

Studies in Faith: Abel

“The LORD put a mark on Cain” (Genesis 4:15)

This morning we are going to explore the subject of faith by examining Abel the son of Adam and Eve. However, before we begin, I wanted to take some time and discuss how Cain helped me find Christ. We are living in a time where everything seems to be focused on racial prejudice; it is one of the primary subjects of the news outlets. Let me say, we cannot change the past as much as some would like to rewrite history. One reason we study history is to learn from the past. Correcting mistakes and capitalizing on the good. You might be asking, why am I starting in this manner? I dealt with this in my life of being Mormon. I struggled with the church's stance on people with black skin or negro blood; these people could not hold the Mormon Church priesthood. I was given a number of things to read to explain why this was not racial but a command of God. In an article written in Time Magazine in 1970 when I was a Junior in high school it stated, “**Mormon belief depends largely on the writings of Prophet Joseph Smith, the church's 19th century founder. Though Smith's first book of revelations, the Book of Mormon, clearly states that ‘the Lord denieth none that come unto him, black and white,’** (2 Nephi 26:33) **in The Pearl of Great Price, Smith's later translation of revelations supposedly made to Moses and Abraham, he took a dimmer view. Smith there concluded that Negroes are the descendants of both Cain, the Bible's first murderer, and Ham, the disrespectful son of Noah; the reason for their exclusion from the priesthood is ‘the mark of Cain.’ Though racist 19th century Christian**

preachers once advanced similar arguments, the Mormons go farther, maintaining that in a spiritual ‘preexistence’ blacks were neutral bystanders when other spirits chose sides during a fight between God and Lucifer. For that failure of courage, they were condemned to become the accursed descendants of Cain.” Time, Monday

January 19, 1970, Religion: Mormons and the Mark of Cain. The LDS church’s position was people, by the virtue of black skin, stood with Lucifer against God and committed the first murder. You might understand why I struggled with this position and teaching of the LDS church. In the Pearl of Great Price, one of the three holy works of the Mormon Church, Joseph Smith wrote, “For behold, the Lord shall curse the land with much heat, and the barrenness thereof shall go forth forever; and there was a BLACKNESS came upon all the children of Canaan, that they were DESPISED AMONG ALL PEOPLE.” (Pearl of Great Price, Moses 7:8) As the Prophet of the LDS church Joseph Smith was believed to be writing the very words inspired directly by God. As the Bible teaches, to be a prophet of God one must be right 100% of the time, if not, they are a false prophet and it is easy to prove Smith was a false prophet. The Book of Mormon has had over 3000 corrections and changes since 1832 and there are still great problems within it.

As political pressure grew in the 1970’s against racism and rightly so, based on the work of great men like Martin Luther King Jr., the LDS church began to consider its stance on people with black skin because of growing political pressure. In 1978, an Apostle, supposedly appointed by God, to the Council of 12 Apostles who led the LDS Church, Bruce McConkie wrote, “There are statements in our literature by the early brethren which we have interpreted to mean that the Negroes would not receive the priesthood in mortality. ... And all I can say to that is that it is time disbelieving people repented and got in line and believed in a living, modern prophet. Forget everything that I have said, or what President Brigham

Young or President George Q. Cannon or whomsoever has said in days past that is contrary to the present revelation. *We spoke with a limited understanding and without the light and knowledge that now has come into the world....* We get our truth and our light line upon line and precept upon precept. *We have now had added a new flood of intelligence and light on this particular subject, and it erases all the darkness and all the views and all the thoughts of the past.* They don't matter any more. ... It doesn't make a particle of difference what anybody ever said about the Negro matter before the first day of June of this year.” Bruce R. McConkie, 1978. McConkie was referring to the revelation received early that year by Apostle and President Spencer Kimball extending the priesthood and access to the LDS temples to all men, including blacks. This was announced at the LDS General Conference on September 30, 1978, “In early June of this year ... President Kimball ... had received this revelation, which came to him after extended meditation and prayer in the sacred rooms of the holy temple, he presented it to his counselors, who accepted it and approved it ‘as the word and will of the Lord.’ ” Now I had a problem. I had been taught God is perfect but now I was told He also changes His mind giving a new revelation that erased an earlier revelation. This is called progressive revelation by the LDS Church and also by Islam to explain their changing positions and to correct conflicts within their teachings.

So, because of this conflict I decided to read the 3 holy works of the LDS church; the Book of Mormon, Pearl of Great Price and Doctrine and Covenants from cover-to-cover, the LDS church claims these to be holy and direct revelation from God. Because of the multitude of conflicts and problem within these writings, this led me to leave the LDS Church for it was not hard to prove that these works were not of God but of men. This is one reason members of the LDS Church are not encouraged to read their “holy” works. So, Cain took me on a journey that led

me out of the Mormon Church. This is why the Word of God; the Bible is so important to me. I tried to prove the Bible false like I did the Mormon works but I could not. As I studied, I realized the truth of the Bible and I accepted Jesus as my Lord and Savior. The Bible has stood the test of time and the attacks of men and has always proved to be true. Praise God for His eternal unchanging truth.

Pray

Abel's Sacrifice

Now we will turn our focus to Hebrews chapter 11, where we examine the word and concept of faith. I pray through the course of the next few weeks we will gain a deeper understanding of what saving faith is and what it looks like in the life of a believer. In this text before us, we have a contrast between brothers Cain, the firstborn, and Abel, the righteous. I hope to answer the age-old question about the sacrifices offered and why one was accepted and the other rejected. Please open your Bible to Hebrews chapter 11 and listen as I read 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.”](#) For the church, faith is a much-misunderstood concept. Faith is what separates religious hypocrites from genuine worshippers. Faith is evidenced by [“the fruit of the Spirit”](#) (Galatians 5:22) where a person does [“nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves”](#) (Philippians 2:3) in contrast to a self-elevating act. Faith is what captures the future rather than walking in the present.

Having this kind of life altering faith is why God gives us the gift of His Holy Spirit to dwell within us when we believe in Christ. Mankind is born with a sin nature that rules us - but as believers we learn to die to self and allow the Holy

Spirit to rule within us; He changes us and empowers us to overcome sin and our self-serving egos. The Holy Spirit enables us to understand God's grace and that we cannot earn salvation for it is God's gift of love.

The key idea I want you to leave with this morning is – *Saving faith believes God's Word, both written and 'Living', so strongly that it shapes how we live and how we come to a Holy God.* I want you to notice what it was that motivated Abel to offer his sacrifice. Compare Genesis 4:4 with Hebrews 11:4, “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.” Continuing in Hebrews, “**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 was motivated “**By faith**”. Immediately we come to understand something; we realize Abel was not trying to please God by works. Abel was not being religious; he was not seeking acceptance based on his deeds. Abel understood something that Cain did not. I believe that it was “**By faith**” Abel saw into the future to the day when God would send the Messiah or the Christ to take away the sin of His people by His sacrifice.

Before Jesus was born, before the Egyptian plagues, before the Ten Commandments, before Abraham, before about everything else - Abel, “**By faith**”, offered a sacrifice to his Holy God. That is a rather interesting observation. For it appears Abel offered a blood sacrifice for sin. Remember God gave the example in dealing with Abel's parent's sin. In Genesis we read, “**And the LORD God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them.**” (Genesis 3:21) There is probably no better picture of the sacrificial system than the coverings God made for Adam and Eve after the fall. God killed an animal in order to provide a covering for Adam and Eve's sin. It is also important to see that they tried to

provide for themselves covering and they were worthless. Remember earlier in chapter 3 after eating of the forbidden fruit, “Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.” (v. 3) Their man-made covering did not work and God intervened.

If they were to stand before God, as sinners, they had to be clothed in a covering that He provided. Today, as sinners, we also must be covered by what God has provided. Today, we can be clothed with the righteousness of Christ. We can have our sins atoned for through the shedding of Christ’s blood and His New Covenant. Earlier the writer of Hebrews made clear, “Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.” (9:22) It is “**By faith**” Christ becomes our Mediator, standing between the sinner and a God who demands righteousness. Abel somehow understood this truth. He knew that his sin had separated him from God and that like his parents, an animal sacrifice had to be made to cover his sin. “**By faith**” he placed the blood of the sacrifice between him and God. “**By faith**”, he knew more was coming in the future. God accepted his sacrifice because it pointed to the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus Christ. “**By faith**” Abel knew the gospel of salvation. Earlier in Genesis chapter 3 God spoke to the serpent in front of Adam and Eve saying, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.” (v. 15) I believe by God’s grace Abel knew that one of his own descendants would be born and crush the head of the serpent. In this early model of the gospel Abel believed and it was counted to him as righteousness. He proved that his faith was real as he acted on what he believed.

I believe Abel knew these things because genuine faith always comes after Divine revelation. He could not have brought his offering, **“By faith”**, if he did not have a foundation of Divine revelation. God’s Word, both written and “Living” always precedes saving faith. The Apostle Paul understood this process, in his letter to the church in Rome he revealed, ¹⁴ **“How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? ¹⁵ And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!’ (Isaiah 52:7) ¹⁶ But they have not **all** obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, ‘Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?’ (Isaiah 53:1) ¹⁷ **So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.”** (Romans 10:14-17) It appears **“By faith”** was how Abel lived. He heard God’s Word and followed what God said.**

In Genesis it says, **“Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions.”** (4.4) Notice the difference between how Abel brought an offering to God because He was a sinner and how Adam and Eve tried to hide from God because of their sin. Something is different with Abel. I question, was it possible Abel had been brought to life spiritually by the Holy Spirit? I am not sure, but he knew the truth about his sinful nature and it caused him to run to God for aid rather than hid from God in fear as his parents did. The same is true of us today. When the Spirit of God converts us, we stop seeing God as the Divine Judge and begin to see Him as heavenly Father.

Cain’s Sacrifice

Now comes the question, “What about Cain, the first born?” Reading in Genesis chapter 4, beginning at verse 3, **“In the course of time Cain brought to the**

LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground ... (Skipping to verse 5) but for Cain and his offering God had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his face fell.”

From these verses, we know a couple of things about Cain. First, he believed in God because he brought to God an offering. Second, one could say that Cain was a worshipper of God by his offering.

However, something went wrong; Cain’s situation went from bad to worse. Cain did not bring his offering, by faith. Why do I say this? Because Cain did not bring his offering to God by God’s acceptable method. Just because someone believes in God and even worships God does not mean they have been brought to life spiritually. He thought that he could approach God in his own way and could gain approval by his efforts. Cain knew the truth that Abel knew but he lacked saving faith. He wanted to approach God by his own merits. He wanted to work his way to God.

This brings back to the key idea I want you to leave with this morning is – ***Saving faith believes God’s Word, both written and ‘Living’, so strongly that it shapes how we live and how we come to a Holy God.***

The problem was not that Cain was a farmer, but his offering was of no value because as Hebrews 9:22 says, “Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.” Cain deliberately ignored the way God set in place for people to be justified in His sight. We know this because, ⁶“The LORD said to Cain, ‘Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen?’ ⁷If 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.’ ” Cain’s sin nature ruled, he lacked saving faith. The religions of the world could be compared to Cain. They are all trying to work their

way to God, with one exception and that is Christianity is by faith given by the grace of God. The many religions of the world are all sewing together their own coverings and offering God fruit of their hands but have disregarded the only way in which salvation takes place. Only through the blood of Jesus Christ will anyone ever please God.

I am sure Cain had everything placed in the bowl just right. I am sure he brought God the best that his garden produced. I am sure that he dedicated it to God. However, God does not accept our good works for salvation. Cain knew the right way and chose to ignore it. A.W. Pink, the British reformed theologian who died the year before I was born wrote of Cain. *“Thus, in Cain we behold the first hypocrite. He refused to comply with the revealed will of God, yet cloaked his rebellion by coming before Him as a worshipper. He would not obey the divine appointment, yet brought an offering to the Lord. He believed not that his case was so desperate that death was his due, and could only be escaped by another suffering it in his stead; yet he sought to approach unto the Lord, and patronize Him.”* (A.W. Pink's Studies in the Scriptures - 1932-33, Volume 6 of 17, page 196) So, we have no need to feel sorry for Cain. Do not think for a second that God is mean and that Cain was the victim. Cain knew exactly what he was doing. Cain reaped the consequences of his actions and unbelief.

Like Cain, a person can look like a worshipper of God. A person can even do the right things and be rebellious and live despising God's grace the whole time. Do you see yourself as a sinner to the point of desperation? You cannot turn over a new leaf or start over apart from Divine grace. Unless one comes to God **“By faith”** their works and their trying to please God by works reveals they think that their sin is really all that bad, they can earn their salvation and that they are, in

part, responsible for their salvation. On-the-other-hand Abel saw his desperate situation and “**By faith**” came to God with an appropriate sacrifice.

Basis of Abel’s Faith

In the words in the middle of verse 4 we read of Abel, “**through his faith, though he died, he still speaks.**” These words the writer was inspired to use are very interesting. The writer says there is something about the death of Abel that is still speaking today. His sacrifice or offering still speaks. It shows us what God expects. We can only come before God as sinners and this only after the appropriate sacrifice is made. For us, the perfect sacrifice was the blood of Christ. However, the writer specifically says that through Abel’s death he still speaks. How did Abel die? What the writer is revealing is that Abel’s death is a picture of the ultimate death. Abel in this sense is a type of Christ. Abel was righteous before God and was killed by an angry religious Cain. Christ was put to death by those who were angry and jealous and religious. Just as Cain was the first hypocrite, so Jesus died at the hands of hypocritical religious men. However, in another way, by way of contrast Abel’s death points to Christ. Abel’s blood cried out for vengeance, reading again from Genesis chapter 4, at verse 10, “**And the LORD said to Cain, ‘What have you done? The voice of your brother’s blood is crying to me from the ground.’**” Christ’s sacrifice, His blood does not call for vengeance but it proclaims forgiveness. As the writer of Hebrews reveals in chapter 12, “**and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.**” (v. 24) This again returns us to the key idea I want you to leave with this morning is – ***Saving faith believes God’s Word, both written and ‘Living’, so strongly that it shapes how we live and how we come to a Holy God.***

Basis of Salvation

As we wrap up this case study in faith and understand the contrast between Cain and Abel, it is important to nail down a couple concepts. Faith is the opposite of works. Cain thought he could get God on his side because of the works of his hands. He thought that God would certainly have regard for his offering. What Cain thought is exactly what most religions people have thought throughout history to the very day. Work hard and do good deeds and be very devout and in the end, God will say, well done good and faithful servant. However, from this passage and from other passages of God's Word we must come to the conclusion that God will not accept sinners apart from His prescribed method. Only by grace through faith in Christ does God welcome sinners.

Faith is the one heart attitude that says, "I am completely dependent upon God for everything." When we come to Christ by faith, we say, "I give up my right to myself. I will not depend on my good works or on myself any longer." Faith says, "I know that I cannot make myself righteous or in any way acceptable to God." Faith says, "I will trust Jesus Christ alone for everything God requires." Faith sees Christ as the only answer to man's sin problem.

Abel knew the desperate need he had. He knew that apart from God's prescribe way, he would be lost. Cain on the other hand, did not see his sin as something all that bad. He felt he could add a little good works to his bad deeds and even things out.

As we think through this text and apply it, it is important for us to see and model Abel's faith. We can model the faith of Abel as we realize, like he did, that sin is too great an evil to ever work our way out of it.

It is not by works we can be justified. It is not even by faith plus works. It is not God's grace and then a little bit of our works. Salvation is completely and entirely a work of God. Abel's sin was atoned for by the blood of Jesus Christ. That same blood reaches forward to us today and saves. ***Saving faith believes God's Word, both written and 'Living', so strongly that it shapes how we live and how we come to a Holy God.***

Let me close by asking, "Does God's Word shape the way you live? Does it shape the way you approach God?" If so, then this is true, "through Abel's faith, though he died, he still speaks." Abel would agree and say along with Paul, ⁸"**For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰ For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.**" (Ephesians 2:8-10)

To this, the Word of God, all of His children together say, "Amen and amen!"