“Worship That God Accepts”
Genesis 4:1-16; Hebrews 11:4

Not all that is called worship is acceptable to our God. In His conversation with the woman at the well of Samaria, Jesus made a distinction between true worship and false worship. A sobering truth to consider is that what passes for worship in most churches may not be true worship.

William Temple - “For worship is the submission of all our nature to God. It is the quickening of conscience by His holiness; the nourishment of mind with His truth; the purifying of imagination by His beauty; the opening of the heart to His love; the surrender of will to His purpose--and all of this gathered up in adoration, the most selfless emotion of which our nature is capable and therefore the chief remedy for that self-centeredness which is our original sin and the source of all actual sin.”

Worship is all of me worshiping God for all that He is and all that He has done. It is a matter of my heart and life.

G. Campbell Morgan - “God seeks and values the gifts we bring Him--gifts of praise, thanksgiving, service, and material offerings. In all such giving at the altar we enter into the highest experiences of fellowship. But the gift is acceptable to God in the measure to which the one who offers it is in fellowship with Him in character and conduct; and the test of this is in our relationships with our fellow men. We are thus charged to postpone giving to God until right relationships are established with others. Could the neglect of this be the explanation of the barrenness of our worship?”

There will always be barrenness in worship wherever there is emptiness and shallowness in the worshiper’s heart.

Worship is a matter of one’s heart. It is all too possible to worship in word only while one’s heart is far away from God. Much of what’s wrong with our worship in the church today is not that it is worship without words, but that it is worship without heart.
A.W. Tozer - “What passes for worship in many churches today is anything and everything but what reflects the holy mind and nature of God or even pleases God. Worship in many cases is still and artificial, with no semblance of life in it. I am afraid that many have truly forgotten what it means to worship God in the sacred assembly. There is ritual and routine aplenty but lacking the overwhelming passion of being in the holy presence of God.”

Jesus confronted the Pharisees with this truth.

Matthew 15:8-9 - “These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me.”

John Bunyan - “When you pray, rather let your heart be without words than your words without heart.”

That’s why I love the song we sing from time to time that says, “I’m coming back to the heart of worship--it is all about You, Jesus!”

Worship is the response of a heart that is in love with Christ.

Here in these verses in Genesis, we are given an example of true worship as it is upheld against false worship. Cain and Abel, though there be plenty of similarities in their lives, are both polar opposites when it comes to their approach of God.

God sees into the heart of Cain and rejects his worship while accepting the worship of righteous Abel. Abel’s worship was offered from a heart of faith. When we look at what Genesis says in light of what the writer of Hebrews says about Abel’s worshiping faith, several truths emerge.

1. Abel’s worship was the result of SALVATION from sin

“By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous...”
The writer of Hebrews takes us all the way back through redemptive history, all the way back to the days immediately following the events of the Garden of Eden. And in so doing, he is showing us how faith has always been the plan of God.

Approaching God through faith is not something that is confined to the New Testament; God has always saved men and made them worshipers by means of faith in Him alone.

The Genesis narrative tells us that Adam and Eve had two sons. Cain was born first, and Abel was born sometime after Cain.

Eve’s response to the birth of Cain in 4:1 and of Seth in 4:25 indicate that she was looking for the One who would crush the head of the serpent and bring salvation and restoration.

“Cain” - acquired or gotten

The idea is that when Cain was born, Eve thought that he was the one who would crush the serpent’s head and provide redemption. Of course, she was right in thinking that Messiah would come. She was wrong in believing that Cain was him. It wouldn’t take very long for Eve to see that Cain was a man who needed a Savior himself.

By the time her second son was born, she recognized this.

“Abel” - vanity or vapor

What the boys were like growing up is left up only to our imagination, for Scripture is silent. We know that both of them became hard workers and took different occupations. Abel was a keeper of sheep, while Cain was a tiller of the ground. Both of these men were sons of Adam, so they both were born sinners. Both of them were taught to worship God, their Creator. I imagine that both of the young men were instructed in the ways of God from a very young age as Adam would perhaps bring them close to himself and tell them of his earlier days of what life was like in the Garden.

Romans 5:12 - “Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned.”
Because they were the children of Adam, the Bible says that both Cain and Abel were sinners who needed to be saved. The difference between the two, however, is the way that they approach God. The object of their faith and worship is what makes all the difference.

**Genesis 4:3-5** - “In the course of time Cain brought to the Lord an offering of the fruit of the ground, and Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions. And the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering He had no regard.”

When we view this in light of what Hebrews says, we learn that Abel came to God the way that God Himself had specified.

The writer of Hebrews tells us that Abel's worship is a matter of true faith, while Cain's worship is a matter of self-righteous works. In effect, Cain approaches the altar with his fruit and vegetables and says, “Look here, God, at what I have done.” There is no atonement in that.

Abel, on the other hand, comes to the altar with the very best of his flock and slaughters it and its blood is applied to the altar. He says, “Look here, God, at what I have done. Forgive me and atone for my sin!”

Abel recognized his sin and need for atonement.

By offering a sacrifice of the best of his flock, Abel was acting on the truth that he no doubt had heard from God—the fact that there needs to be blood on the altar before worship will ever become possible. This was true long before the law of Moses, for we see the first blood atonement made mention of in Genesis 3:21 where God Himself shed blood in order to cover Adam’s nakedness.

This is the first instance of an innocent taking the place of the guilty and its life being required so that they can be covered.

The parents would teach their children what God had taught them, thereby giving emphasis to the nature of sin and the need for covering or atonement.
2. Abel’s worship was reflected in SACRIFICIAL giving

“...through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts.”

The idea is that Abel comes to the altar with the right atonement as well as the right attitude. Both are necessary if we desire for our worship to be acceptable to God.

Compare Abel’s sacrifice of blood to Cain’s sacrifice of fruit. The Bible says that God accepted Abel’s worship, but He rejected Cain’s. Simply looking on from an external perspective, there is a lot we would find to be impressive with Cain:

• He was a hard worker
• He came from a well-known family
• He grew up in an ideal environment
• He made it a priority to come to the altar

Warren Wiersbe - “From the human point of view, Cain was a man of good works and moral character. He labored in his field, he came to the altar, and he brought God a sacrifice. But from the divine viewpoint, Cain’s good works were seen as evil works.”

Cain may have been religious, but he was not righteous. The truth is that righteousness is not something that a person earns by his or her own effort; righteousness is something that a person receives through faith.

Cain rejected salvation by faith through a blood substitute, therefore he rejected true righteousness.

Cain’s religion wanted nothing to do with blood because it plagued his conscience. Bloodshed reminded him of how big a sinner he was deep down in his heart, and he perished at the thought. Thus, it was easier for him to come to a sugar coated altar in a way of his choosing.
His worship may be self-soothing, but it is not heart changing. We know this because although Cain wasn’t willing to spill the blood of a lamb, he sure was willing to spill the blood of his brother.

**Jude 11** - “Woe to them! For they walked in the way of Cain and abandoned themselves for the sake of gain...”

The way of Cain is religion that does not lead to salvation.

**Hebrews 9:22** - “Without shedding of blood there is no remission.”

Abel’s faith resulted in salvation and reflected itself through sacrificial heart worship because of his faith in God’s Word and his obedience to come through the only way that God had specified and declared worthy of His acceptance.

Notice that the Bible says he offered to God the very best of his flock, meaning that his worship was not merely token.

**Allen P. Ross** - “This gives the reader a preview of human worship in general: some people attend a service and are uplifted, and other who are there do not respond; some give to the Lord and are blessed, while others do it and are disgruntled. It is not the ritual that is at fault but the person.”

Cain and Abel represent two different kinds of worshipers. At first glance, Cain’s worship offering looks like it should be acceptable, but it was halfhearted. The Bible simply says Cain brought an offering, but Abel brought the best of his flock.

**“Commending” - or testifying; literally means to bear record of**

It means that God accepted the sacrifice that Abel offered to Him in worship. It means that his worship had God’s approval and sanction. As a passionate worshiper of God, Abel was to be found at the altar offering the very best of his flock. It means that Abel’s faith resulted in his giving the very best of what he had to the Lord as an act of worship. Thus, his worship was evidence of his faith. Where there is no passionate worship, there is no personal faith.
Warren Wiersbe - “Communion with God leads to confidence in God. One of the problems in the church today is our lack of true worship. Too often the sanctuary has become a theater where paid performers entertain an audience. The audience pays the price by its patience during the sermon and through offerings. Gone is holy hush of God! Gone is the awesome sense of His presence! In its place is mere human enjoyment instead of spiritual enrichment.”

Cain was discharging a duty; Abel was a passionate worshiper.

This is the difference between the two brothers as worshipers. Both of them had received the same instruction, and witnessed the same example. Abel worshiped according to God’s will, Cain worshiped according to his own will. Abel gave the best of his flock, Cain merely brought a token offering.

With the example of Abel, we learn one of the very first principles of sacrificial, God-honoring worship. Those who possess a true heart for worship make it their number one desire in life to please God. The issue is not so much what they give, but whether or not they give themselves to God.

True worship is submission and obedience to God.

1 Samuel 15:22 - “Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams.”

True worship, whenever it has taken place, will always result in greater obedience in the worshiper’s life.

3. Abel’s worship remains to SPEAK even now

“And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks.”

Abel died. His life was taken by his self-righteous, proud, and murderous brother. He is the first death and martyr.
Though he died, he still speaks. It means that his worshiping faith outlived him. His example continues for us to emulate.

Amazingly, there’s no place in Scripture where we ever read any of Abel’s words. There are no recorded words of Abel to be found anywhere in the Bible. Yet, he speaks.

In fact, the Bible only refers to the voice of Abel’s blood that cried out to the Lord from the ground. It wasn’t the voice of his mouth that Scripture makes mention of; it is the voice of his blood. Abel’s life was righteous, therefore his life’s blood cried out to God from the ground.

It is still the voice of Abel's blood that cries out to us these many thousands of years later. It remains to speak of faith in God, in the way of God, pointing us to the precious blood of Christ.

Lessons we need to come away with:

- God is to always be approached through the blood of a Substitute
- God has no regard for the religion of human achievement
- Man-made religion can do nothing to change the heart

Cain’s worship was all about himself:

- He approached the altar with a man-made scheme
- He offered up a man-made sacrifice
- He focused on a man-made satisfaction

When your worship is all about yourself, you get the very best of what you yourself can provide. Cain’s worship did nothing to transform his heart. In fact, it only revealed the sinfulness of it. His pride was exposed. True worship is without man-made scheme. True worship is according to proper sacrifice. True worship is about divine satisfaction. Worship that is born from faith in Jesus Christ is the only worship that God accepts.