

Guest Preacher - Rev. Dr. Malcolm Maclean

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Preacher: Rev. Malcolm Maclean

- [0 : 0 0] We can turn back to Hebrews chapter 11, and I'd like you to think about verse 4. By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous.
- ! God commended him by accepting his gifts, and through his faith, though he died, he still speaks. The book of Hebrews in chapter 11 is a very well-known chapter, and containing certain names.
- I've done something notable for God, and they're listed there, so that we can see what they did.
- And although it is important, I think, when we read Hebrews 11, to pay attention to the last verse of the chapter, which tells us that we have something better than they had.
- So whatever it was that they possessed in their particular time, God has provided something better for us, so that they, apart from us, will not be made perfect.
- [1 : 3 3] When we think of people of faith, then perhaps we're surprised that who's not mentioned in this chapter. For example, there's no mention of Adam and Eve.
- And we may wonder why that's the case. And one could be that they didn't do anything notable for God.
- That after the first few verses of Genesis 4, they don't really appear again, apart from where Paul mentions Adam as the covenant head of fallen mankind.
- So maybe they're not mentioned because, well, they didn't really do anything that stood out. Of course, another possibility is that they weren't people of faith.
- That despite God saying to them that, didn't say to them, he said to the devil, that they would become a champion who would deliver his people, they might not have listened to that.
- [2 : 5 9] We don't know. The Bible is silent about it. And I suppose that's where we should leave it as well.
- If the Bible's silent, we should be silent. There's John Bunyan has got one of his books. It's got a scroll of the Book of Life.
- And in it, he says that the first clear name on it is Abel. But there's a little space above it. And he's not sure if there's anybody's name in there.
- So I think Bunyan's just telling us no one knows about Adam and Eve. But then silence doesn't actually say everything.
- Because there's various other important people not mentioned in Hebrews 11. For example, Seth is not mentioned. The son that was given to Eve to replace Abel.
- [4 : 1 0] And who, as we can see from the rest of Genesis 4, became the leader of the righteous in those early days of human history.
- And there's no mention of Seth at all. And yet we're told in Genesis that it was in his days that people began to call upon the name of the Lord.

Nor is there a mention of, say, someone like Phineas, who was a wholehearted follower of God where the children of Israel were going through the wilderness.

And who was prepared to stand by himself in defense of God's truth and so on. Yet he's not mentioned. Nor is there any mention of Othniel, the first judge in the Book of Judges.

And a judge of whom nothing negative is said. And yet he's not mentioned here. Whereas some other judges are mentioned about whom some negative things are said.

[5 : 16] Like something and so on. So the silence is, well, silence doesn't tell us everything always.

But anyway, Abel is mentioned. And I'd like us to think, really, first of all, about the times in which Abel lived. And then secondly, religion of Cain.

What was it? Because here in Genesis chapter 4 we have two religions. There's, first of all, religion of Cain. I'd like us to think about that a little. Because we are told in the New Testament to beware the way of Cain.

So whatever Cain did is not limited to himself. But there's lots of others who imitate him. And whatever else we can say about Cain, he was a religious man.

So we're told in the New Testament to beware the way of Cain. And then, thirdly, some thoughts about Abel.

[6 : 27] What kind of man was he? And just see where all that takes us. So the times of Abel and Cain, what were they like?

What does Genesis 4 tell us about it? We're not told how long after the expulsion from the Garden of Eden that the incident described in Genesis 4 occurred.

But we can see some obvious things from it. One is, by this time, Cain and Abel are adults. So quite a long time has passed since Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden.

And that in itself doesn't tell us very much about Adam and Eve. We know that Cain was married. Because it goes on in the rest of chapter 4.

We didn't read it. But Cain was married. Married to one of his sisters. Since there's nobody else for him to marry. And later, when he was sent out from God's presence, he and his wife went off and founded their own city and so on.

[7 : 51] Cain was also, when God spoke to him about what he had done in murdering his brother Abel, Cain was frightened of being found by a search party.

So that tells us that there was some kind of structure in society. And he doesn't suggest that anyone who finds me will kill me.

It doesn't just mean that there's somebody wandering about who will kill him. It means somebody who will be searching for him. And searching for him for a reason.

Because he's broken the law. And it was a very serious action that Cain had done in murdering his brother.

So there does look to be some kind of structure to society that had developed after the fall of Adam and Eve. Another feature that's obvious in Genesis chapter 4 is that worship was taking place.

[9 : 08] And that there was a kind of structure to their worship. Because we're told there in Genesis chapter 4 that Cain and Abel came together.

That's what is described as the... In the course of time in verse 3.

The idea behind the phrase in course of time doesn't just mean and it so happened. It means that there was some kind of regularity about their worship.

And that it may have been at harvest time. Because that would fit in with the offering that Cain made. Or it may have been just the regular weekly worship.

Who can say that the worship was structured. And there's some interesting details about the worship that's taking place during the life of Cain and Abel.

[10 : 12] And the obvious ones that occurs in the chapter we read. Genesis chapter 4 is that God speaks to them. We're not told that he said anything to Abel in chapter 4.

But he did speak to Cain. But... So... And there's no indication that this was the first time it happened.

That the... And this is an extraordinary feature of worship, isn't it? That God comes and addresses the two individuals who on this occasion are worshipping him.

And he speaks to them about their... Or at least he speaks to Cain about why he hasn't accepted his worship. Now...

Now... God's invisible. So... How did God speak to them?

[11 : 20] And... The general answer that's given to that question is that... That he took on a temporary form. And there's nothing surprising about that because...

God does that several times in the Old Testament. He just... He appears in the... Like the two that appeared to Abraham. Or the three that appeared to Abraham.

And one of them was God. And he just looked like a man. Took on a temporary form. And even the... Occasion there in Genesis 4 is not the first time in the Bible he's described as doing that.

Because in the... In the previous chapters in... In the Garden of Eden, we're told that... God came in the cool of the day. And spoke with Adam and Eve.

So there... There was this... Contact between the great God of heaven... God who is... As far as his essence is concerned...

[12 : 25] Is totally invisible. And no one... No creature has ever seen it. But... In order for there to be... Dialogue and... And communion, we might say...

Discussion... Between God and his creatures... He takes on a... A temporary form... And... And speaks to them. And...

What's also quite surprising is that Cain speaks back to him. I mean... Cain recognizes who he's speaking to.

And... In the way he speaks to him... And we'll think about this later on... Yeah... Cain is... Whatever else we want to say about it...

Cain is quite frank. Cain... So... It is extraordinary, isn't it? That the times in which they lived...

[13 : 23] That... God came down... And met with Adam... Sorry... With Cain and Abel. And we're told...

At the end of Genesis chapter 3... That... That... God placed cherubim... At the gate of the garden... In order to...

Guard the way to the tree of life. And it has been suggested that... Wherever the cherubim appear...

There's a message... Offering redemption. The cherubim... Kind of like the angels...

But they're... They seem to be... Different... And there's drawings of them... Or... Not drawings of them... But... Their shapes appear in the curtains...

[14 : 25] Of the tabernacle and the temple... And... Some people think... They're the same as the seraphim... That appeared in Isaiah chapter 6... And two of the cherubim...

Were on the Ark of the Covenant... Looking down into the... Onto the mercy seat... And their cherubim... At the gate of the Garden of Eden...

After Adam and Eve... Had been... Evicted... There are these... Creatures...

Who... Symbolize in some way... That there's a way back... When they're...

They're guarding their way... To the tree of life... They are... Protecting it... But... Why... Why are they...

[15 : 27] Protecting it? And the answer... That's normally given to that... Is that... That the tree of life... Could be seen...

That... That the tree of life... And... When Cain and Abel... Came to worship... They did it... At the gate of Eden... The gate that they...

Were not allowed to go through... As it were... But that they could see... What they had lost... That what sin had taken...

From them... And... They were worshipping... In sight of the presence of God... It's...

A strange... Occasion... Isn't it? And some people suggest... That when God was... Speaking to them... He was speaking from his side...

[16 : 30] Of the entrance of the garden... Speaking to them... Outside the garden... And indicating to them...

There's a way back... So that's the times... In which they lived... They could see...

They could see... The garden of Eden... They could see... What they had lost... They could draw near... In a certain sense...

But only so far... And yet... God spoke to them... Or he spoke to Cain... As far as Genesis 4 is concerned... But as we look at...

Genesis chapter 4... What we do see... Is that even... At this early stage... There's two religions... There's a religion that...

[17 : 35] God approves of... And there's a religion... That he doesn't... Approve of... So having thought a bit... About the times...

Think about... Cain... And his religion... What was it like? What was involved in it? Now...

Some people... Wonder... Is it because... Cain didn't offer... An animal sacrifice? That's... What was wrong with it?

And... That might be... That view might be correct... But... It does have a problem... That... That particular reason...

Is not really given... In the Bible... And... There were sacrifices... Later on in Israel... That did not involve... Animal sacrifices... I mean...

[18 : 36] One of the... Five sacrifices... That are described... In the first chapters... Of Leviticus... The meal offering... It... Did not include... Any blood sacrifice...

The offerer... Just took... Something of his... First fruits... And offered them to God... So it is possible... That here... In Genesis chapter 4...

The problem is not so much... With Cain's... Offering... But with Cain himself... Abel...

Offered it by faith... Cain... Didn't... Matthew Henry says... In his commentary... That what...

Cain was trying to do... And I have no idea... If Matthew Henry is right or not... But... What Matthew Henry says... That what Cain was trying to do... Was to continue... What would have happened... In the Garden of Eden...

[19 : 35] If man hadn't fallen... That... He was taking off the fruit of the ground... And thanking God for this... And that may be right...

And if Henry is right... It means that... Cain... Had no problem... Or... Cain... Did not accept... The reality of the curse...

God had cursed the ground... For man's sake... And here's... Cain... And he's bringing to God...

Something that God has cursed... That God has cursed... But of course... The same thing... Could be said about... The sacrifice... That Abel offered... Because God had cursed... The whole of creation...

But anyway... Cain is there... And as we look at him... Worshipping... One thing that strikes out...

[20 : 37] That he's got no repentance... He draws near to God... And he gives to him... Produced as a... As a...

From looking after the... Area of ground... That he was looking after... And even after he commits... This terrible sin... He has got no repentance... He draws near to God...

And God points out to him... That sin... And it makes no difference... To Cain at all... Obviously... He's got some kind of... Awareness...

Of what he's doing... That he's worshipping... The great God of heaven... He's worshipping the creator... That he is... Worshipping the one... Who in some way...

Has given him this... Produce to offer to God... But as he draws near to the Lord... He's got no awareness... Of the sin in his heart... And when he...

[21 : 39] Is confronted by God... Of having committed that terrible sin... That he did when he murdered his brother... Cain has got no repentance... He doesn't turn...

To the Lord and... I shouldn't have done it... Instead he just... Accepts that he's done it... And the only justice... He's afraid of...

He's not afraid of God's justice... He's afraid of... Some other human finds him... That that other human... Will kill him... But he's got no concept...

In his outlook... As to what the God... That he's speaking to... Might do to him... There is no fear of God... Before his eyes... He's talking to the Lord Almighty...

The God who knows all his heart... The God who tells him... That his brother's blood... Is crying out of the ground... And only God could hear that... And Cain...

[22 : 43] As he reacts to God... Has got no repentance... Is that the way of Cain... That we're to avoid...

A religion without repentance... A religion in which... Sin is just... You shrug your shoulders at it...

And the only possible... Consequences of... Wrong behavior... Is if other humans... Find out about it... What a sad...

Picture we have in Cain... Cain would have been aware... Of the promise... That God had given... Through his condemnation... Of the devil...

That a champion... Was going to come... But Cain has got nothing to say... About that amazing promise... He's got a religion... That's quite prepared...

[23 : 50] To accept... There's a sovereign God... A creator... But as he draws near... To this God... There's no repentance... In his heart... And there's no desire...

To confess his sin... Even... His flagrant sin... So that's the religion of Cain...

And I suppose... The question comes to us... Have we repented? Repented?

As we look at our... Sinfulness... Where there's that... One sin... Or at many sins... How do we treat them? As we come to God...

And are before him... Even now... Are we repenting? Repentance is the...

[25 : 00] Only appropriate response to sin... We have to say to the Lord... I'm sorry... That I committed that sin...

Obviously not the sin... As outrageous as Cain did... But all of us... Have got plenty to repent of... And the Lord looks on the heart...

And the way that pleases him... Is a penitent heart... Is a penitent heart... A broken heart... A heart broken for sin...

He will not despise... So that's religion of Cain... A heart without repentance...

What about religion of Abel? What is it like? Well... Abel was aware of the promise... That God had given...

[26 : 07] About the coming of a champion... Out of the... The sin had brought it into... He was going to deliver... The human race... Out of the... Terrible predicament...

The sin had brought it into... He had no idea... When the champion was going to come... He just knew that... At some stage in the future... The... Savior would... Be born...

And would be here... And would somehow... When he was here... He would deliver... Or pay the penalty... For sin... And...

As many people have said... He may have... Offered this... Animal sacrifice... As a picture... Of the sacrifice... That was to come...

Of the sacrifice... As many people have said... He may have... Offered this... Animal sacrifice... As a picture... Of the sacrifice... That was to come...

[27 : 07] We don't know... If he had any more promises... Given to him... If they were... The Bible is silent... About them... All we know is... That he had one...

Promise... And this... One promise... Of a coming deliverer... Marked his outlook... As he worshipped God... If we wanted to...

We could almost say that... He was saying something similar... To what Paul said... Although Paul said it... In the full light of the cross... But Abel was saying something similar...

In his worship... Thanks be unto God... For his unspeakable gift... That...

God... Had made an incredible promise... About his intent... That through his gracious action... Some...

[28 : 12] Person would come... And deal with this terrible situation... That sin had brought... And Abel's a reminder to us... And I think this is one of the significant things...

About him... That he... Mapped out his life... In light of the promises of God... And his faith took hold of these promises...

Of the coming deliverer... And he came to God... With a worshipful heart... Thanking God... For his salvation... I think Abel realized something else as well...

As he'd grown near to God... He knew... That his brother... He realized that... Options... Even in that... However many people there were...

In the world at that time... Who can say... He realized that... There were two... Options... Even in that... However many people there were... In the world at that time... But he... He realized there were two options...

[29 : 19] You either were marked by faith... Or you're marked by having no faith... He realized that... While he was a member of... An earthly family...

He needed also to be in another family... He needed to be in another family... He needed to be in the family... That belonged to God... And therefore he...

He approached God... In whose family he was in... He needed also to be in another family. He needed to be in the family that belonged to God.

And therefore he approached God as one in whose family he was in. Another thing we can say about him, and it's quoted here in Hebrews chapter 11, and it says that God accepted his offering because he was righteous there in verse 4.

And the Savior, Jesus, when he speaks about Abel, he describes him as righteous Abel. And the righteousness that Abel showed was by the way he lived his life.

[30 : 46] The law of God was written on his heart, and he obeyed God every day. Not just on the day when he offered sacrifices, but on every other day of his life.

He lived righteously. And the Savior, who is, as it were, summarizing Abel's life, calls him righteous Abel.

And the three details that I've just mentioned. The need, the promise of the coming Savior who would deliver him from his sin and pay the penalty for it.

And the need to be in another family, a family composed of those who have got faith in God. And the need to live a righteous life.

By the power and grace of God given to him. Well, is that not what life is about? Well, how do we describe ourselves?

[32 : 00] Are we those who look to the promises? Are we those who are glad that there's another family? The family of God?

And are we living righteous lives? Whatever we are. That's the religion of Abel. The religion of Cain, no repentance.

The religion of Abel, he trusts in the promises. And he lives a righteous life. And he speaks to us.

Doesn't he? That's what the writer of Hebrews tells us. That he speaks to us. There's other things we can say about Abel that come across very strongly.

He's the first martyr. And he's reminding us. That being a worshiper of God can be a costly experience.

[33 : 16] It cost Abel his life. To be a worshiper of God. He's not the only one who's had that experience. There's plenty today who are perhaps experiencing it too.

But Abel says to us. Your devotion to God. Might be very costly. Abel wasn't just the first martyr.

He's the first sinner to arrive in heaven. It's hard for us to imagine it. But at one time there were no sinners in heaven.

At one time heaven was empty of sinners. All these saved sinners. Sanctified sinners. Perfected sinners.

There was a huge space. That's the word space. So subsequently saved sinners were going to occupy.

[34 : 28] And from the amazing worshippers that wouldn't just gather around a place on earth. But would gather around a throne in heaven.

At one time there was none of them. Only angels. There was no humans there. And then one day a human arrives.

Abel. The spirit goes. The spirits of just men made perfect. He's the first of them. And if his previous experience was sad.

When his brother did what he did to him. What an amazing privilege he had. Of being the first to enter into glory. And I suppose.

Who can imagine it. But how welcome he'd have been there.

[35 : 45] As he went from the place of earthly worship. To the place of. Perfect worship. Abel also. Witnesses to us. He witnesses to us. With the need of faith. Sometimes.

And. It includes myself. We can come in to worship God. And our faith is not active. We're just looking at the things around us.

We're not seen beyond them. Abel saw beyond. What was around him. He saw a greater sacrifice was coming.

He knew it was possible to go to heaven. He knew that he was going one day to be in heaven. He lived his life by faith. And that is what we're all called to do.

[36 : 58] There's one more reference to Abel. That's in chapter 12. Of this letter. Of the book of Hebrews. And it says about him. That.

The blood of Jesus. In verse 24. Of chapter 12. That the blood of Jesus. Speaks a better word. Than the blood of Abel.

The. Genesis tells us that. God said. The voice of his. Abel's blood. Was crying to him from the ground.

It was crying to him. I suppose. For vengeance. For vengeance. His blood. His blood was. Crying out.

In some way. For divine justice. But the blood of Jesus. Speaks better. Than the blood of Abel.

[38 : 06] Abel's death. Abel's death. From a certain point of view. Abel's death. Did nothing for anybody else. It was.

A very sad. Experience. For Adam and Eve. To see this taking place. They could say to themselves.

Well. Abel. Abel. Abel has gone. To a. Better place. But. His death. Didn't do anything. For anybody else. Really. But the blood of Christ.

The blood of Jesus. Is still speaking. And it. Is. Not crawling out. For justice. Is. Is calling out.

For mercy. And that's astonishing. Abel is one of the. Great witnesses to God.

[39 : 12] But his life. And his death. Couldn't do anything. For any other sinner. No matter how commendable.

His devotion was. But the life. And death of Jesus. It speaks to us. Of someone.

Whose life. And whose death. Can bring great. Blessing to us. And while it's good for us.

To think about Abel. We are to recognize. That he was just a fellow. Mortal like ourselves. And that in.

Contrast to Jesus. That the life. And death of Jesus. Cry out for mercy. That's why Jesus lived.

[40 : 08] And that's why Jesus died. And that's why the gospel. Tells us. And that the gospel. And that the gospel. And that the gospel.

Is just telling. And the blood of Jesus. Speaks better things. And it tells us. That we can be forgiven. Amen. So we've just been thinking about.

Religion of Cain. Religion of no repentance. Religion of Abel. Based upon the promises of God.

Asked God for mercy. And lived righteous living. And the testimony of Abel. We could say is. Don't look at me.

But look at Jesus. Because his blood. Speaks better things. Than our. And Abel's blood.

[41 : 10] Could ever do. I hope we're. Off religion of Abel. Who delight.

In knowing. That our sins. Can be forgiven. Because Jesus. Came into the world. Shall we pray.

Lord. It's hard for us. To imagine. What the world was like.

Back then. Our world. Is very different. From then. But there are. Certain things. That are just the same. And religions.

Is one of them. And even as there was. Back then. Two religions. So today. There's two religions. As well.

[42 : 10] There's a religion. Which doesn't have repentance. Which doesn't take account. Of their sin. And if it does.

See them. It doesn't take account. Of your remedy. And there's a religion. That Abel had. A religion.

That he looked to the promises. And lived his life. In response to them. And although it was very costly.

For him. We know that you had prepared. For him. A place in your presence. The first to get there.

And since then. He has been joined. By millions. We pray Lord. That. We would be copying Abel's example.

[43 : 09] And looking ahead. Or looking back. To the champion that came. To Jesus. Who came the first time. And who's yet to come again.

And to take all his people. To be with himself. To be with Abel. And the countless other millions. Who will be there.

Lord help us to be thankful for mercy. Cain could speak to you. And sadly it didn't do him any good. But help us Lord.

To speak to you. And to do so in a penitent way. So remember us and bless us. For your own name's sake.

Amen. Amen. We'll sing Psalm 130. From the Scottish Psalter. Lord from the depths.

[44 : 13] To thee I cried. My voice Lord do thou hear. And to my supplications voice. Give an attentive ear. Psalm 130.

On page 421. And we can sing the whole psalm. Lord from the depths.

To thee I cried. My voice Lord do thou hear.

Unto my supplications voice. Give an attentive ear.

Lord who shall stand. If thou, O Lord.

[45 : 20] Should spark iniquity. But yet with thee.

Forgiveness is. That fear thou mayest be.

I wait for God. My soul doth wait.

My hope is in His word. More than they that.

For morning watch. To see. My soul. My soul waits for the Lord.

[46 : 27] I say more than they that. To watch.

The morning light. To see. Let Israel. Let Israel.

Open the Lord. For with Him. With Him mercies be.

Amplentious redemption. Redemption. Is ever found with Him.

And from all His iniquities. He Israel shall redeem.

[47 : 47] May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. The love of God the Father. And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. Be with us all. Amen. Amen.