

The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 13 February 2022. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced, and see the context for yourself. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.

“They Pleased God”

Hebrews 11:4-6

In my growing-up years, I had the privilege of attending a Christian school; and one thing that was strongly emphasised at every grade level of my school was the memorisation of Scripture. To this day, I associate **Hebrews chapter 11** with my third class year, because in my third class year we memorised **Hebrews 11** in its entirety. Every week throughout the school year, we memorised another verse or two of **Hebrews 11**, as well as to two or three other verses from the Old and New Testaments.

Now, it was about this time in my life when I was first encouraged to have a personal “life verse.” In case you haven’t heard of this idea before, a “life verse” is a verse that you choose to be “your own” special verse as you go through life. When you are uncertain, fearful, or going through temptations, this “special verse” comes to mind, and you can claim its promises.

I know many Christians who have, at different point in their lives, changed their life verse, or even adopted a “second” or “third” life verse, as they were dealing with new trials in their lives. I myself have adopted a “secondary” life verse, and even a “third” one. **Isaiah 40:29-31** took on great importance to me when I was going through a great trial of sickness years ago; and **1 Thessalonians 5:24** became very pertinent to me as I was going through all the uncertainties of preparing to go to Ireland as a missionary. However, the verse that I still claim as my primary life verse is the one that I chose when I was nine years old. That verse is **Hebrews 11:6**, which says, ***“But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.”***

This morning we are going to learn about two men who pleased God with their lives, because they lived by faith, and sought God diligently. One of these men had his life violently cut short in his youth. The other man was honoured with being taken to Paradise without even dying! In the end, the record of these men’s lives was not that they “followed their dreams,” or that they “reached the top,” or that they were “happy and healthy, and loved life.” The record of their lives was **that they pleased God**. To please God with your life should be the one driving, passionate desire of every child of God. If you do not have this desire, and *never have* had it, then you have not been saved; and it is my prayer that you *will* receive Christ as your Saviour today. If you are saved, it is my prayer that you will be filled and controlled by this passion to please God. The title of this message is, ***“They Pleased God.”***

Read Hebrews 11:4-6.

I. Abel’s Faithful Sacrifice (v. 4)

Paul’s first line-up in the “Hall of Faith” is Abel—the very first person in history who died for his faith in the Lord. As we focus on Abel this morning, I’d like to point out the **object of his faith**; the **product of his faith**; and the **reward for his faith**. First, though, let’s go back to the book of **Genesis**, and look at the record of Abel’s faith in God.

Read Genesis 4:1-16.

What was the **object** of Abel's faith? In other words, "*In what* did Abel place his faith?" He placed his faith in God's promise of the coming Redeemer. Abel's parents had told him all about this promise. No doubt he had heard, many times, about the words that God had spoken to the serpent: "***And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel***" (Genesis 3:15). Abel knew about God's promise that a Saviour would one day come from Heaven to earth, take on human flesh, and crush the head of Satan—after being crushed Himself. He knew that somehow, the sacrifice of a lamb symbolised this future saving work that the Redeemer would do for him. Abel also realised knew that his action of *sacrificing* that lamb had no saving merit in it. He knew that neither this good work, nor any other good work, could redeem his soul. He knew that *God* was his Redeemer; and his faith rested in God alone.

Cain, on the other hand, *never* placed his faith in the Redeemer. Of course, he participated in the sacrifice of lambs as he was growing up, while he was still under the rule of his parents (just as many people today grow up in Christian homes, and learn all the "motions" of Christianity). He knew all the proper rituals. He knew what to do, and what to say, and when to say it. Even in his adult life, it appears that he had offered the *proper* sacrifice of a lamb for at least some period of time. We know, from what the Bible tells us in **Genesis 4 and 5**, that Cain was already married to one of his sisters. We also know that Cain and Abel were grown men, who were established in their occupations. This surely wasn't the first time that Cain and Abel had offered a sacrifice on their own, without their parents' guidance.

However, there came a day when it became apparent what was *really* in Cain's heart. There came a day when Cain decided to offer the *fruit of the ground* as a sacrifice, instead of a lamb. On that day, he openly declared that his faith was *not* in the coming Redeemer, but in the *works of his own hands*. *He* had sown and reaped that fruit of the field by the toil of *his* hands; and *God had better accept it!* This was Cain's attitude toward God.

There is an old Johnny Cash song called "These Hands," which hit the charts in America back in 1962. I don't usually quote the lyrics of country songs in my sermons; but the words to this song illustrate the attitude of Cain perfectly. The person speaking in the song is supposed to be talking to God; and this is what he says *to God*:

"These hands aren't the hands of a gentleman: these hands are calloused and old;
 These hands raised a family, these hands built a home,
 Now these hands raise to praise the Lord.
 These hands won the heart of my loved one—and with hers, they were never alone.
 If these hands filled their task, then what more could you ask?
 For these fingers have worked to the bone!

Now don't try to judge me **by what you'd like me to be**,
 For my life hasn't been a success.
 Some people have power, but still they grieve,
 While *these hands* have brought me happiness.
 Now I'm tired, and I'm old, and I ain't got much gold;
 Maybe things ain't been all that I planned.

Lord above, hear my plea: When it's time to judge me,
Take a look at these hard-working hands."

The music industry labelled this as a "gospel" music; and it sold albums. However, the "gospel" that is presented in this song is a false gospel! It may be a "feel good" song, and it may jerk a few tears. To the unsuspecting, this song even seems to honour God. However, these words do *not* truly honour God. The attitude of the speaker is, "*I'm a good person. I've raised a family. I've always worked hard. I've never hurt anyone in my life. God, don't judge me by what you want me to be! That wouldn't be fair! After all, no one is perfect.*"

My friends, this attitude is nothing but the old spirit of Cain. Like Cain, **the speaker in this song is making demands of God.** My friends, we may *not* tell God how He should judge us! He is the Judge; and we have no say in how He judges us! When David repented of his sin with Bathsheba, he humbly acknowledged, "*Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightiest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest.*" What a contrast to the attitude of the speaker in "These Hands"! Like Cain, **he supposes that God will "lower the bar"** in His judgment. My friends, God will *not* lower the bar. He *will* judge us "by what *He'd* like us to be." He will judge us against *His* standard, which is absolute perfection! Let's see what **Nahum** had to say about God's judgment.

Read Nahum 1:3.

When Jonah preached to the people of Nineveh in about 760 B.C., the whole city repented of their sin within 40 days; and God spared them from the destruction that was hanging over them. However, only one generation later, the people of Nineveh had completely returned to idolatry, gross sexual immorality, murder, and bloodlust; and God raised up the prophet Nahum to prophesy of the destruction that would come upon them because of their crimes. About one century after Nahum, in 612 B.C., Nineveh was destroyed by the Babylonians, in precisely the manner that Nahum had foretold.

Now, in **verse 3**, we find an important statement about God's character. First, Nahum says that God is "***slow to anger.***" God often grants sinners an astoundingly long time to repent of their sin--just as He did for Nineveh. Nineveh had, at one point, come within a hair's breadth of destruction; but God spared them when they repented. Even after they apostatised again, God allowed more than a century to pass before He finally destroyed them. God was, indeed, very merciful, and "***slow to anger,***" toward the people of Nineveh.

Many people look at the great evil, cruelty, and oppression in this world, and hurl accusations at God. They say, "*If there be a God, then either He is cruel, calloused, and apathetic (since He allows evil to go unpunished); or, He is powerless to do anything to stop it.*" However, nothing could be further from the truth. Nahum assures us that God is "***great in power.***" God can squash the wicked like a bug, instantly! The reason that God delays to punish the wicked is that He is gracious and longsuffering, and is "***not willing that any shall perish, but that all should come to repentance.***" He often gives men a very long time to repent.

However, there *is* an end to God's longsuffering. Nahum assures us that God "***will not at all acquit the wicked.***" God will not "drop the charge" against sin. Sin must be judged! This applies not merely to nations, but to individuals; and it applies not just to temporal judgment

in this world, but to eternal judgment. Not one sin that you or I have ever committed will be overlooked, or swept under the rug. As the righteous Judge, God *must* judge sin. This is bad news for us, because the minimum punishment for even the “smallest” sin is *eternal death in hell!* Ignorance of the Law will not be accepted as an excuse, either, because even those who do not have the Scriptures have the Law of God written in their hearts, and in their conscience. The whole world stands before God with a “guilty” verdict, with no plea bargain to offer God.

Read Romans 2:11-16 / 3:19-20, 23 / 6:23.

We have all sinned against a holy God; and our sin has earned us death. Personalise that truth. *You* have sinned; and *your* sin may *not* be acquitted: it *must* be judged. That is why God, in His love and mercy, sent His sinless Son to earth, so that He might take God’s judgment *in your place*. Those who wish to be saved from the judgment of hell, and to be made at peace with God, must place their complete faith in the Lamb of God, who paid for our sins.

With this in mind, let’s return to the record of Cain and Abel. **(Read Genesis 4:7 again.)** Even after Cain rebelled against God by offering the work of his own hands, God was still merciful to him. God graciously offered Cain the redeeming sacrifice. God said, ***“If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted?”*** God was mercifully reasoning with Cain. He was saying, “I’ve made a way for you to be forgiven and accepted, Cain; all you need to do is come to me by the way that I have provided you.” Yet, God extended His mercy even further than this. God went on to say, ***“And if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door.”***

What did God mean when He said, ***“Sin lieth at the door”***? Well, it is helpful to know that the Hebrew word for “sin” is *khatath*; yet, this very same word, *khatath*, also means “sin offering.” To know whether the word *khatath* means “sin” or “sin offering,” you must look at the context in which it is used. In this case, it appears that the word *khatath* could be taken either way. If Cain would continue to *reject* God, then “sin,” which was lying, or “crouching” at his door like a wild animal, would “pounce” on him, and overtake him, and destroy him. On the other hand, if he would repent, and submit himself to God, then the “sin offering” was available, as well. Simply put, God was telling Cain, “Even though you’ve rejected me up to this point, the sin offering is still available for you. It’s right there ‘at the door,’ if you will only receive it.” God was lovingly urging Cain to place his faith in the “sin offering” of the coming Redeemer. Yet, Cain refused this offer; and because he refused it, sin, “pounced” on him, and overtook him like a voracious beast. He hardened his heart, and became the world’s first murderer. Abel, on the other hand, placed his faith in the Lamb of God, and was saved. **Christ was the object of Abel’s faith.**

Now, what was the **product** of Abel’s faith? What did his faith in God produce? It produced **good works**, which pleased God.

Read James 2:18-20.

Abel was not saved because he offered a lamb. Rather, he offered the lamb *because he was saved*. Abel was saved because he had placed his faith in the coming Saviour. His action of offering the lamb was merely the *result* of his faith. Faith was the root, and obedience was the fruit. As we read through this chapter, we will see example after example of people whose *actions* were the *result* of their faith in God. True faith always produces *obedience* to God.

Christian. do *your* actions tell others that you are saved? If people have a hard time telling that you are a Christian, then something is very wrong! This is why Paul urged the members of the church of Corinth, “*Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves.*” In other words, “Make absolutely sure that you have truly been saved!” Good works don’t save you; but good works *will spring forth* from true faith. The Bible says, “*For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.*” Don’t float through life contented that you are saved merely because you believe in God. Hell is very real! Make sure that you have true, saving faith!

We’ve seen the **Object** of Abel’s faith. We’ve seen the **product** of his faith. Now, let’s examine **the reward for Abel’s faith.** (Read Hebrews 11:4 again.) What was the reward for Abel’s faith? His reward was that he “*obtained witness*” from God that “*he was righteous.*” This “righteousness” wasn’t Abel’s *own* personal righteousness; it was *God’s* perfect righteousness, which He credited to Abel’s account, as though it were his own.

Read Romans 4:3-6.

In **verse 5**, that word “*counted*” means “credited to someone’s account.” Paul is using a book-keeping term to describe salvation. Now, think about this analogy! If you were the bookkeeper for a firm, and if you were audited, and if it were found that your books came one cent short, you’d be in hot water! Well, guess what? The same is true in the spiritual realm--except that the consequences are infinitely higher. If you were to come only one “cent” short of the perfect “bank ledger” that God requires, you’d still miss Heaven. (And believe me, you fall far shorter of God’s standard than that!) According to God’s Word, you are spiritually bankrupt. It is as though you were a bookkeeper, and you had embezzled millions of euros. The *only* way you can be forgiven and accepted by God is to have your sin *deleted* from your account, and to have Christ’s perfect righteousness *credited* to your account: and the only way this transaction can take place is for you to receive God’s gift of His Son, by faith.

Though Abel lived 4,000 years before Christ came to earth, and though he never saw his Redeemer in the flesh, Abel received God’s perfect sin-offering by faith: and his faith still “speaks” to us today. That is why Paul says of Abel, “*he being dead yet speaketh.*” Abel’s testimony is a warning to those who have not placed their faith in God’s sin offering, Jesus Christ; and it is an encouragement to those who *are* saved to continue to live by faith.

II. Enoch’s faithful walk (vv. 5-6)

Read Hebrews 11:5 cf. Genesis 5:21-24.

The second person in God’s “Hall of Faith” is Enoch. Just as we did with Abel, we will examine the **object** of Enoch’s faith; the **product** of his faith; and the **reward** of his faith.

First, let’s look at the **object** of Enoch’s faith. In what did Enoch place his faith? Well, just like every other Old Testament believer, Enoch placed his faith in the coming Redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ. However, there was a part of God’s redemption plan in which Enoch seems to have taken a keen interest: and that was God’s plan for the last days. God rewarded Enoch for his faith by giving him divine revelation about the last days. Let’s see what God told him.

Read Jude 14-15.

We don't know what other prophecies God may have given Enoch. (If God did give any other prophecies to Enoch, they were oral prophecies, which were not preserved in Scripture.) However, this particular prophecy *is* verified as a true, unabridged prophecy of Enoch. It was passed down by the Jewish people orally, from generation to generation; and when it was written down by Jude, it was finally included in the Scriptures. This is a short revelation; but it gives us a vivid picture of Christ's return to earth. This is a prophecy of the Battle of Armageddon, when Christ will execute judgment on the Antichrist and his followers.

Now, I want to direct your attention to that phrase, "with *ten thousands of his saints.*" God told Enoch that when He returns to earth, His saints will come "with" him. Now, I'm sure that Enoch must have pondered this statement. Surely he must have wondered: "If God's saints will be descending *from Heaven to earth* "with" Him, then when did they go *up* to Heaven? And in what bodily state will they be when they descend to earth? Surely God's saints will have *bodies* when they return to earth to reign with Him. But if so, then when will they *receive* their resurrected bodies? And what will those bodies be like?" I don't know what, exactly, went through Enoch's mind; but he must have had a lot of questions about the resurrection! He believed the revelation that God had given to him; and you may be sure that he meditated upon this truth often. This is what *every* believer should do! When Christ is the object of your faith, the *resurrection* and the *return of Christ* will be in your mind often.

Now, what was the **product** of Enoch's faith? What did Enoch's faith in the promise of Christ's return produce in his life? **It produced a close, loving, daily walk with the Lord.** We are told that "Enoch walked with God." Faith in the promise of Christ's return still has this effect on God's people to this day! The measure of your faith is revealed by the kind of daily walk you have with the Lord. Do you love Him with all your heart? Is He your dearest friend? Those who walk by faith want to *please God*. Their driving desire is to be found walking with the Lord when He returns, so that they won't be ashamed to stand before Him. John wrote, "*Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.*"

Now, in closing, let's look at the **reward** of Enoch's faith. What was the reward of Enoch's faith? Well, we know that Enoch, just like Abel, had the reward of **God's imputed righteousness**. (He was *saved*.) We also know that God rewarded Enoch with a **special revelation** about Christ's future return to earth. However, God also rewarded Enoch in a way that no other believer (except for Elijah) has ever been rewarded: namely, **he left earth without dying!** Enoch did not see death: rather, his body was "translated" into Paradise! Enoch had been diligently meditating on the resurrection throughout his earthly walk with God; and God rewarded him by permitting him to have the privilege of leaving earth without dying! In essence, God gave Enoch a "**pre-view**" of the **resurrection of all believers**. To us believers who are awaiting Christ's return in the clouds, Enoch's translation is a "sneak peak" of what the Rapture will be like. In a "**moment, in the twinkling of an eye,**" those of us who are in Christ will one day be translated into immortal, glorified bodies, which are fit for Heaven. We will meet the Lord in the clouds; and we will go with Him to our heavenly home.

Now, let's read **verse 6** again. (**Read Hebrews 11:6.**) We've just been told that Enoch's testimony was that he *pleased* God. Now Paul proceeds to tell us that "***without faith it is impossible to please Him.***" Now, let's examine that statement closely. What is real faith? Well, first of all, real faith believes "***that he is.***" Now, believing that God "is" is the extent of most people's "faith." Most people believe that God *exists*; but that is as far as it goes. In reality, they live their lives as though He *doesn't* exist. They live by sight; they live for things of this world; and they live to fulfil their lustful desires. Is this true "faith"? No, it is not. You see, to believe that "He is" doesn't merely mean to believe that there is "*some kind of* God" up in Heaven. He is *not* the "god of many understandings," as the minister who prayed at President Obama's inauguration called him. He is the God who has revealed Himself in the Bible. The *God of the Bible* is the one in whom you must believe. And who is *He*? The Bible tells us that God is immortal, invisible, unchanging, immutable, transcendent, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, infinite, eternal, and sovereign. He is the infinite Spirit who created all things by His power. He is one God, yet three Persons in one—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. He is a personal God, who created men to commune with Him. He is perfect love; yet, He is also the righteous Judge, who cannot tolerate sin. He is longsuffering with men, and willing to forgive; but He will save men only on His terms. His terms for salvation are simple repentance of heart and faith in His Son, who became human flesh, and died in our place to pay for our sin. To reject any of these truths about *who God is*, is to *deny* that "He is." A God that you have concocted in your imagination to suit *you* is not the true God at all!

True faith believes that "He is." True faith accepts what God has revealed about Himself. However, that's not all. Real faith also believes that God is a "***rewarder of them that diligently seek him.***" The kind of faith that pleases God seeks nothing but *Him*. True faith seeks to be *reconciled* to God, so that you may have a *relationship* with Him! Tragically, most people are *not* seeking after God, because they don't really want Him. They do not want to submit to *Him*. They want to have their *own* way, and to follow their *own* pursuits, and their own glory, and their own sinful pleasures. Perhaps this describes you. Perhaps you have never even begun to seek after God. You may have *religion*, and you may desire to go to *Heaven*; but you have never been interested in *God's ruling your life*. If that be true of you, then you need to be saved! God is speaking to you, and is telling you that you need *Him!*

Those of us who *are* saved have been given the "reward" of salvation. We've received the reward of Jesus Christ. There was a day when we placed our trust in Him to save our souls. Yet, none of us have sought Him as fully as we should. **God wants us to be lost in Him!** He wants us to continue to seek Him diligently every day. He wants us to go "deep sea diving" in the fathomless depths of His mercy. He wants us to turn over every gem of the "riches of His grace," and stand in awe of its beauty!

Read Ephesians 3:14-21.

Christian, if you can't say that you have a passionate desire to know your Saviour; to read His Word; to be in His house; to talk to Him in prayer; to tell others about your Saviour; and to do His will at all costs, then you are not walking by faith as you ought, and you are not pleasing God as you ought. Now is the time to get right with Him again, so that you, like Abel and Enoch, can live a life that is continually pleasing to God.

Conclusion: After more than three decades, I can still quote **Hebrews 11** without stumbling too much. (My third class teacher taught me well!) However, merely *memorising* God's words is no substitute for living by *faith*. If you have never truly repented of your sin and believed on Christ, then you have not even *begun* to live by faith. You need to place your faith in Christ alone, and become His child! **If you are saved, there is no substitute for living by faith.** Is the record of your life right now that you are "following your dream," or that you are "happy and healthy, and love life"? Or is it that you are striving to please God? God wants you to trust Him with your *whole* life. Ask Him to increase your faith in Him!