



WEST VALLEY CHURCH OF CHRIST

9:30 am Bible Class—all ages
10:30 am Sunday Worship
5:00 pm Proverbs study (online)
7:00 pm Wednesday Bible Class

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When Blood Speaks

Soon after humanity's creation came the first story of its failure, when Adam and Eve ate fruit that God had forbidden (Genesis 2:16-17; 3:6). It's such a blessing then that so soon after the first story of failure came the first story of faith, when, as Genesis 4 records, a young man named Abel worshipped God. The New Testament says of his decision, "By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks" (Hebrews 11:4).

It's easy not to look at Genesis 4 as a story of Abel's faith but rather as a story of his brother Cain's failure. That failure began when Cain offered a sacrifice which the Lord "did not respect" and was compounded when Cain's anger over this rejection led him to kill his brother unprovoked (Genesis 4:3-5, 8). The text doesn't say why Cain's offering was rejected, but the simplest explanation I can give is that it wasn't "by faith" like Abel's was. In either what he offered or the way he offered it, he did not show enough respect for God, and God in turn had no respect for his offering.

It's interesting though that the Hebrews author chooses to focus on Abel and even says of him, "He being dead still speaks." Though the Genesis account says, "Cain talked with Abel his brother" (Genesis 4:8), that conversation is not recorded, and neither are any of Abel's words. In fact, the only voice of Abel's that is heard in the text is that of his blood after his murder. God asked the murderer Cain, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood cries out to Me from the ground" (Genesis 4:10).

Though it's probable that the thing "speaking" that drew the Hebrews author's attention was Abel's faith metaphorically, some interpreters of this passage see Abel speaking through the same thing he spoke in Genesis 4: his blood. In the very next chapter, the author exhorts his readers by telling them that they have come, among other things, "to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel" (Hebrews 12:24). Abel's faithful example certainly speaks to us after his death but so does his blood, and Jesus' blood speaks something better.

What does the blood of Abel say? Later in Scripture, the Bible reveals that blood shed by the innocent in death has the power of bringing a charge of guilt against the living (e.g., Deuteronomy 21:7-9). God considers the blood of the innocent to be precious (Psalm 72:12-14) and its shedding to be a crime without pardon (e.g. 2 Kings 24:3-4). He sees himself as the avenger of this blood (Psalm 9:12). It's not too big of a stretch to imagine the blood of Abel saying to God about himself and Cain, "I'm innocent, and he's guilty!"

Like Abel, Jesus died in innocence, being "put to death" by "lawless hands" (Acts 2:23). Before he died, the architects of His crucifixion cried, "His blood be on us and on our children" (Matthew 27:25). The potential certainly is there for the blood of Jesus to say the same thing as Abel's blood. It doesn't. Through the graciousness of God and the power demonstrated in Jesus' "resurrection from the dead" (Romans 1:1-6), Jesus' blood only proclaims innocence – not just Jesus' innocence but the innocence of every heart to whom the blood of Jesus is applied.

Until our hearts and souls are purified by obeying the truth of Jesus' Gospel (1 Peter 1:22), we stand guilty before the Lord. We are guilty of our own sins and, in a sense, guilty of calling upon God to offer His innocent Son to die for us. Though His blood is on our hands, Jesus promises to sprinkle His blood on our hearts (Hebrews 10:22; 12:24; 1 Peter 1:1-2), forming a covenant of salvation with us (Hebrews 13:20-21), sanctifying us (Hebrews 13:11-12), redeeming us (Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 1:20; 1 Peter 1:19; Revelation 5:9), justifying us (Romans 5:9), cleansing us from all sin (1 John 1:7; Hebrews 9:14; Revelation 1:5), and bringing us peace with and proximity to God (Ephesians 2:13; Colossians 1:20).

I'm so thankful for the "better things" Jesus blood speaks about me, and I hope you are too.