

Bethel Christian Church  
*In God Alone*

**Study 3**

**Abel: God Still Speaks about Trust**

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**Abel: Tragic figure but the prophet of God through whom God still speaks.**

The lie of the Evil One had been embraced. Just as God had promised, death had come. Now the heinous rejection of joyful freedom with God was about to bring terror into the first family.

At the birth of Cain Eve cried, "I have got the Lord's man." Here was the Lord's promise that relief from their sin was 'in the pipeline' and it was the Lord's doing. No one except the 'Lord's Man' could untangle the web of deceit so newly woven yet so deeply and hopelessly tangled. It is possible to hear, in Eve's cry, the dependency we all have upon God's grace. It seems from what unfolds in her family that Abel heard and embraced his mother's testimony but Cain did not.

So Abel was born and the first community within creation was up and operating. What nobody foresaw (sin seeks always to cover the truth), was that from within this very first community one would rise up and seek to destroy any presence or manifestation of the image of God. Living in death meant seeking to eradicate all reminders of God's true life and love (Romans 1:18ff). Both lads grew and chose their directions in life's tasks, their way of relating and faith as trust and joy in their God.

*Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a worker of the ground.*

Genesis 4:1-3

Everything was normal, nothing inappropriate here. Two men doing what God had commanded and what their parents had shown them: Filling the earth and ruling over it involved animal husbandry and dirt farming. Flesh and grain were both part of Israel's later prescribed offerings. This was part of their worship, given to them by God. (We note that there is no record of God prescribing their offerings. Presumably they understood that this was part of their relationship with him.) But it was only part, only the shell. True worship did not reside in offering external offerings to God. Their hearts were to honour God and be thankful. An essential element of honouring God was relating truly as sons and brothers. It seems that Abel flowed freely into the goodness of wholesome worship. But terrible things were brewing in Cain's heart.

Unbeknown at his birth Abel was to be the first martyr but also the first prophet. What is a prophet? One who has been called into the counsel of God and speaks God's testimony to the world. Abel's righteous living could only ever have been the product of being known and loved intimately by God. As a simple sheep farmer Abel lived in the embrace of God and his life was prophetic towards his brother. This is how brothers should be. This is how family should be; each member bearing the testimony of God's goodness to the other. However, where guilt is left un-graced by love the testimony of God's love is received as skewed and ugly.

## **Worship Matters**

The murder of Abel was the climax of faulty worship. This is the sad story of two kinds of worship, one an issue of the heart, the other an external, contractual, empty thing. One the worship of a soft heart open to the instruction of the Father: The other a hard self righteous casualness about God. But worship was never given as an external action. It could not be separated from the real desire of the heart. Worship was the gift of 'Garden' communion: Of walking face to face and heart to heart with God in the wonder of his creation. At its essence was simple trust. *Without trust we cannot please God.* This is the same as saying without a relationship with God which issues into a joyful trust and enjoyment of God then the activity of worship says one thing while the heart declares another.

*And Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering, Genesis but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his face fell (Genesis 4:3-5)*

Why did God have regard for Abel's worship and not Cains? Reasons must be drawn from the following, either:

- Abel was a better person than Cain
- Abel had better information about how to worship
- God had favourites
- God was fussy

Or

- Cain knew what to do and refused

The flesh, expressed in contractual religion, will gravitate to one of the first four alternatives. God makes the truth clear in the following Scripture. Abel was a man of faith but Cain was not.

*1Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. 2For by it the people of old received their commendation. 3By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.*

*4By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts. And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks (Hebrews 11:3-5).*

But what was this faith of Abel which God commends? We know that all faith comes gift-wise through hearing the word of God (Romans 10:17). Experientially that means that as God shows a person the goodness and wonder of his love for them in his grace their heart opens into a free and rich communion of trust and enjoyment. This is what God has planned and so he rejoices and approves of that communion showering more and more revelations of his love into the mutual relationship. Hence he is known as the fountain of life.

So when God found Abel's sacrifice more acceptable than Cain's it was not because he was partial to Abel or because Abel had inside information from a worship manual

not given to Cain. God had surrounded Cain with the same revelation of his goodness and grace as that given to Abel.

God commended Abel for walking with him in simple delight. Abel had operated under the grace of God like a true son. No brownie points for Abel, he was simply being holy like God had gifted him to be.

- When he brought his gifts to God it was with a full heart of thanks.
- His offerings came out of being overwhelmed in a relationship of love.
- His attention was wholly upon God, his Father/Creator/King and Friend.
- Abel comes with the delight and teachability of a good conscience.

Cain's problem on the other hand was that of rebellion against all that God had clearly shown them both.

### **Abel the prophet**

So Abel becomes the first Elder who bears to us the testimony of God as to what truly pleases him. Cain, on the other hand, becomes the testimony of the God as to what an evil conscience and an angry spirit does to a human being.

But God declares to us through Abel that simple trust and future hope in the goodness of God's promises reflects the kind of communion with him which issues into true worship.

*<sup>6</sup>And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.*

Abel must have heard about God's grace promised to his parents. The hope that one day God would crush the serpents head. Abel had no visible sign of this but trusted God to do it. His worship then was his heart saying "Because you promised it, it is as good as done. I know you to be faithful and true. I honour you and bless your name. Take me with you to your solution. In that sense Abel received ahead of time the goodness of God's 'solution' to sin. Abel's worship was a throwing of himself onto the mercy of God.

### **So what does this mean for us?**

How does Abel speak to us today?

He stands as the testimony of God to all humanity. Through Abel affirms the way of trust for us all. We are to respond simply and openly to God's revelation of his goodness and grace. This opens the heart to a good conscience. The result is hearty worship of God and honouring the community of his love into which he has placed us.

Do we hope alone in Christ, his grace and present reign which will issue us to the Father?

Do we see ourselves by faith joined to Him as he said we are?

Do we say each day "Lord bring me further today, closer to the goal you have promised and secured for me."

The alternative is to live in Cain's anger, fussing and fuming: Bringing our religious strivings which never deliver us into the joy of Christ, into trusting worship.