

## ABEL: JUSTIFYING FAITH

In evangelical circles today we are hearing much about faith. It is important. I raise the question, “Is faith enough?” To answer that I will examine the faith of a number of people named in the Bible’s “Hall of Fame,” given in Hebrews 11.

We observe the list is made up of people from the Old Testament. That in itself should be an abiding lesson for us because many of them had no written word. They did not have the Bible. Rather it appears they had direct access to God in an intimate way.

It may be difficult for us to analyze their experiences since we depend on the written word. And rightly so. We believe the Bible is the true record of God’s dealings with the human family as He revealed Himself through the process of history.

We learn that faith moves muscles. Faith is the basic motivating factor in life. The Epistle of James teaches that faith alone is dead. A vibrant faith will move to action.

We learn that the object of faith is vital. Hebrews 11:3 teaches that faith brings understanding which reason cannot attain. “Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.” Thus what we cannot observe or test by experiment we can know by faith.

Hebrews 11:6 elaborates on that truth by laying down another basic factor for the object of faith. “But without faith it is impossible to please him; for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that dili-

gently seek him.”

We rightly affirm that the act of faith arises from the will. Jesus challenged the faith of the man who brought his epileptic son for healing with these words:

“If thou canst believe...” To which the distraught father with tears replied, “Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief,” Mark 9:23-24.

Turning now to the Hall of Fame, Hebrews 11, we study the first one in the list, Abel, the second son of Adam and Eve. In his book, *Seeing the Invisible*, A.B. Simpson, defines Abel’s faith as JUSTIFYING FAITH.

Hebrews 11:4

*4. By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh.*

Genesis 4:1-5

*1. And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain, and said, I have gotten a man from the LORD.*

*2. And she again bare his brother Abel. And Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground.*

*3. And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the LORD.*

*4. And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the LORD had respect unto Abel and to his offering:*

*5. But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect. And Cain was very wroth, and his counte-*

*nance fell.*

We approach Abel's expression of faith from several VANTAGE POINTS to develop in us a more active faith.

ABEL'S OCCUPATION PRESENTS A VALID VANTAGE POINT FROM WHICH TO VIEW HIS FAITH. For him there was no competition. Just reflect on that a moment. There was no big work force. No, there were only two of them as far as the Bible is concerned—it names only two. The whole field was open to him.

Some years ago I learned that there were forty thousand job opportunities here in the United States. I suppose there may be a hundred thousand by now. But then, for Abel there was no limitation. There was no competition.

Let me suppose that Abel wrote his resume as he applied for his job. I know this is presumptuous, but let's think about it just a little. I am writing here what I think Abel could have written for his resume for the job.

"My name is Abel. I am the second son of Adam Barelohim. I have one older brother whose name is Cain, first born. I have other siblings, which I will not name. I cannot list any previous jobs which I have held, so I am open for any assignment which seems appropriate to my personality. I have a meditative nature. I like the outdoors and find personal pleasure in being alone in the field. I, therefore, will gladly accept the position of shepherd. Sheep are my kind of animals. They provide both food and clothing. Besides, they are docile, corresponding well to my nature."

Apparently Abel got the job and became a successful shepherd. No doubt his flock was the best for he had no competition. And besides, the animals were of the first line and first order. So he had a well-developed flock. That gave him time for reflection.

Adam and Eve were driven from the Garden before either of the sons was born, so Abel had no experience in the Garden. Might the parents have told the boys of the wonderful joys of the Garden and the terrible sorrow of being deceived and driven out? I feel sure it was so strong in their minds that they must have spoken about it over and over. They knew of the animal skin clothing God had made to cover their nakedness. They may have been not far from the Seraph with the flaming sword guarding the entrance to the Garden. That Eve and Adam broke covenant with God must have troubled Abel during his hours of meditation. He must have known something about this, and pondered it in his shepherding experiences.

So in the course of time, the brothers, Cain and Abel, brought offerings to the Lord.

ABEL'S OFFERING FURNISHES A SIGNIFICANT VANTAGE POINT FROM WHICH TO VIEW HIS FAITH. The text in Hebrews 11 says he brought "a more excellent sacrifice," a better sacrifice. There must have been some indication of what was acceptable to God by those coats of skin that were provided for Adam and Eve before they were driven out of the Garden.

Abel offered the firstling of the flock and the fat. Later it was specified in the Law of Moses that the fat was God's choice sacrifice. Abel may well have been a prophet doing this first. Abel's offering also anticipated atonement by blood, life for life. He offered a lamb, the choicest lamb. Worship by sacrifice from the beginning was clearly written here. A. B. Simpson in his book, *Seeing The Invisible*, pp. 5, 6, makes a striking comment, which follows.

But Cain's whole offering was a direct denial of all that God had said about the curse upon the ground and all its fruits, of the fact of sin and the need of an atoning Saviour.

Abel's sacrifice was a simple and humble acknowledgment of all this, and a frank acceptance of God's way of pardon and acceptance. We see Abel's faith in the acknowledgment of sin manifested in his sacrifice. The first act of faith is to believe what God says about sin. We do not need to try to work up a certain feeling about our sins. It is enough to believe that we are sinners because God says it. Abel did. He took the sinner's place and instantly he found the sinner's Saviour.

The effectiveness of the sacrifice depends on the quality. To do as Abel did shows he acknowledged his need for atonement.

Again Simpson illustrates Abel's sacrifice by referring to an experience of the emperor of France years ago.

The emperor of France was once leading a foreign king through the prisons of Toulon. As a special act of courtesy, he said, 'You can set free any prisoner you please.' He spoke to several, but found no one that seemed to deserve it. All were innocent, much abused men. At last he found a sinner, a poor fellow who could only say, 'Oh, sire, I am an unworthy man, and am only thankful my punishment is not worse.' At once he set him free, saying, 'you, are the only man I can find that has anything to be forgiven. You are pardoned by the emperor's command.' So the self-righteous miss the great salvation, and the lost are the saved. Thus let us take the place of guilt, and of pardon, through faith in His Word and His blood. He condemns to save. 'God has bound all men over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all' (Romans 11:32).

Abel's offering brought him into favor with God!

ABEL'S APPROVAL ARRIVES AT THE REWARDING VANTAGE POINT FROM WHICH TO VIEW HIS FAITH. The text says he was righteous. We can see from Genesis that his offering was acceptable to God. Now let me suggest that righteousness may have more to do with attitude than it does with action.

Take for example the parable in Luke 18:9-14. Jesus spoke

about a Pharisee and a publican who went up into the temple to pray. The Pharisee prayed with himself, telling God how good a man he was, how carefully he obeyed the law, how he fasted twice a week and all of that. The publican stood over by himself and didn't even as much as look up to heaven but smote himself on the breast and said, "God be merciful to me a sinner." And Jesus said the publican went down to his house justified rather than the Pharisee.

Well, you may list all your good deeds to no avail. You see, the attitude the publican had brought him justification. The attitude the Pharisee had did not. We are also told that God testified to Abel by accepting his offering. There was some way it became apparent to both Cain and Abel that Abel's sacrifice was acceptable to God. Cain saw it. Abel saw it. It made Cain angry.

As then so now. The righteous condemns the unrighteous. Righteous acts grow out of righteous attitudes. David the Psalmist knew what God accepts. He wrote in Psalms 51:17, "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise." God's approval is our highest aim.

By studying Abel we learn the answer to the question, "Is faith enough?" Abel's faith was a justifying faith. We saw his occupation: a shepherd, where he could meditate on God's goodness. We saw his offering: a choice lamb, life for life. We saw his approval: God testified by accepting him. To meet God's approval we must come as He prescribed. Is faith enough? No, our faith must move us to action.

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