

CLOUD OF WITNESSES | 02:: Abel

PRAYER: Before you start this study, take a second to connect with the Lord. Maybe sit and listen to a song or two from the Faith in Action playlist on YouTube. If you feel this way, pray and let the Lord know how thankful you are to spend time with Him today. Praise Him and then ask if He would open your eyes to something new in this familiar Bible story and help you grow in faith.



In the previous post, we started to study Hebrews 11-12:3. Today we start with the first on the long list of our great cheerleaders in the faith – Abel. And I'll be honest – there is not a lot on Abel, possibly because his life was so short, but what we do have is gold. So, don't forget your journal and a pen! There is a lot of digging ahead.

Before we begin, grab your Bible and open it to Hebrews 11 again. Let's refresh our memory on how Abel pleased God with his faith.

READ HEBREWS 11:4.

By faith, Abel brought an offering that was pleasing to God. Let's see how that plays out in Genesis.

READ GENESIS 4:2-8. WHAT KIND OF OFFERING DID ABEL BRING? WHAT ABOUT CAIN?

It would be easy to look at this story and feel bad for Cain. I mean... verse 2 literally says that Cain was a farmer and Abel kept flocks for a living. We see in verse 3 that Cain brought some of the fruits from his harvest and in verse 4 that Abel brought fat portions from the firstborn of his flock. So, each man brought *what he had* and sacrificed it to God. Right?

Well, we know from Bible history that during Old Testament times, God required an animal sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins – so it's possible that God had already laid the groundwork for Adam and his family and Cain disobeyed the rules. If you look at Genesis 4:7, God's question about being accepted for "doing what is right" implies that Abel



did what was right in this circumstance and Cain did what was wrong. Therefore, God accepted Abel's offering and not Cain's.

Let's look at 1 John for a bit more direction. (You'll start to notice that learning about a Bible subject can sometimes take a bit of research and that the whole Bible is connected!)

READ 1 JOHN 3:11-12. ACCORDING TO VERSE 12, WHY DID CAIN KILL ABEL?

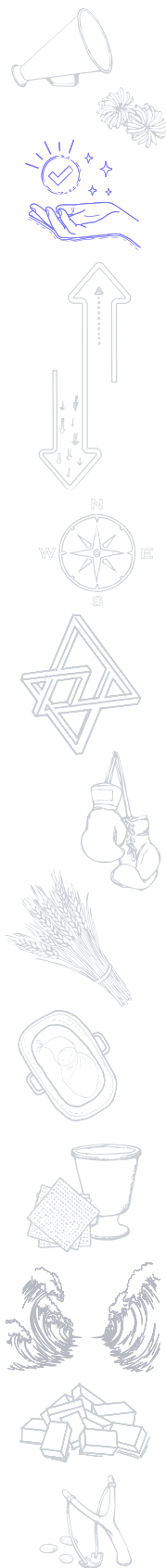
Cain was living in contrast to Abel. While Abel obeyed the Lord, Cain did not. Abel trusted what the Lord said and acted on it and was therefore counted as righteous. Looking back at Genesis 4, we can see that Cain had a bad attitude (v. 5) and he did not do what was right (v. 6). And 1 John shows us that Cain's actions were evil. Yes. Killing his brother was an evil act. Hideous. But this isn't just an isolated event, it stemmed from a bigger problem and we can conclude that Cain's actions were continually evil. How do we know?

LOOK AT 1 JOHN 3:12 AGAIN. HOW DOES THE FIRST HALF OF THE VERSE DESCRIBE CAIN? WHO DOES IT SAY HE "BELONGED" TO?

Gross! The evil one!?! Sends chills down your spine if you think about it. John is saying that Cain belonged to Satan. That sounds harsh, but let's back up just a few verses and keep reading.

READ 1 JOHN 3:7-11. WHO IN THESE VERSES DOES JOHN SAY "BELONG TO THE DEVIL"?

In verses 7-11, John is explaining how children of God (Christians) act and how those who "belong to the devil" act. He then points to Cain as an example of someone who "keeps on sinning" and therefore is ruled by the Devil. John's statements have a bigger context – which we could totally study in a different Bible study – but for the sake of staying on track, I'll boil it down to this: when we walk by faith (thinking about the whole theme of this series we're in) we will resist and turn from sin. To put it in a practical way: we will listen to the Holy Spirit convicting us in our heart and we will repent (have a change of heart, a sincere desire to obey God rather than do our own thing, and go to God for forgiveness) from our sin. Anyone who lives month after month, year after year in the same kinds of sins just going about their business without any conviction from the Holy Spirit and never changing



their ways, never apologizing, never growing spiritually, etc. seriously needs to examine their own heart and see if they even know God at all. This isn't for us to look at our friends or family or that bully at school and judge them, this is for us to all take stock of our own lives.

I'm sorry if this is getting a little heavy, but stay with me. I think there's something here for all of us, because Christian or not, we all struggle with sin. Let's continue down this bunny trail and figure out what "evil" is in the sight of the Lord. Because the world likes to ignore most things and only define sin as big things like killing someone. Surely, we're "good people" if we've never killed anyone! Satan would love for us to get caught up in that too. "Well... the worst thing I've ever done is lie to my parents, so I'm good right?" Sorry. God holds us to the standard of His holiness and it says in Romans that everyone has sinned and fallen short of that standard, so we're all on the hook. Proverbs 6:16-19 lists seven things that the Lord hates, but there is a similar list in Galatians 5.

FLIP TO GALATIANS 5 AND READ VERSES 16-26.

This is another collection of verses that deserve another Bible study for another day. But I want to hone in on the fruits of the flesh. Jealousy, fits of anger, putting ourselves first, hatred... they all make the list. That brings it back down to earth a bit more doesn't it? I'm sure we've all dealt with these and several others. So, Cain's "continually doing evil" is not so far removed is it? It's possible that someone reading this post "continually sins" because they lie habitually or they are filled with pride.

God gave Cain some great advice in Genesis 4:7, "...if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it." God is such a good Father. Even though He basically had been slapped in the face by Cain giving Him an unworthy sacrifice, He took the time to correct Cain and gave him an opportunity to repent.

So, how do we rule over sin? Can we do it on our own? Do we just wake up and say, "Today I will not fight with my siblings. I don't care how annoying they are, I refuse to fight with them!" and be successful? Of course not! You know the second something goes down, you'll be right there in the ring with boxing gloves.

How can we find success then?

READ GALATIANS 5:16-17 AGAIN AND THEN IN YOUR JOURNAL WRITE IT IN YOUR OWN WORDS.



Let's grab one more piece of scripture and then chat about this a second.

FLIP TO AND READ JAMES 1:19-25.

James talks a lot in that passage about "the word planted in you." Listening to it, accepting it, doing what it says. That "word" is the Holy Spirit. If you have trusted Jesus as your Savior, if you've invited Him to live in your heart, the Holy Spirit is "planted" in you. Tying it back to Galatians 5, when we walk by faith (or "walk in the Spirit"), we can successfully fight our sinful urges because we are following the Holy Spirit's leading (and sometimes conviction). It also means we are relying on the Holy Spirit for every step we take. When we have full confidence in God, we trust Him and walk by faith.

Abel did this. He trusted that what God required was right and acted on it. If you hear the Lord's voice, trust in Him and act or speak as He leads you to do. And just like it says in Hebrews 11, "run the race set before you," because the race set before you is different than it is for someone else.

Unfortunately in this story, Cain didn't heed the Lord's words and after their conversation, he lured his brother into a field and killed him. Ironically, Abel's name in Hebrew means "temporary." And while Abel's life was temporary, what the Hebrews writer says about him is true, "...by faith Abel still speaks, even though he is dead," because we are taking notes on his faith even today.



DIG A LITTLE DEEPER:

- * We covered a lot of ground in this post – and a lot of scripture. Take a moment to reflect on everything you've read and write down a few things that you didn't know before, things that stood out to you, things that touched your heart, etc.



* Go back to Galatians 5:19-21. Which fruits of the flesh do you struggle with? Be honest with yourself and God. We've all struggled with sins on this list. I'd venture to say the list in Galatians isn't comprehensive, so there may be a sin you're struggling with that Paul didn't mention. If you can't think of anything, sincerely pray for the Lord to reveal to you any place where you have sin. Once you can name a few things, write a prayer asking for the Lord to help you with these sins. Be real with Jesus. Explain your struggle, but don't make excuses. Allow the Holy Spirit to do His job in convicting you and you do your part to sincerely apologize and seek to change. Repentance is not something we can do on our own human strength. We HAVE to rely on the Lord to do it and ask for His help. So, in your prayer, feel free to ask for His help, too.

* Write in your journal about a time when you've felt the Holy Spirit's leading. Did you see in your own life how walking in the Spirit helped you fight against what your flesh may have wanted?

* How has Abel's faith inspired you in your faith? What can you take a way, personally, from this story?

