

Guest Preacher - Rev. Donald Morrison

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Preacher: Rev. Donald Morrison

[0 : 00] Shall we turn back for a while to the passage of Scripture we read in Genesis chapter 3 and 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, but for Cain and his offering he had no regard.

So Cain was very angry and his face fell. 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. After the death of Abel, when Cain had murdered his brother, the Lord asked him the question, Where is your brother Abel?

And he gave that response, Am I my brother's keeper? And many people would be familiar with that particular statement.

[1 : 26] Am I my brother's keeper? But they might be hard put to actually say where that particular statement is to be found.

And it's one of those biblical statements that down through the years has found its way into general English parlance. I was googling the other day how many biblical phrases are there in the complete works of Shakespeare.

And the number that I came up with was approximately 1,300. So Shakespeare himself was very familiar with the Bible.

And of course, in his day, in the Church of England, the Geneva Bible, the predecessor of the King James, was placed in every single parish church throughout England.

And this was a revelation for the people of England and Wales, because here was a Bible in their own language. And people must have delighted as they gathered in churches to listen to the Bible being read, not just on a Sunday, but throughout the week.

[2 : 36] And perhaps in a small community where there were not many literate people, somebody who was literate would read and others would gather round. And they would delight in all the different phrases that they would adopt into normal English usage.

He was saved by the skin of his teeth is one of those phrases that has come into English usage. Let us eat, drink, and be merry, because tomorrow we die, and many, many others.

And so I wonder how many people in general in the world today and in our own country, which is so biblically ignorant, would know about the account of Cain and Abel.

And Cain's reply to God's question when God was asking for the whereabouts of his brother reflects the attitude of the self-centered man or woman who wants to do things their own way and seek their own advantage and their own advancement.

Cain not only murdered his brother, but he spoke defiantly to God. He did not want to be accountable to God. He showed his resentment at being answerable to him, and his independent actions showed his unwillingness to approach God on the terms that God had laid out for them.

[3 : 58] He was the archetype of the I'll do it my way. There was a survey some years ago of the favorite hymns, songs, if you like, that are sung at funerals throughout the United Kingdom, and I'll do it my way was very much one of them.

Well, you can choose which way you want to go. You can go God's way, or you can go my way. But following the fall, when Adam and Eve pathetically tried to cover their guilt by making garments of fig leaves, in contrast, God provided them, as we read at the end of chapter 3, with garments made from animal skins.

Garments made from the skins of animals. God made garments of skins, and he clothed them. He didn't make garments of skin because they were more durable than the garments made from fig leaves that Adam and Eve had tried to make and to cover themselves.

But he wanted to impress upon our first father and mother the sheer gravity of sin. And he wanted to impress upon them the seriousness of disobeying the Lord.

And so God was doing what our first father and mother were incapable of doing themselves. He was re-establishing the relationship that had been broken by their rebellion.

[5 : 38] And thus, he was re-establishing the relationship that we ourselves can have through trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ.

But he was showing them that for that relationship that had been broken to be re-established, the blood of an innocent animal had first to be shed.

And in this instance, God did not command Adam and Eve to kill, to slaughter some hapless creature from the flock and shed its blood, but he did it for them.

He was providing a substitute, one, a creature, yes, who would die in their place. And having warned Adam that disobedience would bring death, God could not go back on his word.

And it's precisely because God cannot go back on his promises that he's given, that we can trust him implicitly in life, in death, and in the life to come.

[6 : 40] God had made a promise to Satan. He said, I will put enmity between your offspring and hers, the woman Eve that he had beguiled. He will crush your head and you will strike his heel.

No time frame is given, but this is the first evangelical promise, the first promise in Scripture of a Savior, a Redeemer, one who would come in the far distant future to redeem the Lord's people.

And he would be a descendant of the woman who had been deceived, and he would strike Satan a mortal wound. But it would be at great cost.

No details were given, simply God's promise. And as we work our way through the Old Testament, you know, God was illuminating more and more of what that future Savior would do.

And we see that especially outlined for us in Isaiah 53, for instance, and in parts of Psalm 22. And Jesus, when he was speaking about Abraham on one occasion, he spoke of the faith that Abraham had.

[7 : 54] Abraham saw my day and he rejoiced. He saw my day. He believed the promises of God that a Savior would come. He didn't know the details.

He didn't know exactly what that Savior would accomplish when he came. But it was enough that God had given him a promise, and so he believed in the Lord, and it was credited to him, we read, as righteousness.

And the promise that God gave to Satan that a future one would come who would strike his head, was followed by the fact that God shed the blood of an innocent animal so that he might cover the guilt of this man and wife, literally to atone for their sins.

And these plain skin garments point ahead, down through the centuries, to the beautiful robes of Christ's righteousness.

Many, many years ago, I was preaching in King Ussi before I became a minister, and the people we were having lunch with showed me a very rare Bible.

[9 : 06] It was known as a Breaches Bible. And when the Bible was translated into English, apparently a limited number of copies were printed that God made breaches for Adam and Eve.

And then they quickly realized that breaches was not necessarily a good translation, and so they changed it. But those particular Bibles have become very, very valuable.

They're known as Breaches Bibles. But on the cross, and right there at the very beginning of time on the cross, Jesus dies for our sins, the great exchange.

He takes upon himself the guilt that is due to you and me for the sins that we have committed. Not just the sins that we have committed, but the fact that we are sinners by nature.

It's an inherent part of our fallen nature. Almost, we might say, a part of our DNA. And in exchange for him paying the penalty for our sins, he gives us, in exchange, his own perfect righteousness.

[10 : 14] And so, by trusting in Jesus, we can find acceptance with God. In 1 Peter chapter 3, Christ died for sins once for all.

Once for all. That's so important, isn't it? Because down through the centuries leading up to the coming into the world of the Lord Jesus Christ, the high priest had to go into the inner sanctuary of the tabernacle and the temple, and he had to make a sacrifice on behalf of the nation.

On the day of atonement, Yom Ekepur. And he was doing it, as we read in the letter to the Hebrews, time and time again, every single year.

But Christ died once and once only. His was the final blood that was to be shed in order to bring salvation to you and to me.

The righteous died for the unrighteous, it's put by Peter so eloquently. And the fact that Adam and Eve understood what God was instructing them in, when they saw this animal being sacrificed, when they saw its blood being shed, God would have explained the significance of that to them, although it's not highlighted for us here.

[11 : 33] And it is evident that this hard lesson was taken to heart because they taught their children, they taught Cain and Abel that, yes, you can have a relationship with God, you can still approach God.

Yes, we've been thrown out of the garden because of our sin and our rebellion, but God has not rejected us completely. There is a way back, but that way back must be through the shedding of blood.

And we know that Abel himself took the lesson to heart, because when he approached the Lord, he did so with an offering from his flock. He had sacrificed one of his lambs, goats or whatever it was, and he had shed its blood.

And so we read here that the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering. He did so because Abel was approaching God by means of the way that God had outlined for them.

If you approach me by the shedding of blood, then I will accept you. He had killed it, he had shed its blood, and God looked with favor on his offering.

[12 : 48] But despite having the same upbringing, despite having the same teaching from his father and mother, Cain brought instead the produce of the ground, fruit and vegetables.

But God rejected it because when we read in Hebrews chapter 9, without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness. And Cain had thought that he would approach God on his own terms, that he would offer him a bloodless offering.

It was an offering that came from the ground. He might have put a lot of thought into his offer. I remember many, many years ago when I was young, my father went to visit a good friend in hospital, and he'd bought this sort of presentation box of fruit from a greengrocer's, and it was beautiful.

There was peaches and plums and apple, and there was grapes. We didn't have many grapes in the house in those days, and I desperately wanted to, you know, just to pick one grape, but I didn't dare do so.

And it was an indication of the esteem that my late father had for his friend who was in hospital. And it might be that Cain had gone to great lengths to put together an offering to the Lord that looked beautiful, that smelled fragrant.

[14 : 10] But he was approaching God not on the terms that God had outlined for him, but he was approaching God by his own way.

Without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness. He brought a bloodless offering. It might have looked beautiful. It might have contained the best of the crop, but God rejected him because he was trying to bypass the way of approach that God had provided for his people.

The juice of fruit and vegetables does not wash away our sins, but only the blood of a sacrifice, and only the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.

As we meet here today, we can look around the world with all the many different religions, many of them very colorful, all sorts of rituals that might be of great interest, people hoping that they can get right with God.

But if they try to bypass the cross, if they try to reject the means that God has provided for them, if they disdain the sacrifice of Jesus, if they deny that God even has a son, as Muslims and Jews do, then the sad fact is that God will reject them.

[15 : 29] God will not be mocked. We must approach him, and he is very approachable, but we must approach him on the terms that he himself has laid down, and only then will we find acceptance.

Jesus says, I am the way. He doesn't say, I am one way amongst many, as the world would have us believe. He says, I am the way, the life, the truth, and the life.

No one can come to God except through me. But the tragedy is that so many people try to approach God by their own works and by their own charitable giving.

But we see here the grace of God, because he didn't reject Cain out and out. He didn't say, get out of my sight. He said, if you do well, will you not be accepted?

He was giving him another opportunity to go away and to come back. And God knew perfectly well that Cain knew the way, because he had received the same teaching as his brother Abel.

[16 : 36] Cain did not come by faith. Abel had come by faith. But Cain approached God trusting in his own works. He represents the natural man, the natural woman, who thinks they can please God by their own efforts.

Pink, who lived in Stornoway for many years and who had a sort of a ministry writing to people all over the world. He wrote a parody of one of the hymns.

He said, something in my hands I bring, to my goodness I do cling. And that was his way of summing up the approach of Cain to God. Something in my hands I bring, to my goodness I do cling.

A former Archbishop of Canterbury many years ago was asked where his faith for the future lay, because we live in a world of turmoil, a world of war, a world of great spiritual darkness.

Where did he see the future? And he said that he believed in the innate goodness of mankind. He was the head of the Anglican Church.

[17 : 46] He was a man who was supposed to advise royalty on spiritual matters. And yet he saw the future not in God, as he didn't mention God, but he saw it in the innate goodness of mankind.

Well, every time we turn on our television sets and we watch the news, we see the evidence there of the innate goodness of mankind. But Abel came by faith.

He came by faith not in the innate goodness of humanity, but faith in God's Word. Faith that God, having promised to accept him if he came by a certain way, that God would indeed do exactly what he had said.

And his actions show that he recognized himself as a sinner, that he was a fallen creature, that he was worthy of death. But he came trusting that God would accept him because he brought a substitute, a creature that he had slaughtered and whose blood he had shed to atone for his sins.

In Ephesians chapter 2, once we were without hope and without God in the world. And I'm sure that those of us here who are Christians, that was our situation at one time in the past.

[19 : 06] Once we were without hope and without God in the world. But now, but now, you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ.

We didn't come near through our own volition. Our natural instinct was to turn our backs upon the Lord, to run away from him. We didn't want this man ruining our lives, ruling over us, and doing things that we didn't want to do.

But we have been brought near through the blood of Christ. A good friend, he was in the ministry of another denomination, and he had to do three 20-week placements with different ministers when he was studying at university.

And the first placement was with a very liberal minister, and that liberal minister knew that my friend was an evangelical, a man who came from Harris. and he said to him, I hate those churches that are awash with the blood of Christ.

So you can imagine the sort of preaching that the people in that church would have heard. I hate those churches that are awash with the blood of Christ. But without the blood of Christ, there is no hope for any of us, for you or for me.

[20 : 29] And how wonderful to know that the Son of God was willing to leave the glory and the adulation of the heavenly host and to come into this dark, sin-sick world to shed his blood for you and for me.

For God so loved the world that he gave, his one and only Son, his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him, whoever, whenever, wherever, shall not perish, but have everlasting life.

Do you have the confidence that you have entered into everlasting life? Not because of anything that you have done, but because God graciously has enabled you to trust in his Son and the sacrifice of his Son, a sacrifice to which we can add nothing except to come by faith.

When Jesus had borne our sins on the cross at the end of that afternoon, he said, It is finished. It is finished. No loose ends to be tied up.

Nothing to do except to come by faith, trusting in him. And here, Abel represents the spiritual man, the man or woman who trusts in Christ for his or her salvation.

[21 : 43] My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness. The unbelieving world stands shoulder to shoulder with Cain.

But if we are trusting in Jesus, then Abel is our brother. But, you know, saving faith, people might say, Oh, yes, I believe in God and I believe that when Jesus died on the cross, he died for the sins of the world.

But that saving faith is more than simple mental ascent. Saving faith involves putting the boat out and taking action.

When Jesus said to Simon, Put out into deep water and let down the nets for a catch. Simon answered, Master, we've worked hard all night and we haven't caught anything, but because you say so, we will let down the nets.

And so he did what he thought would be a hopeless exercise. But as we know, he caught this enormous catch.

[22 : 47] These expert fishermen, they knew their trade, they knew the waters had been toiling all night. But because Jesus said so, they hated Christ's words and they let down their nets.

Matthew, when he was at his tax collector's booth, Jesus said, Come, follow me. We're not told that he even put the books in order to hand them over to the next tax collector or tied up the bags of coins.

He simply got up and followed Jesus. He didn't say, Well, let me finish what I'm doing and then I'll follow you. He just got up and followed Jesus.

And here in Genesis chapter 4, we've got the fountainhead of the two streams of humanity that have flowed through the world ever since.

One finding its way to heaven, the other to a lost eternity in hell, the saved and the lost. Only two ways, not three ways or four ways as it is in the world of politics.

[23 : 54] Those who do it God's way and those who choose to do it their way or my way. We need to ask ourselves which way are we walking along this morning?

Are we on the broad highway that leads to a lost eternity that Jesus speaks of? Or are we walking along the narrow way following in the footsteps of Jesus?

And when life's journey finally ends, will we be swept joyfully into the safe anchorage of heaven? Or will we be sucked down into the whirlpools of hell?

And what separates the two, we might ask? And the answer is blood. The answer is blood. On the night of the Passover when the destroying angel was passing through the nation of Egypt, when he saw the blood of the partial lamb daubed on the door frames of the houses of those who had taken God at his word, he passed over their homes.

He spared them. But if he passed over a house, whether it was a hovel or a palace, and he saw no indication of blood, therefore people there not putting their trust in the Lord, then he destroyed their eldest son.

[25 : 09] It was blood. And all the way through scripture, it's blood, blood, and yet more blood. And unless we understand these fundamental truths, we will never truly grasp why it was that Jesus had to go to the cross or to comprehend the sheer gravity of sin.

The world thinks that sin is just doing a few things here that we might tut-tut about. But in the eyes of a holy God, sin is very, very serious.

In Habakkuk, God's eyes are too pure than to behold iniquity. My grandson, Johnny, he's 12, and about a year and a half ago, he said to me, Shen, he said, when Jesus was on the cross, why did God have to look away from him?

And I explained a wonderful question for a boy of 10 or 11, isn't it? Why did God have to look away from him? And it's because God's eyes are too pure than to behold iniquity.

And the sins of the Lord's people was there, laid on the head of his beloved son. And God could not look upon his son. He had to turn away his countenance so that Jesus cried out, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

[26 : 31] And so I was able to explain to him the nature of sin and how God, being holy, cannot abide sin, but he has provided the means whereby we can find forgiveness.

The blood of Jesus is that washes away our every sin. And so there are two approaches to God, but only one that finds acceptance with God, and that is to come through the sacrifice of blood.

And all the blood that was poured out throughout the Old Testament period was all pointing ahead to the blood of the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, even the Lord Jesus Christ.

And the wonderful thing is that no further blood need to be shed anywhere. So we live in a world of many religions, but there's only one cross, there's only one Savior, there's only one door into heaven, and we approach God by the terms that he has spelled out for us.

We come his way, and when we do so, he will not turn us away. I am the way and the truth and the life, says Jesus. No one comes to the Father except through me, and neither do they.

[27 : 47] Amen. And may the Lord add his blessing to these thoughts and meditations on his word. Shall we pray? Our Heavenly Father, we thank you for the Gospel.

We thank you for the simplicity of the Gospel, that we're not obliged to go on our knees up some mountain path to some distant shrine.

We thank you that we don't have to engage in religious ritual, jumping through all kinds of hoops to get right with God, where everything has been done for us, the finished work of Christ on the cross, and all that is required of any one of us is to come by faith and trusting that when he bore the sins of his people, that we were numbered amongst those people, that he died for me on that cross.

We thank you for the simplicity of the Gospel, and we pray that as your word goes out throughout the world this day, it would impact upon the hearts of many people, young and old alike, and bring them from the kingdom of darkness and bring them into the glorious kingdom of light, knowing Jesus, who is the light of the world as their saviour and as their Lord.

Jesus is Lord, the great creedal statement of the church. He is the only Lord, and he will not give his glory to another.

[29 : 16] So Lord, bless all that has been said here this morning, and we trust that you will take away anything said that's not been in accordance with your word, and may the glory be yours and the blessings ours in Christ Jesus, our Lord.

Remember those at home who are unable to join us, but we thank you that they can join us electronically, and we thank you that wherever we are in the world, we can engage with you, we can pray to you, knowing that your ear is ever inclined to the pleas and the petitions of your people.

Bless every family represented here, bless any who have special needs. Remember those who mourn the passing of loved ones, remember those who are unwell, either themselves or their family members, remember those who are troubled and anxious, remember those who suffer mental afflictions of one kind or another, remember those who find it difficult to make ends meet and were filled with many anxieties.

May they look to you as the one who provides for the needs of his people. So Lord, continue with us and bless us. Bless the children especially and forgive us our every sin in Jesus' name.

Amen. We conclude by singing from Psalm 1A in Sing Psalms on page 1 of this altar.

[30 : 45] Blessed is the one who turns away from where the wicked walk. He does not stand in sinners' paths or sit with those who mock. Instead, he finds God's holy law, his joy and great delight.

He makes the precepts of the Lord his study day and night. So we sing the whole of Psalm 1A to God's praise. Blessed is the one who turns away from where the wicked walk.

Amen. Blessed is the one who turns away from where the wicked walk.

Who does not stand in sinners' paths or sit with those who mock.

Instead, he finds God's holy law, his joy and great delight.

[31 : 58] He makes the precepts of the Lord his study day and night.

He prospers ever like a tree that's planted by a stream and in Jew's season yields its fruit.

Its leaves are always green. Not so the wicked they are like the chaff that's blown away.

They will not stand when judgment comes or with the righteous say.

It is the Lord who sees and knows the way the righteous go.

[33 : 27] But those who live an evil life, the Lord will overthrow.

And now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, one God, rest and remain with you all now and forever.

Amen.

Amen. Amen.