

An Acceptable Sacrifice

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Date: 09 September 2018

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[0 : 00] Now we turn again for a while to the passage of scripture we read in Genesis and in chapter 4. And we read again from the beginning of chapter 4.

Now Adam knew Eve his wife and she conceived and bore Cain saying, I have produced a man with the help of the Lord. And again she bore his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep and Cain a worker of the ground.

In the course of time Cain brought to the Lord an offering of the fruit of the ground. And Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions. And the Lord had regard for Abel in 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 for you. But you must rule over it. Many people are familiar with the words of Cain when questioned by the Lord as to the whereabouts of his brother Abel.

[1 : 42] He replied, am I my brother's keeper? Many people are familiar with those words but they might have difficulty in telling you exactly where those words are to be found.

Many I'm sure would perhaps suggest it's from one of Shakespeare's play. Hopefully many others would be able to pinpoint it here in the opening passages of the Bible.

Cain's reply to the question when God asked him about the whereabouts of his brother Abel reflects very much the self-centered and selfish attitude of the world.

And I can identify that because I was not always a Christian. And I'm sure that you were not always Christians either. And until we come to Christ then we are following in the footsteps of Cain.

Cain not only murdered his brother but he spoke defiantly to God. He was not willing to take responsibility for his actions. His independent actions showed an unwillingness on his part to approach God on the terms that God had laid out.

[2 : 57] He was very much the archetype of that well-known song, I'll do it my way. I hear sometimes of funerals in other denominations where a young person may have passed away and the family asked the minister whether they could sing that well-known song from Frank Sinatra, I'll do it my way.

But the man or woman who wants to do it my way, their way, is the man or woman who will never enter into the kingdom of heaven. They will hear those terrible words, depart from me for I never knew you.

And for us to understand the cross and the centrality of the cross to us as Christians, we have to go right back to the very beginning of Scripture.

Because the cross makes no sense unless we go back to the foundations of Scripture. And we find, as we read in chapter 3, that following the fall, Adam and Eve pathetically tried to cover themselves up by making garments of fig leaves sewn together.

But then when God came and spoke to them, when God asked them how it was that they knew themselves to be naked, when God poured out his anger to them and spoke to Satan and rebuked him for having led them astray, God made garments of skin for them.

[4 : 31] Not because garments of skin are more durable than garments made from fig leaves, which they most certainly are, but to impress upon them the gravity and the seriousness of sin and the gravity and seriousness of disobeying the Lord.

God, when he made those garments of skin, was doing what Adam and Eve were incapable of doing for themselves. Because when he made those garments of skin, he had to take an innocent creature, he had to take an animal, and he had to kill it, and he had to shed its blood.

And so he was showing that, yes, there was a way back to God, that the relationship that Adam and Eve had with God at the beginning, although broken, was not broken completely, that there was a way back.

But the way back had to be through the blood, the blood in that case of an innocent animal that God himself shed. And that must have been a traumatic experience for our first father and mother, because they were vegetarian.

They had not seen death. They had not seen blood being shed from any creature. And in this instance, God did not command them to kill the animal, that he did it for them.

[5 : 54] He made atonement himself for their actions. And by so doing, God was establishing a lasting principle, a principle that continues right on into our own day and age.

And everything hinges on God's warning to Adam that should he disobey God, then that disobedience would result in death.

And God can never go back on his word. We might think, well, Adam and Eve were new, they were fresh, they were naive. Would God not have given them another opportunity?

Would God not have said, well, you were deceived because of your naivety, because you lacked in earthly wisdom, if I can use that term? But if God had gone back on his word, even on that one occasion, by giving Adam and Eve a second chance, then would there not be a possibility that God would go back on his word on another occasion in the future?

But God is totally dependable. God will never, ever break his word. He is utterly a trust forward. He is utterly, we can trust him absolutely fully.

[7 : 12] Every step of the way. Excuse me. And it's precisely that God does not break his word, that he never broke his word at the beginning, that we can trust him, trust him in life, and trust him in death and in the life to come.

And we find in chapter 3 that God gave a promise to Satan. We see that in verse 15, the first gospel promise.

I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your offspring and her offspring, and he shall bruise your head and you shall bruise his heel. And so God had given a promise to Satan who had deceived the woman that a male descendant, no time frame is given, but a male descendant of that woman would one day inflict a mortal blow upon the head of the serpent.

But that in doing so, he would suffer pain. You shall bruise his heel. The first gospel promise that Satan knew from the very beginning, and Adam and Eve knew from the very beginning, that here was something that God would do in the future, but no time frame was given.

And it was following on from that promise that God gave to Satan that he provided skins as coverings for Adam and Eve.

[8 : 42] The promise that blood would atone for their wrongdoing and for their sin. And of course, for us, in our own day and age, looking back 2,000 years to the cross, we see that it was the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, the blood of the Lamb of God who died for the sins of his people, that it was his blood shed there at Calvary that atones for our sins.

But of course, it was the same blood of Jesus that atoned for the sins of all the Old Testament saints, because the blood of animals cannot cleanse us of our sin.

And the blood that was shed on that particular occasion, when God made those garments of skin, was simply pointing ahead to the ultimate sacrifice, the sacrifice of Jesus, the one of sacrifice that would avail for all of his people in the Old Testament and in the New Testament era, and until the very day when the Lord Jesus Christ will eventually come back, as come back he promised.

Peter, in his first letter, says Christ, died for sins once for all. The righteous died for the unrighteous to bring us to God, or rather, should I say, to bring us back to God.

And this was a hard lesson for Adam and Eve, and so they went, I'm sure, to great lengths to impress upon their sons Cain and Abel the seriousness of sin.

[10 : 14] There could not have been a day in their existence, in Adam's long life, when he did not regret and feel remorse for what he had done, and yet he knew that God had provided forgiveness through the shedding of blood.

And so they would have emphasized this in the upbringing of their children, that if they wanted to approach God, then God would willingly accept them. He would not turn them away, but they had to come to God on the terms that God had set out for them.

They had to come via the shedding of blood. We see here that although both sons had the same upbringing, they approached God in very different ways.

One Cain came with a basket of fruit and a basket of vegetables. He brought to the Lord an offering of the fruit of the ground. And Abel, his brother, also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions.

We have a duty to bring up our children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, telling them about Jesus, encouraging them to come to Sunday school and to listen and to take on board what they are being told and to read the Bible and to come to the Lord in prayer.

[11 : 35] That's the duty of parents. But not every parent would necessarily see their sons and daughters, their offspring, coming to faith. Sometimes there will be a way with son.

Sometimes there might be a hard-hearted and stubborn daughter who will reject the offer of Christ and the love of Christ. And they will go their way and go the way of the world.

And others from a very young age will put their faith in Jesus. I was hearing the other day of a young girl of about six or seven over in Uig who passed away 30, 40 years ago.

But she was a really bright witness for the Lord Jesus Christ. Her heart was filled with the Holy Spirit. And people would come to her bedside when she was dying.

And for several weeks they would enjoy a wonderful fellowship with the Lord in the midst of this child. Who knew she was dying but who was rejoicing because she knew that she was going to be with her Lord whom she loved.

[12 : 43] We pray for our children. We bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. But then we have to let them go. And we trust that the Holy Spirit would keep his hand upon them that he would lead them and he would guide them.

And so we find here that Cain brought to the Lord an offering of the fruit of the ground. Many years ago my father went to visit a good friend in hospital and he bought one of these presentation baskets of fruit.

And it was beautiful. There was grapes. There was all sorts. There were peaches and there was apples and what have you. It was beautifully put together. I'm sure it cost my father quite a lot of money at the time.

And it could be that when Cain came to the Lord he had a basket. It was beautifully arranged with different colors, different types of fruit and different vegetables.

And yet we find that the Lord rejected his offering. You see he was coming to the Lord hoping to find acceptance with the Lord. But he was not coming by the way that the Lord had provided.

[13 : 52] He had not shed the blood of an innocent animal. Whereas in contrast Abel who brought the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions we're told that the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering.

Both sons had the same upbringing. Both sons heard the warnings at their father and mother's knees. Both sons went out into the wild but one preferred to do things his own way and the other approached God by the way that God had provided.

At Ramadan Muslims fast for a month. They'll enter beautifully ornate mosques daily. They will deny themselves food and other things until evening.

They hope that by so doing they will ingratiate themselves with the Lord. But the Lord will reject them just as much as the Lord rejected Cain because Muslims have rejected the cross.

They have rejected the fact that Jesus is the Son of God. They have denied that God is Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. They try to work their way into heaven but if God takes sin so seriously that he had to send his Son his beloved Son his only Son the Son whom he loves to die in the place of sinners is it likely that he will allow anybody to bypass that sacrifice to come sneaking into heaven through the back door or over the wall.

[15 : 27] If sin is so great that God's own Son had to die for us then there's no way that God will ever let anyone into heaven who tries to bypass his Son.

But you know our God is gracious isn't he? He didn't well yes he he did not regard positively the offering of Cain he didn't reject him out of hand but he sent him away.

If you do well he says here why are you angry? Why has your fist 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 for you but you must rule over it.

He was saying to Cain you know the way you know the way because your parents have instructed you in the way so go away and then come back and emulate the sacrifice of your brother Abel and if you come by the way that I have provided for you then I will accept you and I will accept your offering I will regard your offering.

He had brought to the Lord fruit and vegetables which came from the ground and remember that the ground had been accursed and so the Lord in his grace was not rejecting him out of hand but he was simply sending him away and saying to him come back to me but come back the way that you know the way that you have been told the way that your brother has a come.

[17 : 03] God will not be mocked we can only approach him on his own terms and his own terms are that Jesus is the way. Not one way amongst many is the world would have us believe.

I am the way says Jesus and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. We read in Hebrews 11 that wonderful roll call of the Old Testament saints by faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did.

By faith he was commended as a righteous man when God spoke well of his offerings. He was a righteous man because he had trusted in the promises of God just as Abraham trusted in the promises of God.

Jesus said of Abraham he saw my day and he rejoiced. He saw my day with the eye of faith and I am sure Abel was just the same. He was declared righteous by the writer to the Hebrews because he also saw with the eye of faith the Lord Jesus Christ far far away in the distance not knowing the detail that we have so clearly laid out for us within the scriptures but Cain did not come by faith.

Cain did not come trusting in the promises of God. Cain came trusting in his own efforts. There's a hymn that says nothing in my hands I bring simply to the cross I cling and Mr.

[18 : 40] Pink who lived in Stornoway many years ago has a bit of a parody on that. He says something in my hands I bring to my goodness I do cling.

Something in my hands I bring to my goodness I do cling. It's a parody on the words of that hymn. A former Archbishop of Canterbury on television he was asked once where his faith lay for the future of mankind and he said that his faith lay in the innate goodness of mankind in the innate goodness of humanity.

We'll look at the world today and we see reflected around us the innate goodness of the human race people killing and being killed simply because of religious differences.

All these young people being knifed to death in the city streets of London. I was reading an article the other day in a newspaper and it said only 13% of crimes in England and Wales lead to conviction and yet the person writing that article said that the chief constable of the Metropolitan Police found time to investigate whether Boris Johnson had committed a crime by likening the garments of Muslim women to a letterbox.

What a sad state we are in today. And Mrs. May just a couple of months ago she took on board the demands of the lesbian and homosexual community and she's going to give them everything they want.

[20 : 23] Give them everything they want. They don't want equality. They want superiority. And she said that she's going to ban those efforts of people who try to make lesbians or homosexuals leave that way of life.

Well is she going to ban the Lord Jesus Christ? Because I know a man who was once a homosexual. He had many partners. One day a friend told him about Jesus. He came to faith and by the power of the Holy Spirit he was able to turn away from his old destructive and dark way of life.

And today he has a family, he has children and he is serving the Lord and he is so glad that Jesus came and broke the bonds that tied him to a life of sin.

Is Mrs. May going to pass a law that prevents Jesus from coming by his spirit and changing the lives of a people? by faith Abel came trusting in God and trusting in his promises.

Cain came to the same God but he was not willing to trust to the promises of the Lord. You know the greatest promise of all in the Bible, God so loved the world, God so loves you and me and everyone else in point that he gave his only begotten son, his one and only son, that whomsoever believeth in him shall not perish but have everlasting life.

[21 : 54] That's a promise, that's a promise, a cast iron promise from the Lord. Have we taken him at his word? Have we come to trust in Jesus? Have we come to put our faith in him whom to know is eternal life?

Or are we like the rich young ruler who came to Jesus and hopefully we'll be looking at him this evening? He came to Jesus because he knew that Jesus had the means of giving him eternal life but the demands of Jesus were too much.

The demands of Jesus was not something he was willing to take on board. He was not willing to trust Jesus and accept his word and sadly he went away because he was trusting in the things of this world rather than in the word of the son of God.

And so here in this passage we have the fountainhead of the two streams of humanity. The way of the righteous, the way of the unrighteous, the way of the godly and the way of the ungodly.

The way of those who trust in Jesus and who walk on the narrow way and the way of those who will not trust in Jesus, who will not have this man to rule over them and who will walk upon the wide and broad highway that Jesus tells us will lead ultimately to destruction.

[23 : 20] Two ways, the saved and the lost. Those who will do it my way and those who do it God's way. Which way are we on this morning? Are we on the narrow pathway following in the footsteps of Jesus, trusting in him, believing the promises of God, promises that are yea and amen in Christ and that will never, ever be broken?

Or are we going along the broad highway, following the ways of the world, the ways of the world which might look attractive? There is a way that seems right to a man, says Solomon, but it will ultimately lead to death.

Which path, which highway, which road are we walking along today? And at the end of the day, what's the difference between these two ways?

what's the difference between those who follow Christ and those who reject him? And the answer is blood. The answer is blood, just as it was here back in the time of Cain and Abel.

It was the blood that made God accept the offering of Abel. But of Cain's offering, it might have looked pretty, it might have looked beautiful, he might have worked hard to put it together, but we're not saved by the juice of fruit and vegetables.

[24 : 41] We're saved by the blood of the Lamb of God shed at Calvary's cross 2,000 years ago. Not any death, but the death of God's only beloved Son.

Because only the sacrifice of Jesus, the sinless Son of Jesus, will avail for us. When we come into the presence of God, as come every single one of us will, God will want to know what we did with the gift of life.

Did we waste it? Did we go running after the things of this world? The things that are empty, the things that are made from the dust and will return to the dust?

Or did we follow in the footsteps of Jesus? And we know that God accepted the sacrifice of Jesus because Jesus did not remain in the grave.

You can search as hard as you like, but you will not find the grave of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Because he who died for us, the sinless Lamb of God, is risen, risen gloriously at the right hand of God, ever living to intercede for us at the throne of grace.

[25 : 52] I saw a television program not long ago and this chap was wandering around the Holy Land and he was looking for evidence of Jesus. He asked a stupid question.

He said, is there any scientific evidence that Jesus ever lived? How could you possibly get scientific evidence for the existence of Jesus? My eighth great grandfather, Dolkhan Macaulay, lived in Uig. Is there any scientific proof that Dolkhan once lived in Uig and traveled around the north of Scotland? Absolutely none. But we have many stories about him.

But what is most impressive of all is that we have God's word, the word of the living God, the final revelation of God to humanity, a word to which we can add nothing, a word from which we can take nothing.

Are we willing to take this word on board and to trust in the Lord Jesus Christ? Please do not imagine that if you come to the Lord claiming you did this and claiming you did that, claiming that you gave all that you had to charity, that God will take you on board.

[27 : 08] If you try to bypass his son, the door of heaven will be firmly closed. You will be like those five virgins whose lamps were not trimmed and had no oil and who came beating and banging on the door.

But the door was shut. The wedding banquet had already begun. And I hope that when that wedding banquet finally takes place, that you will all be there. you will all be there because you have trusted in Jesus and in his shed blood and his shed blood alone.

Amen. May the Lord bless to us his thoughts and meditations on his word. Shall we pray?