

CHRIST IN GENESIS ABEL'S SACRIFICE

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This message was given as spoken ministry in Richmond, Virginia, in January, 1982. It is the second in a series of eight messages on seeing Christ in Genesis through the biographies of eight men.

GENESIS—4:1-12

HEBREWS—11:4

The book of Genesis is a book of biographies. This shows us that God is not so much interested in doctrines, in teachings, in ways, in methods, or in techniques, but that He is very much concerned with and interested in man. That is why the first book of the Bible is a book of biographies, especially of eight persons. God did such a work in each of these eight persons that we see in each one of them a symbol, a trademark, something that came out of the dealings of God in their lives. And when you put all these symbols together, you will find the man after God's own heart.

The second person in the book of Genesis is Abel. After man sinned, God came to man. On one hand, God pronounced his judgment upon man; yet at the same time, He gave man a wonderful promise: "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, [that is between the serpent and the woman,] between thy seed [of the serpent] and her seed [the seed of the woman]. The seed of the woman shall crush the serpent's head, and the serpent shall bruise his heel" (Genesis 3:15).

That is the first promise in the Bible. It is a wonderful promise. God gave this promise immediately after man's fall. In the seed of the woman will be the salvation of the world.

After man was driven out of the garden of Eden, man knew his wife and she bore the first child. When the first child was born, they named him Cain, which means "acquisition"; "we have acquired a man from the Lord." What does it mean? When Adam and Eve got the first child, they thought this was the seed of the woman, the fulfillment of God's promise. They thought that the salvation of mankind would be in Cain; but unfortunately, Cain was not that man. The "seed of the woman" was not just *any* man born of woman. The seed of the woman is fulfilled in Christ Jesus our Lord. In the fulness of time, He was born of a woman, a virgin, born under the curse of the law that He might deliver us from the law and give us our inheritance, even the adoption, the sonship.

What a disappointment it was to Adam and Eve to find that this child Cain was not the seed of the woman. Very soon they discovered that he was not, so that when the second child was born, you find a complete reaction. They called the second child Abel, meaning "breath" or "vanity." They had discovered that man under the dominion of sin was just a breath, just vanity. Just like a breath, it soon fades; it is all vanity.

CHOOSING A PROFESSION

As these two children grew

up, they began their professions. Cain became a husbandman; he began to till the ground. Before man sinned, when they were in the garden of Eden, they ate the fruit of the trees in the garden. That was their food. After man sinned, God cursed the ground and told man that from then on he had to toil and to labor for his living. The ground would grow thistles and thorns, and with his sweat he would get his food. This ground was cursed ground. When Cain became a husbandman, he tilled the ground; he fought against the thorns and the thistles. Is it not true, that in order to make a bare living, man has to fight against nature because nature has changed? Cain had to toil and labor and sweat and try to make a bare living out of the ground. He tried to make the best out of the curse; he tried to live for himself.

But Abel became a shepherd. This is very strange because man at that time did not eat any meat. After the flood, because of all the degeneration of the physical body through sin, God allowed man to eat meat, but not the blood. But before the flood, in the time of Cain and Abel, man did not need any meat. Man ate only fruits and herbs and vegetables out of the ground. Why did Abel choose to become a shepherd? There must have been a reason for it.

Before God drove Adam and Eve out of Eden, He killed an animal, shed its blood, and made the skin as clothes for them to cover their nakedness. Adam and Eve must have told their children that because of their

sins, an innocent animal had to be killed. Blood must be shed in order that they might be clothed with the righteousness of God. So these two children must have heard this story from their childhood. They grew up with that story. With Cain it was just a story, but Abel believed it. And because he believed that man was under sin and there was no remission of sin without the shedding of blood, out of his faith and fear of God, he became a shepherd. In other words, he wanted to raise sheep, not that he might eat the sheep, but in order to bring these sheep to God as a sacrifice, that with the shedding of the blood his sins might be forgiven. He sought for the salvation of his soul. He did not live for himself in a sense, but because he lived for God and for God's salvation, he became a shepherd.

When Christ was born, the angels appeared to the shepherds tending the sheep in the fields of Bethlehem. We are told that these shepherds were not ordinary shepherds; they were temple shepherds. Since sheep were offered in the temple, they had to be under the scrutiny of the priests. These sheep had to be perfect, without any blemish, ready to be sacrificed in the temple to God. Therefore they were kept by shepherds who were special, and because of that the angels appeared to them. They were the first ones who knew that a Child was born, a Son was given, because they tended the temple sheep. They must have been of such pure hearts, therefore they saw God.

Evidently, when Cain chose a

profession, he chose one for himself, for the maintenance of his physical body, but Abel chose a profession for the salvation of his soul, for the salvation of the Lord. In the very choosing of their professions, you can see two very different philosophies of life. Cain's philosophy of life was to make the best out of the worst situation in the world, but Abel feared God and chose the salvation of the Lord.

Now, if you read carefully you will find that Cain was not a bad person at all. He was a good man, an average man. He was a man who was diligent, dutiful, even religious. He diligently tilled the ground. He was not wasteful, or riotous, or doing all kinds of things. The Bible did not say anything about it in the beginning. He was not like many people in this world who have no sense of worshipping God. But he felt the need of worshipping God. So, in the fulness of the day, Cain took of the first fruits of the produce of his land and offered this to God. Most likely he tried to approach the garden of Eden as near as he could. The cherubim with the flashing sword guarded the gate to the way to the tree of life. Probably, Cain would draw as close as he could before that flashing sword and the cherubim. There he offered the produce of his land to God. He knew that God must be angry with man, so he tried to appease God with the best that he had.

NATURAL RELIGION

Aren't all natural religions

based on appeasement? No matter what religion it may be, all the religions of this world are based upon the principle of appeasement. They know that God must be angry, therefore they must offer something to appease Him, to bribe Him. And is it not true that all natural religions are based on the principle of merits, of good works? Take the first fruits of the produce of the land, the work of your own hand, the best of your work, your merits. And by offering your good works to God, then certainly He will forgive you and He will accept you. That is natural religion.

In the very act of Cain you find the source, the root of all religions—appeasement, good works. But it depends on yourself, all the natural you. If you want to be saved, you have to do it yourself; you have to depend upon yourself. Cain depended upon himself. He depended on the works of his own hand, thinking that these should be good enough for God. But he was rejected. God did not look upon Cain and his offerings.

Abel came and offered a lamb. The blood was shed and God looked upon Abel and upon his offering. God accepted him. The difference is not between Cain and Abel as people. In other words, God was not partial to Abel. God looked upon Abel and Cain in the same way, but the difference was in their sacrifice. God did not look upon Cain because of what he offered; God did look upon Abel because of what he offered.

“By faith Abel offered a

more excellent sacrifice than Cain” (Hebrews 11:4). So far as people are concerned, we are the same; there is no difference. “All have sinned and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). There is absolutely no difference. What makes the difference is the sacrifice. Cain had faith in himself, but not in God. Abel had faith in God and in His word. “By faith...” How important it is that by faith we offer the sacrifice that God accepts.

REVEALED RELIGION

This is revealed religion. Actually, we do not consider Christianity as a religion because Christianity is *Christ*. But suppose you consider it as a religion. There is a great difference between Christianity, as a religion, and all the other religions of the world. You can put all the other religions of the world in one category—natural religion. Natural religion is something conceived naturally by the thoughts of man. Then you can put Christianity on the other side as a totally different category—revealed religion. It is not conceived by man, it is revealed from above, revealed by God.

There is a vast difference between revealed religion and natural religion. According to the natural thought of man, it is a matter of appeasing the anger of God, of trying to bribe Him. But according to the revealed thought of God, it is a matter of satisfying the righteousness of God. God’s righteousness must be satisfied. That is the glory of

the blood of our Lord Jesus. We often think of the blood of the Lord Jesus as something to be sprinkled upon our heart. That is true. “... the conscience of our heart being sprinkled...” (Hebrews 10:22). The conscience of our heart being sprinkled by the blood, our conscience is cleansed. We have a clear and clean conscience before God. Thank God for that! But remember, that blood is not basically for us. The blood is primarily for God, to satisfy the righteousness of God.

During the Passover, God commanded the children of Israel to prepare a lamb for each household. But it was not just having a lamb; they were to kill the lamb. After the lamb was killed, what about the blood? The blood must be put in a basin, carried out the door, and put on the lintel and the doorpost. Who was to see the blood? The family would be gathered inside the door. They would not see the blood. They put the blood outside the house. The blood was on the lintel and on the doorpost. Probably, the basin would be left at the bottom of that threshold. In other words, the blood was not for the Israelites to see. The blood was for the Angel of destruction to see. When the Angel of destruction passed through the whole land of Egypt and saw the blood, he passed over. This symbolized that the blood is basically to satisfy the righteousness of God.

Oftentimes we forget and think that the blood is for us. Thank God, it is for us! Because of the blood our conscience is

cleansed, therefore we are no longer under condemnation. We have a clear conscience before God. We can stand before God with holy boldness because of the blood of the Lamb. We can enter into the holy of holies by the blood of the Lamb (see Hebrews 10:19). That is true. But basically, it is to satisfy the righteousness of God. Unless the righteousness of God is satisfied, there is no salvation; and that is why, no matter what you do to try to appease God, there is no satisfaction. All the human religions try to appease God by good works, by doing some good things, by the produce of the land, even the first fruit of the produce of the land, the best that you can gather. You try to bribe God with the best to forgive and forget your sins. But you cannot. All our righteousnesses are as filthy rags (see Isaiah 64:6). The best that we can offer to God is filthy rags. Only Christ—only Christ—can satisfy the righteousness of God.

Natural religion is man depending on himself, but revealed religion is depending on Christ, depending on the redemption that God has provided for man through our Lord Jesus Christ. The result is that one is rejection and the other is acceptance. God looked upon Abel, that is, upon his offering and saw the blood. God saw Abel in the sacrifice and he was accepted.

How can we be saved? We cannot be saved by our good works. We can only be saved by the blood of the Lamb, by the blood of our Lord Jesus. We are

accepted in the Beloved, not because we are any better than anybody else. We are no better. We are accepted because we have the faith. We believe that God has sent His Son into the world and Christ has died for us. The blood has been shed; God's righteousness has been satisfied and our conscience has been sprinkled with the blood. We have holy boldness to stand before God. This is Abel's sacrifice.

When Cain saw that his offering was rejected by God, he was angry. He thought that God should accept what he offered. He thought that he was honoring God. He was trying to serve God. Since he was doing the best that he could, why should God reject him? So God told him, "You are rejected because you offer the wrong thing. If you do the right thing, you will be accepted just as your brother. But if you do not do the right thing, sin is at the door."

What happened? One day Cain and Abel were walking in the field, and talking. Suddenly Cain rose up and murdered his brother. Do you see the picture here? Cain was an average man; he was not bad at the beginning. On the contrary, in the beginning he was a diligent farmer. If he were not diligent, he would have no produce. He was also quite religious. He thought of worshiping God, of serving God, even with the first fruits of the produce of his land. He was a good man. If someone says there is no good in man, probably you will not believe it because Cain was good. How was he good? Good flesh. Cain

manifested the good in his flesh. In his flesh there was something good, and he manifested that good. But because he lived according to the flesh, even the good of his flesh, one day the bad in his flesh would come out. The murder was already there. It had not had the chance to come out, but when the chance was given, it came out.

HAVE NO CONFIDENCE IN THE FLESH

That is why the Bible says, "He that is born of the flesh is flesh." In other words, in this flesh, there might be some good and lots of bad; but whether it is good or bad, it is flesh, and all flesh is condemned by God. If we live by the good of our flesh, the result will be that the bad of our flesh will sooner or later follow. Do not depend on your flesh. Do not believe in your flesh. Have no confidence in your flesh. If you have confidence in your flesh and live even by the good of it, one day the bad of it will be revealed. And that is what you find in Cain. That which is born of the flesh *is* flesh. You cannot change your flesh. You cannot try to transform your flesh. Religious flesh is still flesh, just like irreligious flesh is still flesh. Before God, the whole flesh, all flesh is condemned. It is a blessed day when you realize that there is no good in your flesh.

Even in the life of the apostle Paul, before he knew the Lord, how much confidence he had in his flesh because there was so much good in his flesh. In Philippians 3, it says, "I was

born an Israelite, of the tribe of Benjamin. On the eighth day I was circumcised. I was brought up a Pharisee, a son of the Pharisees. According to the righteousness of the law I was blameless."

Here was a man full of the goodness of the flesh. He was born an Israelite, God's chosen people. He was born of the tribe of Benjamin. Why did he boast of the tribe of Benjamin? When the ten tribes separated themselves, Benjamin continued on with Judah. Benjamin never separated. He was circumcised on the eighth day because God told Abraham all males must be circumcised on the eighth day. (Ishmael was circumcised when he was thirteen years old. Abraham was circumcised when he was ninety-six years old.) So, Saul was circumcised on the eighth day. He was brought up a Pharisee, of the sect of Pharisees, the strictest of all sects. And according to the letter of the law, he was blameless. Oh, he had so much good in his flesh; and yet, at that time he was a persecutor of the followers of Jesus Christ. He himself acknowledged later in the first letter to Timothy that he was a persecutor, an arrogant, insolent person, the chief of sinners. But in the beginning he didn't know that. Oh, how he depended on his good flesh! And how he sinned against God until God met him on the road to Damascus! Even after he believed on the Lord Jesus, he had to come to a point that he could not depend on his good flesh.

In Romans 7 Paul said, "I

know, according to my renewed mind, what is good. I know I should not be greedy and I tell myself, 'I do not want to be greedy. I will not be greedy.'" But he said, "The more I will not to be greedy, the greedier I become." Finally he said, "O wretched man that I am, who can deliver me from this body of death? I acknowledge that in me, that is in my flesh, there is no good."

A WAY OF LIFE

Do not say that the flesh is all bad. It is true, there is some good in the flesh, but even the good in the flesh is condemned by God. And if you try to live by that good flesh, the result is death. It will bring out all the bad that is in you. We need to have our eyes opened to see that in me, that is, in my flesh there is no good. Only then will we be completely delivered. So Paul said, "Thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord."

At the time we are saved we cannot depend upon ourselves. We have to be utterly cast upon the Lord Jesus. Remember, this is a principle of living. After you are saved, do not go back to depend on your flesh. God has not changed your flesh. He has saved you; He has given you a new life, but He has not changed your flesh. If, after you are saved, you try to go back and depend on your good flesh, the tragedy will be that all the badness of the flesh will come forth. We need to see that there is no good in our flesh. We cannot live according to the flesh. The flesh is condemned before God. The flesh and all its

passions and lusts are crucified on the cross. It is no longer I; it is Christ who lives in me. This is the way to live. Otherwise, you will be walking the way of Cain, who depended on his flesh. And what a tragedy it is! He became a wanderer and a fugitive. He went out from the presence of God. But by faith, Abel offered a more excellent sacrifice. He depended upon Christ and upon His blood. He did not depend upon anything in himself and because of this he was accepted by God.

THE FLESH PERSECUTES THE SPIRIT

Isn't it true that the flesh always persecutes the spirit? Isn't it true that the world always persecutes those who are the Lord's? This happened in the beginning of human history. There you find Cain, a representation of the flesh, and Abel, a representation of the spirit, because he sought for spiritual things. Cain persecuted Abel and murdered him. From the very beginning of human history, the world, even the religious world has risen up and persecuted those who follow the Lord. It has not changed. Even in our time, the flesh always hates the spirit. Because the flesh is rejected by God, even unto our day, not only the world, but also the religious world always persecutes those who are pure in heart. They cannot stand to see people who are accepted by God. But there is nothing to fear because even though Abel was murdered, the Bible says that by faith, having died, he yet speaks. In other words, though

he was killed, his blood cried out and God heard his cry. Abel's blood cried for vengeance, but the blood of our Lord Jesus cries for forgiveness: "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." And not only the blood of our Lord Jesus cries out for forgiveness, but the blood of the martyrs throughout the centuries cries out, "Forgive."

When Stephen, the first martyr in the church, was stoned to death, he cried out, "Lord, forgive them, forgive them." And this has been the cry of the blood of the martyrs throughout the centuries. Even though they died, yet they speak. In other words, there is a testimony to the reality of the greatness of the salvation of the Lord.

Cain, who lived according to flesh, became a wanderer and a fugitive. Yes, it is true, he went out from the presence of the Lord, but Cain was the first one who built a city. Isn't that a contradiction? God said he was to be a wanderer, but he built a city. In other words, he was rebellious to his very end. He was always trying to make the best of his situation. He was always trying to improve his own situation, but he never repented and humbled himself before God. But look at Abel. Though he was killed, yet he speaks. His testimony continues on.

Do you think that we who believe in the Lord Jesus can expect the world to welcome us? To put out a red carpet for us? Not only the world as such will not do that, but if you really follow the Lord, even the

religious world will rise up and persecute you. Do not be surprised. Throughout the twenty centuries of church history, official Christianity has always persecuted those who are pure in heart. How many have been killed, not by the world, but by the Christian world! But thank God, though man can kill your body, he cannot kill your soul. That is why the Lord said, "Fear not. Just fear the one who can destroy your soul; just fear God."

Even though outwardly there will be persecutions, and yet these having died, yet speak. In other words, there will be a testimony. Where is the testimony of Jesus? How is the testimony of Jesus maintained throughout the centuries? The testimony of Jesus has been and

is still continuing on, maintained by those who live according to the Spirit, who trust in the sacrifice, in the blood of the Lamb, who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. Even though outwardly they will be persecuted and despised, they yet speak. The testimony of Jesus will continue on.

Do we want to be a wanderer and a fugitive? Or do we want to have our testimony go on? That is what you see in the lives of these two brothers. They had the same opportunities. They lived at the same time, not very far from the days of the garden of Eden. The garden of Eden was still before them. They could see the flashing sword, the cherubim. Probably they could see the tree of life afar off, and yet one did not believe in God

and God's word. But the other, by faith, offered a more excellent sacrifice, and God bore witness to him that he is righteous. By that sacrifice, having died, he yet speaks.

Today, it is the same thing. The same gospel is preached, the same offer is given. But some have faith, and some do not. May the Lord help us to be those who by faith offer this more excellent sacrifice, even Christ Jesus. But remember, it is not just a matter of offering a sacrifice, it is not just a matter of receiving the Lord Jesus. After we have received Him, this is a way of life. We do not live *for* ourselves; we live *for* Him. We do not live *by* ourselves; we live *by* Him. And if we do, then we will have a testimony on this earth. May the Lord help us.