

## The Heart of Worship

Gen 4:1 – 6

**Proposition:** The heart of the worshipper determines the acceptability of the worship.

**Application:** Confess all known sin. Accept Jesus as our substitute for sin. Worship God by offering our bodies as a living sacrifice

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A woman went to a Baskin Robbins store in a Kansas City Plaza for an ice-cream cone. After making her choice, she turned and found herself face to face with Paul Newman. He was in town filming the movie Mr. and Mrs. Bridge. Newman's blue eyes caused her knees to buckle. She managed to pay for her cone then left the store, heart pounding. When she regained her cool, she noticed she didn't have her cone. She went back to the store to get it and met Newman at the door. "*Are you looking for your ice-cream cone?*" he asked. She nodded, not able to speak. "*You put it in your purse with your change.*" Strange things happen to us when we come face to face with a famous person. What effect does standing in the presence of God have on you?

This morning, we will explore the heart of worship. We will look at the right way to come into the Lord's presence. The point of this event is to teach us a vital lesson on the kind of worship that pleases God. The writer wants us to know that a worship that pleases God comes from a heart that pleases Him. This passage centers around two major events: *naming two sons* and *the offerings each one gave*.

### I. Naming of the boys (4:1, 2)

*Cain: A Symbol of Promise* (4:1, 2): In Jewish culture, the name given to a child often conveys the parents' wishes or desires for that child. Parents may name their son David because they hope he will grow up to be a great leader like David. Parents may name their daughter Sarah, because they hope she will have Sarah's traits. Picture the awe prompted by the birth of the first baby in history. What a wonder it must have been for Adam and Eve to hold the first baby in their arms. Cain was a symbol of Adam and Eve's hope. The verse can be translated "*I have gotten a man, the Lord.*" The phrase *the help of* is in italics meaning it is not in the original Hebrew text. The birth of Cain produced hope that he was the promised Messiah (Gen 3:15). God promised that from the seed of a woman, One would come who would right the wrongs. One would come who would release people from the grip of sin and death. One would come, who would crush the head of Satan. Eve knew a child would be born who would save people. Did Eve believe she had given birth to the Messiah? She likely did not grasp the time frame of prophecy – that it may take many centuries before the prophecy comes to pass. Eve believed the promise but was confused as to when the promise would be fulfilled.

Although they may have believed Cain was the Christ, they were destined for failure. It did not take long for the parents to see that Cain was not the Christ. Cain became a source of sorrow. He could have been esteemed as a great man of God, but he chose to follow his own selfish way. The tragedy of Cain is the tragedy of a man who lives life his own way. The first man born into this world rejected God, killed his brother and became the father of an evil culture. After seeing how Cain behaved, Eve had lowered her standards. The hope of Cain had failed. He was not the promised God-man.

*Abel: A Symbol of Disillusionment:* Abel's name means "vapor, vanity, meaninglessness, futility (Ecclesiastes 1:1, 2). Picture having a name like "Futility." I can just imagine a schoolteacher meeting *Futility* for the first time. No doubt the teacher would think the boy's name was odd. "Futility would you like to draw me a picture?" "Futility can I help you with your math?" Abel was a symbol of disillusionment. There was no hope that Adam and Eve's sons could undo the damage they had done.

Let's now look at the offerings these two sons bring to the Lord. I have often wondered why God refused Cain's offering. After all it seems obvious that a farmer should bring his crops as an offering to God.

## **II. The Offerings Each Presented**

These offerings teach us lessons about worship (4:3 – 5): ***We cannot approach God on our own terms.*** "The firstlings of the flock and fat portions," refers to the first and best of what Abel had. Because this is not said of Cain, his gift was not from the first and best he had but from among the left-over produce. Cain was content to give to God a second-rate offering. He did not go out of his way to offer the Lord the first fruits of the ground. His gift was offered out of religious duty not out of desire. And therefore, because his offering was out of duty, he did not offer his best produce.

If you were going to visit someone at their home and they offered you a cold cup of coffee, cream that turned sour, and stale carrot cake what kind of statement are they making? I think it says, "I don't really like you but I am obliged to offer you something so I will give my left-overs." What Cain offered to God, was not the first fruits but the left-over fruits. Cain likely thought God does not care what I give so long as I give Him something. He thinks his gift of fruit should win God's favour. Here is the problem. Because his heart was devoid of faith in God, his gifts were below standard. At the core of Cain's belief is that God should accept whatever he had to offer.

Cain's offering teaches us vital lessons on worship. God does not accept our left-overs as gifts offered to Him. The second thing Cain teaches us is that ***the Lord rejects our gifts when we are not in a right relationship with Him.*** Notice God first looked at the person

then He looked at what was offered. God looks at the heart first then He looks at the gift offered. If He accepts the person, He accepts the person's offering. The type of offering is not as important as the state of the heart. This teaches us that although Cain was religious, he was not righteous (Mal 1:6 – 10). When Cain offered his gift, his heart was in a state of unbelief. An unbelieving heart will offer low quality gifts. An unbelieving heart gives out of duty not desire.

Now let's look at Abel's gift. His offering teaches us three vital truths on how to approach God. ***When we are right with God we will offer our best to Him.*** Abel was right with God before he offered his gift. Notice it says *Abel and his offering*. God was pleased with Abel and so God was pleased with what he offered. The Lord looks at the heart of the one bringing the gift and, on that basis, accepts the gift offered. Abel's sacrifice was accepted because Abel himself was accepted. The kind of worship that pleases God springs from a heart that is right with Him. When our heart is right with the Lord we will offer Him the best we have to offer (Heb 11:4). Because Abel was right with the Lord, he offered the Lord the ***first*** and the ***best*** he had to give. It would not cross his mind to give cold coffee, cream that was sour and stale carrot cake. God gets the first and the best of his flock.

The second truth that Abel's offering teaches us is: ***To draw near to God we must first admit our sin.*** Not only did Abel offer the very best of his flock, but his offering also involved the shedding of blood. As Scripture says, *"Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sin."* The act of sacrificing an animal shows the dreadful consequences of sin. By offering an animal Abel confessed he was fallen. Abel took his place before the Lord as a guilty sinner needing an atoning sacrifice. He acknowledged before God that he was guilty of sin.

When God accepts us He then accepts our offering. When we are in a right relationship with the Lord, we give Him our best. To draw near to God, we must first admit our sin. ***Our only hope of being accepted by a holy God is to have a sinless substitute the Lord Jesus take our place.*** Abel brought a lamb. Built an altar of stones. Cut the wood. Set the logs on fire. Then took hold of his lamb, put his hand upon the lamb, as a symbol of transferring his sin onto an innocent victim then slaughtered it, placed it in the flames, and offered it up to God. Abel knew he should have been the one that was slain. Meanwhile Cain likely looked on with disgust at Abel's messy, sloppy and bloody offering. To him this kind of offering was barbaric, it was offensive and disgusting. But Abel knew that the only hope of standing in the presence of God is to have a substitute atone for his sin. When John the Baptist first saw Jesus, he said: *"Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."* The Lord Jesus is our substitute. Abel knew

he should have been on that altar. We too should have been on that cross, but the Lord Jesus died in our place. He died so that we can live.

To draw near to God, we must admit our sin. When we are in a right relationship with the Lord, we will give him our best. Our only hope of standing in the presence of a holy God is to have the sinless substitute, the Lord Jesus, die on our behalf.

There are two ways to approach God – the way of Cain which leads to failure and the way of the cross which leads to God’s favour.

I heard about a young man who was in a Sunday worship service and believed God was calling him. The offering plate was passed around and he had no money to give. When the offering plate came to him, he picked it up, excused himself, walked out of the pew, stood in the aisle, put the offering plate down on the floor, and then stepped into the plate. *“Here I am Lord, I’m Yours.”* Since the Lord accepts us based on our faith in the Lord Jesus, He also accepts what we have to give. Give your talents, your time and your treasures to Lord as your acceptable gift of worship.

If you are trying to please the Lord through your good works, your religious practices, your own efforts cease trying. God does not accept our offerings if He is not pleased with us. Without faith it is IMPOSSIBLE to please God. Instead of trying to earn His favour, through religious duty, instead put your faith in the Lord Jesus by admitting you sin; by believing that Jesus died as a substitute for your sin and that He rose again on the third day. And call on Him, receive Him into your heart and you will be saved,