



W E E K

4

Believing You Are Who God Says You Are

DAY 1

A BETTER SACRIFICE



Today's Treasure

By faith Abel offered
God a better sacrifice
than Cain did.
Hebrews 11:4

Some months ago I was walking toward the platform to teach the introductory session of a video-driven Bible study. The set was beautiful. The room was filled with a ready and willing audience. As I fought back tears, I caught myself apologizing to God for having to use me. I could cry about it again! Before each taping I do my best to pick at every scar I have until it returns to a wound. Miserable. Surely a mind-set exists between self-aggrandizement and self-torture, but I, along with most people, ordinarily seem unable to find it.

In the few seconds it took to get to the stage, a peculiar sense of God's voice fell on me, speaking a concept rather than words to my heart. I knew He was asking me why I could not fathom that His plan all along had been to reach people through people. In other words, "Child, quit apologizing for something I did. I like this plan. I made it up Myself." We forget God had complete foreknowledge when He created us, don't we? Our infirmities, insecurities, and insufficiencies neither surprised nor repulsed Him. They were all part of the human package. We wonder how divine God could choose us, while God delights when hearts so prone to wander choose Him. What would be His greater source of joy—for perfect people to do perfect things or for pitifully self- and world-centered humans to fight the daily battle to become God-centered? Beloved, our victories bring far more delight to God than our defeats bring disappointment:

He knows how we are formed,
he remembers that we are dust (Ps. 103:14).

This week our challenge is to start behaving like people who believe we are who God says we are. Each day we will glance at one of the lives listed in the Hebrews 11 hall of faith. Not one of them was superhuman. Not one of them was better equipped to believe God than we are. Not one of them was genetically predisposed to greatness. Not one of them failed to struggle with the calling. How do I know? Because each was commended for his or her faith. The evidence of faith always indicates the existence of a viable alternative. That which is completely obvious and explainable is not faith.

Enter Abel, the first portrait of a mortal in this hallowed hall of faith.

Read Hebrews 11:4 and the original story in Genesis 4:1-16. What might have made Abel's offering to God more acceptable than Cain's?

At first glance Cain and Abel's account might seem unfair, but several elements beg to differ. Let's take the most obvious first. Even in today's violent society we rarely read about a young man killing his little brother in cold blood. Something in Cain's heart was vicious.

Second, Cain was rebellious. Genesis 4:7 is our clue: "If you do what is right, will you not be accepted?" Cain still had a chance to make it right. God did not say, *If only you had done what was right, you could have been accepted, but now it's too late.* Don't miss the intimation that Cain knew what was right. He simply didn't do it. Cain's offering represents every time a believer knows what God wants and refuses to give it. We often quickly give Him other things, as if He won't notice. Sometimes we give more in many other areas but doggedly withhold the one thing we know He wants. And sin crouches at our door.

Why was Abel's offering more acceptable? I have a feeling Abel didn't know the answer himself. God had obviously made clear to both Cain and Abel that He wanted a sacrificial offering, and Abel presented it . . . by faith.

Genesis 3:21 could be the connection. What does it tell us?

You see, the concept of the death of something innocent for the covering of sin is as old as the garden. Both Cain and Abel were born with a sin nature just as we were. God desired their fellowship, but access came through faith that looked forward (through symbolic offering) to the substitutionary death of Christ. Cain's ongoing refusal to obey or repent ultimately led to his expulsion from God's presence.

I love the reference to the blood of Abel in Hebrews 12:24. Read this verse and compare it to Genesis 4:10. For what do you think the blood of Abel cried out to God?

I have a feeling that the blood of Abel cried out to God for justice if not for vengeance. How I praise God that the sprinkled blood of Christ speaks a better word! I don't want God to simply treat me justly. I've made many mistakes and committed countless sins. I need mercy! How about you? The blood sprinkled from Christ's torn body speaks grace to all who accept the perfect offering by faith.

The payment for all sin—past, present, and future—has already been made. God, however, still calls His own to obedience. We've not all nursed murderous thoughts like Cain, but most of us at one time or another have been unwilling to give God the very thing we know He wants from us most. Faith means believing that blessing never fails to follow obedience, no matter the sacrifice.



1. Read in the margin Strong's definition of the words *covenant* and *better*, used in Hebrews 12:24. Write in your own words a summary of the definition.

Covenant _____

Better _____

covenant

GREEK STRONG'S NUMBER: 1242

Transliteration: *diatheke*

Phonetic Pronunciation:

dee-ath-ay'-kay

Part of Speech: *n f*

1) a disposition, arrangement, of any sort, which one wishes to be valid, the last disposition which one makes of his earthly possessions after death, a testament or will 2) a compact, a covenant, a testament 2a) God's covenant with Noah, etc.

better

GREEK STRONG'S NUMBER: 2909

Transliteration: *kreitton*

Phonetic Pronunciation: *krite'-tohn*

Part of Speech: *adj*

1) more useful, more serviceable, more advantageous 2) more excellent

You might be blessed to know that the verb tense for “speaketh better things” is present-active-participle. This verb tense has become familiar to us. What does this verb tense tell us about how the blood of Christ speaks?

If you put the word *continually* in your answer, you have the concept. Present-active-participle means the blood of Christ continually keeps speaking a better word.

How do you feel about the fact that Christ’s blood continues to speak on your behalf?

- relieved elated skeptical puzzled
 overwhelmed loved encouraged other

sufficiency

GREEK STRONG’S NUMBER: 2426
Transliteration: *hikanotes*
Phonetic Pronunciation: *hik-an-ot’-ace*
Part of Speech: *n f*
1) sufficient, ability or competency to do a thing

2. Second Corinthians 3 also talks about those of us who live under the new covenant. This term simply refers to God’s people in a post-cross rather than pre-cross world. Read 2 Corinthians 3:4-6. Read in the margin Strong’s definition of the following words from verses 5-6. Write a summary of the definitions.

Sufficiency _____

able

GREEK STRONG’S NUMBER: 2427
Transliteration: *hikanoo*
Phonetic Pronunciation: *kik-an-o’-o*
Part of Speech: *v*
1) to make sufficient, render fit
1a) to equip one with adequate power to perform duties of one

Able _____

Ministers _____

ministers

GREEK STRONG’S NUMBER: 1249
Transliteration: *diakonos*
Phonetic Pronunciation: *dee-ak’-on-os*
Part of Speech: *n m*
1) one who executes the commands of another, esp. of a master, a servant, attendant, minister
1a) the servant of a king
1b) a deacon, one who, by virtue of the office assigned to him by the church, cares for the poor and has charge of and distributes the money collected for their use
1c) a waiter, one who serves food and drink

I love the NIV rendering of verse 6: “He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant.” I hope you noted that the word *ministers* encompasses the entire realm of servanthood, not just a pastor or a deacon. Beloved, God has a ministry for you, and in Him you are completely competent to receive it and fulfill it. Will you believe God?



Choose any one of three different elements of today’s lesson to address with God in prayer. Perhaps you are withholding something you know God wants from you. Or perhaps you want to thank Him for the sprinkling of blood that speaks a better word over your life than justice or vengeance. You might want to pour out your heart to God over a lack of faith that you could ever be called or competent in an area of ministry.
