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THE BLOOD OF ABEL, Part One

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I don't think many people remember being born. I surely don't; but for every one of you, I can guarantee that there is one person who, if we could talk to her, could tell us all about the moments surrounding your birth, and that is your mother. The miracle of that birth is so special that we feel compelled to celebrate it each year. Our mothers remember those first moments, the first word, the first tooth, the first steps, and all of those other things that are dear to the heart of a mother.

What could be more heartwarming, more endearing, than the first birth of the first child in the world? The story is spoiled for us because we know how it ends, but let's look at this step by step today. We'll start in Genesis 4:1:

And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain, and said, I have gotten a man from the LORD.

Eve holds in her hands the wonder of the world: a precious newborn baby. I think there's hardly a person alive who can hate to look at a little baby. We love the little fingers and toes, we love to plant a kiss on the fuzzy little head, we love to pat and hold and dress those tiny bodies. For Adam and Eve, this was something special and new, because they had never seen a baby before. Eve says, "I have gotten a man from the LORD!" She was overjoyed, as any of you would have been.

It may also be that in this statement, she was believing that this child would be the one to deliver the world as God had promised in Genesis 3:15. Was this what she meant? I do not know, but these words are here for a reason. Adam and Eve had faith in God's promise of redemption; but if they believed this child was the redeemer, they were in for a surprise.

I'm sure there were episodes as little Cain grew up that brought his parents both joy and grief. They began to see in little Cain the same rebellion against them that they had shown against God. We've seen this in our children, haven't we? The little face screws up and the lips close tight to keep out the carrots; and maybe if we did get them in, the child spat them right back out. We've seen the temper tantrums and the pouting lips, dragging all the way to the floor. We're familiar with this early evidence of our sinful nature. I'm sure Adam and Eve were flummoxed from time to time, just as we all have been. However, as the story unfolds, you'll see that they did manage to teach little Cain how to work hard and how to worship God properly. They were good parents.

The story continues:

And she again bare his brother Abel. And Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground.

Cain has a little brother. The boys' childhood is omitted; instead, a singular incident is recorded which defines the relationship in our minds. We are told that each chose an occupation as an adult. We should also remember that Cain and Abel were brothers, but had other siblings as well. Genesis 5:4 tells us that

Adam had numerous sons and daughters, of which only three sons are actually named in the account. Remember, the Bible tells us *what we need to know*, but not necessarily *all we'd like to know*. It does not give us a biography of each of Adam's children, or tell us about their relationships. Instead, it tells us about three of them, for a very specific purpose. The Bible focuses on the truths we *must* know in this broken world.

The children are born; then we fast forward to their adulthood. Each has an occupation. Then, one fateful day...

And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the LORD.

And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the LORD had respect unto Abel and to his offering:

But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect. And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell.

Here we have in very brief form a point of conflict. Each son brought an offering. God respected Abel's offering, but not Cain's offering. How did they know what kind of offering would be acceptable? If there were no previous instructions on how to bring an offering, or of what a proper offering consists, then how could God refuse Cain's offering?

Let's start by saying that God does not rule by whim. He is absolute and unchanging. He would not simply say, after the fact, "Well, I just don't think that kind of offering was right, Cain. I like Abel's better, now that I think about it." God isn't like that.

We also want to review what other Scripture has to say to this matter. Hebrews 11:4 tells us something significant.

By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh.

What was the difference between Able's and Cain's offering? Faith! Abel gave his offering by faith. But faith in what? You see, faith isn't some blind leap into the dark; it's based on something concrete. Abel's faith was based in his knowledge of God: who He is, and what He expects. Abel knew enough about who God is and what He expects to make an appropriate offering.

How then did he know? He knew because of the information available to him. God expects us to act upon the light we have received from Him. Our faith, like Abel's, is based on *what we know*.

What information was available to him? First, both Cain and Abel knew from their parents the story of Creation, Paradise, and the Fall. They knew the curses and the promises that stemmed from that primal event. They knew that God's first action after His pronouncements of judgment was His provision of coverings for Adam and Eve; and it seems inconceivable to me that those coverings had anything less than a physical and a spiritual component: they were spiritual coverings for the shameful sin of Adam and Eve just as they were physical coverings for the shame of their nakedness. We cannot dogmatically state that God *at that moment* showed Adam and Eve how to offer a blood sacrifice for sin; but it is hard to imagine it otherwise. In any case, it seems unlikely that if an offering to God were needed that

the first time an offering were given happened years and years after the Fall, when both Cain and Abel had grown up. It seems unlikely that they would each conceive separately to make an offering of different kinds but at the same time. No, I believe *they were continuing a practice* they had observed while growing up.

With these things in mind, it makes sense that Abel could make his offering “by faith”: he *knew* what was expected, and because of that, he could *rest assured* that God would accept that offering. That is faith. Faith is concrete, not some mystical quality.

It also makes sense that Cain’s offering was not given “by faith,” since he was making an offering of his own conception. It is clear that he *believed* God *should* receive it, but that is not the same as *knowing* that He *would* receive it.

There is one final thing to note here. Let’s consider the words of Jesus in Luke 11:50-51:

That the blood of all the prophets, which was shed from the foundation of the world, may be required of this generation; From the blood of Abel unto the blood of Zacharias which perished between the altar and the temple: verily I say unto you, It shall be required of this generation.

Did you notice this? Jesus categorized all of the prophets of the Old Testament, starting with the very first one: Abel! Jesus called Abel a prophet, and He ought to know! Let me ask you this: in the Old Testament, what was the job of the prophet? Prophets were *to carry the word of the Lord*. They were to declare God’s words and make them plain. That’s what a prophet was to do.

And so Abel had knowledge of God and God’s revealed will. He operated by faith: faith in the knowledge that God had revealed.

What is clear is that no later than this moment, mankind knew that God expected a blood sacrifice as a covering for sin. All through the Old Testament, the practice of making a sacrifice for sin was carried out in just this manner. All of that pointed to the One promised of God in Genesis 3:15, Who would be bruised for us. That is why when Jesus came to earth, His cousin John the Baptist was able to point to Him and call Him “the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.”

Whether by example and teaching from their parents, or by direct, subsequent revelation to the prophet Abel, God had made known His will and His directions. Most likely, He revealed His will by both. In any case, both Cain and Abel *knew* God’s instructions and *were responsible* to follow and obey those instructions.

That brings us back to our passage. God revealed that Cain’s offering of “the fruits of the ground” was not acceptable, and that Abel’s offering of a lamb was acceptable. How did God reveal that? Some have speculated that God rained fire from heaven on Abel’s offering, but I don’t think that was even necessary. As God’s prophet, it would have been Abel’s job to tell Cain that the offering wasn’t acceptable.

Let’s think about this from Cain’s point of view for a moment. He’s worked hard all season. He wants to bring God something springing from that effort, and so he plans to give God an offering of the food he has grown. In his heart, I’m sure Cain felt that his effort and his offering *ought* to be accepted. After

all, he'd spent a great deal of time and effort preparing the the ground, tending the crops, and selecting most likely the very best of all he had grown. In his mind and in his heart, he felt that God *ought* to accept this offering.

God, however, had a very specific reason for demanding the kind of offering that He demanded: only a blood offering would suffice, because only a blood offering would stand as the picture of redemption through Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God. You see, a blood offering is a terrible thing to behold. The lamb was slaughtered and burned as a picture of Jesus Christ, Who would suffer and die for us. His death was a terrible, terrible death because *sin is terrible*. Cain did not know God's reason, but he was still expected to obey God's directions.

That's just like us, isn't it? We don't know God's reasons *now*. There will come a time when maybe some of the things that we go through that seem harsh will finally make sense, and we will see the love and mercy of God at the end of it all; but in the here and now, we can't make sense of what is happening. We simply have to trust God, knowing that He is good, that He loves us, and that He knows what is best. God does everything He does for a purpose, and that purpose *can only be good*. The problem is that we live in a broken world and we cannot see the purpose He has, nor could we probably understand it at the time when everything seems to be against us. The light of eternity will reveal God's work for good in our lives at those times when we were most in doubt and despair and even anger.

And so we leave today with Cain in a fit of anger: "*And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell.*" *Wroth* is a lovely old fashioned word that means *angry*. Cain was, in fact, *very angry*. It showed on his *countenance*, which is simply his *face*. Cain apparently felt that it was unfair for God to reject his offering. He didn't even want to look up at God.

You might remember a time when perhaps a teacher or a coach told you something you didn't want to hear. Imagine if you will that person gently reaching out and putting a hand on your shoulder, and your turning sharply to shrug that hand away. That's what is about to happen when we return to this passage next week.

In the meantime, I conclude with these challenges today: first, I ask you to trust God with your heartaches, your troubles, your disappointments. Know that He can only work for good in your life. Second, I ask you to consider God's ways, and walk in them. We may not understand all of the reasons for the directions He gives in His Word, but we can know and believe that His wisdom will only guide us into what is true, correct, righteous, and blessed. Cain decided that God was unfair; what will you decide?