

# Attested By Faith

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Well, we're at Hebrews 11, and we're looking at the second paragraph as it's found in the RSV, which runs from verse 4 to verse 7. And I will read it for you, but trust you will read it with me, at least by following it. Do you know in the Hebrew synagogues, it takes two men to read the Bible? Because one of them goes along and makes sure that he doesn't miss anything. You know, sometimes they have a little pointer so that if he misses so much as a syllable, he's brought back to that. So that one man checks the other one to see that it's written. So you have to check me out now to see that I read it as it's written.

Hebrews 11, verse 4, By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he received approval as righteous. God bearing witness by accepting his faith, he died, but through his faith he is still speaking. By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death, and he was not found because God had taken him. Now before he was taken, he was attested as having pleased God. And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him. By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, took heed and constructed an ark for the saving of his household.

For this he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness which comes by faith. So you have in this passage three characters. You have Abel, Enoch, and Noah. And all of them, we understand, are those who, in terms of chapter 10, verse 39, did not shrink back and be destroyed, but those who have faith and keep their souls. So that's the catalog of the men in Hebrews 11, those who did not shrink back. So somehow faith is not shrinking back, but going forward.

And faith is described and defined for us in verses 1 and 2 and 3 of chapter 11, the assurance of the time. The assurance of faith is not seeing. It's another reality which we are in touch with by faith. The exercise of faith is not the reality, but it is the reality which stimulates the faith.

And it's experiencing that reality that allows you to grow in faith. And then faith is proved by its fruit, by the results of your faith in your life. And so it goes on to explain how that works.

[ 3 : 5 1 ] Now, if you conceive of, in some mystical way, the reality of God, and that's the mystical way, and if you have here and here two men, and this one over here is Cain, and this one over here is Abel, then you see two men coming before God, and each of them making an offering to God. The difference being that Cain's offering is of, well, it's a kind of grain and things that he's grown, and Abel's offering is a blood offering.

And this comes in Genesis chapter 4, so it's one of the great statements, the great pictures, at the very opening of Scripture, by which we are taught to understand the relationship of man to God. And, you know, this being God, this being one way of approaching God, and this being the other way of approaching God.

And the great mystery of Genesis chapter 4 is, why is this way not as acceptable as this way? And you can read that chapter, and you can get angry and frustrated, and you can do all you like, but you are left with the mystery that Cain, his offering was unacceptable to God, and Abel's offering was acceptable.

And we in Canada, and in the modern, sophisticated world, have decided that everybody's offering to God should be equally acceptable, and it should be measured only by the sincerity of the heart of the person that offers it, and if that person is sincere in offering it, then God must surely be required to accept it.

[ 6 : 1 6 ] Even though, as a foundational principle of biblical faith, in the fourth chapter of the Bible, it is established that one man's offering is not acceptable, and another man's offering is acceptable.

And you can look at these two men and try and figure out why. This was a grain farmer, and this was a shepherd, presumably, because he offered a lamb, and he offered that. Now, didn't they both do the right thing? Why shouldn't they both have been equally acceptable? Am I not acceptable in terms of what I choose to offer God? Well, the fact is, you're not. And that's a very hard lesson for us to learn. We don't write the terms of our relationship to God.

Now, if you look at Hebrews chapter 11, it says, By faith, Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain.

[ 7 : 30 ] So that what was happening over here had to do with faith, and what was happening over there didn't have to do with faith.

Now, what was the difference then? The difference was that this faith understood who this God was and related to this God in terms of who he was or who he is, while this man over here offered to God an expression of who he was.

Do you follow me? And that's where we get into trouble with religion generally. We think we should be able to work on the basis of who we are.

And the Bible makes it very clear that, No, you don't work on that basis. You work on the basis of who God is. So that you might characterize it by saying that this man over here was saying, God, whoever you are, look after me.

And that's pretty wild universal religion, isn't it? I mean, everybody does that. God, whoever you are, look after me.

[ 8 : 53 ] Well, this one over here was saying, God, because I know who you are, forgive me. Because knowing who you are, I know that I need to be forgiven.

And this is why this becomes acceptable to God, and this is rejected. And it's why the passage goes on to say through this faith he received approval as righteous.

God conferred on this man the status of being righteous because he had offered the offering for his sin, knowing that he was a sinner before God, and God conferred on him the status of being righteous.

Well, he couldn't do it to this man because this man wouldn't come to terms with him. He could have come to terms with him if he wanted to, but if you read Genesis chapter 4, you will see that he was quite clearly unwilling to, to come to terms with God.

And so God could not do for him in response to his offering because he was offering on the basis of who he was and not on the basis of who God is as known by faith.

[ 10 : 25 ] So what happens, you see, is that by faith we enter into a realm, a reality in which God is a person, a particular and unique and individual person.

Now that's not hard to understand because each of you is a unique and individual person. You are all different from one another.

And it's no good me going up to Alma Ramage and saying, Kathleen Mary, how nice to have you today because that's not who she is.

And she is liable to be offended if I don't know who she is. And God intends that we should know who he is.

And we can know who he is by faith. That's how it happens. That's what Abel knew that Cain didn't know.

[ 11 : 42 ] Now, I could stop here because this goes on and on and I'll tell you how it goes on and on. Do you know what Cain did to Abel? He took him out for a brotherly chat in the back 40, lifted up a rock and hit him over the head, killed and buried him.

Now, you see, that is, in the fourth chapter of Genesis, a precise prophecy of what would happen to Jesus Christ.

That he would come and he would know God and he would tell people he knew God and the people who claimed to know God and wanted to know God on their own terms would say to Jesus Christ, there is no place for you in our world.

And they would nail him to a cross. They would get rid of him in order to preserve what they wanted to believe about themselves.

And then you can carry that one step further and you can see that we as individuals reject Jesus Christ because of what we want to believe about ourselves.

[13:17] So that this pattern that you see here of Abel, by faith, offering to God in the knowledge of who God was, a sacrifice that was acceptable, was made righteous.

That status was conferred on him by the God who accepted the offering that he made. And that is why at the heart of Christian faith, there is only one way by which we can approach God. And that one way is through the acceptable offering. and the acceptable offering is God's self-offering of himself in Jesus Christ.

And that's why the Bible comes and says hard things to us like there is no other name by which we can be saved except the name of Jesus Christ.

that isn't an aberration of the New Testament. That's a fundamental biblical principle. You can only approach God in terms of who he is.

[14:51] You cannot approach him in terms of who you think he ought to be. And that's why that's why when we when we suffer bereavement, you know, when somebody when we when we are face misfortune, when we face illness, when we face bereavement, when we face any of these things, we get mad at God because he isn't who we think he ought to be because if he was who we think he ought to be then he wouldn't behave the way we think he ought not to behave.

And so we reject him categorically and say, God, you can't do that. And God's only answer to that, which is perhaps frustrating to us all, is in this crisis in your life, you have only one question to answer.

Do you trust me or don't you? Are you going to revert to this and make me to be what you want me to be or will you trust me for who I am?

And that's that's really, I think, why it says to you as we've talked this morning from Hebrews 11, though Abel died through his faith, he is still speaking to us.

Well, then you come along to Enoch. Now, I can't do much with Enoch because there's no pictures to draw.

[16:41] but after Abel died and Cain departed, as it says at the end of the chapter, from the presence of God.

Incidentally, he went into the land of Nod. Well, I don't think that means what we think of him. But it's he departed from the presence of God.

and then another child is born to Adam and Eve and his name is Seth. Now, what you have in the story of Cain is the establishment, and this is right there in the chapter, the establishment of an early culture based on arms, fighting, the ability to put people to death.

And that's what Cain did. I mean, you can, if you want to look at it, I'll show you exactly where it says that so you can see how clever he thought he was.

it's a society that depends upon God in one sense, but then it says if anyone slays Cain, vengeance will be taken on him sevenfold.

[18:28] God says, and who came upon him should kill him. So that this society is protected. And then you have down in verse 22, you have forgers of instruments of bronze and iron.

And in verse 23, you have arms production, the beginning of the nuclear arms race. when he says, I have slain a man for wounding me, a young man for striking me.

In other words, by the production of a sword or with instruments of bronze and iron, they were able to do more than an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.

They were able to slay seven in terms of one. So you get that buildup of a culture which says God has to be who we want him to be, as opposed of the culture that says God is who he is and we must serve him.

And so Enoch is the son of, comes in the other line of the families of Adam and Eve, the line of Seth, which were the line, the family that continued to go on with their faith in God.

[19:59] And Enoch had the great distinction of being the father of Methuselah. But Enoch himself, it says, in chapter 11, he was taken up so that he should not see death, and he was not found because God had taken him.

But before he was taken, he was attested as having pleased God. That is, he walked with God. Now, if you go back just to the beginning of Genesis, you will find that Adam, before he rebelled, walked with God.

And so you have in Enoch, a man who walked with God, and who in a sense stands again at the head of our whole Judeo-Christian tradition, teaching in the Bible, in the whole of the Biblical faith, as a symbol of the fact God's God's purpose is not death.

Death doesn't solve any problems. Death is an inevitable response to man's disobedience. But God's purpose is life. life. Now, we consider ourselves enormously emancipated intellectually when we don't go in for that nonsense about life after death.

[ 21 : 41 ] Which, if you turn that around, what it means is we believe that death is the ultimate and final arbiter of power over human life.

that it is the final and victorious tyrant. Now, that's what we believe.

We may think it very brave to say, well, I don't think there's anything after death. But what in fact you're saying is that death is the ultimate tyranny to which we must all learn to submit.

And the Bible doesn't teach that from the beginning to the end. It doesn't teach that because death is not God's purpose. What God's purpose is beyond death we know very little about.

But because we know God, we know that he has a purpose beyond death and that purpose is to be fulfilled in our lives.

[ 22 : 48 ] And so we trust him. like Job who says, though he slay me, yet will I trust him. It's a, and it's one of the kind of, you know, it's a kind of essential point in sort of dividing, or a watershed kind of.

You know, when you're driving north of Lake Superior, there's a sign along the side of the road which says all the water from here flows to the Atlantic and all the water beyond here flows to the Arctic or something.

Well, this is a kind of watershed, a point at which death is not, death.

Well, the Bible says it's the last enemy, but it's the last enemy in a list of enemies that are to be destroyed. Death itself will be destroyed.

And that's why the reformers talk about the crucifixion of Jesus Christ as the death of death. death.

Death comes to an end with the crucifixion of Jesus Christ because death could not hold on to him.

[ 24 : 10 ] And so right at the beginning of Scripture in the person of Enoch you have, Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death and he was not found.

There was no corpus delicti, so to speak. There wasn't a searching for the body because he was taken up by God.

Before he was taken up he was attested as having pleased God or walked with God. And it goes on to explain a little bit more, without faith it is impossible to please him.

And that means if you don't know him you can't please him. And you can't know him apart from faith. Now a lot of people when they say they believe in God are saying they believe in that being or power which they think ought to be like in that, what's the movie, The Force, you know, that's a kind of, as they say, new age concept of God, that he is the force, the force be with you.

Well, that's just a concept of who God is supposed to be according to our thinking. He is the force. But what he's talking about here is not the force.

[ 25 : 50 ] He's talking about the God who is. And he's saying about the God who is that it's impossible to please him unless you know him.

For nobody, for whoever wants to draw near to God must believe that he is and that he rewards those who seek him, that you want to find out who he is.

Now, we spend most of our life hoping that we will find somebody who really knows and understands who we are. And when you get married and things like that, you hope you have now found the person who really knows who you are.

And then 20 years later, you're sitting at a bar saying to the bartender, she doesn't understand me. She doesn't know who I am.

Well, or vice versa. But that, what it's saying here is that we are to know God and whoever draws near to God must believe that he is.

[ 27 : 09 ] That is, that he is his own person, so to speak. He's not the result of our imagination. He's not the force as we conceive of him.

He is who he is. He is the one who has made himself known to us. And that he rewards those who seek him. If you go looking for him, you will find him.

And he won't be who you think he ought to be. He will be his own person. That's what that means.

And that's what Enoch discovered. He discovered who God was. was. And, well, that's what happened.

Enoch, because he made that discovery, he was not. He was not because God had taken him. And it's a demonstration that God's purpose is not that we should be subject to the process of sin and

death, but that we should be subject to the process of life and forgiveness, or forgiveness and life. [ 28 : 35 ] And that's the relationship in which God wants to be with us. But the difficulty is, if you manufacture a God according to your own image, which we tend to do, you will never confess your sins to that God because you will never know that before him you are a sinner that needs to be forgiven.

He will only reflect who you are. And he won't demand that you worship to be because you don't want him to be that way.

So that again then is who Enoch is. That the God who is is different from the God who should be, according to our thinking.

And that's hard for us to come to because we spend a lot of time thinking about God. Well, then you go on from there to Noah.

And with Noah you can at least build an ark. You know, that's you can all tell what that is.

[ 30 : 13 ] That's the door. So there you have the ark. And it says in chapter 11 about this good man, this faithful man.

Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, took heed and constructed an ark for the saving of his household. By this he condemned the world and became an heir of righteousness which comes by faith.

God. So again, Noah knew God. And the evidence that Noah knew God was that he accepted the warning which God gave.

he did. Now, what had happened to Noah then, what he characterizes for us is man living in fear of the future because the future, he was told, was going to involve God's righteous judgment on the earth.

God was going to judge the earth for its tyranny and rebellion. God was going to bring judgment and so man should live in fear.

[ 31 : 34 ] And that's about how we live now. We live in fear of the future. And we try and defend ourselves from the future.

We defend ourselves by blotting it out of our minds. We defend ourselves by all sorts of barriers that we put up to try and protect ourselves from the fear the future has for us.

We don't know what to do about it. We are fearful about the future. And politicians know. And that the way to make people respond is to heighten their sense of fear.

And that if you build a huge atomic or nuclear sort of nuclear capability on this side so that you terrify the Russians.

And the Russians build a huge nuclear capability on the other side so as to terrify us. the hope is that if everybody in the world is totally terrified they will behave themselves.

[ 32 : 51 ] If everybody can live in absolute fear then they will behave themselves in an acceptable way. And a few people refuse to do that and take off and live in rebellion against everything and everybody.

But if you can impose absolute fear then you can take off. Then you can control the world. You can rule the world by faith. But Noah being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen took heed and constructed an ark for the saving of his household.

Noah had some faith for the future and he could see what was unseen in the future and he built the ark on dry land because of he knew what he had been warned by God to do this.

Now the ark is the prototype in the whole of the Bible for the church of Jesus Christ. In fact it sort of built like an ark.

I'm not sure if it would float but maybe we'll find out one of these rainy Sundays. But what in effect it is is a community of faith that trusts in the promises of God concerning the future.

[ 34 : 22 ] It's a very future looking community. faith. A community that refuses to be under the absolute tyranny of fear but a community which lives by faith in the purposes of God which he has made known to us in Jesus Christ.

Now you know that Hebrews 11 says these all lived in faith not having received the promises. the church is a Noah's Ark kind of community that faces the future and recognizes that whatever happens in the future God's purposes will not be frustrated nor his promises forsaken.

They will be fulfilled. And so we as a community live in that faith and that was the faith that was demonstrated way back at the beginning by Noah building an Ark.

Now it says about Noah building his Ark that by this he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness which comes by faith.

You see that same thing is up above when it talks about Enoch that he was counted righteous. Well Noah too was counted righteous.

[ 35 : 55 ] This was the status conferred on him not because in his past if we assume this is going this way not because in his past he was a righteous person but because God's purpose for him in the future is his righteousness.

And so that's what happened to him and he condemned the world. Now he didn't go out and say to the world you are condemned.

He was obedient to God and the world chose not to be obedient to God. And by that condemned themselves. And so you will nobody will be condemned by God ultimately.

they condemn themselves by refusing to be obedient to God's revelation of himself. And this is what the community of faith is all about.

Well let me just take one minute to talk about you. That's you.

[ 37 : 15 ] And you and I are called to live by faith. We can't do it by ourselves because we need a community of people among whom to do it.

And the church is the community of people among whom we live by faith. and you see the difference between this and Cain is a lot of people excuse themselves from believing in God because they really can't understand.

And God is too complicated to be able to understand him. Therefore I don't choose to believe in him.

Well the reality is that if you take Cain's position and suggest that you should know God by the exercise of your own intellect then if you end up in despair trying to do that that's not very surprising.

But if you know God because he has chosen to reveal himself to you and you know him in a personal way then even though you know him a very little bit you still know him.

[ 38 : 37 ] Do you follow me? It's in the sense that if somebody asks me if I know Carrie Ratcliffe of course I know her and I've known her since I came to Vancouver.

Now I don't know all there is to know about her and I'm not going to try and find out Carrie but I have the basis of a relationship with her.

It's not based on the fact that in my mind I know all there is to know about her and I've checked her medical charts and seen her doctor and her psychiatrist and her counselor and all those people and found out all the secrets of her life and read her biography and all those kinds of things.

It's not that. I have a personal relationship with her on the basis of which our relationship can grow. and the relationship we have to God which is expressed by the faith of Abel the faith of Enoch and the faith of Noah is that they knew God in a personal way and they were learning more about him all the time.

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[ 40 : 13 ] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you very much for your time and patience. Let's just bow our heads for a moment. Our God, we think of the wonder of how your scripture reveals to us who we are and how we are called to live in relationship to you and in relationship to our world, to its fears and its threats and its tyrannies, and how we are to live in relationship to Jesus Christ.

So grant that as we think about these things and meditate on them, we may be strengthened in that faith. And we may be given the assurance so that we don't shrink back from the challenges that life confronts us with, but press forward in the faith which you have given us.

We ask this in Christ's name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.