

True Faith and Costly Sacrifice

by Zac Poonen

This sermon delves into the story of Cain and Abel in Genesis 4, emphasizing the importance of offering our best to God with a genuine heart of faith. It challenges the misconception that God accepts offerings based on rituals or external actions, highlighting the significance of giving sacrificially from the heart. The speaker urges listeners to seek God wholeheartedly, emphasizing the power of fervent prayer and genuine faith in aligning with God's will. The message underscores the principle of offering God what truly costs us something, not just in material terms but in our devotion and commitment.

Scripture: Genesis 4:3, Hebrews 11:4, Hebrews 11:6, 2 Samuel 24:24, Jeremiah 29:12, James 5:16, James 2:5

Topics: "Heartfelt Worship", "Sacrificial Giving"

Description

This sermon delves into the story of Cain and Abel in Genesis 4, emphasizing the importance of offering our best to God with a genuine heart of faith. It challenges the misconception that God accepts offerings based on rituals or external actions, highlighting the significance of giving sacrificially from the heart. The speaker urges listeners to seek God wholeheartedly, emphasizing the power of fervent prayer and genuine faith in aligning with God's will. The message underscores the principle of offering God what truly costs us something, not just in material terms but in our devotion and commitment.

Transcript

Now, let's look at Genesis 4. It speaks here about the time when Cain, verse 3, in the course of time, Cain brought an offering to the Lord of the fruit of the ground, and Abel, who was his younger brother, 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, for Cain and his offering, he had no regard. Notice it is not that the Lord accepted the offering first, now that's what many Christians have taught, 95% of believers teach this, because they don't read the Bible carefully.

They teach that God accepted Abel because of his offering. He offered blood, Cain didn't offer blood. That's what I've heard all my life, that's what I've heard in every evangelical Christian book.

But what does the Bible say? Christians have a tendency to turn upside down what the Bible says. And it doesn't say God rejected Cain's offering, he rejected Cain, and therefore he rejected his offering. It's very important to notice that.

I want to tell you, don't believe everything that you read in Christian books, go and check it in the Bible. I have found a thousand and one things wrong in Christian books, which are not in the Bible. I have found a thousand and one things wrong in Christian songs, which are not in the Bible.

Here is one example of that. Christians say the Lord had regard for Abel's offering, and therefore he accepted Abel. And do you know what that type of teaching produces? It produces people who think that if they offer the blood of Christ, we're accepted.

It doesn't matter how we live. It's not true. It's a heart that God sees.

Then he accepts our offering. That's very important. And you know, in the New Testament, in Hebrews 11, it says it's by faith that Abel, let me show you that verse, then we'll come back here.

In Hebrews chapter 11, it says, by faith, Abel offered a better sacrifice than Cain. So what was it? Nowhere in the Bible does it say God accepted Abel's offering because he brought blood. I'll tell you what he brought.

He brought faith. It doesn't matter how many times you quote the blood of Christ. If you don't have faith, it's not going to accept you.

Without faith, verse six, it is impossible to please God. And now we want to understand what faith really means by looking at the first example of faith in Hebrews 11, which is Abel. I hope you know that.

First example of faith mentioned in Hebrews 11 in the Old Testament is Abel, the first person about whom it's written in the history of the human race who had faith is Abel. We can learn something from him about true faith because it's that faith that made his sacrifice better. So now we turn back, keeping that in mind and getting rid of all these wrong concepts that we have heard and read for so many years from people who don't study their Bibles carefully.

Turn back to Genesis 4. Do you notice a difference between the two offerings that Cain and Abel brought? And then you will see what faith really means. Remember, Abel was the first human being who exercised faith. The first, not Abraham, Abel.

Abel's name comes long before Abraham's in Hebrews 11. What was it that made his offering an offering of faith? And what is it that made Cain's offering not an offering of faith? How does that apply to us? All of us bring some offering to God. I don't mean money or anything.

I mean a life. What is it that makes God accept one person and not accept another person? It's important to understand. I want God to accept me.

Don't you want God to accept you? Well then we must know what is it that makes God accept a person and what is it that makes God reject a person. And it's not a lot of religious ritual or going to a church or a temple or a mosque. No.

It's something much more important than that. And if you have read carefully, you notice the difference. Cain brought an offering.

The world is full of people who bring an offering to God. Put a little bit of money in the offering box. Give a little bit of time to God on Sunday or Friday or Tuesday or someday.

And give a little money to the poor. This is all an offering to God. Cain did it and he was not accepted.

He was not an atheist. He was a very religious man. Religious people may not be accepted by God.

It's very, very important. The first two human beings after Adam and Eve. We learn something from them.

The first two human beings that were born into the world, Cain and Abel, produced two streams of humanity. A few men and women of faith following Abel and a multitude following Cain. But both bring offerings.

Both are religious people. But there's a world of difference between the two. What did Abel bring? Notice the word first.

Abel, verse four, brought the first of his flock, the best. There is a difference between giving God an offering and giving God the best that you have. There's a difference between giving your life to God when you're 70 years old with one foot in the grave, and giving your life to God when you're 17 years old with your whole life ahead of you.

That's the difference. Giving the best to God and giving the dregs to God. There's a lot of difference between giving the best of your time to God and giving five minutes to God and five hours to movies and television.

A lot of difference. Yeah, you can say the man who gave five minutes to God gave an offering to God. He read his Bible.

Do you know what faith means? Why did Abel have faith? Because he gave God his best. Many of us think we have faith. Today you will discover whether you have faith or not.

If you're honest, you can ignore all that and say, no, no, no, that's not it. Okay. Don't get a surprise when you stand before God one day in the day of judgment.

I would rather believe what the Bible says, what God's word says so plainly, right from beginning till end. The true men and women of God are the ones who gave God their best, not the dregs. That is a principle that comes throughout scripture.

And those who have eyes to see it will see it. And it's possible that many of us have missed what God wants to give us and do for us because we haven't understood this principle. You see that throughout scripture.

When God wanted to bless Abraham, he asked him for his best to offer up his son. There's nothing more precious to Abraham on earth than his son. And God said, I want that.

The same principle as with Abel. I want to ask you, my brothers and sisters, have you heard God asking you to give him something? What do you think he's asked you for? To give him 10 minutes in the morning to read the Bible? It's not a question of time. It's a hard attitude that says, Lord, I have only one life on this earth, and I want to give you the best.

Now, to give God the best does not mean you have to quit your job and be in full-time Christian work. I personally feel that God calls maybe one in 10,000 Christians to full-time Christian work. The rest are to be in their secular jobs, like almost all of you are.

So it's not a question of giving up your job. There are a lot of people who are in full-time Christian work as priests and pastors who are not going to be even in God's kingdom. I'm absolutely certain of that because I met many of them, and I see the quality of their lives, and I don't even believe they're born again, most of them.

So what does it really mean? Let me give you another example that challenged me when I was a very young Christian. If you heard me, I've quoted it many times. It's from 2 Samuel, Chapter 24.

When I was a very young Christian and working in the Navy, and I used to read my Bible every day, one day I came across this verse in 2 Samuel 24 where David came to give an offering to God. That's what we're thinking of. Abel brought an offering.

Abraham brought an offering. David brought an offering. And when he came to the place where the Lord told him, in this particular field of this farmer called Araunah, you've got to bring an offering.

And he went to that place, and that farmer, Araunah, was so delighted that the king has come. He said, what have you come for? He said, I've come to make an offering. And Araunah, the farmer, said, sure, O king, take whatever you want.

I'll give you the wood for the offering, and I'll give you the bullocks, and you can have everything freely. And listen to what David said. You know how we all like to get something free? If we can get something free, even if we don't need it, we take it.

Well, David did not. It was offered free to him, and the king said to Araunah in 2 Samuel 24, verse 24, no, I won't take it free. I will certainly buy it from you, because if I take it free and I give it to God, it doesn't cost me anything.

But if I buy it from you, then I have made a price for it. And this is the statement that came to my heart as a young Christian. I was just about 20 years old, 21 years old.

I will not, in the middle of verse 24, I will not or I will never offer to my God that which costs me nothing. And the Lord spoke to me so clearly. I mean, I don't hear it so clearly every time I read the Bible.

But that day I did. The Lord said to me, never in your life offer me something which costs you nothing. And I said, Lord, help me.

I will never offer to you that which has cost me nothing. If it costs me nothing, it's not fit for offering to God. I mean, think of you husbands and wives who love your wives very much or wives who love your husbands.

Supposing you want to get a gift on their birthday or anniversary or something like that to your partner, and you go to the store. Would you look for the cheapest thing available there? The cheapest flowers or the cheapest whatever you get? No. What about when we offer to God? I'm not talking about money now.

I'm talking about time, our life, and so many things. If you follow this principle, it will change your life. Because I told you this is what Abraham did.

This is what David said. This is what Abel did, the very first person whom God accepted. And you heard me say there that that is the mark of genuine faith.

What we call faith very often is just an intellectual belief in certain things. Christ died for my sins. Which Christian in the world, and there are billions of Christians, which of them does not believe that Christ died for the sins of the world? But it doesn't mean they have faith.

How is it possible that your faith is not much better than theirs? In 2 Chronicles 3, we see God selecting the place where he wanted to build his temple. And when you apply that to the New Testament, we can say where does God build his church? Or through whom does God build his church? That's the principle we want to learn here. In all the world, God selected one particular spot where he was going to build his temple.

Where his presence would be. Where the glory of God would come only on one spot on the whole earth. It was in Jerusalem, but it was in a particular place there.

And it says here, the Lord directed Solomon to that place. In 2 Chronicles 3, verse 1, the Lord told Solomon to build the temple, the house of the Lord, in Mount Moriah. Mount Moriah is where Abraham offered up his son.

It became a sacred spot. When God saw that, he said, I will build my house here. Further, it was the same spot where David, verse 1, offered his offering, which we just read.

Where David said these words, I will not offer to the Lord that which cost me nothing. Now why did God select that spot? This is a principle of sacrifice. People had given their best.

I mean, what more could Abraham have offered than his son? And that principle, that is where the temple was built. And what came to me at that time when I first was gripped by this truth, many, many years ago, nearly 60 years ago. The Lord said, it is only this type of person that I will use to build my church today.

One who will say to me with all of his heart, I will never offer to my God that which costs me nothing. Whether in terms of time or any other type of sacrifice we make. And I'm very glad that I learned it at a very young age.

It's very easy to ease our conscience by saying, I prayed. I read my Bible today. I've done this.

I've done what is necessary for my Christian life or for today. It's very different when we have the principle of David who says, I will never offer to God that which costs me nothing. Now, when we say cost me nothing, it doesn't mean that most of 24 hours we have to give to God.

It's an attitude more than quantity of time. It's not percentage of your income. No.

It's an attitude. It's an attitude towards God that's determined the way we fulfill that statement. I will not offer to God that which costs me nothing.

But I want you to see something that the Lord so said in Jeremiah in chapter 29. And here you may see the reason why many of our prayers are not answered. Haven't we all, every one of us had the experience where we pray, nothing happens.

We pray again and pray again and again and nothing happens. And we sit back and say, well, maybe it was not God's will. We have a way of reasoning it all out.

Of course, I did what was right. But it was not God's will. Maybe that was not the answer.

Maybe God didn't even listen to your prayer. Why couldn't that be the reason? Okay, now listen to Jeremiah 29, verse 12. Then you will call upon me and you will come and pray to me and I will listen to you.

Jesus often said that about prayer. God will listen. But there's a condition.

You will seek me and find me only when you search for me with all your heart. There again we come to the same principle. How eagerly are you praying? Is it just a nominal, okay, I've said my prayers.

I've gone through the ritual. I'm supposed to pray every day and I've done it. Again, it's not a question of time.

It's not a question of five hours in prayer. It may be only two minutes in prayer. But it's with all your heart you sought God.

Then you will find me. And I think the meaning is otherwise you won't find me. Let's turn to James in chapter 3. Sorry, James chapter 5, the New Testament.

James in chapter 5, in verse 16, the last part of James 5, 16. The effective, and in the King James Version it says, the effective fervent prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much. Now you leave out some words from there, like leave out the word righteous.

Leave out the word effective and fervent. And it sounds like this. Prayer can accomplish much.

That's how most people understand it. Prayer can accomplish much. But the Bible says the effective fervent prayer of a righteous man.

And it takes the example of Elijah who prayed earnestly that it would not rain. And it did not rain. And then again he prayed earnestly that it would rain.

And it rained. And if you go back to the Old Testament, I don't have time to show you that. Take some time in 1 Kings chapter 18 to read it.

How Elijah prayed. He wanted rain to come. He first prayed for rain to stop.

And now the rain is to come as sacrifice was offered up and God had accepted it. And he told his servant, go and see. And he answered.

The servant says, no, I don't see any sign of rain. Elijah gets back on his knees and prays again. Any sign? The servant says, no, Elijah, not a sign of rain at all.

He prayed and he prayed and he prayed until his servant said, ah, I see a cloud. Elijah says, that's it. The effective fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.

And now perhaps we can understand why our prayers, some of our prayers are not answered at all. Of course, some things that may not be God's will, that's another thing. But why some of our prayers are not answered at all and we write it off as perhaps it was not God's will.

In other words, we assume, of course, we are right. We did nothing wrong. We did our part perfectly, but it was not God's will.

Perhaps 101 things that we said was not God's will was God's will, but God would not change those circumstances because we never prayed fervently. I don't want to discover something like that at the judgment seat of Christ when I stand there and my life is evaluated by the Lord and says, the Lord says a lot more I wanted to do through you, but you are not serious. You are not serious about your Christian life.

You just did the bare minimum. Bare minimum of everything and eased your conscience. Of course, you didn't commit sin or you listened to the message in the church that you should not sin.

You never told lies and you were upright. You paid your taxes. You did everything right.

But what you offered to me hardly cost you anything. And I'm not talking about money. So, brothers and sisters, it's good for us to think about this.

God has a wonderful plan for every one of our lives. And on another note, I was very happy to hear of something that happened when I was away. I was away the last couple of months.

That, you know, some time ago, we had a little bit of an uproar about this business of registries, birth registries, etc. So, I was very happy to hear that in the last couple of months, beginning in the East Bay, some brothers celebrated the first birth of a child with not a registry, but a birthday celebration. When nobody was asked to bring any gifts, but people came to share God's word.

And I believe they've already had two celebrations like that. And one brother said, at the end of it, he says, I got a lot more from the words that I heard from my brothers than if they had given me a whole lot of financial gifts. What a testimony that monetary gifts didn't mean so much.

And I'm glad that NCCF has started a trend to celebrate birth with God's word and not with gifts. Because I'll tell you what happened in another CFC church. The person told me himself.

There was a registry there for birth and you know how a lot of things and some of them were expensive. This person said, I was a bit late in going to the registry and I found that the only thing left was far too expensive for me to buy. And so I didn't go to the celebration at all.

Isn't that sad that someone who was not well off enough to buy something expensive, could not go to the celebration of someone in their own church. Because they felt bad that they could not buy something which was listed in the registry, which was far too expensive for them. Is that a good testimony for a church? Is that a good testimony for a Christian church? Is that the type of thing that Jesus would say? Okay.

God has chosen the poor of the world, rich in faith. That's the verse in James chapter 2. And I come from a country where most of our churches are among poor people, very poor people. And I've seen that they are rich in faith.

And that's why wherever I go, whether it's NCCF or any other church, I'm always concerned about the poor. If you follow this pattern, how will it affect the poor? How will it affect the poor? How will it affect the poor? And I'm thankful that we've now set a pattern in this church to celebrate births, as the elders have decided, where anyone can participate. We will not offer to the Lord that which costs us nothing.

Video: <https://sermonindex2.b-cdn.net/EPwCHbn9TMA.mp4>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/zac-poonen/true-faith-and-costly-sacrifice/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net