

1.21.2024 Sermon

Still Favored | Hebrews 11:4, Genesis 4:1-16

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

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SPEAKERS

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Good morning. As Pastor Bady said, I am Sandra Anderson, and this has been a hard three weeks. Pastor Tracy was not telling a lie when she said that the elders were stressing and having a hard time with this faith series. And if they ain't, maybe it's just me. So, nothing has changed. I still feel like I am at the bottom of her list of favorites, as I get the hardest sermons ever. But here I am. And this is what I got.

My title today is "Still Favored." As Pastor Bady said, I'm favored, so we're gonna roll with it. So, this is sermon three of our new series of faith. And our hero today is good ol' Abel. And our text today is coming from Hebrews 11:4. And it reads, "Faith moves Abel to choose a more acceptable sacrifice to offer God than his brother Cain. And God declared him righteous because of his offering of faith. By his faith, Abel still speaks instructions to us today. Even though he is long dead." That's it.

It didn't click with me either. And yeah, so if you are confused about Abel or you don't remember, I think it's only best that we go backwards to go forward. So, we're gonna go back to the story of Cain and Abel, which is in Genesis chapter four, verses one through 16. And yes, I said 16 verses. So yeah, settle in.

So, Adam loves his wife, Eve, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Cain. She said, with the help of the Lord, I have brought forth a man, not a child, but a whole man. Later she gave birth to his brother, Abel. Now Abel kept flocks and Cain worked the soil. And in the course of time, Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the Lord. And Abel also brought an offering that 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.

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 rule over it. Now Cain said to his brother Abel, let's go out into the field.

While they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother and killed him. Then the LORD said to Cain, where's your brother Abel? I don't know, he replied, am I my brother's keeper? The Lord said, what have you done? Listen, your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground. Now you are under a curse and driven from the land which opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. When you work the ground, it will no longer yield its crops to you, you will be a restless wanderer on the earth. Cain said to the Lord, my punishment is more than I can bear. Today you are driving me from the land, and I will be hidden from your presence. I will be a restless wanderer on the earth and whoever finds me will kill me. But the Lord said to him, not so, anyone who kills Cain will suffer vengeance seven times over. Then the Lord put a mark on Cain so that no one who found him would kill him. So, Cain went out from the presence of the Lord and lived in the land of Nod, East of Eden.

To me, you know, I love crime TV. And this was interesting to me because it was crime TV Bible edition. The first murder in the Bible and in the first family, and this story I found very complex and in so many ways. It goes from birth to a sacrifice to murder. And I really found myself upset with the author of Genesis because I just felt like a lot of information was left out. There are so many unanswered questions and the lack of information made it very hard for me to figure out this whole faith with Abel. Like what made him so special and how did Abel end up in the heroes of faith? What faith do we even see in this story? So that was my three weeks of worry and pondering of what's so great about Abel.

And I think this story of Cain and Abel was the first realistic story in the Bible, to Genesis for everything prior to that, you really kind of had a lot of faith to believe it. This was the first story in the Bible that I was like, I don't need a lot of faith to believe that that's everyday life. Here we have jealousy, anger, and rejection. And although these don't sound like good traits to have, I found it relatable. I found it me because I too have dealt with it, still deal with it. Jealousy, anger, rejection, still today.

So, I found myself sympathizing with Cain. Because honestly, every time I read a book, or if I watch a movie, I look for the character that I can relate to. I don't know if you guys do that, too. So, in this story, it wasn't good ol' Abel that I related to, I related a lot with Cain. So, Cain was who I advocated for in this story. I mean, I do relate, besides the murder part, I don't want you guys to get confused on that aspect. I don't, but I do get a bit angry. In my opinion, Cain made Abel look like a saint. I mean, all we know is he was born, he was a shepherd, he brought a sacrifice that the Lord favored. And then he died. That's it, that's all, we have nothing negative to say about him with the information provided.

So, I can't relate to Abel. Because that's not been the story of my life. So that's what made it hard to kind of understand what was so great about Abel. With the information we got, I see nothing special, nothing special he did, I do not see how faith moved him in any kind of way to make it to the heroes of faith.

What I actually saw is the bounded set. I see a God portray that. A bull made a good choice. So, he was in, Cain made a choice that was not favored. So, he was out. And that didn't settle with me, a God that would say you're in and you're out. An out because of why? We don't know. All we see is two boys, Cain and Abel, brought an offering to God from their own professions. One made it in and was called righteous and the other. Not favored. So, it made me think, if I was bounded set of, I got to figure out what Abel did. So that I too can be righteous. What is a good sacrifice? Because I want to be in I don't want to be out. It was complex.

And it doesn't say what Cain did that was bad. And God says, if you do right, what did he do wrong? We got so lack of information. And it's like, what did I do? I brought you an offering. And you've rejected it. It does not make me comfortable to feel like I too can bring God an offering. And he accepts it. Because I don't know what the wrong is. This doesn't tell me.

How do you have faith? It says through faith Abel made a good choice. What is the faith? Like how do we define what the faith was? And what is the faith the size of a mustard seed? What does that even mean? How do you gauge a measure of faith? Because we want to be right, right? We want to be in but it doesn't tell us how to have faith? Or where did that even looked like for me, which was even more discouraging is I started thinking of the disciples who actually got an opportunity to walk with Jesus today. to talk with him.

And there's occasions like when they were in the middle of the storm, and, you know, they're crying out and they're like, "Careth not that we perish?" And Jesus gets up and he's like, Oh, ye of little faith. Then he goes, and it was another time when this demon-possessed boy was there. And his dad was a little snitch, in my opinion. And he goes, and he says, you know what, I asked these guys, and they could do nothing. And oh, my cute little snitch. And then decide what you know, and he pops talked about it. That's when he called him faithless and perverted. And I said, whoa. And he said, how long would I be here with you? And he said, if you only had the faith, the size of a mustard seed? Are you thinking like the disciples like, doll? I had faith? Because I literally tried. They probably all tried and nothing happened.

So, what does that look like? When you give it all you got? And Jesus is saying, if you only had a little faith, the size of them, what? What more faith can I have? That's why I was confused. Like, if they couldn't do it, then I don't stand a chance. Because how do you gauge it? How do

you get it right? Because this bounded set is a God that either you're getting right, or you're getting wrong. And I'm gonna favor you, or you're not.

I'm not saying that. You know, Cain had issues, but I feel like his reaction was a little bit extreme. Most people when they get rejected, they start thinking, wow, what did I not do? They get sad, maybe confused, Cain from zero to a hundred real quick. So, I feel like maybe something was already going on with Cain. Now this is my thoughts. Do not make this your thoughts.

But I started thinking about what do we know about the brothers? What we know is that Adam and Eve were their parents. Cain is older than Abel, Cain was to till the soil meaning he was a farmer. And Abel was the keeper of the sheep, meaning he was a shepherd. Now, if you remember, back in Adam and Eve, when they got kicked out, you know, the Lord told them, hey, I'll make you this promise. tilling the soil is gonna be hard for you. It's gonna be really hard, by the sweat of your brow. That's how you're gonna eat.

So, to me, I know injustice when I see it. I have siblings. And in this story, I found injustice, and we are Cornerstone, and we stand for justice. And I said, why is it that Cain is working hard, you know, tilling the soil, and sweating in good ol' Abel is out tending the sheep, probably gazing at the stars and, you know, singing songs, and you know, how guiding and Cain is like, do you see my hands? I don't know about you. But that would have pissed me off. Like, I would have been like, why am I toiling so you can eat. And Abel is just having fun. I don't know why Cain. But he should have did what I did back in 95. I told my parents, hey, it's any quality in these chores, I cannot be washing dishes while other people sweep. We need to rotate. Because I see her washing off counters, and I'm washing a million dishes. So, we created a rotation so that nobody feels that you work and hard. Why you sweeping the floor. So, I'm just saying maybe that when I helped him like it helped me because it helped me feel like some justice was done.

So back to the question, why didn't God have regard for a look with favor on Cain and his sacrifice? There are a few reasons why that's out there. Some say because Cain offered the fruit from the field which had been cursed. And Abel offered a blood sacrifice.

Or they thought that, you know, Cain offers some of the fruits when he I don't know, maybe he should have brought them all. They got an issue with it. So, I'm advocating for Cain, what do you want me to do? I brought some something that Abel, what Abel brought was considered the best because it was the firstborn of his flock.

And some say But God told them what to sacrifice. And they you know allude to this because when Adam and Eve sinned, they found out they were naked. So, they went and covered

themselves with fig leaves. And God said, No, that don't work. So, they think that God made a sacrifice to cover the sins of man, because we can't do it ourselves. So, he slayed an animal. And that was what they assume is why Cain did it to atone for his sins. He's doing what God has set an example. Makes sense? But there's nothing to prove that in a text, we can only speculate God told them to do this.

And even then, you know, the laws of you know, the sacrifices weren't even in effect it and even then you had to have a priest and there's no priest around in this time. And secondly, again, advocating for Cain, I just do not think that this man would bring something that God said he didn't want. It's like, you bring in somebody a gift, and they, you know, they don't want it, but I'm gonna bring it to you anyway. And I expect you to be happy. I just the reaction of him being rejected should have been a given if he knew and still brought something that he knew he was supposed to bring.

So, I boil it down to this. It wasn't so much as the sacrifice was wrong. But Cain didn't offer His sacrifice from a pure heart, as an act of worship. Psalms 50 lines 16 And 17 says, you do not delight in sacrifice, or I will bring it you do not take pleasure and burn all friends. My sacrifice, oh, God is a broken spirit. A broken, contrite heart, you God would not despise. God looks at the heart of the worshiper. It's not really about the sacrifice. And there is nothing that you can give to God. Besides your heart. The greatest commandment says, for you to love the Lord your God with a passionate heart, from the depths of your soul, with your every thought and with all your strength. That is what God wants. It's not about what you bring, how much you bring. It's about your heart, and how you give it even in given the Scripture says God loves a cheerful giver. And I don't think that's just in relation to money. It's are you giving just saying you gave something? How was your heart posture? When you give? It said each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion?

So, I don't think it was God wanting lamb chops versus vegetables. I believe that God was rejecting Cain's heart posture. He didn't give with a pure heart.

But I too like Cain have come to church several times. And said, God should be happy that I sacrifice being at home and came here. What where's my heart? Or I'm just singing songs. Or I'm just saying stuff. But where's my heart in it? Am I doing stuff out of routine? And think that God is supposed to be happy because I gave something. But I'm not happy about it. When I come to church is just checked the box. Is your heart on God? You come here? Or is your heart on your circumstance? I come to church several times. And it's like, what's going on in my world? It's clouding the reason why I'm even here. That I'm not bringing a good sacrifice. I'm bringing something and I want God to be ecstatic and say, I favor you with what you choose to give me because it said a man chooses in his heart, what to give.

We do it all the time. When we think about giving people gifts, you choose in your heart. I'm not to go all out. Or you choose to say let's stop at Walgreens on the way and get whatever is in the store, throw it in a bag and no thought into it. It's I'm just doing something I'm giving something and then when we get to the party, and they are favoring everybody else's gift. We look and say well, I brought you something to be grateful. How many of y'all attended the regular breakfast? That is why, because you tell people what you want. And what do they do? They bring you with they want to give you. Hence the reason why we have this regift breakfast. For all the rejected gifts from people who may not have given from the heart but decided that you should be grateful and you ungrateful people brought them gifts down here anyway. Exactly.

That's what we do. We give gifts to God and think you should be grateful and don't you dare return it. Don't you dare give it to somebody else, you should use exactly what I give you and be happy about it. We find man the heart postures stems from a gratitude for the gift we've been given an eagerness to serve God with it. Your heart decides what you give and how you give Hebrews 10. And 22 says, "Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with full assurance that faith brings faith motivates our actions."

And I believe that is why the heart plays a key. It motivates our actions. So, when God looked with favor, where he didn't look what they were on Cain offerings, what came out of his heart. Anger as string reaction, Proverbs 423 says, "Above all else, guard your heart for everything you do flows from it." Your heart is the seed of your actions, and was boiling up in your heart, and your thoughts is what comes out. That's how you show love to others or choose not to show love to others. Because what's in your heart on forgiveness, anger, it how can you give and show love to others when you are holding on to all of this. But these are the greatest commandments to love God and love others as you love yourself. But how can you if all of this is going on and churning in your heart? What is going to come out?

I submitted this, I submitted my sermons to Pastor Tracy did you think she looked only with favor? She gave it to me real? How did I react? Did I say forget you I'm gonna do what I want to it's the heart. The heart to say if I tell you? If you do what is right. You too can be accepted. How do we act when we feel God is rejecting us until you? If you do what is right there. You too will be accepted? Do we get mad? run away and hide like we do people. When we get issues with people, the first thing we try to do is run and hide because I don't want to face it. I don't want to fix it. I'm gonna go running hot. It's what's in your heart? Do you want to change?

Because at the end of the day, and this story, in my opinion, God's thinking about a will. God able is like these religious people who think that they have arrived. It's okay. You're good, good for you. You're the you're the 99 Good for you. God turns to the rejected one is if you do well, you too will be accepted. He stays with us and says You are the one who forgets the 99 You

good God for you. Let me focus on the one who I still see purpose in that I still see. He motivated him. He said you know what? sin is crouching at your door but I still see that you can overcome it. That might come. Have faith is dead. But we saw him rejected and God is saying, No, I still see that even though some is warning you so bad. I know you can do it. That's the God that I know that while everybody's thinking all I can reject it, are you saying that God is still with you? That he's focusing all of his attention to say, Yeah, you're good, but it's you that I want you to say, I still want you. You can get this right.

There're several times where I would tell Billion do something, and he'll do something half-heartedly. And he wants me to accept and be happy. And sometimes Brittany will say, "Well, he did his best. "But I know that I got something better for them. And I know you can do better because I have seen you do better. The loving parent and me says, go back and fix this. And I still would be here waiting, I still would be just as happy if you got it right the second time or the third time, but I know you can get it right.

But sometimes we don't want God to be a parent. We only want the good stuff. But then we say God is punishing me. No, God is correcting you, you know parent in here that I assume is just gonna let the child run heavy and just keep doing what they want to do. It's a corrective love that he's saying, I'm still here. And I got faith in you. Do what is right in you to be accepted.

What does Cain do? He had a choice. But it says he looked away. downcast mean, someone turning their face downward and away, Cain took his eyes off of God. And even in a moment what God is inviting, and he's pulling, and pleading, Hey, come on, get it right. Cain says, nope. How many times we do that? Because we hurt. We reject it. And he looked away, and said, instead of gazing on God, you look at your circumstance, we come. And all of these circumstances and everything that we got going on, we take our eyes off of God and start looking at my circumstance, I'm looking at my problem. But instead, we focus on the circumstances.

And God has said, you too, I got something for you. But we want to focus on our circumstance. We want to take our gaze of God, and trust me, and believe me, I have had my eyes of God. And then we blame other people, always to church, people that push me away. It's these people, these people, we get mad at people instead of God because Cain and Abel weren't a problem. But we mad at God. We're gonna take it out on other people, and blame other people, when we should look inward and get it right so we too, can move on. But what do we do? I don't want to focus on God. This is my circumstance right here right now. Instead of focusing on God, and God saying, Hey, I believe in you. Yeah, I know sin is knocking at your door every day, saying I want you to clap back every day. But are you going to focus on me? Are you going to focus on these people? These people get on your nerves everyday you're

going to focus on them and get distracted so they can start turning in your heart so you can get pushed to do what sin is crouching to give you.

Are you going to say God regardless of what these people doing, I'm gonna keep my eyes on you? But Cain says, oh my brother let's go for a walk. And he killed him. And even there, God's still chasing them their gods still follows him as Yes. Oh man what you did? And Cain is like, how bad is too much for me, we don't like the consequences that's too much for me and when too much when you took this boy life, but now my punishment is too much. And God who could have rejected him there, still said, "You know what? "I'm gonna mark anybody mess with you.

That's the love of God that even when we go to the far extreme and go away from his presence, he said, I still mark you and I call you my Cain still had access to a good life. God marked him and said, I go tooth and nail for you. So that no harm can come to you. That even when we if we make our beds in hell, God is still there is no where we can go to escape the love of God. That's the favor, that I still see. Okay. So, stop worrying about if I got rejected, or God moving in their life and they move in in my life. I'm at a standstill come do something for me God, aren't you saying that he is chasing you. If you start worrying about what he doing for somebody else, and be grateful and see the gratitude of what he doing for you, even in your wrongdoing, he is still chasing you down. Leaving the night in there leaving the good people. Like the prodigal son. He said, Go ahead. Live whatever life you think you want to live. And I'm still here and when you decide to come back, because God He never left. When you decide to make the choice to come back. I'm here with open arms whether to give you a party because my last child is back.

So, the faith that I see is trusted and a faithful God that no matter what I do, no matter how far I wander no matter how far I try to hide that if I make my bed and hell he's still chasing me. You're not rejected? You're not the unfavored one. As a parent it's kind of hard to have children that say Oh, nobody should fail. You may have a good day where you may outshine the other or you may have a bad day where you outshine with your bad news but at the end of the day, we all his favorite it's the invitation that when you take your eyes off of God are you willing to say I'm gonna get it right and refocus and get my eyes back on you? Or am I going to be mad and take it to another extreme where is your heart posture?

What are you bringing are we going through the motions or is your heart passionately seeking that regardless of your circumstance focus our gaze on God because he's always there and biting us deeper His love will chase us. Joni I know you are off work, but I so feel the invitation to hear Reckless Love, because Cain is me. Tightness under song save me when I was wondering like when I believed that I was rejected when I believed that I was lost and God favorite other people instead of me. Or it's songs like this that showed me the reckless love of

God that chases me because in there's nothing you can do to earn it and we definitely don't deserve it, but I got faithful God that would chase me too.

No matter how many times I've turned my face away from he's there, God pushed me to focus on it and that's also for you chase you down because you are the one he loves. So, Joni, if you can sing that for us. And if you feel like you've been there, rejected, the altar is open. And even if you choose not to come up here, let these lyrics and where God is speaking. Singing for you. And I pray that it'd be true for you. As it's always true for me every time Joni plays this song. She says Sandra played for you because she knows that this is evidence for me. Every time I hear this song as evidence in my faith a how much God loves me. God really loves you and there's nothing you can do to take that love away.