

(Genesis) 11 - the Voice of God's First Prophet to Our Dying World

by S. Lewis Johnson

The story of Abel and Cain highlights the importance of faith and the need for a speaking prophet in our dying world.

Duration: 49:50

Scripture: Genesis 4:1-8, Matthew 6:33, Hebrews 11:4

Topics: "Prophet"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the story of Abel from the book of Genesis. The sermon begins by highlighting the importance of having a contemporary voice from God in our age. The speaker then explains that the story of Abel in Genesis chapter 4 marks the beginning of world history under the curse. The three enemies of the soul, namely the world, the flesh, and the devil, are emphasized in this chapter. The sermon concludes by mentioning the tragic event of Abel's murder by his brother Cain, highlighting Abel's faithfulness and his role in the epistle to the Hebrews.

Transcript

For the scripture reading, we are turning to Genesis chapter 4 and reading verses 1 through 8. Genesis chapter 4, verses 1 through 8. Now the man had relations with his wife Eve, and she conceived and gave birth to Cain. And she said, I have gotten a man-child with the help of the Lord. And 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. And 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 for his offering. But for Cain and for 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 well, sin is crouching at the door and its desire is for you, but you must master it. And Cain told Abel his brother. Now that word told is rather awkward, because of course we want to ask, well, what did he tell his brother? And if you have a Bible with some

marginal notes in it, you will probably notice that for told, it is suggested that perhaps all that is meant is simply said to.

And Cain said to his brother, and again you want to ask the question, well, what did he really say? It may be that we have here an unusual use of the verb translated told. And that unusual use, traceable to a use of the same root in some of the cognate languages, is in the sense of appointed a place for meeting. Well, that makes very good sense in the context, and so that may well be the meaning of Cain told his brother.

That is, Cain appointed a place to meet with his brother. And it came about when they were in the field that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him. May the Lord bless this reading of his word.

The subject for the exposition of the word of God today is the voice of God's first prophet to our dying world. The Lord Jesus said that Abel was a prophet. The author of the epistle to the Hebrews said that though Abel was dead, he was still speaking to men.

He said by faith Abel offered a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts, and by it he being dead yet speaketh. One thing our age certainly needs is a speaking prophet, a contemporary voice from God. So it should be of great interest to us to know what Abel, the first prophet, is still trying to say to us.

To answer the question, we must of course consider the story in the book of Genesis, found in chapter 4. We've studied the creation of the heavens and the earth and the creation of man. We have considered the probation of man and then we have seen the tragic account of man's fall in chapter 3. What we call world history begins in chapter 4 and it is the history of the world under the curse. Someone has pointed out that in Genesis chapter 3 we have stressed the devil, while in chapter 4 we have stressed the world and the flesh.

These are the three enemies of the soul of men, the world, the flesh, and the devil. And so we look now at the stress upon the flesh and the world. You also notice as you study the book of Genesis that what we see in Genesis chapter 4 is the final cycle through which sin passes.

Sin begins not in immorality, it ends in immorality. When we think of sin, we often think of immorality, but that's because our standards of sin are not the same as the standards of God. We think of adultery, we think of lasciviousness, we think of theft, and we think of murder.

Now these are sins, but sin is much more significant than that. Those are the issues of sin. The scriptures tell us that sin is unbelief, that it issues in rebellion against God and finally flowers in immorality.

So we see the cycle. We saw the sin of unbelief in chapter 3 and the sin of rebellion and now we are going to see the sin of immorality. Its ultimate flowering in the murder of Abel, the first prophet by Cain.

There are several points that merit attention before we look at the text. You might have thought that man, given this great promise of a Redeemer to come in the proto-evangelium of Genesis chapter 3 verse 15, he shall bruise you on the head and you shall bruise him on the heel, would have responded and united around that promise. You might have thought that the race would have sought to find its destiny in the seed of the woman and thus have the assurance of overcoming in him.

But it's clear from Genesis chapter 4, right from the beginning, that the race cannot unite around the gospel of our great God. It also is clear that that prophecy already is in its beginnings of fulfillment

because Cain's act is a declaration of war between the two seeds, the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. Cain, according to scriptural teaching, is the first soldier in the army of the serpent.

In the New Testament, the Apostle John speaking about Cain in his first epistle, the third chapter, the twelfth verse, says, not as Cain who was of the evil one. That is, his origin is there. Cain is of the evil one and slew his brother.

So that Cain is the first soldier in the serpent's army. And the conflict that exists between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent has its first manifestation right here. That makes it clear to us that man is not going to want to walk in the guidance of the word of God.

In the New Testament we read, there is none that seeketh after God, no, not one. And right here in the beginning we see the manifestation of man's rebellion against the word of God. One final point.

This chapter has great significance for the history of mankind. In our study of the first chapter, I mentioned this a number of times. Human history is not to be subsumed under the doctrine of evolution, but under the doctrine of devolution.

For it is clear from the study of the human race that it is not a long development from the caveman stage to modern enlightened humanity, such as we are. But rather man began on a high intellectual and physical level and fell from that. One commentator has written, whereas man was not an inferior being on a lower level, such writing of history degrades him without warrant.

Whereas he was brought low by the fall, this pseudoscience ignores his true degradation. So modern science has erred in two ways. They have failed to see that the history of man is the history of devolution, not evolution.

And then in failure to understand the true moral degradation of man, which is traceable to the fall in the Garden of Eden. The men of Adam's day were not rude savages. They were men of considerable technological and intellectual equipment, as we shall see in our next study in the book of Genesis, right here in Genesis chapter 4. So we do not then in the Bible proceed from savagery to civilization, but it is to savagery from the civilization that originally existed in the Garden of Eden.

I think that it's very interesting to look at human history in that light because what we really see is that Cain's axe, by which he felled his brother Abel, ultimately becomes dynamite and phosphorus and hydrogen and explosions and space rockets and neutron bombs. And so that really the history of the human race is the history truly of degradation. What we see when we study history is certain world historical individuals like an Alexander or a Caesar or another, and they rise up from the abyss, they conquer half the globe, and then they fall back again into the depths from which they came.

But all of our leaders, it would seem, are to be classified under the same general heading of sinners. Now let's turn to our story, and it's a very interesting one. The New Testament makes a great deal over it.

Three times, incidentally, in the New Testament, Abel is called righteous, and Cain is referred to, as I've already mentioned, as being of the evil one. The sound and healthy world is now behind man. The cherub stationed at the entrance into the Garden of Eden sees to it that there is no returning, and the fruit of the partaking of the tree will now lead on to fratricide, and we will see the beginnings of what will ultimately issue in the Tower of Babel and the rebellion against God that that particular thing manifested.

The conception of Cain and Abel is described in the first two verses, and specifically in verse 1, the conception of Cain, and then Eve makes a comment concerning that. Now the man had relations with his wife, Eve, and she conceived and gave birth to Cain, and she said, I have gotten a man-child with the help of the Lord. The Hebrew word *new*, which is rendered here had relationship with, is a word that speaks euphemistically of sexual union.

I must confess, I still, perhaps it's my acquaintance with authorized version text, I still like that rendering that the man, or Adam, knew his wife Eve, because the term *no* is a word that suggests the truly deep personal level that sexual relationships should manifest. Adam knew Eve, his wife. Now that lofty sense of sexual intercourse may be lost in the Bible in the 19th chapter of this same book of Genesis, which we shall study down the way a while, the Lord willing.

We'll see that that term *no* can even be used of such distorted relationships as homosexuality, but it expresses the fact that a sexual relationship is a deep relationship, and therefore it's not something to be entered into without that particular knowledge. Adam knew Eve, his wife, and she conceived. And she said after she had conceived and given birth, I have gotten a man-child with the help of the Lord.

That word *gotten* means something like *acquired*. It can mean *made* or *created*, although I think probably here *I have gotten* is fairly accurate. And Cain's name is called *acquisition* because his name is related to the word for *to get* or *to acquire* or *to possess*, which is used here.

So there is a play on words in the original text. Cain comes from the Hebrew word *kana*, which means to *acquire* or perhaps to *make* or *create*. So Cain then is given a name related to the way by which Eve and Adam have come to have this man-child.

The expression with the help of the Lord is very interesting, though, because many have sought to translate this in a way that would suggest that Eve had some hope that this man-child, Cain, might really be the deliverer mentioned in Genesis chapter 3, verse 15, or the seed of the woman. It is true that preceding the word *Lord* is a Hebrew particle that indicates the direct object, and so some have sought to translate *I have gotten a man-child with the help of the Lord* in this way. *I have gotten a man-child, that is, the Lord.*

In other words, Eve then is supposed to have an understanding of the fact that her child, Cain, is likely the one promised in Genesis chapter 3 and verse 15, and furthermore she understands that he is going to be a divine child, seed of the woman. I do not think that that is possible. That is really untrue to the Hebrew text.

What the Hebrew text says simply is *I have begotten a man-child with the Lord*, and so we are probably to understand this as it has been rendered with the help of the Lord. So Eve must not be credited with understanding fully the promise of Genesis 3, verse 15 as it pertained to a God-man, the Lord Jesus, who would ultimately come as the seed of the woman, but she is to be credited with expression of a true cry of faith, for she does understand that the child that is born is a child that is given to her by the Lord. And so she says *I have begotten a man-child with the help of the Lord.*

It was an exhibition of faith, and puts her in the company of Adam, who called his wife's name Eve, because she was to be the mother of all of the living. The conception of Abel does not draw quite as much attention from Moses. We read again, she gave birth to his brother Abel, and Abel was a keeper of the flocks, but Cain was a tiller of the ground.

Abel's name, incidentally, means something like breath, or vapor, or vanity. So it may well be, as some have suggested, that she is now disillusioned. Not disillusioned about the fact that the promise of Genesis 3, verse 15 is no longer to be fulfilled in Cain, but rather disillusioned about what is transpiring in humanity.

Evidently, she already recognizes that, or they already recognize that something is wrong in humanity. And so the second child is given the name Vanity. Paul, incidentally, in Romans chapter 8 says that the world was made subject to vanity, and this is in accord with it, reality.

They now see that things are not going to be anything like they were in the midst of the Garden of Eden, and so acquisition is the name of the first child and vanity the name of the second. Then Moses describes the offerings of Cain and Abel. Evidently, there was a regular time for them to bring their offerings and a regular place of worship.

I suggest to you, this is only a suggestion, that it is likely that the place that they were to come to worship the Lord was at the gate of the Garden of Eden. We know, for example, in the tabernacle, over the mercy seat, the cherubim were placed guarding the holiness of God, signifying that, symbolizing that. So it would be rather appropriate, since the cherubim were stationed at the entrance into the Garden of Eden, that it should be right there, almost as a kind of mercy seat, where the offerings were to be made.

But evidently, at certain times, and at that place, if that's the place, they came and rendered worship to the Lord, kind of mercy seat at the entrance to the Garden. The offering of Cain is described first, and we read that Cain brought an offering to the Lord of the fruit of the ground. It is significant to note that it was a non-bloody offering.

Now someone might say, well, after all, Cain was simply a farmer, and what would you expect a farmer to bring? He brought of the fruit of the ground. On the other hand, Abel was a herdsman. And so what was more natural for him to bring than an animal? And that is what it states concerning Abel.

On his part, he brought of the firstlings of his flock, evidently a lamb, and furthermore, the best portions of the lamb, and of their fat portions. So one brought an unbloody offering, the other one brought a bloody offering, a lamb. And a fine lamb at that, in contrast to what later tended to be the habit in Israel when they brought the animals with blemishes to the Lord and called down the wrath of God upon them through the prophet Malachi.

The reception of the offerings is, of course, one of the most important features of this story. We read in the last sentence of verse 4, And the Lord had regard for Abel and for his offering, but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. Abraham Kuyper was one of the greatest of the theologians of a generation or so ago.

He was the founder of the Free University of Amsterdam, was the prime minister of Holland, was professor of Old Testament and also of dogmatics at the university that he's founded, has written some very significant volumes, one of which is a translation, one of which has had part of it translated into English and called The Principles of Sacred Theology. In that volume, a very important volume, every Christian ought to read it, in my opinion. Skip the first 50 pages, but begin then and read it, because it's one of the finest treatments of a Christian worldview that you will find anywhere.

Professor Kuyper's primary point is simply this. There are two kinds of people that live in this world. There are those who are the sons of the palingenesis, as he liked to put it.

Now, palingenesis is a Greek word found in the New Testament several times, which means new birth, new creation. So, he said there are those that are the sons of the palingenesis, that is, those who have experienced the new birth. And then there is the remainder of the human race.

Those that have experienced the new birth have a different philosophy of life, they have a different kind of science, they have a different kind of psychology, they have a different view of history. All of their views of life are governed by their world outlook. The others are blind, according to the Word of God, and therefore their viewpoints are affected by the fact that they are spiritually blind.

The Bible states just this, The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, they are a foolishness unto him. Neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. There are two kinds of people, sons of the palingenesis and the rest.

And the views that these men have on reality will always differ when spiritual things are at issue. Kuyper went on to point out that when they both measure things, they measure the same way. But when evaluation comes, the sons of the palingenesis look at reality from the standpoint of their presuppositions, while the sons of the evil one look at things from the standpoint of their presuppositions.

Now we find a beautiful illustration of that here, because Cain is of the evil one, and Abel is a son of the palingenesis. And you can see the kind of worldview that they have in the way that they respond to the Word of God. Now notice the reception that is given to Abel's offering.

We read in verse 4, And the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering. And notice the order. It is Abel first, the person, and then his offering.

On the basis of this, some have said, you see, the really important thing is not the offering, but the fact that Abel was a better man. In other words, it was his attitude that determined God's acceptance. He had the right attitude, and Cain had the wrong attitude.

But that is a very superficial way to look at the text, in addition to the fact that it is contrary to the analogy of Scripture. Because you see, you should ask the question, why is it, and we must admit that Abel did have a better attitude, why is it that he did have a better attitude? Well, he had a better attitude because of his faith, which was given him by God. Now the New Testament says, By faith Abel offered a better or more excellent sacrifice than Cain.

And God gave testimony to him that he was righteous, testifying of his gifts. So it is true, Abel's attitude was better, but his attitude was better because he had been given faith to believe the word of God, and he responded in the obedience of faith. So motivated by faith, he gave the lamb that God had required.

He had what we would call a faith that worked. Now the Reformers were very careful to point out that men were saved by faith alone. But they also pointed out that true, genuine faith always produced works.

We may not see the works, incidentally, but it always produces works. They put it this illuminating way, Sola fides justificat, sed non fides qua est sola. Now isn't that illuminating? Usually with college students, if I would say something like that, one of them would say, Hallelujah.

But really it means simply this, Faith alone justifies, but not the faith which is alone. In other words, faith alone does justify, but true, genuine faith will manifest itself in works. Well that's the story of Abel.

God had respect for Abel and his offering because it was an offering made in faith. And so he had respect for Abel, the faith that he had implanted in his heart, and the offering that that faith brought. Now you can see from Abel's offering that there are several things that it reveals.

In the first place, it reveals the knowledge of man's state. Man is a sinner. And consequently God can only be approached on the basis of the death of an animal, which is the acknowledgment that he, Abel, deserves to die because of his sin.

The Old Testament says, Your sins have separated between you and the Lord. And so in the offering of the animal, Abel recognizes that he should have died, but the animal is his substitute. I read somewhere of a clock that would not work.

I think it was Beecher who spoke about it somewhere. And he said the clock had a sign on it that said, Don't blame my hands, the trouble lies deeper. Well that's really a picture of the state of man.

The trouble with us lies much deeper than our outward actions. We are sinners within. The second thing that it reveals is Abel's faith.

He brought the offering because he believed the word of God. And of course it was an evidence of assent to blood sacrifice. He slew the lamb and he brought the fat parts of the animal because even though he may have understood this very vaguely, he already knew that without shedding of blood there is no remission for sins.

No salvation apart from sacrifice. We know of course that the ultimate fulfillment of this is the Lord Jesus Christ's blood atonement which he offered on Calvary. Without the shedding of the blood of Jesus Christ there is no remission for sins.

And Abel in his offering illustrates that. People have difficulty believing this of course and some have legitimate difficulties. But let me assure you that the one who holds the seas in the hollow of his hands and who grips the winds in his fist is a person in whom we can trust.

And if he tells us that there is no approach to him except through sacrifice, we had better come to him in that way. Now one might ask, how did Abel know that he should bring an animal? Well, I think that he knew because God told him. In the New Testament we read, Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God.

So it's evident that if Abel knew that he was to bring the sacrifice of the lamb and if he offered that by faith as the writer of Hebrews says, since faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God, Abel had been instructed. And we assume too that Cain had been instructed as well. The two had been instructed in the proper approach to God.

Not only that, but they had been given an illustration. For when Adam and Eve were naked in their sin, God had slain an animal and had taken the skins off of the animal that had been slain and had clothed them as we saw last week. So they had not only the word of God, but they also had the illustration from the Lord himself.

It's my own opinion, this is only an opinion of course, and I want you to understand that I don't think that this is specifically taught in the Bible, although it is by good and reasonable inference, that the first theological lesson in the word of God was the doctrine of the penal substitutionary atonement. And it was

given by God himself in the Garden of Eden as he clothed Adam and Eve with the coats of skin. And Adam and Eve knew the kind of offering that they should bring.

And Cain and Abel knew the kind of offering that they should bring. Now, the reception of Cain's offering, if that is true, becomes understandable now. Cain evidently came in self-righteousness.

He was very disturbed when his offering was not accepted. He was very hot. Incidentally, that's the meaning of that word.

Cain became very angry. He was hot over it, and his countenance fell. So he was angry that his offering was not accepted.

If we assume that offerings were accepted, as they often were in the Old Testament, by fire consuming the sacrifice, evidently what Cain expected to see was when he brought the fruit of the ground, he expected to see a giant mushroom cloud of smoke come up in testimony to the fact that his offering of the fruit of the ground was acceptable to the Lord. And he probably expected Abel's to be just a little wisp of smoke that trailed along the ground when Abel offered his. But it was just the opposite.

His was not accepted, and Abel's was. Now, it's possible, of course, too, that God was there present. And Abel may have noted, and Cain noted from the look upon the theophany, that is, the Lord in his human appearing presence there, they may have noted the fact that God was not pleased.

When people look at this, they tend to have different ideas about the reason for Cain's non-acceptance. Some say, well, Cain, after all, was just simply a loser. He was just one of those people that is always unhappy.

He never does have the proper kind of luck. In examinations, while Cain was of the kind of person who, when he takes an examination, discovers as he looks on the board or at the examination paper that the very question for which he is not prepared, and the only one for which he is not prepared is the one that the professor gives. Or, if he gets in his car to drive, he always makes the red lights.

Incidentally, I got in my car after preaching this at 8.30 and went down about a mile from here and missed every light. Which may mean that I, with Cain, am a schlemiel, but nevertheless. So, Cain is a loser.

He is the kind of person that of all the nice, beautiful young ladies, such as we have in Believer's Chapel, he winds up with plain Jane. The worst of the crowd, humanly speaking. Or it may be that, and this has often been said, that, well, really the problem was that Cain was an evil man and Abel was a good man.

And after all, does not God reward righteousness with acceptance, and evil with non-acceptance? And so they tend to look at it from the standpoint of human reasoning. And they expect, just as Cain evidently expected perhaps, that God is on the side of the heaviest artillery, the biggest cars, the social superiority that we may have. God is supposed to dance when we pipe.

I would imagine that Cain probably thought that of Abel, his brother, his younger brother. He probably thought that every time I play on my pipe, Abel should dance. And now God should dance when I play on my pipe too.

Job was like that. He thought that it was right for the good to prosper and for the wicked not to prosper. And as long as God conformed to his idea, everything was all right.

But when God did not conform to his conception of moral world order, then Job went into a tailspin. He went on strike, and as someone has said, he withdrew into the sulking corner of the religiously disappointed. There are things in the Word of God that we do not understand by human reasoning because there are two kinds of people, sons of the palangeneses and those that are not.

And the second class cannot understand the things of the Word of God. What are the things that indicate that Cain's offering would not be accepted by the Lord? Well, in the first place, he had religion, but he did not have righteousness. He attended to his cultic duties.

He brought the sacrifice. He did not say, no, I do not believe in sacrifice at all. He brought a sacrifice.

He even went to the place of worship, the place where the sacrifice was to be brought. He is like a person who attends church. He will go that far.

He thinks religion is all right, but the religion of the Bible, that is something else. I will go, I will hear the Word of God, but I just will not respond to the Word of God in faith. And so he came, but as he left the church, then he murders Abel.

And that is precisely what this murder is. It is the kind of murder that a person commits after he has spent Sunday in a divine service. So he had religion, but he did not have righteousness.

Someone has said, a minister sees man at his best. A lawyer sees man at his worst. A physician sees a man as he really is.

Well, if that is true, in the Word of God, where we have the words of the divine physician, we find the truth about ourselves. And Cain, while he had religion, he was not subject to the Word of God. And consequently, there is manifested in his life the disobedience of unbelief.

Now, God pleads with him, but nevertheless, it is the disobedience of unbelief. He says, Cain, you are not doing well. Now, the doing well was the bringing of the wrong sacrifice.

Incidentally, he brought the works. He brought as his offering the fruit of the ground, the works of his own labor. Now, the ground had been cursed in the preceding chapter.

There may be some indication in that very thing that Cain was bringing the wrong offering because he was bringing something that was under the curse of God. We may not probably make too much of that. He was guilty of trust in his human works.

Incidentally, you can see the difference between these two men comes down to one thing. They had the same parents. They had the same heredity.

They had the same nature. They had the same privileges. But one is accepted and one is rejected.

And the writer of the epistle of the Hebrews says that God gave testimony to Abel's gifts. In other words, it was the sacrifice that was the evidence of the faith to which God gave heed. It was like the Israelites at the Passover.

Those families were no different one from another. And when the destroying angel came down in among the Israelites, he did not look for those that had good character and those that had bad. He did not tally up the good works of one family and the good works of another and pick those who had a passing grade of

over 70 percent.

Because as a matter of fact, God requires 100 percent perfection. But the destroying angel went down through the children of Israel in their families. And the text of Scripture says, when I see the blood on the doorposts and on the lintel, then I will hover over that house and protect it from the destroying angel.

So God went down before the destroying angel and protected those that had the blood on the doorpost. It was those whose faith was exhibited in the slaying of the sacrifice and the splashing of the doorpost and the lintels with the blood that secured remission from the judgment of the destroying angel. And it is just like this here.

God had respect unto Abel and to his offering. Faithful Abel, the man of faith, and the product of it, his offering. The admonition to Cain is given in verses 6 and 7. The Lord turned to Cain and Cain with his countenance fallen, sullen, sulking in the fact that he was unacceptable.

God still pleads with him. Why are you angry, Cain? Why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will not your countenance be lifted up? Give the right offering in the right spirit. Because after all, as the rest of the Bible indicates, it's not simply the offering, but it's the offering made in faith.

That's very important. It is true that there are people who misread this. They say it's just the offering.

No, it's not just the offering, it's the offering in faith. Just as we read later on in the history of Israel, they brought the offerings, but God was so angry with them that when they trampled in the temple, it was just like trampling to Him. He hated their sacrifices because they were not made in faith.

So you can err in two ways. You can err by saying it's not necessary to bring the sacrifice. Or you can err by saying I'll bring only the sacrifice and it doesn't make a bit of difference whether I believe or not.

No, it is the sacrifice that is brought in faith. God had respect to Abel and his offering. The right offering in the right spirit will mean acceptance, and God pleads with Cain to bring the right offering.

But he warns him in the latter part of chapter 7, he says, Now if you do not well, then sin is crouching at the door like a crouching beast, and its desire is for you. It is striving to possess you, to dominate you, and to make you its slave. But you should master it.

Now the eighth verse concludes the account with the story of the fratricide. The renunciation of God brings the renunciation of the brother. So Cain arranges a meeting.

He appoints a place to meet Abel, his brother. He said, Abel, come on out. Come on out in the field and let's have a little talk.

And it was not long after that that the deadly axe swished down upon Abel, and the first murder takes place. Incidentally, that was the first of the seed of the woman that entered into the presence of the Lord. And so Abel heads the role of the faithful in the epistle to the Hebrews.

By faith, Abel. And on the other hand, Cain is the first of the seed of the serpent, and the first of those that shall ultimately find their way into the lake of fire. There are people who say, how can a God of love send a man to hell? That's the wrong question.

The right question is, how can a God of righteousness take a sinner to heaven? That's the right question. How can anyone be saved, not how can someone be lost? It's easy to understand how all of us ought to spend our time in an eternity of separation from God. It's difficult to understand how any one of us, wicked as we are, could be received by a God of holiness.

That's the real question. And it can only be answered through the death of Jesus Christ. May I conclude by saying this.

What then does Abel the prophet say to us today? He being dead yet speaketh, the writer of the epistle to the Hebrews says. Why he says simply this. The righteousness of God is the possession of those who have come to him by the sacrifice in faith.

The only way in which we can find acceptance with God is through the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lamb of God. As our Lord himself said, I am the way, the truth, and the life.

No man cometh unto the Father but by me. I re-read a story which I had read some time ago and after I had already read it I remembered the other one. But it's told a little differently.

A very religious but an unsaved church member had a dream in which he saw a ladder that had just the sides of it, the side rails of it, pointing up to heaven. And he was to supply the rungs to complete the ladder. And so day by day he pictured himself in his dream as sincerely and energetically completing the ladder.

When he did a good deed the ladder had one step upon it. And so on. Every day he did some good deed and the ladder grew toward heaven.

When he was baptized he was able to add five rungs to the ladder. And when he joined the church, ten rungs to the ladder. And finally he reached the top of the ladder and expecting to step into heaven, he was horrified to discover there was nothing there and he began to fall like a plummet.

And as he was falling past the planets there suddenly was a clap of thunder and a voice that came out which he heard that said, He that clammeth up some other way is a thief and a robber. And he awoke from his dream at that point. Well, it is no dream, however, that we must be born again.

We cannot get to heaven by our good works. There is only one ladder to heaven and that is our Lord Jesus Christ himself. One well-known teacher of the Bible said, Death is never the last word in life of a righteous man.

How true that was of Abel. He offered the sacrifice in faith and he lost his life. But he's been speaking ever since.

And Jesus called him a prophet. Who was the man that was blessed? Was it Cain or was it Abel? Why, of course it was Abel. And his voice is the voice of God ringing down through the centuries down to you today right here.

He's still speaking that the way of access to God, the way of salvation is through the sacrifice. Now the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ. If you're here this morning and you have never believed in our Lord Jesus, we want to remind you of the Word of God and call upon you as an ambassador of the Lord Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit to give yourself to him who has offered the one sacrifice for sins forever and

has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

If you're seeking to come up some other way, you're a thief and a robber. And God will not have regard for any offerings that you bring. But the offering of our Lord Jesus Christ for your sins is imminently acceptable to him.

Will you not hide in Christ? Will you not come to the cross and cling to that cross and the blood that was shed for your salvation? Do you doubt that you are truly a sinner? Do you doubt that you stand under the guilt and condemnation of God? Do you doubt that there is such a thing as eternal hellfire? May God speak to your heart. May the warnings of Holy Scripture and the admonition of the men of faith down through the years cause you truly to tremble and to flee to him who is the true city of refuge, the Lord Jesus. Come to him.

Come to him and receive as a free gift eternal life. It doesn't come by joining the church, by being baptized, by sitting at the Lord's table, by having culture or education. It comes as a free gift in grace.

May God speak to your heart. May you come and receive everlasting life. Join the sons of the palanginesis who are on their way to the presence of the Lord and true joy forevermore.

Shall we stand for the benediction? We thank thee, Lord, for the admonition of Holy Scripture. And we do ask that if there should be someone in this audience who has not yet come, O God, we do pray that thou wilt make them so uneasy in their sin that they will truly come to Christ, believing in him unto everlasting life. How gracious of our great God to give the life that is everlasting.

And, O God, we pray that thou wilt work in the hearts of all here. We pray that the faith that we claim that we have may be seen in our true worship through Christ. May grace and mercy and peace be in abide with all who know him in sincerity.

For Jesus' sake, amen.

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