

“Confidence at All Costs”

Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. (2 Timothy 1:2)

Introduction: A Brutal Murder

There is no better attention getter than a brutal murder. Whether you watch “C.S.I.” or “Magnum, P.I.” a brutal murder in the first scene gets your attention and makes you want to watch the rest of the program to find out why it happened.

Chapter four in Genesis is not the first scene in the Bible but it is close. This “scene” starts out with the brutal murder of one brother by another brother. It would make great material for a crime show. Only much later in the Scriptures do we find out an important fact behind the murder.

A Tale of Two Brothers

Cain and Abel are the two brothers involved in the world’s first murder. Cain kills his brother Abel because God accepts Abel’s sacrifice and rejects Cain’s sacrifice. For centuries people debated why one sacrifice was acceptable and the other was not but I’ll say more about that later.

First, let’s find out what we can about these two brothers. Cain is the older of the two. When he was born Eve said, “I have possessed a man by the favor of the Lord.” Cain’s name comes from this expression and means to possess.

Abel’s name probably means something like vanity, vapor or breath. It refers to the shortness of his life and the fact that he could not found a family line because he was struck down so soon.

Because Abel never marries and has no family line, he is often thought of as being Christ-like. (Despite what the DaVinci Code says, Jesus never married or had children.) There are other reasons why Bible scholars see Abel as being Christ-like. Both are strong in faith. Both

were shepherds and both were martyrs. Jesus even tells us that Abel was the first prophet to be killed for his faith. In Matthew 23:35 Jesus says:

And so upon you will come all the righteous blood that has been shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Berekiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar.

Abel's murder is a foreshadowing of Christ's murder and the murder of other righteous prophets.

The Murder

Cain's murder affects more than just two brothers. It affects more than just human beings. It affects our whole planet. When Cain kills his brother, he forces the earth to drink the blood of an innocent man. In verse 11, the earth is personified and one literal translation reads, "Cursed be thou by the earth which has opened its mouth and drunk the blood of thy brother." So the earth responds to being forced to drink Abel's blood by cursing Cain. The earth is portrayed as no longer being willing to produce food for him because of what he has done to her.

Now remember that Cain is a farmer. He depends on the earth for his livelihood. So when he can no longer farm, I can only imagine that he has to live by killing animals and eating them. So the cycle of bloodshed continues with one killing forcing him to continue killing.

Justice Delayed

After killing his brother, Cain went on to have children and even founded a small city named after Enoch his son. So while his brother could not found a city or even have children, Abel can see enough offspring to have a small city.

In the Hebrew worldview, having children is of utmost importance. Remember how Abraham begged God for a child? Remember how John the Baptist's father, Zechariah, pleaded with God to give him a son?

According to the Hebrew worldview, it is a supreme injustice that a murderer receives a large family while a righteous man dies without heirs. This is such a gross injustice that Cain is right to worry that someone will try to kill him.

In a surprisingly merciful act, God decides to mark Cain so that no one will kill him. Adam would have been justified in demanding Cain's death but does not do so. He obeys God's will and lets Cain live. In the case of Cain, justice is delayed until the day he dies.

We may not like this turn in the story but it does reflect reality in this fallen world. Sometimes the unjust prosper at the expense of the righteous. This was the case with Abel and Jesus and it may be the case in our lives too. We simply have to trust that God will make things right on the Last Day.

Abel's Faith

You may be asking yourself what hope we have that things will change. Of course, for Christians that hope is found on Easter Sunday. It is the hope of the resurrection. Jesus wasn't simply killed by the unrighteous. He was killed and rose again. Abel will rise again and be in better standing before God than his brother Cain. We know this because Scripture calls Abel righteous and says that the works of Cain were evil. The Apostle John makes this clear in 1 John 3:12 where he writes:

Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother's were righteous.

This is one of the clues to why Abel's sacrifice was accepted and Cain's rejected. But we get an even better clue in Hebrews 11:4. This is the important fact I hinted at earlier about why Abel's sacrifice was accepted. We don't learn it explicitly until we come to the New Testament:

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.

It is because Abel had faith that his sacrifice was accepted. He trusted God's promise to send the Messiah and that is why God was pleased by his worship.

Cain, on the other hand, did outward acts of righteousness but his heart was not in it. He was a fraud even though he knew how to act like a righteous person.

We know that this is true in the Church today too. Not everyone who worships is really Christian but we need to delay judgment until God reveals people's hearts. In the meantime, we can judge people's outward actions but only God can judge the heart.

Conclusion: Confidence at All Costs

Abel's heart was set on the promises of God. He offered his sacrifice to God with faith and it pleased God to receive it. Even though his life was cut short, Abel's confidence was not in vain. He is now in the presence of God as one of the blessed. On the last day, he will judge angels along with the other saints. (1 Corinthians 1:6)

The same confidence was exemplified in the life of our Lord. He faced death with sadness but not with hopelessness because he knew that it would bring us eternal life. We too can face the challenges of life when we have the confidence of Abel, Zechariah and all the other saints that have gone before us.

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:7)