

The Life of Faith: Abel (Hebrews 11:4)

There is a kind of worship that is wrong. Wrong worship is approaching God our way and not God's way. But true worship is obediently responding to what God requires. The life of faith will be a life of acceptable worship to God and this is illustrated in the life of Abel. The story of Abel is found in Genesis 4. There we learn that Abel and his older brother Cain were workers of the land. Both of them worshipped God, but only one worshipped God in the right way, and that was by faith (cf. Heb. 11:4a). In this message we will learn that the life of faith involves acceptable worship.

1. Sacrificing by Faith (11:4a)

Both Cain and Abel worshipped the Lord by means of sacrifice (Gen. 4:3-4). Despite the fact that they both offered a sacrifice to God, only Abel's was deemed acceptable (cf. Gen. 4:4). Cain's offering would have appeared visually acceptable and sacrificial to the human eye. However, that is not what makes sacrifice or any act of worship acceptable to God. Abel's gift was received and Cain's was rejected (Gen. 4:5) because one worshipped God according to His ordained way and the other did not (cf. Heb. 11:4; 12:24).

It is not revealed in the Genesis account the reason why Abel's offering was acceptable, so we can only assume that the Lord had revealed the method to them prior (cf. Gen. 3:21; Rom. 10:17). Abel offered His sacrifice by faith, indicating he had knowledge of what was and was not acceptable in sacrificing to God. God is not interested in our sacrifices; He is interested in our obedience. We are to bring to God what He wants, not what we want. Sadly, Cain approached God with his own method. From this example we learn that there is a kind of worship that is wrong. At the heart of it is the act of not coming to God on the basis of obedience. One can offer up the sincerest words and acts of sacrifice, but if it does not come from a life that submits to God it is wrong worship. So the first truth we learn about Abel's life of faith is that it involved sacrifice God's way, and this was acceptable to God.

2. Standing by Faith (11:4b)

The second truth I want you to see is that Abel's life resulted in a standing by faith. When I say standing, I am referring to his reputation. A life lived in obedience to God will not be prized by the world. In-fact, a life lived God's way will be condemned by the world. But what matters most is what God thinks of us not the world. Cain may have condemned Abel, but God commended Abel as righteous. That is significant. That is the only compliment that matters in life. The life of faith is lived God's way. It will most often be rejected by the world, but God sees it and commends it.

3. Speaking by Faith (11:4c)

From a worldly perspective, things did not end well for Abel. He was murdered! This was Cain's way of silencing his brother. He could not stand the testimony of obedience. But this life of faith was not a waste. The life of faith, even when it is silenced, still speaks. Abel's life still speaks because God preserved Abel's story in Scripture and it continues to bear testimony.

Conclusion

The life of faith is a life of right worship. In order to do this, we need to be in a saving relationship with our Lord, and then have our minds renewed by Scripture followed by lives of obedience to it. This is beautifully summarised in Paul's words in Romans 12:1-2.

Group Discussion

1. Many judge the spirituality of worship on the basis of their experience. Is this valid? What is the basis for worship that pleases God?
2. Both Cain and Abel made sacrifices to God, but God was only pleased with Abel's sacrifice. Why did Abel's sacrifice please God?
3. Abel did not receive the commendation of his brother, but he pleased the Lord. Why do we often crave to please others and not the Lord?
4. How does Abel still speak? How does our obedience to Christ speak loudly to others?
5. Read Romans 12:1-2 and give practical ways we can guard our lives from wrong worship.