

## **Living the Life of Faith, Part 1: Abel's Message (Hebrews 11:1-4)**

This morning as Pastor Cliff announced, I'll be introducing a new series of messages we'll be doing from Heb chapter 11 that will continue tonight and future night services. I'll continue Phil 4 future Sunday mornings, but today both morning and evening our focus will be living the life of faith from this great chapter, Heb 11. Each evening service from now till this summer we'll be walking through this chapter that's all about walking by faith, not sight. I want to first *read* the verses in Heb 11 we'll be looking at today, introduce this study and persuade you that you *need* to be a part of this series. Then we'll look at the first life of faith in Heb 11 and his message for us to *heed*. It starts with faith's explanation, its basis in biblical creation, its illustrations

Heb 11:1–4 *Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.* <sup>2</sup> *For by it the people of old received their commendation.* <sup>3</sup> *By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.* <sup>4</sup> *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.*

Abel is Exhibit A in the gallery of faith. Heb 11 has been called the 'heroes of the faith' or 'honor roll of faith.' It's like a biblical 'walk of fame' with names highlighted along the path for their achievements or, in this case the righteous by faith shine like stars (Dan 12:2, Phil 2:15 NIV). Or some of our brethren in England call Heb 11 'the Westminster Abbey of the Bible.'

A more sport-minded title for the chapter is the 'hall of fame of faith.' I like that because if you look at Heb 12:1 a race is the analogy it's all building to: *'Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us...'* The life of faith is a race, a marathon, and many have run before. Faith's hall of fame in chapter 11 are a great cloud of witnesses surrounding us, encouraging us to endurance as we run. They've set the pace, some of them have stumbled and can help train us not to be entangled in the sin that slowed them down. Think of Olympians in a stadium, they could still compete if there were no witnesses or if there had been no games before them, but crowds and witnesses motivate them. Saints of old line the way retelling triumphs of His grace as we run the race.

There's value in looking to them, but above all we need to look to Jesus, it says in the next verse, as He's the author and perfecter of faith. He's the real Hero of faith, but when Jesus is the *object* of faith, heroic lives are possible by faith. Any human heroism is all to His glory but we can learn from those who lived that. Jesus is our ultimate example, but we also need examples of weak flesh and blood people made strong, those who unlike Jesus stumbled in sin but got up, so they can show how and where not to step as they did, by showing us sin's consequences in their lives. Heb 11 shows us what God can do as fallible sinners step out by faith in infallible scripture. Imagine if in your sport you had a hall of famer as your private coach and trainer. And what if one-by-one 16 of the greatest in history offered to give you input to help? Would you say no? Would you be ok with missing some? Heb 11 has just that in 16 names for us. Don't say no or think you don't need this study! The next 16 Sunday nights the hall of fame of faith has instruction for you!

Why is this needed? This race is hard, sin is so easily ensnaring, and it's not so easy for us to be enduring when we're weighed down. If no one could see us, we might be tempted to run away rather than run the race, but we need the cloud of witnesses. We need to be cheered on and I want to challenge you to stir you on with us. We need the faith of our fathers to be true to the end. We'll see in Heb 11 elderly believers commended for what they did by faith to the end, what living and dying faith looks like on death beds. This is a chapter for young people, too. It includes some whose life of faith began as a little kid (Samuel) or as teenagers (David and Joseph). There's women and widows in this list, and men weak in faith, and others with wicked sins and pasts of murder, adultery, prostitution, etc. This is a text for everyone.

It has application for us but was addressed to professing Christians in NT times of Hebrew background, some of whom were being drawn back to Judaism. Some were tempted to be more into Jewish-ness than the Jewish Messiah. So this letter calls them back to the sufficiency and superiority of Jesus in His position and His priesthood. Chapter by chapter it lifts up Jesus as better in His deity and humanity: His name is more excellent than angels, His nature is more exalted than angels, so don't neglect so great a salvation! Jesus is better than Melchizedek or Moses or the Mosaic old covenant. He fulfills the Sabbath, the sacrificial system and sanctuary and our salvation. 10:21: *and since we have a great priest over the house of God,*<sup>22</sup> *let us draw near with a true heart in **full assurance of faith**... And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works,*<sup>25</sup> *not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another ...*

So I've been considering all week how to spur you on in the race of faith, in love to stir you up to come tonight to meet together with us for a fellowship opportunity to get to know and to stimulate others in good things. I know our night services aren't a habit of some but I want to encourage you to make it a new habit to be a part of these meetings together in this series, starting tonight. Each Sunday night various faithful men from our church will give the message on the faith of the various believers in Heb 11, and it encourages our brothers as they develop their gifts to have you assemble to hear them and stir them on. Consider one another and come encourage them

I was super encouraged this week just looking at the list of men who will be bringing the Word and that God has blessed a church our size with so many who can handle it and can helpfully bring it to us. Tonight Graeme speaks on v. 5-6, the faith of Enoch, next Sunday night you'll hear Steve speak on v. 7, the faith of Noah, and so on. This Sunday morning you'll hear from a guy who's been speaking a long time, his name is Abel. The end of v. 4 says *'through his faith, though he died, he still speaks'* (KJV *'he being dead, yet speaketh'*). Abel had been dead more than 4,000 years when this was written but he was still speaking. He died (past tense) but he's still speaking about living faith (Greek present tense for continual repeated ongoing action). If you have ears to hear, you can still hear his voice today. Abel's name isn't listed as a speaker in your bulletin, but by his life of faith he keeps speaking

Abel was the son of Adam and Eve who was killed by his brother Cain, but that didn't stop Abel's voice. God said to Cain: *'The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground'* (Gen 4:10). And the voice of Abel's blood-earnest message is still crying out. In Christ's day 4,000 years after Abel, Christ said *'from the foundation of the world...the blood of Abel...will be required of this generation'* (Lk 11:51). His life and death speak to ours. He's the opening keynote speaker of the faith conference speaking to us on:

1. True Faith
2. True Worship
3. True Righteousness

**First, Abel still speaks to us about what true faith is:** <sup>4</sup> *By faith Abel ...*

What is faith? v. 1: *'the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.'* Our world says seeing is believing, God's Word says believing is *not* by or based on seeing. Faith is conviction or certainty of what we haven't seen. v. 1 isn't a total or technical definition of faith, it's a type of faith defined in this context. This faith includes future hope in God.

It's not wishful thinking hope, there's substance to true faith, and we're sure of it based on who God is and what He has said. v. 3 starts with the universe made by God's Word, trusting everything I see is made from what I can't see by a God I can't see. Abel wasn't there, he wasn't even a twinkle in the eye of Eve on day 6 of creation week, he and we understand by God's Word that creation out of nothing happened by God's Word. Ps 33:6 *'By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth all their host...[like breath on a cold day God's moves out to sprinkle a universe with stars spoke into being. The psalm goes on]...stand in awe of him! <sup>9</sup> For he spoke, and it came to be...* (one translation has 'it appeared at his command')

He didn't speak, then over billions or millions of years it finally came to be. There wasn't a big bang that smoked into being burning stars and planets. There was a big God who spoke a universe into being out of nothing! In the beginning He created heaven and earth (day 1), and day 4 heavenly lights. Some earthly creatures He made of dust, God breathed in to man's nostrils the breath of life, but the universe out there is by God's breath of command. It's not delayed obedience when He commands, God speaks and it happens! We can't make things reality by our speaking, no matter what the prosperity gospel preachers on TV say. I'll bet most can't even get their kids at home to do what they command! I speak a lot of things that don't come to be. I like instant obedience and I'd like to be able to install a ceiling fan. I can replace a lightbulb? God *'calls into existence...things that do not exist'* (Rom 4:17).

John Whitcomb said<sup>1</sup> honest atheists should admit by faith they understand the universe was *not* created by God's Word, and everything that's seen was made of previously existing simpler things evolving over ages by chance. It's by faith evolutionists see the universe as they do: faith in a consensus of scientists who aren't creationists, faith in long time and in design without an intelligent Designer, faith in Darwinism and naturalism randomly bringing about irreducible complexity in living organisms, even cells. Observational science by definition is what's seen, origins science is what's not seen and like v. 3 says, they have assured convictions by faith about the ancient past. No scientists see life come from non-life, animals evolve into another kind, mutations adding new beneficial information to DNA, explosions and chaos producing amazing order, and so on. It's by faith they understand that either matter's eternal or nothing turned into something that turned into everything

*By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible. By faith Abel...*

Now notice in v. 4 it goes on to contrast Abel's faith in action with Cain's. Cain had faith, but not the kind of faith Heb 11 is talking about. Cain wasn't an atheist (though even atheists have faith). Cain talked to God, worshipped God, we'll talk about that in a bit, but Cain didn't have true faith like Abel. He didn't have, like v. 2 says, the kind of faith that God commends. Even demons have a faith in God, as James says, but Heb 11 faith is deeper in v. 6: *'And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.'* Even unbelievers know God exists (Rom 1) but true faith draws near by seeking *Him* personally, diligently or earnestly for eternal reward. That moves from faith in our Creator to faith in our Savior, treasure, and reward

### **Abel being dead still speaks about True Faith, and 2ndly True Worship**

*<sup>4</sup> By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain ...*

Others say it was *better/more excellent* so God commended and accepted it. Keep a finger here and turn back to Gen 4 to see the rest of the story. The most asked question in Gen 4 is probably where Cain got his wife (if you want the answer to that, you can ask my dad after. Hint: it's all relative). If you ask Glen where Cain got his wife, he'll tell you BIOLA University. Don Whitney has a sermon [Don't miss God's favor looking for Cain's wife.](#)

The important question is: How did Abel receive God's favor or approval, and why didn't Cain receive it? Why was Abel accepted and Cain rejected? In Gen 4 Adam and Eve were raising Cain, and v. 2 says Eve gave birth to another son, Abel. The middle of v. 2 says *'... Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a worker of the ground. <sup>3</sup> In the course of time Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground, <sup>4</sup> and Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering, <sup>5</sup> but for Cain and his offering he had no regard...'*

Some have suggested the difference is Abel brought an animal sacrifice, a blood sacrifice, and Cain brought fruits or vegetables that can't please God because only blood can atone. But that's not in the text, and even when the text of God's Law was later written, both offering types can be pleasing to God. In the context of v. 2, both are giving offerings from their occupation, which is good and right. This Hebrew term for *offering* usually meant grain offerings in the Law, more like Cain's offering than Abel's bloody one. The original readers of the Torah wouldn't expect animal sacrifice with this term

To get to the heart of what's going on we need what's going on in the heart. Simply put Heb 11 says *without faith* we can't please God but *by faith* Abel did. Gen 4:4 says Abel brought the firstborn or first-fruits and fat portions, the very best part of his flock, but with Cain, v. 3 just says some of the fruit of the ground, it doesn't say it was the cream of the crop or first or best and Cain wasn't cheerful in v. 5. God loves a cheerful giver and giving offerings was part of worship long before the Law of Moses and continues for us not under Law. A few chapters later Abraham gave a tenth of all God blessed him in worship. Believers in Bible times brought tithes or offerings in worship, we're not under a legalistic code, but our offerings are still to be the first-fruits, a first and best portion or percent from occupation/earnings.

In worship today we don't offer firstborns, we now do financial offerings of what God gives to us, and it's not to be leftovers, it's to be the first *in faith*. But you could give more than 10% in the offering box and not please God if it's not from a heart of faith. We don't know what percent of Cain's labors he brought as an offering, or if there was bad fruit, but he had a bad heart. It wasn't true faith or true worship in Cain's heart and you can tell his focus is off in v. 5-6 by how he responds in rage. Cain's heart wasn't right, we can tell because in v. 7 God tells him if he does what is right he'll be accepted. The 2nd half of v. 7 is all about the battle with sin going on in Cain's heart. But Cain doesn't show the humble repentant heart that's part of true faith and true righteous worship God looks for, that alone pleases (Isa 66:2, 64:6)

Here's how 1 John 3:12 applies it: '*We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one...Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous.*' James 4 says what's going on in a heart is what makes us fight or even kill. Notice in Gen 4:4 if you read carefully God was looking to the heart, to the person first, then their deeds: NIV '*...The LORD looked with favor on Abel and his offering, <sup>5</sup> but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor.*'

Walt Kaiser 'there was a problem with Cain's "gift"--he was the problem.'<sup>2</sup> Bruce Waltke adds this: '*Cain's speech*, disclosing his unregenerate heart, condemns him. His sarcastic question, "*Am I my brother's keeper?*" betrays both his callousness against God and his hate of his brother made in God's image (v 9). He calls into question God's wisdom, justice, and love and attempts to justify himself, claiming [in v.13]: *My punishment is more than I can bear...* Even after God mitigates his sentence (v 15), he fails to respond to God's grace (v 16)...Cain's flawed character led to his [false] worship.'<sup>3</sup> But *by true faith* Abel's true worship pleased God, he being dead still speaks



### 3rdly and finally Abel speaks to us about True Righteousness

Back in Heb 11 Abel's name is the first and foremost example of a righteous one who lives by faith (10:39). Jesus called him '*righteous Abel*' (Mt 23:35).

<sup>4</sup> *By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him ...*

That's a passive form; Abel didn't commend himself as righteous, God did. Same word in v. 2 where it's clear by faith OT believers were commended or approved as righteous, that's their testimony. If you look at v. 7, the end of v. 7 makes it clear men receive this '*righteousness that comes from faith.*' True righteousness comes from true faith, with which it is possible to please God (v. 6). There's a positional righteousness we get in justification by faith and when it's true there it will result in practical righteousness to our brother

1 Jn 3:10: *'whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother...'* <sup>12</sup> *We should not be like Cain, who ... murdered his brother...* <sup>15</sup> *Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer ...* <sup>16</sup> *By this we know love, that [Jesus] laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers...* John says if we have faith in Jesus, manifesting in love to one another (v. 24), that gives us assurance of faith (v. 19) and certainty that we're pleasing in His sight (v. 22) by faith in *Jesus Christ the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins...*(2:1 NIV)

John also saw in a vision the souls of all those slain for their witness (same Greek root used of Abel in Heb 11:4). Rev 6 says these martyrs at heaven's altar are crying '*out with a loud voice, "O Sovereign Lord...how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?"*' In the voice of the martyrs is the loud voice of Cain's blood crying out to the sovereign Lord, crying out for the righteous judgment of God on sinful men

Jesus said to self-righteous religious people who lacked true righteousness and true worship because they lacked true faith in Jesus, God's vengeance is coming: '*And so upon you will come all the righteous blood that has been shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah... whom you murdered...*' (Mt 23:35). That was from many centuries before, but for those who reject the righteousness of God in Christ, it's as if they were Cain, as if they killed themselves. When we hate, we're murderers in our heart, Jesus said, and Heb 6:6 says professing Christians who turn away from Christ in apostasy '*are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt.*' It's our sin nailing Him there.

I bear blood-guilt. Heb 10:29 warns of judgment if we trample Him or treat wrongly the blood of the covenant, vengeance will be repaid, v. 30. Abel being dead, still speaks. His shed blood still cries to a sovereign judge. It's a fearful thing for sinners to fall into the hands of a living God, v. 31 says. But there's good news in Heb 12 in another shed blood, and it's a wonderful thing through it to be in the hands of a loving God, hands we can't fall out of! Heb 12:24 says believers have come '*... to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.*'<sup>25</sup> *See that you do not refuse him who is speaking....*

Praise God there's another voice and blood that speaks! Jesus and His blood speaks a better message than Abel's blood! Jesus offered a better sacrifice than Abel could. Abel, though he died, still speaks, while Jesus though He died, still lives! Jesus speaks not as a martyr in the grave, but as a Mediator to save murderers or moral false worshippers. He was commended by God, raising Him from the dead as His beloved Son in whom He's well pleased, and it's that righteous life received by faith alone than can justify Abel or us

Abel's unrepentant brother hated him and killed him for being righteous and Christ's unrepentant brethren hated Him and killed Him for being righteous. But there's a contrast: Abel's blood cried out for justice and vengeance but the blood of Jesus cries, shouts out forgiveness. Cain in Genesis 4 was the original criminal who leaves paradise and the presence of the Lord because he would not repent of his sin as he spoke with the Lord. But when Jesus shed His blood there was a criminal on a nearby cross that spoke with him and did repent. Cain the original criminal in Genesis leaves paradise and the presence of the Lord because of unrepentant sin, but the criminal on the cross is promised Paradise in the presence of the Lord. And all sinners like him who put their faith in Jesus as Lord and His saving work He accepts.

**12:28** *Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to acceptable worship, with reverence and awe ...***13:15** *Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for with such sacrifices God is pleased ...* v. 20 *Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.*



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<sup>1</sup> John Whitcomb, “By Faith We Understand” ([www.sermonaudio.com](http://www.sermonaudio.com))

<sup>2</sup> Walter Kaiser (1996). *Hard Sayings of the Bible*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, p. 99

<sup>3</sup> Bruce Waltke, “Cain and His Offering,” *WTJ* 48:2 (Fall 1986) p. 370-71.