

The Last Eyewitness, VII

Living Sacrifice (1 John 3:11-24)

November 23, 2003

CAIN AND ABEL

We have Hitler as a cultural icon of evil. In John's day the Jews had Cain, the firstborn son of Adam and Eve.

This is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another. Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. - 1 John 3:11-12 NIV

The OT story of Cain and Abel is brief. And to be honest, it's hard to tell exactly what Cain did that was so wrong.

Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil. In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the LORD. But Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The LORD looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. - Genesis 4:2-7 NIV

It doesn't say his offering was given reluctantly or arrogantly. It doesn't say he was trying to bribe God, or buy His affection.

- Cain brought fruit; Abel brought lamb.
- God liked the lamb; but not the fruit.

Q: But, what if God had told them both to bring lamb?

Think how unjust that would've seemed; Abel kept flocks and Cain worked the soil. Abel has hundreds of sheep. Cain just has the few he's raised for his family. Why can't he bring a portion of his abundance? God isn't fair! You know, distrusting God ran in the family!

Q: What if Cain took it upon himself to make it fair?

So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast. Then the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it." - Genesis 4:2-7 NIV

When we see someone more righteous than ourselves it exposes us and sometimes shames us. And we'll have one of two reactions:

1. Conviction (I want to be like them)
2. Revulsion (I can't stand that idiot)

There are reasons why people (why we) do wicked things: anger, fear, pride, envy, rebellion. Unless and until we allow God to heal us at the level of our motivations, we'll be tripped up by evil.

TAKE MY LIFE

Cain couldn't see God's purpose behind basing salvation on the shed blood of an atoning sacrificial lamb that would hearken to, and usher in the ultimate sacrificial lamb.

And why did [Cain] murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother's were righteous. Do not be surprised, my brothers, if the world hates you. - 1 John 3:12-13 NIV

- John's brother James was the first apostle to be martyred.
- John had lived to see the putting to death of 10 apostles.

There's an old maxim that states: The worse always attacks the better.

Q: Who do you attack? When do you attack? Why do you attack?

We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death. Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him. - 1 John 3:14-15 NIV

John's echoing Jesus' teaching that one who hates is a killer at heart (*Mat 5:22*) because the end result of hatred is murder.

What's interesting here is that John tells us that we have a choice to make: we must either take a life, or give a life.

This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. - 1 John 3:16 NIV

But it's not as easy as just dying! God calls a few to be dead sacrifices, but He calls most of us to be living sacrifices.

... offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship. – Romans 12:1 NIV

Jesus demonstrated what brotherly love is all about: sacrificing our life to serve others.

Just as murder is the end result of hatred; martyrdom is the end result of love. It's two extremes on the same continuum. And Christ alone can bridge that gap.

This is what John means when he says to pass from death to life. We have passed from the death side to the life side when we have gone from selfishness to "servishness".

To be a living sacrifice means to serve others with no thought of receiving anything in return. A great example of this is right in this room: Nola, who donated a kidney so her sister Hillary could have a new lease on life.

NEEDS AND DEEDS

- A lot of people want to serve God, but only as advisors!

If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth. – 1 John 3:17-18 NIV

Here's another trap: When our heart has been moved, it's easy to settle for talking about the need instead of acting on the deed.

- Real love is an action, not just a feeling.

We are self-deluded when we derive our contentment from feeling compassion rather than from acting compassionately.

However, when John says, "sees his brother" he's obviously not referring to every stranger we meet with a need. It is an obvious truth that it's impossible to assist everyone. And yet, we can feel guilty for not doing more

CONDEMNING HEART

But sometimes, no matter how much we do, we feel guilty for not doing more. But if my satisfaction comes from actions rather than feelings alone, I can rest assured I'm living in truth.

This then is how we know that we belong to the truth, and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence whenever our hearts condemn us. For God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. – 1 John 3:19-20 NIV

- He knows our short-comings.
- He's greater than our limitations.

Let Him be the savior, and you just the humble servant.

PRAY AND DO

Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God and receive from him anything we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases him. And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us. – 1 John 3:21-23 NIV

John tells us that we can “receive anything we ask” but with the condition that “we *obey* his commands and *do* what pleases him.”

- God won't do for us what He can do through us

When Jesus raised dead Lazarus, He told others to “Take away the stone” (*Jn 11:39*). And to “Take off the grave clothes” (*Jn 11:40*).

- Jesus only did what only He could do.

God won't spoil us by granting requests we're too lazy, fearful, or selfish to do for ourselves. But, He'll encourage and assist us to do that which He created, gifted, and energized us to do.

- When we refuse to do our part, we restrict His part

Q: What is our part? John puts it right out there:

1. To believe in the name of his Son ...
2. To love one another as he commanded ...

- If we believe in His name we'll behave with His nature

Those who obey his commands live in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us. – 1 John 3:24 NIV