

Introduction

Good morning. This is the second week of our sermon series looking at Hebrews 11. I want to thank Jim for starting out this series last week. He has worked hard over the past 15 months for this congregation – and I just want to express my appreciation for giving so generously of your gift to this congregation.

Last week, Jim introduced our topic for this series – Kamikaze Hearts for God – Faith and Action Take Us to the Edge. He covered the first three verses of Hebrews 11 and did a great job setting up the definitions for us.

Faith is not passive – not just sitting back and waiting for faith to drop on us
Faith is like a muscle – it must be exercised

And I loved his definition from Tony Evans:

Faith is acting like it is so
even when it's not so
in order that it might be so
just because God said so.

Each week in this series we are going to look at an Old Testament saint who did just that – acted on his or her faith. Exercised their muscle even when it didn't seem possible. And did it because they heard God's word.

Today we are going to look at the story of Cain and Abel and how Abel responded to the extravagant magnificence of God through Kamikaze giving.

Let's Pray Father – use your Word today to speak to us; to heal us; to change us; to encourage us – Amen

I don't know about you, but anytime a pastor speaks about money and giving there is always the possible appearance of self interest. You know the line:

“Brothers and sisters. God wants to set you free from your pocket book”

and in the pew we are thinking – “Yah – right – so you can line yours”

So it is not surprising that many non-Christians feel that “getting you to give your money to the church” is all that churches are about. The Barna Group reports that 58% of non-Christians believe that “churches are too concerned about raising money.”¹ I want you to see this bumper sticker I found recently on Amazon.com²

¹ [http://www.kybaptist.org/kbc/welcome.nsf/files/barnareport/\\$file/BarnaReport.pdf](http://www.kybaptist.org/kbc/welcome.nsf/files/barnareport/$file/BarnaReport.pdf)

² <http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B0002U6ZGG/104-8163383-9330308?v=glance&n=15684181>

If the love of money is the root of all evil, why does the church want it?

I have found that this is a very difficult topic for many pastors to speak about because the topic is so mis-used in so many churches and ministries. But since I am not the pastor here we are going to go after this topic head on.

Traps and Misunderstandings about Giving

Over the years, I have found myself falling into several traps in my relationship to giving. The first is where giving comes out of a sense of duty and it becomes a habit. Every pay period, the first check I write is our tithe check. That's biblical – in 1 Corinthians 16:2 Paul encourages us to do that:

On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income,

The danger is that our giving to God can become like taxes that are taken out each week – and we don't even notice it. We don't even think about it. Some of the missionaries we support now automatically deduct our monthly amount from our credit card – and we are not required to even think about them – real people – Bob and Becky and Kelsey, Katie and Corey, Emma and Molly and Wheaton – Randy and Diana – Pat and Steve. So that's one trap we fall into – I call it "Giving without Really Giving."

Closely related to that trap is the one I call the: "What do you want?" trap. Let's watch this video clip of how Frank falls into this trap.

[Slide of Video Clip]

Anybody identify with Frank – "Just tell me what's needed God."

Another trap that I fall into is that I give to God thinking that if I give and tithe – he's going to give back to me. And that's biblical too – In our video Frank mentioned it - Malachi 3:10

Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the LORD Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it.

God does promise to give back to us as we give to Him – but it's not quite that simple. The blessing that God pours out is not always material in nature. So that's the trap I call "Quid pro Quo Giving."

Finally, another trap that I fall into is what I call the “Giving to God” trap. This is where I think that I am truly giving to God what is mine when in reality I am really returning to Him from what He has already given to me. Giving to God instead of Giving Back to God.

Another trap I fall into – is thinking that it is unnatural to give – that people need to be converted to give. Martin Luther said that the last part of a man to get converted is his pocket book. And although there is within us greed and selfishness that hinders our giving, the latest scientific studies are showing that there appears to be hard wired into our DNA a very unique desire to give and to give self-lessly. In an article in a 2004 edition of Scientific American Mind (not a magazine known for its theistic leanings) the authors concluded,

In an age of enlightenment and secularization, scientists such as Charles Darwin shocked contemporaries when they questioned the special status of human beings and attempted to classify them on a continuum with all other species. Humans were stripped of all that was godlike. Today biology is restoring to them something of that former exalted position. Our species is apparently the only one with a genetic makeup that promotes selflessness and true altruistic behavior³.

That’s incredible – apparently we are hardwired – designed to give self-lessly. Amazing.

I suspect that most of you find yourselves falling into one or more of these traps as well. Our Scripture today, provides us a different view of giving – what I call Kamikaze Giving. It’s the story of Cain and Abel – and I suspect most of you know the story. We are going to first look at the historical account in Genesis and then look at what the Holy Spirit has to say in the New Testament commentary on the story in Hebrews 11.

The Scripture

The story of Cain and Abel is found in Genesis chapter 4 beginning in verse one. Now I have to tell you that this passage brings memories of one of my most embarrassing moments – so preaching on this will hopefully bring some healing of the memories for me.

In 1974 I led a group of High School students here at the Barn on a retreat and did some Bible charades as an ice breaker. I wrote down the wrong verse and asked them to act out this passage. Most kids used the Living Bible in those days and verse one was very graphic. They protested (as all teen-agers do) but I insisted. Thankfully at the last minute I saw my error.

People of God - Hear the Word of God

Genesis 4:1-5.

¹Now the man had relations with his wife Eve, and she conceived and gave birth to Cain, and she said, "I have gotten a manchild with the help of the LORD." ²Again, she gave birth to his brother Abel. And Abel was a keeper of flocks, but Cain was a tiller of the ground.

³So it came about in the course of time that Cain brought an offering to the LORD of the fruit of the ground. ⁴Abel, on his part also brought of the firstlings of his flock and

³ “The Samaritan Paradox” Scientific American Mind November 2004 Ernst Fehr and Suzann-Viola Renninger

of their fat portions And the LORD had regard for Abel and for his offering; ⁵but for Cain and for his offering He had no regard.

Let's take some time this morning to unpack these and see what God has to teach us:

Chapter 4 of Genesis begins the story of the new beginning of mankind after the fall. Before this chapter, man lived in the Garden of Eden in constant fellowship with God. He was in unbroken communion with God, with his fellowman and with Creation. After the fall, his relationship with each of these was irreparably broken.

And in verse 3 "in the course of time" which is a Hebrew idiom for "the end of a period of time," we find Cain and Abel bringing an offering to God. The sense here was that this offering was taking place either at the end of a week or the end of a month or perhaps even the end of a season. And the implication is that Cain and Abel were doing something that was part of a regular cycle.

One of the questions that comes to us as we look at this is "Was this offering a

- Sacrificial offering for their sins?"
- A voluntary thank offering for God's provision?"

Our text uses the same word to describe what Cain and Abel did:

An **offering** – the Hebrew word used here in verses 3,4, & 5 is not the one used later in the Hebrew scriptures for sacrifice – this word is used to describe a donation, a tribute, a sacrificial offering (usually bloodless).

So our text give us a sense that this offering was a regular time of giving back to God a portion of what God had given to them. We have two brothers – each bringing the fruit of their labors as a sacrificial gift offering to God.

But this time, something was different. God had regard for Abel's offering and did not have regard for Ca-in's offering. And notice that it wasn't just the offering that God had regard for – but for Abel and his offering. And it wasn't just Ca-in's offering that God rejected – but Ca-in and his offering.

Why was that? This is an important question. Most of us want not only our work to be approved but we long for God's approval as well. Why did God approve of Abel and his offering but not Cain and his offering.

There's a number of things we can see from our text that give us some hints.

One possibility is that Abel's offering was a blood offering – it was foreshadowing the blood sacrifices of the Old Testament which were foreshadowing Jesus' blood sacrifice on Calvary. This view says that Abel's offering was accepted because a blood sacrifice is better than a grain offering. The problem with this view is that grain offerings were very acceptable later in the history of the Hebrews.

Another thing we see is that Cain brought some of the fruits of his labors and Abel brought of the first born of his flock and some of the fat. Historically, the first of anything holds special

significance to us – our first house – first car – first job – first love – first kiss – and so on – and the first born of the flock was a significant gift that Abel was bringing. And not only did Abel bring of the first born but he brought the fattest of the first born.

So perhaps God accepted Abel's offering because it meant more to him than it did to Ca-in – it was the first and the best from his flock.

But let's see what our other Scripture from Hebrews 11 says:

⁴ By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained the testimony that he was righteous, God testifying about his gifts, and through it, though he is dead, he still speaks

Here Scripture interprets Scripture. Genesis doesn't tell us why God accepted Abel's offering – but the Holy Spirit does through the book of Hebrews.

Hebrews 11 tells us that it was Abel's faith in giving the sacrifice that caused Abel and his sacrifice to be accepted. It wasn't just the offering alone – Cain did that – not just the first fruits and the best – many in Israel after Abel offered their first fruits of their flocks and their grain and were rejected. Because Abel's offered his gift to God in faith – that was the reason it was better than Cain's.

But what was Abel's faith? How did he exercise faith in giving while Ca-in did not? Our scripture does not tell us explicitly although I believe that it is strongly implied in the passage in Genesis. I have already said that Abel gave of the first fruits and the best of his flock. For a farmer to give of first fruits means that he must trust God to bring the second and third fruits. There is no guarantee that more will come. For a farmer to give of the best – it means that he has to settle for the second best and trust God that God will provide quality wool and milk from the flock – even though he has given the best to God. It wasn't just that the sacrifice was more significant to Abel, it was because he was trusting God as he gave it.

What God Wants from Us?

One of the traps we can fall in with God is the same trap that Frank fell into. "Just tell me what you want God? I'll write the check. I'll bring the offering." As I prepared this message, over and over again, I kept hearing God tell me –

Tell them I'm not interested in their money.

Okay – so here goes – God isn't interested in your money. God wants us to know that He's not asking us:

"What's in your wallet?"

All through the Old Testament we find that God's people thought that what He wanted was their sacrifices. They could do as they pleased as long as they offered the right sacrifices. But listen to the words of Isaiah in response to that kind of giving:

"What are your multiplied sacrifices to Me?"
Says the LORD.

"I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams
And the fat of fed cattle;
And I take no pleasure in the blood of bulls, lambs or goats.

Isaiah 1:11

Again the Psalms

40:6-8 "Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them"

But then what was the purpose of all of those offerings? What does God want from us? If God doesn't want our money – what does He want?

In the parable of the persistent widow recorded in Luke 18, Jesus tells the story of a woman who pursues justice from an unjust judge. At the end of the story, after Jesus promises that God will provide answers to His people who cry out to Him day and night - He asks this question:

However, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?"

What is God looking for? Jesus tells us that He is looking for / He's seeking faith in His people.

Giving to God is a Vehicle for Expressing our Faith

And giving to God is one of the vehicles by which we can express faith. Remember – giving alone is not an expression of faith. We are hard wired to be generous and giving. Ca-in offered a sacrificial gift to God and God had no regard for it. There is a kind of giving that is an expression of faith. It's the kind of giving that Abel did – and I'm calling it Kamikaze giving. God is looking for a people who will learn to express their faith in Him by practicing Kamikaze giving. As we offer our time and our talents to God and His kingdom through Kamikaze giving – we will both be using that faith muscle – but also growing that faith muscle.

What does Kamikaze Giving look Like?

So what is this Kamikaze giving?

Remember the definition Jim gave of Kamikaze. In Japanese Kamikaze means "Divine Wind." So a Kamikaze giver is one whose giving is driven by God's divine wind – His Holy Spirit. Remember what the Pastor told Frank? Not giving what you think – but giving what God places on your heart. A Kamikaze giver is one who actively seeks God about what to give and then does it.

Remember the Tony Evan's definition of faith

Faith is acting like it is so
... just because God said so.

Faith is an action in response to God's word – allowing God's divine wind – His Holy Spirit to move us. Remember what Paul said in Romans 10:

¹⁷So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.

So a Kamikaze giver is one who has heard God's word concerning giving and then in faith acts upon it.

But don't look so relieved out there. Some of you are looking like Frank – whew I don't have to give 10% - If you and I are really going to let God direct our giving – guess what – I can guarantee that He is going to take you to the edge. And I would go so far as to say – if your giving pattern is not taking you to the edge of your faith – not growing your faith muscle – then I would encourage you to go back and ask Him if you are hearing Him correctly.

God doesn't want our money – but He wants our faith to grow. And our giving should be growing our faith. Why did Jesus honor the widow giving two small coins to the temple? Remember the story from Mark 12?

⁴¹And He sat down opposite the treasury, and began observing how the people were putting money into the treasury; and many rich people were putting in large sums. ⁴²A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which amount to a cent. ⁴³Calling His disciples to Him, He said to them, "Truly I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all the contributors to the treasury; ⁴⁴for they all put in out of their surplus, but she, out of her poverty, put in all she owned, all she had to live on."

She is an example of a Kamikaze giver. Did God wanted her money? Do you think Jesus was glad that she was poorer? No – He was honoring her faith – that she was trusting God with her all. Allowing God to take her to the edge. He knew His Father would take care of her.

A number of years ago I felt that God asked me to give the way a Kamikaze giving farmer would give. I felt that his divine wind was asking me to give the first fruits of my labors at a time when there was nothing else guaranteed to come in. And as the time approached – you know what I did. I got scared. And I took my sailboat and I came about. I turned it around. To this day – I know that I missed a tremendous opportunity to grow my faith muscle.

Our scripture this morning says that Abel's faith is still speaking to us today. How is his faith – his kamikaze giving speaking to you this morning? Let's close in a time of confession and ask God to show us how He is calling us to apply this today. Where is God's divine wind taking you in your giving? How is your giving pattern exercising your faith muscle?