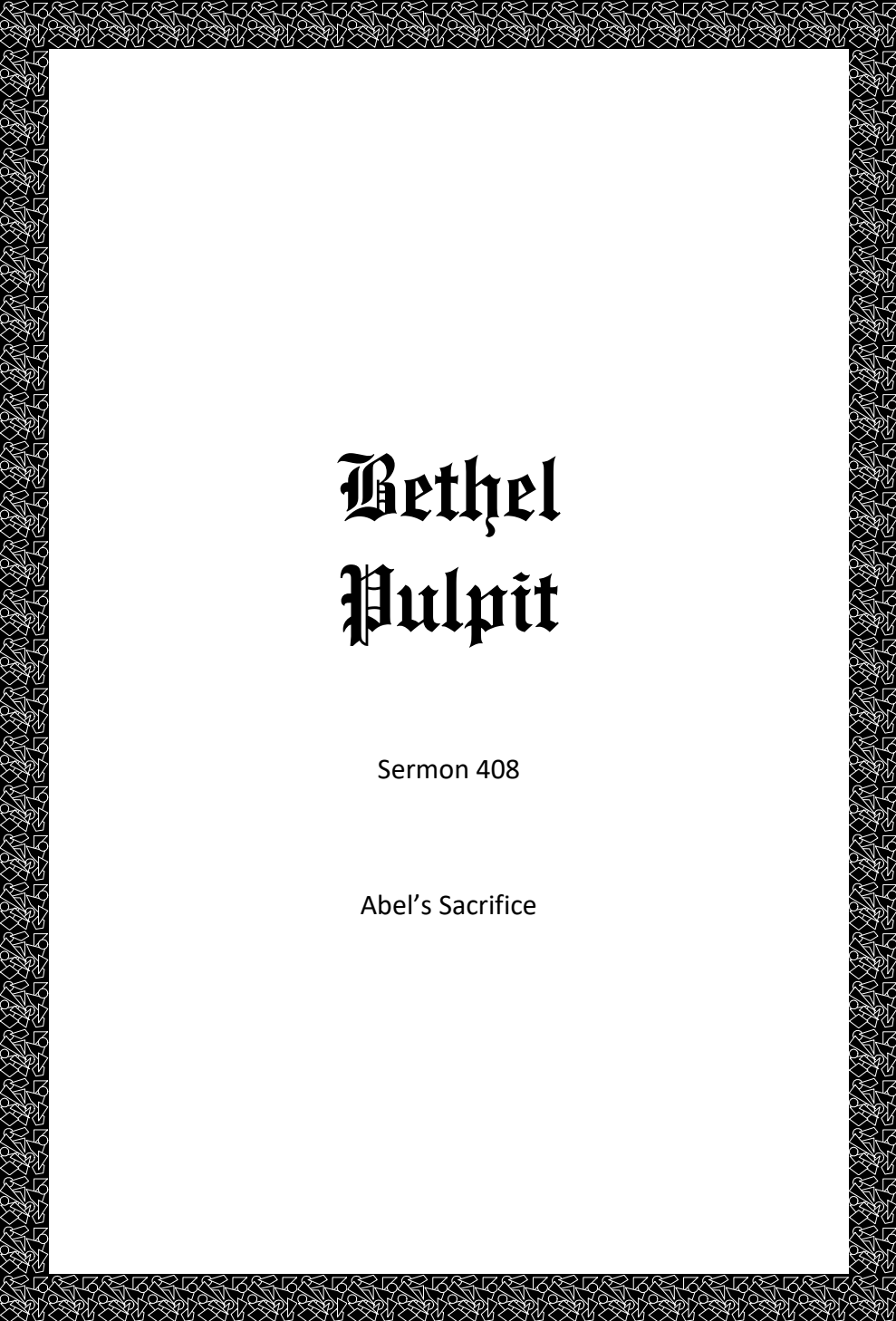




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 408

Abel's Sacrifice

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day evening, 31st March, 2019**

Text: *"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" (Heb. 11. 4).*

When we read that solemn account of the murder of Abel by his own brother, don't we have to say,

"O thou hideous monster, Sin,
What a curse hast thou brought in!"

We read this evening Genesis chapter 4. At the beginning of Genesis chapter 3, the preceding chapter, there were Adam and Eve walking in love and union with their Creator. God in His kindness had done everything for them and He placed them in a beautiful garden. They had everything, and there was just one little restriction put on them, a test of their obedience. They were created perfect, without sin. Really, they were put under the holy law of God, which is profitable, which is good. And solemnly they sinned, and they broke God's law, and they were excluded, driven out from the Garden of Eden. There were the cherubims with flaming swords proclaiming that truth of no way of entry as sinners by our own efforts, by our own attainment, lost for ever unless in mercy the Lord has contrived a way to save rebellious man. And glory to His name, He has.

But there is only one way, and that way is through a Mediator, One who stands between. That way is a way only through blood which has been shed – nothing in self, everything in the Mediator, His Person and His work. And these things are most strikingly set before us in that chapter that we read. We read of the first birth that there ever was, and it was a birth not in paradise, but in a sinful world. And when Eve cried out with delight, "I have gotten a man from the Lord," most of the godly divines have believed that she thought she had the promised Messiah. She thought that the Saviour had come. As she

held that newborn baby in her arms, and said, “I have gotten a man from the Lord,” sadly instead she was holding a murderer, the first murderer – the awful fruits of sin!

Now there were two brothers, Cain and Abel. “Cain was a tiller of the ground.” You might say he was a farmer or a gardener. Abel was a shepherd. In Cain and Abel you see the complete separation that goes on right through Scripture to the last page, under all kinds of names – the righteous and the wicked, the sheep and the goats, the wheat and the tares – so we might go on – the separation of the whole human race. And beloved friends, the vital point for you and me is to find out which side we are on, because we are on one side or the other, and in the great day, the judgment day, where every one of us in this chapel tonight shall meet, there will be the eternal separation, as there was the separation here between Cain and Abel. “Come, ye blessed”; “Depart ... ye cursed.” O that each one, even the oldest down to the youngest, might really be concerned to be made right for that last great day.

“Let me among Thy saints be found
Whene’er the archangel’s trump shall sound,
To see Thy smiling face.”

Well, may it be a solemn, sacred reality to each one here.

Now we are told that the time came – there seems to be an emphasis, it was a special time, perhaps it was the harvest time, and probably it was the end of the year, if years were being reckoned then. Both of them brought an offering before Almighty God. So they were both religious men. Cain was not a man who had no time for religion. They both drew near. They both knew there was a God.

“By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain.” Of course, the vital difference was this, and it is a truth which resounds right through Scripture to the very end: “Cain brought of the fruit of the ground.” That was alright for a thank offering, but it was not alright for acceptance with a great and holy God. It was not alright for forgiveness. It was not alright for cleansing. The whole testimony of Scripture is, to quote three vital words from the Epistle to

the Hebrews, “Not without blood.” Joseph Hart never spoke a truer word:

“Sin to pardon without blood
Never in God’s nature stood.”

So, “By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain.” But let us just be clear a moment. Let us just look at this. Our natural minds would think, Well, perhaps Cain did not know any better. Did it really matter? Was it all that important? Now let us be clear: Adam and Eve, when they sinned, tried to find acceptance with God by covering their sin and their nakedness, by something you might say like Cain’s offering: the fruit of their hands, fig leaves, and the Lord clearly showed that that fig leaf covering would never hide a sinner from a holy God. There is no acceptance there. Even before they were expelled from the Garden of Eden, the Lord revealed the first hope of salvation, the first promise, that one day the Seed of the woman should come, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and He would bruise the serpent’s head, Satan, but in doing so, He Himself would be bruised.

We just pause there. We must not hurry over these things. At Calvary, “He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised” – the Seed of the woman – “He was bruised for our iniquities.” But then the Lord revealed to them the only way of acceptance. Away with all those fig leaves of your own invention, your own plan. The Lord clothed them with coats of skins. So there must have been a death, and there must have been blood shed as a sacrifice (as only later were animals allowed to be killed for food). Death, blood offered in sacrifice – I do not think Adam and Eve ever forgot that. I believe they had to hang on it all the days of their life, and they had to go to heaven as sinners saved by grace, resting on that promise of Messiah who should come and shed His precious blood that they might be covered.

It is very clear with Adam as head in his own house, both Cain and Abel must have been instructed, must have been taught continually the only way of hope, the only way of salvation. They

must have heard that lesson often. It must have made them tremble, how their father and mother were in this beautiful garden, paradise, how they sinned, disobeyed God, how terribly they were excluded from the garden, but the Lord gave them a promise – more than a promise – He revealed to them the way of salvation: “Not without blood.” The awful, solemn point is this: Cain despised it; Cain rejected it. He went in his own way. It has been like that with most of the human race ever since. They have despised the only way of salvation, which is by faith, and it is by faith in the Lamb slain, the blood shed. That is what Abel brought. He brought a lamb, and it was when God the Father looked down and He saw that lamb, that slain lamb, the blood shed, but He looked right through it all to Calvary where the Lamb was slain.

“Conduct, blest Guide, Thy sinner-train
To Calvary, where the Lamb was slain,
And with us there abide.”

So in Abel we see the first martyr, the first martyr who suffered for the truth’s sake, but we see him as the first of this great cloud of witnesses who went safe to heaven on the ground of atoning love and blood, and no-one has ever reached heaven apart from the same ground on which Abel came to heaven. The beloved John on the Isle of Patmos was given such a view of the whole church of God safely landed, and he heard that question: “What are these?” Who are they, these who have got to heaven, “arrayed in white robes? and whence came they?” And he received the answer: “These are they which ... have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” – every one of them. “Therefore” – on no other ground – “Therefore are they before the throne of God.”

So in Abel we have this solemn and yet interesting story, but it is really how the first man who ever reached heaven got there, and it is laid before us as an example. “By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain.” There was an excellency in it. All through the Epistle to the Hebrews we read of excellent things, and not just excellent things, but more excellent things. This is one: “A more excellent sacrifice.” “By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent

sacrifice than Cain.” We are told it was by faith. Now Cain never possessed that living faith. He brought an offering; he had a religion; he was destitute of faith. What about that word: “Without faith it is impossible to please Him”? If you and I are ever going to be forgiven, ever going to be blessed, ever going to reach heaven, we must have that living faith, and not just that faith that believes there is a God, believes there is a Saviour, but that we cannot do without Him, we must have Him, that living faith which works by love, which causes us to flee to Him as our Refuge, our only hope

“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.” It is usually assumed that the way Almighty God made known His will, as you have it in so many places under the law: fire from heaven to consume the sacrifice. The sacrifice was offered and Abel himself was accepted, and the Lord bore witness on the ground of that sacrifice that he was righteous. Now Cain came before God as an unrighteous man, and that is why he was rejected.

But Abel “obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts.” So beloved friends, there is so much here. There is the whole of the gospel here. This is the prototype. And then you have it following right through Scripture: the lamb slain, the blood shed, till at length we come to Calvary, until we hear that voice of John the Baptist: “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.” Now how much Abel knew, we are not told, but it was through faith, living faith, and we believe he had just a glimpse, however vague, of that glorious Person, the Lamb of God. May you and I be favoured to have a little glimpse of Him.

“Lamb of God, we fall before Thee,
Humbly trusting in Thy cross.”

That was the excellency of Abel’s sacrifice. It was not just the lamb laid on the altar; it was “the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.” It was the blood of Christ which cleanseth from all sin. It was the “one offering” by which “He hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.”

“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.” Now that was just the beginning, right at the very start, soon after the Fall, and of course we see it worked out year by year. We have Abraham and Isaac. You all know the story; you do not need me to go into it, when God commanded Abraham to slay his only son Isaac, and they two went up together to Mount Moriah. Isaac said, “My father ... Behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?” “And Abraham said, My son, God will provide Himself a lamb.” That is looking forward beyond Mount Moriah to Calvary. (Many people think that the cross of Christ was actually on Mount Moriah.) What was it? A lamb taken, a lamb provided, a lamb slain, a lamb in the place of Isaac, substitutionary atonement, “he instead of me.” “Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the Just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God.” And then Isaac set free, and it must be by death, it must be by blood, but it is by the death of another. “Another’s life, Another’s death.” It must be by sacrifice. It must be by blood.

“By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain.” And then as we pass on, we have the solemn passover night. It is the same truth, that same excellent sacrifice. The destroying angel passed through the land, all the firstborn to be destroyed, the Israelite firstborn no better, no more deserving than the Egyptians. Is there any way the destroying angel can pass them by? Only one way, and it is the same: the lamb, the lamb taken out of the flock, the lamb without blemish, the lamb slain, and the blood shed, and the blood had to be applied, sprinkled on the lintels and doorposts of the house.

Whenever you read of the sprinkled blood, I believe it means this: *a personal interest* in the death of Christ and His great salvation. Then you see that wonderful promise: “And the blood shall be to you for a token upon the houses where ye are: and when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and the plague shall not be upon you to destroy you, when I smite the land of Egypt.” We read so much about the blood of Christ: atoning blood, cleansing blood, redeeming blood. Here on that solemn passover night, it was sheltering blood. We need

a hiding place, a hiding place from the anger of God against our sin, and there is that wonderful hiding place. It is beneath the blood. All along it is that “more excellent sacrifice.” “By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain.” It is the Lamb of God. We have all the types, the shadows, of the ceremonial law, the lamb slain, and what we sing about it:

“My soul looks back to see
The burdens Thou didst bear,
When hanging on the accursed tree,
And hopes her guilt was there.”

And then you come to that wonderful Isaiah chapter 53. Read it, meditate on it, pray about it, especially you young ones. There is everything there. That is where I first found my hope: “The ground wherein my anchor, hope, must firm remain.” What a view there of the Lamb of God, the “more excellent sacrifice”! “He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied.”

“By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain.” And then you actually come to the solemn fulfilment of it: “Behold the Lamb of God!” – Gethsemane. We need to tread carefully there.

“It were an easy part
For Him the cross to fly;
But love to sinners fills His heart,
And makes Him choose to die.”

The judgment hall. And then Calvary, Golgotha. Sometimes it is called the one, sometimes the other, the place where the sacrifice took place. The Lamb of God was slain, bearing the sins of all His people, bearing them all away, “as far as the east is from the west,” finishing the work His Father gave Him to do, laying down His life in death, and then rising again triumphant. The resurrection was the clear evidence that the work has been accepted. In Genesis chapter 4 it is the lamb slain, and in Hebrews 11 it is the lamb slain. But then His resurrection and ascension – it is the Lamb of God exalted, this same Lamb, only one Lamb, only one sacrifice, only one blood, that “more

excellent sacrifice” that by faith Abel saw. Here is the ground of our hope – we have no other – the Lamb slain, the Lamb exalted, the “more excellent sacrifice.”

You pass on in the Word of God. The whole of this beautiful Epistle to the Hebrews opens up this truth: the Lamb of God slain, though especially in this Epistle the apostle writes of the Lord Jesus as a great High Priest, because He is both the Priest and the sacrifice.

But we hasten on. This “more excellent sacrifice.” Beloved friends, many beautiful names are given to our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. I am sure even you young ones can think of quite a few: the Shepherd, the Good Shepherd; the King, the glorious King. But when you come to the last Book of holy Scripture, the Book of the Revelation, it is “the Lamb.” Almost every time the Lord Jesus is mentioned, it is “the Lamb.” It is all going back to Abel. It is all going back to Genesis chapter 4. It is all going back to his sacrifice. All those blessed words that we have: “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain.” If you think about it, when all the church of God are safely landed in heaven, what Rutherford said is eternally true:

“The Lamb is all the glory
Of Immanuel’s land.”

All these things, the Holy Spirit so graciously, gloriously revealed in the first death that took place and the first sacrifice. And Abel was “accepted in the Beloved.” His person and his offering, his sacrifice were accepted. It was by faith. O may the Lord give us that living faith. If He does, personally, savingly, in all your felt need, you will be brought to the Lord Jesus crucified, dying for sin, and in the spirit of it your language will be this (I hope there are a few of you can say it before you go home tonight):

“My faith would lay her hand
On that dear head of Thine;
While like a penitent I stand,
And there confess my sin.”

That is the religion that will take you to heaven. It may be you are a little bit troubled that you have not really seen your sinfulness as you ought. Well, the Lord is sovereign, but when He brings you to the cross, when He brings you by faith to see the Lord Jesus dying and those awful agonies He endured, and that it was all for your sin, then you will know something of what sin really means, and you as a sinner, that your sin caused the Lord of glory there to groan and suffer and bleed on the cross.

“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.” It is amazing – what is it – six thousand years since this happened? and Abel is in heaven, but the Word of God says *he is still speaking*. And if he is speaking, then may we be given ears to listen, ears to hear.

Of course, there is another scripture which says that the blood of Christ “speaketh better things than that of Abel,” because Abel’s own blood shed personally did not atone, though he died as a martyr. But we believe that his blood cried out for vengeance. There is a point there: “Shall not God avenge His own elect?” If you want to look at it when you get home, in the sixth chapter in the Book of the Revelation, John had a view of the souls of those who had suffered, suffered personally, even unto death, for the truth’s sake, and how their very blood was still crying out for the Lord to vindicate their cause. When you read of actual sufferings, being evilly treated, God will always have the last word.

But what a mercy that the blood of Christ speaks better things than that of Abel! Abel’s blood, the blood that he shed, cried for vengeance, but how different the blood of the Lamb, seen in all its fulfilment in the Saviour. That does not cry for vengeance. It cries for mercy. It cries for salvation. It cries to the Father in heaven. It cries on the grounds of the Saviour’s finished work, the blood of Christ that cleanseth from all sin. It speaks in heaven, it cries in heaven, on behalf of unworthy sinners, those venturing. If you are pleading the blood, it is still speaking for you in heaven.

And then that precious blood speaks to the conscience. Those of you seeking the Lord, those of you who want to know Him, those who feel your sins, those who are troubled because you do not feel your sin enough, but you want to be right for eternity – you know it is appointed you must die. Seek that you might know that blood speaking to your conscience. And we are told this: it is *peace-speaking blood*.

O beloved friends, what a subject, what a theme this is! It is the gospel from beginning to end, and it all looks to one Person, the dear Lamb of God, once crucified now risen, exalted, glorified, our only hope.

“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.”

* * *

O ye sons of men, be wise;
Trust no longer dreams and lies.
Out of Christ, almighty power
Can do nothing but devour.

God, you say, is good. 'Tis true,
But He's pure and holy too;
Just and jealous in His ire,
Burning with vindictive fire.

This of old Himself declared;
Israel trembled when they heard.
But the proof of proofs indeed
Is, He sent His Son to bleed.

When the blessed Jesus died,
God was clearly justified.
Sin to pardon without blood
Never in His nature stood.

Worship God, then, in His Son;
There He's love and there alone;
Think not that He will, or may,
Pardon any other way.

See the suffering Son of God
Panting, groaning, sweating blood!
Brethren, this had never been
Had not God detested sin.

Be His mercy, therefore, sought
In the way Himself has taught;
There His clemency is such,
We can never trust too much.

He that better knows than we,
Bids us now to Jesus flee;
Humbly take Him at His word,
And your souls shall bless the Lord.

J. Hart