

A Faith that Speaks

Heb. 11:4

Series “More”

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I don't know if you heard or not, but there has been something all over the news this week...it's been the subject of much of the media talking heads...it has stirred controversy all over social media, and it is something that certainly needs our attention.

I've got to tell you, this has been stressful for me on a personal level, knowing how it will affect my family, specifically my parents, and am concerned about how it may be affecting some of you as well. I want you to know that I have contacted our counseling offices and put them on notice to be ready for an influx of people that may be coming in.

What has taken place has been called, “soulless”. The news that *Cracker Barrel* is changing their logo after almost fifty years has almost been too much for some! Who knew how much Uncle Herschel and his rocking chair meant to so many people?! I'm worried, Church! Ha!

Now, regardless of where you stand on the decision that *Cracker Barrel* made, I do think ONE of the reasons this has gotten so many people up in arms – I mean when you've got Larry the Cable Guy begging on social media to NOT change the design, you have set off a spark!

ONE of the main reasons this has bothered so many people is because the old logo represents something that is meaningful to people...the “old” to many represents authenticity and a brings with it a sense of nostalgia.

You see that “old design”, and while Uncle Herschel may be dead, what he stands for...what he represents is very much alive, and in one sense that which is old (we see it in this controversy) still speaks to us today.

THIS is Hebrews 11:4. I'm calling the message: **A Faith that Speaks**

A faith that speaks gives God the very best.

Abel, who is the main subject of our text today lived thousands of years ago. As we will see, he had a living faith (what this series in Hebrews 11 is all about), and as a result of his living faith – he is still speaking to us today.

Let's look at the text together.

Hebrews 11:4 – “By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts. And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks.”

Now, before we look at what the writer of Hebrews is referring to which goes back to Genesis 4 (which you can begin turning in your Bibles there) I do think it's VERY important to note that all of the men and women that we will look at in this *MORE* series – many are listed out by name and there are others that are “no names” so to speak – VERY IMPORTANT to note that simply because they are in Hebrews 11 – what has been referred to as the Hall of Faith – someone referenced it as the Westminster Abbey of the Bible.

NOTE: EVERY person we will study in this series (named and unnamed) were normal people – some might have had some weird and eccentric personalities, but they had a nature just like ours.

They were people just like me and you, and their name is engraved in the scripture...the Hall of Faith, NOT because they were “super saints” – in fact most all of them had their own set of issues...their own struggles...their own problems.

They are listed out in Hebrews 11 because they lived by faith – their faith is what is to be emphasized and emulated.

Now, recall how we defined and described faith last week. We said that it is according to (Heb. 11:1) the assurance of things *hoped for* (that’s future) and the conviction of things *not seen* (that’s the invisible) – we live by faith, not by sight - 2 Cor. 5:7.

Faith is based on the revealed Word of God and backed by his character and nature.

Faith is not wishful thinking...it’s not pie in the sky...it is not feelings...it is the confident assurance and conviction that what God says in his Word is true, and faith becomes REAL when we act...when we obey:

- EVEN when we don’t feel like it...
- EVEN when it costs us...
- EVEN when what is asked of us doesn’t make sense...

Recall our NEXTSTEPS definition: **Faith – Choosing to live as though God’s Word is true** (because it is! Backed by his character and nature) **regardless of circumstances; regardless of emotions and regardless of cultural trends.**

Faith, by definition requires action. Refer back to our wheelbarrow illustration last week – it’s getting in the wheelbarrow.

Each person in Hebrews 11 is there because their faith influenced their lifestyle...it affected their decision-making...it moved them to action.

THIS is the Abel’s story. His faith moved him to action...and as a result, his faith is still speaking today.

Let’s explore Abel’s faith in action! Hebrews 11:4 tells us that he offered to God a MORE (there’s our word – “better”) acceptable sacrifice than his brother, Cain...it was commended by God.

What’s this all about? Well, let’s look back at Genesis 4 and see if we can’t wrap our minds and hearts around what God would have to say to us today.

Genesis 4:1-8 – (context: this is sometime after the Fall – Adam and Eve have been removed from the Garden of Eden) **“Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, “I have gotten a man with the help of the Lord.”** (interesting side note here: Cain’s name means “I got him” or “this is him of the Lord” – most commentators will point out that when the curse on the serpent was handed down, there was a promise of a Redeemer coming...there was a promise that Eve’s offspring would bruise the serpent’s head - Gen. 3:15 – most commentators believe that Eden must have thought this firstborn son was a realization of the promise by the name given to him, but as we will see nothing could be further from this.) ² **And again, she bore his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a worker of the ground.** (So, Cain was a farmer and Abel a shepherd) ³ **In the course of time Cain brought to the Lord an offering of the fruit of the ground, ⁴ and Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions. And the Lord had regard** (looked with favor) **for Abel and his offering, ⁵ but for Cain and his offering** (he did not look with favor) **he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his face fell. ⁶ The Lord said to Cain, “Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? ⁷ If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you,**

and you must rule over it. Cain spoke to Abel his brother. And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him.”

Amazing story, here. You’ve got two brothers (Cain and Abel). They are raised by the same two parents (Adam and Eve). They bring an offering to the same God, at the same time, AND yet only ONE of the offerings is received and “acceptable to God” and only ONE of the brothers (Abel) is commended.

Abel is in the Hall of Faith...he is listed as an example to follow...his faith STILL speaks for what took place here in Genesis 4. Why is this?

Let’s uncover what we can learn from him. First, if you’re taking notes, write this down. You want like Abel to have a faith that speaks?

Then we must: **Trust God Wholeheartedly**

The emphasis of our text in Hebrews 11:4 is on the words, “by faith”. Look back at (v. 4) and I’m going to read how the NIV translates it!

Heb. 11:4 – “By faith Abel brought God a better offering than Cain did. By faith he was commended as righteous, when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith Abel still speaks, even though he is dead.”

The emphasis is on Abel’s faith. What he did (while important and we’ll work it all out in just a moment) – the foundation and root that produced the right action in his life that was approved by God was his faith. It was his wholehearted trust in God that moved him to act and bring the kind of offering he did to the Lord.

Remember what pleases the Lord?! FAITH.

Heb. 11:6a – “And without faith it is impossible to please him...”

If we want a faith that speaks...that reverberates into the future, it will require that we trust God wholeheartedly. And look, let’s just ask this question right here: Has God ever failed you?

The answer is, “NO”! God hasn’t failed you. Even if you have experienced a loss of some kind...a heart break...a setback...some kind of tragedy that has rocked the very foundation of your faith, I assure you that when it’s all said and done (when we get to the “other side”), you will look back and confirm and affirm, God hasn’t failed me!

Psalms 37:25 – “I have been young, and now am old, yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken or his children begging for bread.”

I make this point of God NEVER failing you...I highlight his faithfulness just to exhort you and say, “God can be trusted!” His character and nature doesn’t allow him to fail! So, Go all-in with him.

You read the scripture...we see it over and over – the idea that God wants us to trust him, love him, seek him with ALL our heart.

Deut. 6:5 – “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.”

1 Kings 8:61 – “Let your heart therefore be wholly true to the Lord our God, walking in his statutes and keeping his commandments, as at this day.”

Psalms 119:2 – “Blessed are those who keep his testimonies, who seek him with their whole heart.”

Prov. 3:5 – “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding.”

What’s this half-hearted stuff? He wants our WHOLE heart! He’s God – he deserves it! He’s NEVER failed us – he’s earned our trust!

Illus. Got my girls cell phones – I told them they had to earn my trust! That phone better be turned in by a certain time...it better not be upstairs in their room...I get to check messages and text ANYTIME I want – you have to earn my trust!

Well, can I just say on behalf of God today – he has earned our trust! So, when he speaks, let’s obey:

- EVEN when it may not make sense...
- EVEN when it comes at a personal cost to us...
- EVEN when we don’t fully understand...

A faith that speaks long after we are gone, will be because we are a people that trust God wholeheartedly. This was Abel’s legacy, and we see it MOST in his (ready for this) his WORSHIP.

This is a faith that speaks! We trust in God wholeheartedly that will naturally lead us to: **Worship God Sincerely**
See, worship – (i.e., Abel’s offering), was the expression of his faith. The foundation of this action was wholehearted trust in God, and what naturally flowed from this trust in God was that he offered to God his very best – that’s sincere worship!

Let’s talk about this worship. Evidently, there was a time to bring God an offering. Look back at Genesis 4:

Gen. 4:3-4a – “In the course of time (can be translated as “at the end of days” or “revolution of days”) **Cain brought to the Lord an offering of the fruit of the ground, ⁴and Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions...”**

It seems that there was a set time – we don’t know exactly when this was...we assume God made this known to Adam and Eve and the first parents educated their children on the importance of sacrifice – this is what God requires.

Recall how God covered Adam and Eve’s shame after the Fall. They realized their nakedness, and God (Gen. 3:21) “made for Adam and Eve garments of skin and clothed them”. He sacrificed an animal – there was shed blood that atoned for their sin – covered their shame.

And from that time on, sacrifice was required and sacrifice equated with worship of God. Read the story of Abraham – BEFORE the law came and the requirements of sacrifice was listed out. What would Abraham do everywhere he went?

Wherever he pitched his TENT, he built an altar. The altar is synonymous with sacrifice and sacrifice synonymous with worship.

Now, MUCH has been made about the KIND of offering that Abel brought versus that of Cain. A lot of people believe that one of the reasons that God found Abel’s offering acceptable and not Cain’s is because Abel brought a blood sacrifice.

Cain though...he brought the fruit of the ground and so some will say that the reason God accepted Abel’s offering and not Cain’s is because he came with the proper sacrifice – he came via blood.

I think that's an argument that can be made and agree with the theology. Remember one of the first rules of studying the Bible is to "let the Bible interpret the Bible". We read a verse within the chapter that it's written, within the whole of the book that it's written, within the hole of the Bible.

Illus. Cross Reference pic – I saw this the other day and thought it was awesome. There are some 63,000+ cross references in the Bible. This represents Genesis to Revelation and the colors show the corresponding cross references – all that to say, when you study the Bible, it testifies to itself! Don't build a theology off one verse!

In the context of Hebrews, it's all about Jesus being the full and final sacrifice. It talks A LOT about blood!

Heb. 9:22 – “Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.”

So, there is certainly credence to this idea that Abel's sacrifice could have been received and approved by God when Cain's was not because it was a blood sacrifice, but the scripture doesn't explicitly say that.

What's interesting is, in the New Testament both Cain and Abel are mentioned and HOW they are described is revealing, and I think it reveals why one offering was accepted and the other wasn't! It's about the OFFEROR more than the OFFERING!

In Matthew's gospel (chapter 23), Jesus is railing against the pharisees. He calls them blind guides...a brood of vipers...fools...hypocrites. He calls them all of these things because outwardly they are doing everything right, but inwardly they are all jacked up!

They have this outward action, but on the inside, Jesus says, “they are dirty...unclean...like a whitewashed tomb. Beautiful on the outside and dead on the inside!

“hypocrites” was a term used to describe a play actor – they would put on a mask and perform. Jesus said, this is who you are because the inside and the outside are NOT lining up. It's the EXACT opposite of a sincere worshipper.

And it's in THIS context of Jesus condemning these religious leaders that he speaks of (Matt. 23:35) “righteous Abel”. Jesus called Abel “righteous”.

Contrast that with how Cain is described in **1 John 3:12 – “We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous.”**

So, get the picture here. Abel described as righteous. Cain described as “of the evil one” – this speaks to their nature. I don't think that approval of their offering had to do with WHAT kind of sacrifice they brought.

Abel was a shepherd – it made sense that he would bring a blood sacrifice. Cain was a farmer – it makes sense that he would bring some fruit from the ground. I don't think it was about the KIND of offering, I think it goes back to what we were talking about previously...the worship...the sacrifice...it reflected these men's hearts!

Check this: The offering wasn't as important as the heart of the offeror!

Abel was “all in”. His offering was “by faith” (whole-hearted trust in God) ...and Cain...evidently, he wasn't, and therefore his offering because it was not offered from a heart of faith...because Cain was not a sincere (offeror) worshipper, God did not look favorably upon the offering.

You see what this teaches don't you? It's NOT about WHAT we bring to God...it's NOT even about HOW MUCH we bring to God – and I'm not talking about just money and resources, I'm talking about ALL of life.

EVERYTHING we do is to be worship unto God! Our lives are to be our offering!

Rom. 12:1 – “I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.”

Col. 3:17 – “And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”

What this passage teaches is that God sees behind our actions to our heart! He sees what NO ONE else can!

- He sees WHY we give what we give...
- He sees the motivation of our hearts and can see WHY we do, what we do...

He looks at us today, and we can be singing as loud as possible on the outside, but he sees the inside – he knows if we mean what we're doing OR if we are just playing games. There's no pulling one over on the God of the universe!

Prov. 16:2 – “All the ways of a man are pure in his own eyes, but the LORD weighs the spirit.”

Prov. 21:2 – “Every way of man is right in his own eyes, but the LORD weighs the heart.”

Motive matters...and God sees it!

Jer. 17:10 – “I the Lord search the heart and test the mind, to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds.”

You remember when God called the prophet, Samuel to anoint David as king over Israel? Remember his words to Samuel?

1 Sam. 16:7 – “But the Lord said to Samuel, 'Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.'”

God did not accept Cain's offering because he saw through to a heart that wasn't his!

Richard Coekin – “Cain offered a sacrifice – as religious people do – trying to impress God and earn his approval. But Abel's sacrifice was motivated by faith within his heart...Abel wasn't just making a costly religious sacrifice to bribe God, as religious people do. He was making a sacrifice to please God as part of his personal faith in the living God, whom he worshipped.”

This text teaches us it is NOT about WHAT we bring to God...HOW MUCH we bring to God...it's all about whether what we are bringing to him is “by faith”.

Listen to me: Abel's sacrifice is NOT “better” – and that's the word the scripture uses – it uses the word “better” i.e. “acceptable”. It's NOT better because its bigger or even bloodier. It's better because it was done “by faith”.

A faith that speaks long after we're gone, will only happen as we trust God wholeheartedly. What flows from this kind of faith is that we will worship God sincerely. And sincere worship will ALWAYS express itself in that we:
Give to God Generously

Some of you are thinking, “Wait a minute, Pastor Jarrett. You just said that the amount we give isn’t the issue, and now you are saying if we want a faith that speaks and reverberates into eternity, then we will give generously (that’s an amount!). Which is it?”

It’s both! Let me explain.

We’ve established that what God is looking for is faith – this is what pleases him. Whatever we bring to him, for it to be acceptable, it must be brought in faith – it’s not about what comes out of your wallet or bank account, it’s about what comes out of your heart!

The widow who gave her small little offering shows us this. Remember the story...this is a GOOD one! Turn very quickly to Mark’s gospel.

Mark 12:41-44 – “And he sat down opposite the treasury and watched the people putting money into the offering box. Many rich people put in large sums. ⁴² And a poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which make a penny. ⁴³ And he called his disciples to him and said to them, “Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the offering box. ⁴⁴ For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.”

See, in this story SIZE of gift wasn’t the issue. However, let’s answer the question, “who put in more?” Jesus said, “the widow did”!

See, the size of her gift was in proportion to the size of her heart for God. Look back at Abel’s gift. The Bible says in (Gen. 4:4) that he brought the “firstborn and the fat portions”.

Translation: Abel brought his best to God. Doesn’t it just make logical sense that if we bring our best to God, it’s going to be generous! The widow gave ALL she had – that’s generous compared to the “rich people putting in large sums giving out of their abundance!

Illus. Jalapeno Corn- I don’t know why, but as I was writing this sermon these two words kept coming to my mind! I see the idea of generously giving to God like this

God, you made it...take as much as you desire. You are worthy of it...you deserve it. Have the best! Let’s not give God the leftovers!

? – As it relates to generosity, it’s not about the amount. BTW, the rich people dropping off their money only felt good about it because they could compare themselves to others...and if we compare ourselves to others, we can always find someone “we are doing better than”.

It’s not about that! The question ALL of us have to answer is, “Are we giving God our best?”

Malachi 1:6b-8 – “But you say, ‘How have we despised your name?’ ⁷ By offering polluted food upon my altar. But you say, ‘How have we polluted you?’ By saying that the Lord’s table may be despised. ⁸ When you offer blind animals in sacrifice, is that not evil? And when you offer those that are lame or sick, is that not evil? Present that to your governor; will he accept you or show you favor? says the Lord of hosts.”

God is rebuking people because they were not offering to him their best. God deserves our best and just a reminder he knows whether if it is or if it’s not.

Illus. Klein Texans – give your best! If we give our best on a football field...to our teammates, surely, we can give our best to the one who gave Heaven’s best to us.

Worship comes from an old word, “worthship” – we worship what/who is worthy! And there is NO ONE more worthy than God – our gifts to him (our life, our time, our energy, our talents and yes, our money and resources) should reflect it.

The Bible says Abel, though dead still speaks. Don’t you want this kind of faith? A faith that speaks to your children and grandchildren...a church that is still speaking to this community long after we are gone?

It can be ours if we will trust God wholeheartedly. This will lead to worshipping God sincerely which will result in giving to God generously. And it will create an echo that will still be heard years from now. Let’s pray.

Please Note: This document is not meant to be a published, cited, annotated research paper. It is simply a transcript of a spoken message, provided as a resource. Many commentaries, articles, and other sermon helps were likely studied and contributed to the forming of this message.