

Dead Man Talking

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[0 : 0 0] And if you would, please take out your Bible and you can turn over to Hebrews chapter 11. And then as you find Hebrews chapter 11, you can also make your way back to Genesis chapter 4.

So Hebrews chapter 11, and then if you have an extra finger, stick a finger in Genesis chapter 4 or a bookmark or something like that, because we're going to need both of these texts today.

Kara, would you please serve us by reading Hebrews chapter 11 and verse number 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. God created the universe.

And he made the universe, as we were taught last week, good for humanity. By God's design, humans have flourished on the earth for thousands of years.

[1 : 1 7] But more important than our physical flourishing, God created the universe so that he, the invisible God, could become visible in the second person of the Godhead, that is, in the Lord Jesus Christ.

As John tells us, the word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory. Glory as of the only Son, from the Father, full of grace and truth.

God created the world so that he could come near us in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

God creates the first man and the first woman, and they enjoy God's presence in a unique way, perhaps much like the way that we go on walks with one another this time of year.

Adam and Eve walked and talked with God. So in that sense, Adam and Eve didn't need faith. Why?

[2 : 2 8] Because they could see him and be with him and enjoy him. But the serpent deceives the man and the woman.

They doubt God's goodness. They doubt his provision. And when the serpent tempts them with the one fruit that God forbids, they take and they eat and they feel guilt and shame for the very first time.

And so they hide from God. Rather than repenting when God questions him, the man blames his rebellion on the woman and shockingly on God.

Genesis chapter 3 and verse 12. The man said, Now, we can't go into more detail this morning, but suffice it to say that at this point in the story, it seems unlikely that the woman would want to be with the man.

Not even if he was the last or the first man on earth. God firmly but mercifully deals with their rebellion.

[4 : 16] And then God graciously reconciles the first couple to each other. This is so important because as our sister Kendra Dahl writes in an excellent article called Restoring Eve, she says this, Apart from God's act of restoring the man and the woman to each other, what would keep them from remaining alienated?

The God of all grace bridges the gap between the man and the woman. And so in Genesis 4, we read, Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, I have gotten a man with the help of the Lord.

And again, she bore his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a worker of the ground. In the course of time, Cain brought to the Lord an offering of the fruit of the ground.

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.

The first baby born on earth. This is a huge deal.

[5 : 44] And Eve recognizes this momentous occasion by naming her son Cain. Cain sounds like the Hebrew word forgotten.

Not forgotten. 4 colon gotten. Perhaps Eve thinks this way. I have gotten him. This is the one.

He will crush the serpent's head. If you've studied the book of Ecclesiastes, then you will remember the phrase, vanity of vanity.

The preacher says that life is not a highway. Life is like a vapor. It's like a breath. Life is meaningless, empty.

It's like a big bag of chips that's mostly full of air. The Hebrew word for meaningless, breath, empty, is hevel.

[6 : 49] Does that sound familiar to you? It should. Because this is Cain's little brother's name. Eve names her second son.

Hevel. He is meaningless. He is irrelevant. Because she has already gotten the one.

Kids, raise your hand if you are not the firstborn son or daughter. Raise your hand if you are not the firstborn. Now, adults, you don't have to raise your hand because I know that can feel weird.

Okay, if you are not the firstborn, think how you would feel if your dad or your mom is introducing you and they say something like this.

This is my firstborn child. I am so proud of him. She is my favorite.

[8 : 01] Oh, that's my child too. Cain is the important one in this story.

Abel is an insignificant afterthought. We should be as surprised as Cain when we read what comes next in the story.

The Lord had regard for Abel and his offering. But for Cain and his offering, the Lord had no regard.

So Cain was very angry and his face fell. Put yourself in Cain's shoes for a moment.

You are the firstborn son of the first man, Adam. Your mom thinks you're the one. You lead out in worship by bringing a sacrifice, but God does not accept your sacrifice.

[9 : 16] while your kid brother, a literal nobody, finds God's favor. God's divine disapproval should have resulted in godly grief that led Cain to repentance.

But instead, Cain is angry. And so God speaks to him. Verse 6.

The Lord said to Cain, Why are you angry? And why has your face fallen?

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 contrary to you. But you must rule over it. Our God is so kind.

[10 : 34] The Lord shows Cain mercy by exposing the sinfulness of his anger. The Lord gives Cain a second chance.

Do well, and you will be accepted. That's grace. In love, the Lord warns Cain about sin prowling around inside of his heart.

Our God is so very kind. What will Cain do? Will God's goodness lead him to repentance?

Verse 8. Cain spoke to Abel, his brother. And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him.

Kids, are you familiar with the phrase, it takes two to tango? Do you know what that means? It takes two to tango? If you're talking about dancing, this is true.

[11 : 52] It does take two to do a tango. But we sometimes take this phrase and we apply this phrase to conflict in relationships.

And then we say, well, it takes two to tango. In other words, if there's some kind of conflict, conflict, then both parties must be in some way at fault.

It does take two to tango if we are talking about dancing. But this is not true when the phrase is applied to conflict.

Some friendships end because one friend behaves badly. Some relationships are toxic because one party is abusive.

It doesn't always take two people to destroy a marriage or a church. Sometimes only one person in the fight actually wants to fight.

[13 : 05] David didn't trigger Saul. Bathsheba did not seduce David. Daniel didn't aggravate the king's wise men.

Jesus did not exasperate Judas. And Abel did not provoke Cain. David writes this in Psalm 120.

I am for peace, but when I speak, they are for war. Cain's pride is pricked.

He is insulted by God's grace. He is incensed by God's goodness. He is jealous of God's acceptance. And when sin like that is allowed to prowl around inside the human heart, it will often lead to violence.

As in the garden, the God of all grace seeks the sinner.

[14 : 24] Isn't that beautiful? And like his father Adam, when confronted with his sin, rather than repenting, Cain doubles down into more sin.

Unlike his mother and his father, but like the serpent in the garden, Cain is cursed. Verse number nine.

Then the Lord said to Cain, where is your brother Abel? And he said, I do not know.

Am I my brother's keeper? He lies to God. And not only that, he's snarky about it.

And the Lord said, verse 10, what have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground.

[15 : 30] And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. When you work the ground, it shall no longer yield to you its strength.

You shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on earth. Cain said to the Lord, my punishment is greater than I can bear. Behold, you have driven me today away from the ground and from your face, I shall be hidden.

I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth and whoever finds me will kill me. Then the Lord said to him, not so.

If anyone kills Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold. And the Lord put a mark on Cain, lest anyone who found him should attack him.

Then Cain went away from the presence of the Lord and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden. Cain is remorseful, but only in self-pity.

[16 : 46] He does not repent. But don't overlook God's mercy here. Did you notice that? The Lord does not banish Cain.

Cain abandons God's presence by his own choice. God doesn't tell him he has to leave.

Cain leaves on his own. That's the back story. Now let's look at Hebrews chapter 11 and verse 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.

[17 : 54] Why was Abel's sacrifice more acceptable than Cain's sacrifice? Maybe like me, you grew up learning that Abel's sacrifice was better than Cain's sacrifice because Abel brought an animal and Cain brought produce.

Perhaps Abel brought a blood sacrifice in obedience to God's command. Perhaps Adam taught his sons how to worship God.

These things may be true, but Genesis 4 doesn't say this. And so I wonder if there's something else that the Holy Spirit intends for us to learn.

Think about the context of Hebrews. Why is the book of Hebrews written? Hebrews is written to confront Jews who are being tempted to abandon the gospel of Jesus and to go back to living under the law and offering sacrifices.

This is why the book of Hebrews was written, to show that Jesus is better than all of the old covenant had to offer. These Jews are giving serious thought to returning to a religious system of laws and feasts and sacrifices, a system where God is viewed as some sort of a cosmic scorekeeper and you earn points with him by obedience and then you bring animal sacrifices whenever you fail.

[19 : 56] Is this why God commends Abel? Is Abel commended because he plays the game better than Cain?

I don't think so. God commends Abel for his faith.

Abel comes to God expecting to receive from God and he does. Abel receives a right standing with God. This is what Hebrews calls God's commendation.

God gives Abel a right standing with him. Righteousness. A right standing with God. Did Abel receive righteousness because of what he did for God?

No. Abel receives righteousness because of his faith in God. Abel's sacrifice was more acceptable not because of what Abel brought but because of what was in Abel's heart.

[21 : 14] What if Abel's faith is what made Abel's sacrifice more acceptable? Then by contrast we would expect that Cain's sacrifice was not accepted because of what was not in his heart.

Cain's worship lacks faith. Cain is a hypocrite. He brings a sacrifice to God knowing that his heart is not in it.

perhaps Cain worshipped out of obligation because he felt like he had to.

Some time ago Lois received a little picture frame and it had as you would expect a piece of glass over it and behind it was some writing and it said I love you because and then you could write on the glass with a dry erase marker and you could share why you loved Lois or why you loved someone in our home and we kept it in our kitchen for a while.

Here's one of the pictures that Chloe wrote for Samuel. I love you because it's your birthday Sam.

[22 : 56] Here's one that Lydia wrote I love you because Jesus loves us. That's good theology right there.

I thought this was funny. I love you because God says I have to.

Do you know who did not think this was very funny? Lois. She did not think that this was a funny joke.

Maybe Cain sacrificed because God said he had to. Not because he wanted to.

Perhaps Cain fooled his mom and dad. Maybe Cain fooled Abel, but he did not fool God. God looked right through that thin veneer of Cain's religion and saw no faith.

[24 : 11] Friend, you may fool others by going through the motions of religion, but you will not fool God. Not with token prayers, not with emotionless worship, not with your hypocritical devotion.

If your faith is nothing more than spiritual pretense, if your faith is nothing more than empty ritual, my dear friend, then you are following the way of Cain.

Jesus said this when confronting those who worshipped without faith, you hypocrites. Well did Isaiah prophesy of you when he said, this people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.

In vain do they worship me. Abel's sacrifice wasn't accepted because he was good and Cain was wicked.

As a result of their father Adam's rebellion in the garden, both brothers were already guilty sinners before God. But Cain thought he could do more.

[25 : 30] He thought he could try harder. He thought he could be better on his own. He thought he could be self-righteous. By contrast, Abel reaches into the future and grabs hold of God's promise of righteousness and drags that promise right into the present and then acts as though God's promise has already come true.

And he offers by faith a more acceptable sacrifice. He worships God expecting to receive from God the righteousness that he knows he cannot work up on his own.

Kids, how many words did Abel say in Genesis? Do you remember? Exactly zero. Abel gets no words in the story.

And yet, look at that last phrase of Hebrews chapter 11 and verse four. Through his faith, though he died, he still speaks.

By faith, Abel still speaks. This is certainly true in the way that Abel testifies to God's trustworthiness.

[27 : 20] But I wonder if there is something more here for us as well. In Genesis four, God tells Cain that Abel's blood is crying out to him.

What is Abel's blood crying out for? For vengeance, for justice, for God to right the wrong that was done to Abel.

Abel died unjustly. He was innocent. He didn't deserve to die. He didn't provoke Cain. And so his blood cries out for justice.

But look what the author of Hebrews says just one chapter later in verse number 24. You 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. Abel bore Cain's jealous wrath.

[28 : 37] And so his blood cried out for justice because he was innocent. Jesus bore God's righteous wrath.

And his blood cries out for forgiveness because he is holy. Abel's blood symbolizes the consequences of sin and a cry for justice.

And when we suffer unjustly, we join Abel's blood in crying out for God to make things right, to do what is just, to give us justice.

But Jesus' blood cries out for something better. Jesus' blood pleads forgiveness, reconciliation, freedom from the guilt of sin, not just for those who wrong us, but for us, for you and for me.

Everything in us, as we sang together, cries out to be rejected. All that we are cries out to be rejected. it. But all that Jesus is, cries out for our acceptance.

[30 : 09] If you are not yet a follower of Jesus, I urge you to repent and believe this gospel. Trust in Jesus. Brothers and sisters, if we don't have faith like Abel, if we don't grab hold of God's promise of Jesus' righteousness by grace alone, and then live right now as if that righteousness is truly ours by faith, then we will become either prickly, legalistic rule keepers or brittle followers of Jesus who wrestle constantly with doubt.

God's faith. Why? Because if we don't have faith like Abel, then our hope is in ourselves.

Our hope is in our own self-righteousness rather than the blood of Jesus and his righteousness. Here's a question for you to ponder.

did Abel know that he was righteous before God? Hmm. Hmm. Living by faith means dying without fully receiving God's promises.

promises. How is this true? Well, we may not receive justice on this side of eternity.

[31 : 52] Until Jesus returns, we will continue to deal with sin prowling in our hearts. And as a result of that, you and I may never feel completely righteous.

though by faith, by God's grace, we are. Even if we don't feel it completely.

But as we trust in God, our hope is nourished. And our obedience is catalyzed. And we come before God like Abel with authentic faith.

Because we come recognizing what we are not. and what God is, what Christ is for us by faith.

So by God's sufficient grace, let's live by faith. And let's help one another prepare to die well. Let's be humbly, worshiply, joyfully confident that one day we will fully receive God's promises.

[33 : 05] And then, joyful, joyful, joyful, joyful praise and endless worship will be our sweet portion.

Let's pray. good father, we are so grateful to have your word.

Thank you for the writer of Hebrews that testifies of Abel's faith. And thank you for Moses who records for us under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the book of Genesis, so that we can have this story in Genesis 4 and consider and reflect and ponder on the story of Cain and Abel.

Father, would you please forgive us for our self-righteousness? Would you forgive us for emotionless worship? forgive us for going through the motions of spiritual disciplines?

Forgive us for not taking time to love and serve those around us. Would you please help us as we take a few moments to reflect on the things that we have heard, to remember your promise of forgiveness in Christ, to confess and to receive your forgiveness.

[35 : 07] Father, your word to us in Romans chapter 8 is so true and so clear and we confess it together, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

By faith we receive the forgiveness that is ours in Christ, and by faith we believe that we are completely righteous in Christ.

Would you please help us to confess and repent of our own self-righteousness and cling wholly and completely and only to the perfect righteousness of our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is in his name that we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Abend Abend Abend