

The Offering of Faith

By Faith: Pt.4

You might be wondering about my outfit today. This is a 1940's era jersey from the Kansas City Monarchs of the Negro Leagues. Specifically it is the jersey of Buck O'Neil who is being inducted today into the baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown. He was a perennial all-star in Kansas City for over 20 years, but American racism kept him from ever playing in the Major Leagues. He was past his prime by the time that Jackie Robinson broke the color barrier, but Buck *did* become the first black coach in the Majors in 1962 with the Cubs. I fell in love with him in the 90's as a talking head in Ken Burns mammoth PBS baseball documentary; Buck's love for the game was so contagious. So I want to join in honoring this great man today.

And it's a good lead-in to the chapter of the Bible that we are exploring all summer long – Hebrews Chapter 11 – it's affectionately known as the “Hall of *Faith*.” The chapter itself is all about the concept of Christian faith and in particular gives us a series of case studies that tell us about how various men and women learned to live lives of faith. And I'm going to read down to verse 4, because verse 4 tells us about Abel, and he is the particular case study to which we look today.

Hebrews 11:1-4, “*Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. 2 This is what the ancients were commended for. 3 By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible. 4 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. And by faith he still speaks, even though he is dead.*”

How many would like for your life to still be speaking long after you're dead? That's a powerful life. How can you live a life of power? How can you live a life of such stability and presence, a life of such poise and greatness, such fearlessness that you can face anything? What's interesting about this chapter is it tells us that very thing. It tells us how to live the life of faith – which is the source of a life of power

And what's wonderful about these case studies, which we've begun looking at this summer, is it doesn't just show us people who through faith have learned just to face *life*. Many of us are wondering how we're going to face Monday, and some of us want to know how we can face our whole lives, but these men and women didn't just know how to face life; these men and women were enabled, they got enough power to go *contra mundum*, against the whole world. Not just to face their *lives*, not just to face Monday, but if necessary to spit in the eye of the world.

Last week, we looked at Noah – talk about *contra mundum*. Everybody else is laughing at him. Here he is building an ocean liner in the middle of Kansas. Everybody thinks he’s ridiculous. He knows he’s right, and he proves that he’s right, and he proves the whole world wrong. See, that’s power. Now how do you get it?

The secret to *all* of these people - they’re called “the ancients” because these are all very ancient case studies - but the secret to all of these people is in **v. 2** – “*This is what the ancients were commended for.*” - and it’s not that easy to see because we have a bit of a translation problem. It’s hard to find an English word that really gets across what is said. The secret of all these ancients, the thing that enabled them to go against the world, was they were “commended”. They were “commended by God”.

Now the trouble with the word “commended” is it’s just too weak. In English, the word commended means I got a certificate or a thank you note maybe. Even if you look at the Greek word there - *martyrein* – it’s where we get our “martyr”. Which in the English language has the meaning of to suffer for a cause - sometimes *needlessly* for a cause.

But if you want to understand what the word means you have to realize that the original word has a legal context. It says “God bore witness.” God gave *testimony* to

them that He was pleased with them. And the idea is a legal one. The setting, the image, the metaphor, is a legal one. Imagine yourself in court and you’re the defendant, and you’re struggling to make your case. All of a sudden, someone walks in - an authoritative witness. Maybe a forensic expert or maybe a missing eyewitness.

That witness sits down and gives a testimony that *completely* destroys the case of the prosecution. Maybe this expert says, “I was there and I saw it.” What happens? It *establishes* your case beyond a shadow of a doubt. The case is dismissed. Joy and relief wash over you because you’ve received this: An authoritative witness who proves that you’re approved. An authoritative witness who puts your case beyond a shadow of a doubt. That’s what the word means. Now there’s nothing we want more than that, and there are many, not just legal, but emotional and personal versions of that.

I went to see a movie last Sunday night, *Where the Crawdads Sing* – the audience was my wife and daughter, every women’s book club in SW Austin, and *me*. But it’s the story – great story by the way – of a girl named Kya who who is abandoned by her family in the Carolina swamps and from about the age of ten learns to live on her own. Anyway, that movie reminded me of this commending, authoritative witness, in a couple of ways.

The first is literally legal, because the overarching narrative is her trial for a murder that took place in the marsh and there's zero evidence tying her to it except that everyone in the town thinks she's some sort of monster just because she's isolated and different. So of course, "The Marsh Girl" *must* have done it. And there's a kind old attorney who believes in her when no one else does and takes her case.

But then on a personal level, there's one boy from town, Tate, who comes out and befriends her and over time falls in love with her and tells her how beautiful and great and talented she is. And at first of course, she struggles to believe him. "Are you for real?"

Now what is that? That's a *witness*, an authoritative witness. "I've examined you. I know the facts, and you're wonderful." It proves that you're approved. These men and women, the ancients, this was their secret. They didn't just have somebody who had a crush on them - though that's *so* wonderful - and they didn't just have somebody who comes in to a particular court case and wins their acquittal.

What we're told here is they had reality itself, the God who's the author of all authority, permanently change their self-understanding by giving them a testimony that He was completely and absolutely pleased with them. He *accepted* them. He *approved* them. He *endorsed* them. And when you know that *that* One - the only eyes that matter, the only Witness who matters -

absolutely *accepts* you, what happens? You can take on anything. Cry havoc and let slip the dogs of war! It doesn't matter. "I can face anything. Nothing fazes me."

That's what they had. This is what the ancients had. They were *commended*. That's how you get the life of power. That's what this whole chapter is about. Now how do *you* get that? How do you get the certainty that God sees you as *completely* acceptable, righteous, He approves you utterly? He says, "You're wonderful. I will never leave you. I love you." Now how do you get that?

The case study of Able shows us the way. We were told back in Genesis 4, that Abel and Cain, two brothers, both came with an offering to God. Abel was a keeper of flocks, and he brought an animal sacrifice. Cain was a tiller of the soil, and he brought a grain sacrifice. And it says that God showed favor to Abel and his sacrifice, but for Cain and his sacrifice, God did *not* show favor.

So at the time of this incident, Abel received the witness. He got the commendation from God himself. He was shown that God accepted him as absolutely righteous, and as a result, he became one of these great hearts who can face the world, can face anything. Now how did that happen? By looking at this case, we'll have some understanding about how we also can know this same thing.

Now, the best way to put this is, of all the case studies in Hebrews 11, this is the only one that's given to us by way of contrast. Abel is given to us by way of contrast with Cain. So let me just look for a moment at two issues. The best way to understand the whole case of Cain and Abel is to ask...How were Cain and Abel *alike* and how were they *not* alike? Then we'll conclude by asking...Which are *you*? Are you Cain or Abel?

First, How are they alike? For just one second, let me point out they are very alike, and for a moment, just think about what the *fact* that they're alike means. The Bible is continually giving us examples of couplings, putting people side-by-side, giving us examples of two individuals who *seem* to be completely alike on the outside, but inside are polar opposites. On the outside, they look identical. On the inside, they're entirely different.

Here you have Cain and Abel. Same family. Same parents. Same upbringing. In fact, they're both going to worship God by bringing offerings – mom and dad raised them to go to church. But totally different. Later you have Isaac and Ishmael: Same father. Totally different. You have Jacob and Esau. Twins! Same gene pool. Totally different. You have the 10 foolish bridesmaids and the 10 wise bridesmaids. Same friends. Same event. Probably same dresses. Totally different.

The reason that we're shown these people over and over again is that the Bible teaches us there's a foundational difference in the human race, and it's the big one. There's one major difference, there's one *foundational* difference, and the reason we're given all these pairs of similar but totally *dissimilar* people is because the Bible wants us to see the foundational difference between people is not a racial one, it's not an economic one, it's not a political one, because the dividing line goes right down the *middle* of races, right down the middle of families. It goes right down the middle of wombs!

And it goes right down the middle of the church. Yes, Cain and Abel, two worshipers, both coming with their offerings. You say, "Well, they're both worshipers. That's the important thing." One is rejected; one is accepted, and one persecutes the other. No, you see, friends, what we're being told here is everybody in the world today is either Cain or Abel. Everybody in this room is Cain or Abel.

There are two fundamentally different ways to approach God. There are two fundamentally different ways to approach *life*. There are two fundamentally different ways to run and operate your heart, and once a choice is made at this point, it affects *everything* - psychologically, sociologically, your eternal destiny - everything.

Here is how they're the same though. They're the same because they both were taught, and they both know intuitively, you can't go to God just as you are; you have to go in with an offering. You can't just go into God. They knew that. There's no such thing as a come-as-you-are party with God. They knew they couldn't just go in as they were. They had to bring an offering and point to it and say, "Accept me because of *this*."

Now why? There are many people who say, "Well, I know why. Because those were primitive people. In primitive times, we believed you had to *appease* the angry, cranky gods with offerings of livestock and grain, but we're enlightened now." No. No, the reason they did this is because of human nature. I submit to you we all *still* fundamentally know this same thing.

In all of our relationships, in our relationship with God, in our relationship with each other, in our relationship with *ourselves*, we all know we can't just go in. We all know that *as we are*, it won't work. If we want to be approved, we have to control what people see, and that is what an offering is. Let me give you an example. Mid-term elections are coming up – it seems like we're *always* in election season now. But what you have is the candidates coming to us, the electorate, and they're saying, "Approve me. Accept me."

But they sure don't come in just as they are. They do *not* let you see who they really are. They control *completely* what we see of them, and they come to us with offerings. They say, "Look at my record. Look at my credentials. Look at my wise plan. Look at my shiny commercials! Please approve me on the basis of my offering." And offerings always do two things. They create an image of **strength** and they hide your **flaws**.

Candidates know that you're not going to accept them if you know everything about them. If you know what they're really like, if you know how they really talk, if you know how they treat their children, if you know their entire voting record, if you know everything...So what do they do? They *control* what you see. They don't just come as they are. They don't just go in. They polish the apple. They bring offerings. "Approve me because of this."

You say, "Well, yes, that's funny how that works. But you know, politicians. Of course they're that that way." No friends, we're *all* like that. That's how we get into any circle. That's how we get into any school. It's how we date. It's how we get into any social circle. It's how we get into any relationship.

I mentioned last week that I am working on my resume and trying to get some adjunct teaching gigs – I feel like I’m getting to a place in life where God would have me begin to teach the next generation of ministers. But of course, I don’t have much academic experience and so as I’m starting to contact schools and seminaries and put myself out there, I feel insecure about that.

I even noticed a couple weeks ago I was tweeting something and I thought, “What if an institution looks at my social media feed?” I wasn’t tweeting anything bad! – just silly nonsense. But I thought, “Maybe I should try to appear more scholarly on Twitter.” What is that? It’s a mask. I was considering editing my true self. Because my true self is filled with vast eclectic knowledge *and* silly nonsense!

Why is it you’re ready to go out on a date, and you dress in the outfit you’ve picked out just for the occasion...and you suddenly get frantic. Why? Because when you look in the mirror, this outfit shows the world what you really look like. We’re all too this or too that, or this part of our body...Our clothes are ways of controlling what people see. As soon as we say, “Oh my gosh! It makes me look as heavy as I am, as skinny as I am, as bad as I am,” we go bananas. When we go into any social situation, the thing that most petrifies us is the idea that people will completely see who we are. We have to control what people see.

Jean-Paul Sartre, in his book *Being and Nothingness*, has a chapter called “The Look.” And in it, he talks about the devastating power of being caught in another human gaze. He uses the illustration of a keyhole “Let’s imagine that moved by jealousy, curiosity, or vice I have just glued my ear to the door and looked through the keyhole.” Suddenly you have a power over whoever it is you are watching. You have the upper hand. They are an object to be observed and judged. “But all of a sudden I hear footsteps in the hall. Someone is looking at me! What does this mean?...shame...shame of *self*; it is recognition of the fact that I am indeed that object which the Other is looking at and judging. I can be ashamed only as my freedom escapes me in order to become a *given* object.” (350)

You’re caught! You’re not in control of your image. You’re no longer a free-will agent, you’re just an object – which is of course what you were making whatever was through the keyhole – but it’s devastating. You’re destroyed. Why? Because fundamentally, we know we’re not acceptable. And we’re terrified for anyone else to find out. So we never just go in. We always bring offerings. We always have to hide and cover up who we are.

Now why is that? The Bible gives a perfectly profound - and the *only* profound enough - answer. In the last few years, people have said, “Well, if you feel that way, it’s bad parenting. The reason you always have to hide, the reason you can’t just be who you are, the reason you feel very often you have to kind of keep people out and you have to control what they see is because you didn’t get enough love as you were growing up.” I think people are beginning to realize now that whereas bad parenting can *aggravate* that condition, it doesn’t *cause* the condition.

The Bible tells us Adam and Eve – Cain and Abel’s parents - before they disobeyed God, were “naked and unashamed.” What does that mean? They just went in. Not only to God but to each other. Naked and unashamed meant they had *nothing* to hide. They had no need for an offering. They had no need to control what people saw. Their hearts were completely pure.

But the *minute* they disobeyed, they jumped into the bushes. They hit the dirt. They put fig leaves on to cover themselves. Not just to cover themselves from God’s eyes but from the eyes of the other. Do you know why? The Bible says the human heart has become self-centered, and yet we can’t extinguish the original knowledge that we were primarily built to serve God and other people, and we cannot let God or other people see how selfish we actually are.

And as a result, there’s a sense of shame. There’s a sense of guilt. We *know* we can’t just go in. We know we can’t just be acceptable as we are. We *have* to have an offering. We have to desperately point and say, “Look at this! Look at this! Look at this trophy! Look at this title! Look at this bank account! Don’t you see I’m acceptable?” All fig leaves. We have to hide. We have to cover. We have to put up an image. We *all* do it. There’s a primal need because there’s a painful, indelible sense that we’re not right, that there’s something wrong with us.

“Well,” somebody says, “I don’t believe that. I’m a modern person. I create my *own* reality. I set my own standards. I don’t care about what anybody else thinks of me.” It’s not true. It’s not true. You say, “I don’t believe in sin. I don’t believe in judgment. I don’t believe in eternity.” And yet there’s a voice inside of you. There’s still a sense of condemnation, and you can’t put it out. You call it “complexes”. You call it stress. You call it “imposter syndrome.” You call it bad parenting, but it’s there.

What are you going to do about it? Do you know where it’s coming from? **Hebrews 4:13** says “***Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.***” The Bible says deep down we *know* that, and we have to keep those eyes out. Can’t fall under “the look.” Sartre doesn’t know *why* we have to, but he knows it’s the fact. Don’t you see?

Why do some of you work so hard? It's your offering. It's your way of saying to yourself, to other people, or to God, "Look! Please, don't you see I'm acceptable?" It's the only way you can feel acceptable, if you're just killing yourself with work. Why is it some of you have to help *everybody*? You can never say no to anybody. You can never disappoint anybody. You're always being taken advantage of. Why? It's your offering. It's your covering up that sense of nakedness. It's your way of saying, "It's the only way I can feel acceptable."

Why are some of you the opposite of that? Why are some of you under-committed, never trusting anybody, tough on the outside, never letting anybody get close, never letting anybody see inside? Because you only feel acceptable when no one knows you! And on it goes. Why are some of you just devastated when you gain a pound? Why are some of you devastated if you're not dating?

These are fig leaves. These are offerings. These are desperate ways of saying, "Don't you see? I really am acceptable." These are ways of trying to commend *yourself*. These are ways of making a case; "I deserve to live. I'm okay." But underneath you know your offerings are not perfect. So there's always that sense of condemnation. Therefore, Cain and Abel both did what we all do. It's not just that Cain is like Abel, but Cain and Abel are like us. We're all the same. We don't just go in to God. We need an offering.

But secondly, How are they unlike? Here's how Cain is unlike Abel. Here's how Abel is unlike Cain. Abel offered a *better* sacrifice. The Lord had regard for Abel and his sacrifice, but for Cain and his sacrifice, the Lord had no regard. Well, a lot of people think this is very, very unfair. It seemed pretty obvious why Abel and Cain brought the sacrifices they did. Abel was a shepherd; Cain was a farmer. Abel brought some of the sheep of the flock; Cain brought some of the produce of the ground.

Therefore, most people think when they went into God, what they were saying is, "Accept me because I work hard. Accept me because I'm a productive member of the human race. Accept me. Look at these things I'm doing. Please accept me." That's not at all true, because if they were both coming like that, then why did God accept one and reject the other? People say, "Well, maybe God is just arbitrary." No. It says here "*by faith*" Abel offered his sacrifice.

Now faith, as we're beginning to see, is always a positive response to God's Word. You have to remember Abel and Cain knew what *we* know from Genesis 3. God had spoken to Adam and Eve when they had disobeyed and when they had fallen into this sense of shame. And when they developed this terrible sense of guilt and shame we all deal with, this sense of inadequacy, this sense of incompleteness, this voice we can't put out no matter how much we try to justify it away, God said something to them. And Abel's sacrifice was done in *response* to that word of God, and Cain's was not.

Abel responded in faith. His sacrifice was a *living out* of the thing God said to Adam and Eve, and Cain's wasn't. Well, what did God say? First of all, he said to Adam and Eve, "Listen. Don't try to cover yourself. You'll never do it. Let *me* do it." That's the first thing. When God saw Adam and Eve pitifully trying to cover up their nakedness - no longer could they just go in as they were, now they had to spin and control what people saw.

God saw how pitiful were their efforts to cover up their nakedness. And God comes to them and He says, "You'll never do it. Your offerings will never be good enough. You'll always know the awful truth. If *you* try to deal with this situation yourself you will *utterly* fail." And so God makes them clothes as a way of telling them, "You'll never deal with this yourself. *Your* offerings will never work. *Your* coverings will never work. *I* have to cover you."

Now this is one of the most wonderful things the Bible says, and there are some tremendous prophecies about it. It says in **Isaiah 61:10**, when the prophet Isaiah comes to understand this tremendous point, "*I delight greatly in the Lord; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of his righteousness...*" There are many places where the Bible talks about that, and it's the first thing God said to Adam and Eve. "Your offerings won't do it. Your covering won't do it."

But then, the second thing, of course, is in answer to the question, "Well, how will God do this?" He looks at Adam and Eve and He says, "I'm going to send somebody, a descendant of the woman, and he will be wounded in a terrible battle. He will suffer. He will bleed. *He* will be the offering. *He* will do it, and it will be the offering that brings you home. He will restore. He will save, but he will be wounded."

And see, when Abel comes with the offering, it's a bloody offering, and it's not just because he happens to be a keeper of animals, but instead he comes and he says, "Lord God, I don't know what this is going to mean. I don't know how you're going to do it. I don't know how this is going to work, but all I know is my only hope is that someday you will send one who is wounded. Here's the wounded one. I trust in this and only in this. I don't come pointing to my works."

Which means that's what Cain *was* doing. Cain comes in and he says, "Look at the size of these carrots. Look what I do. Look at my accomplishment. Look at my work. Look at what a good person I am. Look at how hard I work. You'd better favor me. It's only fair." And Abel comes in and says, "God, I stand unworthy before your merciful glory."

David understood this when he prayed in **Psalms 51:16-17**, “*You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise.*” It must mean Abel was humble and Cain was proud.

See, it’s like the story of the the Pharisee in Luke 18, standing in church next to a tax collector and praying, “Lord I thank you that I am not like these sinners.” Meanwhile the tax collector praying, “God have mercy on me, a sinner.” It says only one went home justified that day – in right standing with God - and it was the humble sinner, not the proud goody-goody.

Abel comes in, and he’s talking about whom? Jesus! He offers a better sacrifice. In **Ephesians 5:2**, it says “*Walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a **fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.***” What does this mean? Look at the passion of Jesus Christ. Look at his trial. What was happening at the trial? Look at the terrible verdict. Look at him being stripped. Look at him on the cross. Look at people *mocking* him.

See, all of us know we’re guilty and we desperately want a verdict of not guilty. We want people to be approving of us. Here’s the One who was guiltless. He gets all of our greatest nightmares; the trial, the verdict, the rejection. He utterly lost control of his life.

Becoming the ultimate object as his freedom escaped him. Stripped naked. “He became sin who knew no sin that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” This is exactly what happens. Abel comes in and says, “God, be merciful to me a sinner,” and points to this sacrifice, and as a result he’s accepted.

Now, lastly, How do you know who you are? Are you Cain or are you Abel? There are two ways to tell if you’re Abel or Cain. There are just two things Abel had that Cain did not. First, Abel was commended. He *knew* he pleased God. And secondly, Abel was killed.

Now let me just show you how these are the two tests for you to tell today whether you’re Cain or Abel. First of all, Abel was commended. Here is the original story from **Genesis 4:4-5**, “*The Lord looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. **So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast.***”

Now what this is telling is no matter how religious they are, Cains - no matter how much they worship, no matter how good they try to live, no matter how much money they give to the church or to the poor - Cains never feel the commendation of God. They’re restless. They’re always angry. Because they always sense they displease God no matter how hard they try - and they’re right. And they’re very unhappy about it.

Abels: If you come as a humble sinner and you plead the blood of Jesus Christ, if you come in not pointing to anything you have done but to Jesus Christ and him crucified - that's what a Christian is. An Abel! A gospel-believing Christian, you go in to God and you *admit* who you are. You don't immediately point away from it. You admit who you are. In a sense, you go in *as* you are, empty hands. But then you point, and you say...and there's so many of the old hymns that say it; *My Hope is in the Lord*:

No merit of my own
his anger to suppress.
My only hope is found
in Jesus' righteousness.

Or *Nothing Either Great or Small*:

Cast your deadly "doing" down
Down at Jesus' feet;
Stand in him, in him alone,
Gloriously complete.

So Abel comes in and he points, and he knows. And here's the reason you know: A Cain is somebody who believes, "I'm trying my best. I'm trying my best," but you always know your sacrifice isn't perfect. You *know* your sacrifice isn't perfect, so there's always doubt.

But an Abel is somebody who comes in to God and says, "My record was not perfect this week. My heart and my faith are not perfect this week, but my *offering* is perfect. My wounded Jesus! My Savior is perfect!" And therefore, you know your offering is perfect. You're accepted.

Cains always hate the idea of being born again, needing the blood of Christ. What do Cains say? Cains say, "Oh, the important thing is you're good. The important thing is you live a good life. All this blood sacrifice, all this being born again, it's just a cop out." You're just showing yourself to be Cain.

Do you know what the big difference is between Cains and Abels? It's *not* your sins. Cains admit they sin. Abels admit they sin. They both repent of their sins. The difference is that Abels repent of their righteousness...and Cains don't. What's keeping you, Cain, from God is not your sins. You admit you're a sinner. It's your damnable good works. It's your offerings. It's the things you point to and you won't see they are just inadequate. Christians *and* non-Christians, Christians and religious people both repent of their sin, but only Christians repent of their righteousness. "No merit of my own." That's the difference.

But the last difference is Cains hate Abels, but Abels never hate Cains. That's how you can tell who you are. See, Cain hated Abel and he killed him. He's dead! Why? Because Cains feel Abels are arrogant. Cains are trying so hard, and they have that sense of nakedness and of unrighteousness, and they're trying so hard to cover it over with their perfect offerings, and their offerings aren't perfect, so they're always restless. They're always mad at God. They always feel they're getting a raw deal. They always feel like God isn't really being fair...always! They don't see themselves as terrible sinners; therefore, when you see an Abel who's *sure* God loves him, Cains hate that.

They think, "You must be arrogant. You must think you're perfect." But, of course, Cains are reading Abels through their own grid – they are projecting. But Abels don't hate Cains, because Abels know they're saved by grace *alone* and there's no real difference between Cains and Abels, and they just yearn for Cains to see the truth. You see, Cains can't handle people who differ with them. It threatens them, because they feel like if you're going to make it with God, you have to be good and you have to be accurate.

But Abels are so different. Abels aren't standing on their own dignity. They're not always worried about what they look like anymore. Abels are people who no longer worry. Abels no longer stand on their own dignity. Abels no longer worry about what they look like. Abels just go in. When you're with an Abel, even though you differ with them, even though you disagree with them – significantly disagree with them even - they don't see themselves as superior to you, because that's not how they get their self-understanding. They don't say, "Ah, I'm a better person in my offerings." No, they say, "There's no difference between you and me."

Therefore, Abels make you feel *you* can be great because *they're* great only by grace. Abels are completely different in the way they treat people who differ with them religiously...but Cains hate Abels. Abels don't hate Cains. Which are you? Christian friends, listen. Be careful you don't act like Cain. You may say, "Oh, I believe all this." I know, but look. You're cast down now. Do you know why? Do you know why you get fear-driven? Because you forget the things you're losing are not your offerings.

Are you upset because of something you're losing, something is happening to you? *Look* at those things and say, "This is not my hiding place. My life is hid *with Christ*. This is not my offering, *Christ* is my offering. I don't *need* this. I don't *have* to have this to look myself in the mirror. I will not be enslaved by this," and you will become a wonderful, loving, transparent person to the degree you do that.

Is there anybody here who has come with your own offering? If you don't let Jesus Christ be your offering, someday, as Kierkegaard said, it'll be midnight, Cinderella, and the mask will have to come off. The golden carriages we've constructed will be shown for the pumpkins that they are. You can't hide forever. Let Jesus be your covering. Let Jesus be your righteousness. One more hymn: (*Jehovah Our Righteousness*)

Let others in the gaudy dress
Of fancied merit shine;
The Lord shall be my righteousness
The Lord forever mine.

Let's pray...