May the Lord’s peace envelop you

*Be gracious to me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness;
According to the greatness of Your compassion blot out my transgressions.*

 Psalm 51:1

When we accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, all our sins, past, present, and future, are blotted out and God remembers them no more. We come to the understanding that we can no longer live in sin; there cannot be a sin that we continue to commit regularly as a part of our life. If we have such a sin, we must at least be fighting it with everything we have while in the strength of the Holy Spirit.

Besides this, we still sin. This is different from living in sin. We still do or say things wrong; we have evil thoughts; our rebellious nature sometimes gets the better of us. We are still Christian, we are still forgiven, but we still need to clear up our relationship with God. Our unconfessed sin blocks our communion with God and we need to remove the block by asking for forgiveness.

This is a difficult thing for us to understand: we are forgiven in Christ before we ask, but by asking we are brought back into a right standing with our Father. Psalm 51 is a wonderful Psalm to pray when asking for forgiveness. It was the prayer of David after he had committed adultery and murder.

In Christ, God’s forgiveness is guaranteed; but confessing and asking for it brings peace to our souls.

In Christ’s love

John

 3-13-22

Genesis 4:1-15

Adam and Eve have chosen to disobey God; consequently, sin became a constant companion of the human race, even to this day. Because God is just, He pronounced their punishment: Women would bear children in pain and men would earn their food by the sweat of their brow. Spiritual death came automatically and immediately; physical death would follow as God had warned them. And we are told in Hebrews 9:27 that “*it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment*.” So, Adam and Eve, and all the rest of us face the prospect of standing before the judgment seat of Christ.

Bearing all this in mind, God is also merciful. First, He ejected Adam and Eve from the Garden so they could not eat from the tree of life. If they had, they would have lived in an eternal state of decaying and of being separated from God. But also in His great mercy, He has provided a better tree of life: Jesus Christ. When we believe in Jesus as Lord and Saviour, His death atones for all our sins and our guilt is removed. We are spiritually reborn so that we can once more be in the presence of God. He then provides eternal life, but the prospect of decay and sin’s consequences are removed, and from Him comes eternal life in fellowship with God.

Up until the time of Christ, a blood sacrifice was necessary to cover the sins of the people. This had to be coupled with faith in God; with believing what He said. Once Jesus came, His perfect blood sacrifice actually removed sin and removed the guilt that comes with it. As it says in the book of Hebrews, chapter 9, verse 12, “*but [Jesus], having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God.*” Then in verse 14 it says, “*For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified*.” Because of Jesus’ work on the cross, those who place their faith in Him are spiritually reborn and granted eternal life in Christ.

God provided a blood sacrifice for Adam and Eve when the animals died in order to provide them with clothing. God had commanded the man and woman to be fruitful and multiply; among other things, this meant for them to have children. In spite of the entrance of sin, God’s command didn’t change. Although God said that Eve would bear children in pain, this indicated that she would still bear children. Adam believed God and named his wife Eve, because she would be the mother of all the living. Here in verse 1 of chapter 4, Eve demonstrates her faith by giving God the credit for her having a child.

Can you imagine what this must have been like for Eve? She was the first to give birth; there was no previous precedent for her to look at to gain some idea of what to expect. This would have been a moment-by-moment new experience. What did she think of the changes that her body went through? What did she think the first time she felt the baby move inside her? Did she have any idea what was happening when the labor pains first started? But she made it through and gave birth and gave God the glory.

I want to back up a little to a false teaching I mentioned a few weeks ago. There are some who claim that Eve first had relations with satan himself and that satan was the physical father of Cain. This first verse of chapter 4 very directly and explicitly debunks that claim. *Now the man had relations with his wife Eve, and she conceived and gave birth to Cain*. Cain was the physical son of Adam, not of satan. Now, the Bible does speak of people who are called children of satan or of having satan as their father. This is in a metaphorical sense; these people do the will of satan and follow his desires. These people are liars and murderers and rebellious against God. In this sense, these people are the seed of satan.

So, Eve gave birth to Cain, the first-born human-being in all of history. The Bible next records the birth of Abel. These become the first two people to grow into men. Now the Bible tells us that Adam and Eve had other sons and daughters, but for now, we need to learn about these two. The most striking thing we learn is the power of evil and the prevalence of sin. We learn how fast it grows and get a glimpse of how horrible it really is; no wonder God hates it. Adam and Eve simply disobeyed a command from God to abstain from the fruit of one tree; by the second generation we have premeditated murder.

Cain followed in the footsteps of his father and became a tiller of the ground; he raised crops for food. Abel became a keeper of flocks. Although at this time, meat had not been given to mankind to eat, the flocks would have been necessary for clothing, possibly for milk, and for sacrifices to God.

We have read the story; we know what happens between these two brothers. This is an actual historical account. Cain and Able were real and lived on this earth. Even so, their lives and what they were like tell us things we can apply to our own lives and show us the difference between those who follow satan and those who choose to follow Christ.

Let’s look at Abel. He brought an offering to the LORD “*of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions.*” Later in the Bible, when the LORD tells Moses about all the sacrifices the people are to offer, He wants the “first fruits” and the fat. These were considered to be the best and also an offering that would demonstrate faith. If you gave what came first, then you were showing that you had faith that the LORD would provide more. Even though the Law had not yet been given, Abel automatically offered to the LORD the best. But that is not why the LORD accepted Abel’s offering. His offering was accepted because his heart was right with the LORD; because he had faith in the LORD.

The offering Abel gave just showed what was in his heart. From deep down, he wanted to give his best to God. The Bible explains this later in Hebrews 11:4, “*By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain.*” We have to remember that Abel was still a sinner; from Adam and Eve on, with the exception of Jesus, every human-being is sinful; is a sinner. What makes the difference in any life is faith. God will count faith as righteousness. As we read later in Genesis, “*Then [Abram] believed in the Lord; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness*.” Likewise, now, when we believe on Jesus Christ as our Saviour, we still have no righteousness of our own; but we have the righteousness of Christ reckoned to us.

The entire verse of Hebrews 11:4 reads as follows, “*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 faith, though he is dead, he still speaks*.” God accepted Abel’s faith as righteousness, which was demonstrated by accepting his offering. The acceptance was God’s testimony. Abel’s story is preserved in the Bible which is God’s word; so, Abel still speaks to us by having demonstrated his faith in God.

We who are now followers of Jesus no longer have to offer sacrifices to atone for our sins; Jesus’ sacrifice has completely taken care of that. But we are called to sacrifice according to the sacrifice of Abel. Abel offered sacrifice out of the gratitude of his heart and reverence for God. It was the evidence of his faith. For us, we have Romans 12:1, “*Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.*”

Our sacrifice is daily following the commands of Jesus; not because we have to, but because we want to. We love God and sacrifice our time in prayer and Bible study and attending worship service and fellowshipping with other Christians. We sacrifice by giving to those in need, loving and praying for those who do us wrong, and serving others, both Christians and non-Christians. When done in the leading of the Holy Spirit, these things are acceptable and pleasing to God.

God told Cain, “*The voice of your brother’s blood is crying to Me from the ground*.” The blood of a living creature is very important, not only to life itself, but theologically. Deuteronomy 12:23 tells the Israelites with regard to eating meat, “*Only be sure not to eat the blood, for the blood is the life, and you shall not eat the life with the flesh*.” In particular, the blood of a human-being is held in high regard by God. In Genesis 9:6 God tells Noah:

*“Whoever sheds man’s blood,
By man his blood shall be shed,
For in the image of God
He made man.”*

People are the only creatures God made in His own image; in His own likeness. We are far and above all the rest of His creation. We are not the strongest or the smartest; but God made us special: there is some fundamental likeness between us and the Almighty.

Considering these things gives us some idea of the significance of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. He poured out His blood for us; He poured out His life for us. In the Lord’s Supper; the act of communion is the spiritual partaking of Christ’s blood; partaking of Christ’s life. We consume the life of Jesus and He enters into us and lives in us.

Back to Abel. God certainly knew all along what Cain was going to do and what Cain did. He let Cain know this by saying that Abel’s blood cried out to Him. In a sense, that’s what a murdered person does, even though dead; the very death cries out for vengeance. We see this again in the last book of the Bible. In Revelation 6:10, the souls of those who have been martyred for their faith in Christ cry out to God, “*How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth*?”

Now, we must be very careful with the concept of vengeance. We see it in the Bible and sometimes people take vengeance and sometimes they ask God for it. But first and foremost for the Christian is that we are not to take vengeance ourselves. Paul tells us in Romans 12:19, “*Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord*.”

This does not mean that we let someone get by with breaking the law or that we don’t defend ourselves. This means that while someone is alive, we pray for them and, if reasonable, speak to them of Jesus Christ. Our example is Stephen who while being stoned for his testimony of Jesus, prayed, “*Lord, do not hold this sin against them*!” We are to forgive; then we don’t have to worry about wrong done to us; either they will accept Christ and be forgiven, or they will receive vengeance from God that will be far worse than anything we could ever do.

In Matthew 23:35, Jesus Himself referred to the “*blood of righteous Abel*”. Abel was counted righteous because of his faith in God. But we learn something valuable in Hebrews 12:24. There is a comparison between the blood of Abel and the blood of Jesus. It refers to, “*Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel*.”

The covenant given through Moses was sealed by the sprinkled blood of animal sacrifices. Under the new covenant in Jesus Christ, we are sprinkled with His blood to seal the covenant. And Jesus’ blood speaks better than the blood of Abel, because while the blood of Abel cries out for vengeance, the blood of Jesus cries out for forgiveness.

Next week, Lord willing, we will take a deeper look at Cain and his representation and significance for humanity.

Prayer

Almighty God, Your word tells us that without faith it is impossible to please You. And faith that pleases You must be faith in You and in in Your only begotten Son, Jesus. Help us, Holy Spirit, to believe all that God tells us in His word; and to act according to His will. May His word be written on our hearts and engraved into our minds so that they become to us words of life through our Saviour Jesus Christ.

We praise You Lord Jesus for the sacrifice You made. Only by You can we be cleansed of our sins and freed of our guilt. You are the only way to the Father. You are the narrow gate. You are the Bread of Life. We proclaim You as Saviour.

We ask for Your constant help and guidance so that our lives may be a holy and living sacrifice to You. May our words and actions glorify You, so that others are attracted to Your holy Kingdom. We long to be fruitful for You; that we are used to build Your Kingdom and provide the worship that You deserve. May the rocks never have to cry out while we live.

We pray these things in Jesus’ name

Amen