

December 3, 2017

Life Lessons from the Book

"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 4:1-5

"Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your reasonable act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind." Romans 12:1-2

We have often discussed the nature of our relationship with our heavenly Father. From the very beginning of time the foundation principle of that relationship has been based in obedience. God, because he loves us, gives us direction in life. He also gives us the choice to choose obedience or rebellion as our response to his direction. Finally, because he is a righteous and just God, he will absolutely hold us accountable for the choices we make.

But, what does God ultimately want from us? What does God expect by way of obedience? In the story of Cain and Abel recorded in Genesis 4 we learn a lot about God's definition of obedience. These two brothers, the first children of Adam and Eve, followed different career paths. Cain chose to be a farmer tending the soil and raising crops. Abel chose to be a shepherd raising sheep and goats.

Both of these brothers loved God and were thankful to him for what he had done for them. How do we know this? In the course of time both of these young men brought thanksgiving sacrifices to the God of heaven. Both chose a level of obedience.

But, Cain brought 'some', and Abel brought fat portions from the firstborn of his flocks. God looked with favor on Abel and his sacrifice and didn't look with favor on Cain or his sacrifice. Why the different response from God? After all, weren't both of these young men being obedient?

To understand why Cain's sacrifice to God was not received with favor I believe we must consider, not what he offered, but instead we need to focus on how and why he offered it. Abel offered the best portions of the firstborn of his flocks and herds. Cain just offered 'some' of what he had harvested.

I think the difference in what these two young men did and how it was received by God is found in their attitudes toward their obedience to God. Cain accepted that he 'should' offer God a thanksgiving sacrifice because it was the 'right thing to do'. He did it because it was the expected thing to do. He obeyed God, but his heart wasn't in it. Abel, in contrast, obeyed God with his whole heart and so he gave the best he had to God motivated by his deep love for God.

Like Cain and Abel you and I are challenged to respond to God's goodness in our lives with obedience. Some of us respond by doing the 'right' things. We 'go to church', we give of our time and money, we serve others. We respond to God's overwhelming love in all of the expected ways, but we never quite give him our all. We are prepared to give God 'some' but we will not give him all. Our obedience is not from our hearts but only covers some of our actions.

The Apostle Paul would tell the believers in Rome that in view of what God had given them presenting themselves as "...*living sacrifices*..." was their only "...*reasonable act of worship*..."

Giving God less than our everything just does not make any sense. Giving God less than our everything is not complete obedience.



In our context for today, Abel was all in and was prepared to give God his everything in complete obedience. Cain did the 'right' thing in the 'expected' way, but he was not all in. He was satisfied with giving his God 'some' of what his God had given him. He appeared to be obedient, but was not completely so.

Jesus calls us to 'take up our crosses and follow him'; to give up our whole lives for him. He will never be satisfied with 'some'. Our relationship with the God of glory is an all or nothing call. We can give him our all, our everything, the very best that we are and have. Anything less will never be enough.