh, that's okay; all right; that's what we're gonna do here. I will let me apply this and then I'll sit down.

The first one. Here's your first application. Godly people suffer, don't they? I mean, one thing that strikes you about the story of Abel is that godly people suffer. Just because you do the right thing with God and put your faith in Him and bring Him a sacrifice, it doesn't mean that life will be easy for you. It won't. You see that right here in the beginning of the Bible. If you remember the timeline here, the world is created in Genesis one. Adam and Eve are described in Genesis two; they fall into sin in Genesis three, and what happens in Genesis four? Abel suffers, right away. The most godly man in that story is put to death, why? Because that's what happens in a fallen world. Sometimes bad things happen to godly

people. In fact, the way that story is written, it's like the world looks at us sometimes and resents what we do because we make them angry. That's what happened to Cain. He looked at Abel's life, and he said, "You think you're better than me. You believe you're so holy, or God thinks you're so holy. I'm gonna get rid of you." It's been happening ever since. You see this in communist countries where the Communist leaders look at Christians and throw them in jail. What'd they do to them? Nothing. You see it in Muslim countries where the Muslim leaders look at them too and cut their heads off. You see it in secular places like Canada, where we stand up and speak out against homosexuality and the culture comes after us. But the point is that this is nothing new. It's been going on since the time of Abel. There's a popular Hindu teaching that's going around right now, that teaches something very different from this called karma. Some of you have heard of karma, which means what goes around comes around. And if you do good things, you'll always get good things in return. And there's a little bit of truth to that because you do reap what you sow in Galatians 6, but at the same time, let me ask you, where's Abel's karma here? Where did "What goes around comes around" take place in his life? It didn't because sometimes things just go bad like this. In a perfect world, they wouldn't go bad, but friends, you don't live in a perfect world. It's far from it.

Which brings you to another application for this. And that is that when godly people suffer, the one thing that can sustain them is their faith. The one thing that upholds you when things go wrong like this is you're trusting God because you know that God will take care of it and bring justice. He might not do it today, He might not do it tomorrow, but He will do it. In fact, if you read between the lines in the story in Genesis 4, you kind of find that Abel's troubles didn't just start at the end of his life. He had it hard at the beginning. When you look in Genesis 4, you find Eve named her firstborn son, Cain. And that may not mean much to you, but the name Cain means possession in Hebrew, because Eve was saying this child is my possession. I'm so proud of him. He's my little baby boy. And you would think she would give Abel a good name too, but she didn't because Abel's name means weak or short, because that's what she thought of him. She didn't name him that because his life was short, but his body was weak. In short, he didn't look that impressive. And not only that, but every time their names are mentioned in the Bible, Cain's name always comes first. He's the most important member of the family so that it's Cain this and then Abel later. Cain was the firstborn, Cain was a tiller of the ground Cain, the one to bring an offering first. You also notice in the story that Cain is the only one who ever talks. Abel's completely silent, kind of like a lower figure. But the point is that Abel stands out here because of his faith. He still kept his testimony and honoured the Lord because he put his trust in Him no matter what came at him in life.

You know, it's been said that Christians are like bells because the harder you hit them, the better they sound. And Abel was like that. I mean, the harder you hit this guy, his life rang out for the glory of God. And I say that because some of you may relate to this. Your life, you may feel like it's being pushed to the side and ignored like Abel's did. And I could give you lots of examples of this, but I won't for the sake of time, but let me tell you, the hope you have when you read this story is that God knows your pain. God knows. He's not oblivious to your suffering. He's not unaware of your trials. This is the first

time you see someone made a victim in the Bible, and what does God do? He acts on it. And this is the very first moment when someone hurts someone else for no reason at all. How does He respond? He takes out vengeance on the oppressor because that's what God does. Which is why you can approach Him with confidence. You know that when people hurt you, He'll take care of it. So you can leave it in His hands.

I'm afraid some people in our church may be forgetting this because you're holding on to so much bitterness right now. And you're dwelling on so many things that people have done wrong to you in the past because you think it's your job to punish them. Let me tell you, it's not your job to punish. That's God's job. Your job is to forgive and move forward. Don't let it consume you.

And just to look at all this from another angle, another application that doesn't have anything to do with that, but it has to do with his story is that you have to repent of your sin quickly. One application you draw from the story of Cain and Abel, is that you can't let your sin fester. Every time you do that it will ruin your life like it did with Cain. Remember we talked about the progression of Cain's sin in Genesis 4 because at first he becomes angry because the Lord has no regard for his offering; and he's not just angry, but he's very angry. And then his countenance falls because his face begins to change; and that shows you that he's dwelling on it and he's meditating on it. Then the Lord confronts him, and he doesn't listen so that he finally kills his brother, because the sin was like a snowball. It kept getting worse and worse, and that's what it does. You have to keep short accounts with God; you have to watch over your sin; you have to turn away from it fast. If you want to write this verse down, James, 1:14 says,

But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.

And James mentions that because that's the progression of sin. It starts with temptation; it ends in death. And it begins with an opportunity or a thought or a glance or an impulse, and it doesn't stop until it destroys your life. You know, I bet if you asked Cain, way back in Genesis 4:3, if he was going to kill his brother, he would say no. He would say, "Why would I do that is my brother?" And if you would say to him before that, "Are you planning on hurting him in any way?" He would say, "Absolutely not." But it happened because his sin built up and built up and built up. It will happen to you as well if you don't take sin seriously.

And it brings you to one more way to apply this story here, and we will close with this one. And that is that you have to realize there's only two ways to come to God at the end of the day, and that is the way of Cain or the way of Abel. There's just two ways to approach Him; and that's the right one and the wrong one. There's no other way. I read somewhere recently that there's something like 4000 different religions in the world, and a huge percentage of the planet is religious or spiritual. But let me tell you something, there's not 4000 religions, there's just two; Cain's or Abels. That's it. And the reminder is if you want to be part of Abel's way of approaching God, you have to give God your very best. In this story, you see very clearly the Lord did not make any excuses for Cain's sin. And He didn't tell him that

"I know why you acted this way is because you were busy or distracted" It says He had no regard for him. And He will do the same thing for us as well.

In his closing thoughts in this chapter. A. W. Pink said this, he said, "In Cain, we behold the first instance of a religious hypocrite in the Bible. Because Cain refused to comply with the revealed will of God even though he closed his rebellion in the guise of a word worshiper." Because that's what hypocrisy does. It comes to worship, but it does it with the heart full of rebellion; and we don't want to do that today.

Next week, Carl Hargrove will be with us. The week after that, we'll be back in the book of Hebrews looking at the next person in the Hall of Faith. And that's Enoch, the man who did not see death. So please come back and join us for that. But for now, let's close in a word of prayer and ask the Lord to apply these things to our hearts.

Heavenly Father, we have looked at one of the most amazing stories in Your Word this morning. It's the one of the oldest stories, and yet one of the most profound, because as was mentioned earlier, all of us can see ourselves in the story. We all have the heart of Cain in us. We all want to sin against You and lash out against others when things don't go our way. We all come to worship in an apathetic way. And yet, at the same time, Father, there's Abel. And there's the reminder that it doesn't have to be that way with us. Our hearts do not have to go sour. They don't have to turn the wrong direction. You give us hope through the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ. Father, thank You for this blessed saint that was mentioned so long ago. Thank You that he lived in a world that in many ways was wonderful, but in other ways, it was hard like our world is. Yet, You sustained him through faith and You can sustain us through faith.

I pray for those who were here this morning, who are suffering like we described, who are hurting because someone has wronged them. They're dealing with family problems, or work problems or problems with friends or whatever it may be. The trials are endless. And yet, Lord, remind them You can sustain them if they put their trust in You. You're a God who never lets His righteous ones suffer needlessly. You always provide hope. Thank You for the reminder of this today. As we go out from this place, we have our care groups, we spend time reflecting on these things, Lord, would you drive these lessons deep into our hearts? We don't want to be like those who read the Word and then forget what it says. We want to remember. Can you help us do that today? May Christ be glorified in these things we discussed. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.