



## **By Faith (Part 2) – Abel**

Pastor Jerry Gillis – February 26, 2017

Sometimes our faith can actually make our lives speak louder than our words. You may or may not know the history surrounding an African-American lady from Alabama, Birmingham, who worked odd jobs, and who was sitting on a segregated bus, but decided not to give up her seat, even though she was seated in the proper segregated section according to that bus. And was asked by a Caucasian driver to get up and give up her seat for another Caucasian passenger. She didn't. Her name was Rosa Parks.

Some of you have studied her, some of you may have heard about her during Black History month, which is this month. But Rosa Parks was an extraordinary lady that helped in the process of changing the tenor of the civil rights movement in the United States. She was not the first one to do what she did nor was she the last, but she was one. And as a result, God used her in a unique way and I say that advisedly. God used her in a unique way because she was actually a person of deep faith who loved the Lord Jesus Christ. She's also the first woman upon her death at the age of ninety-two years old, the first woman to ever lie in state in the Capital Rotunda in Washington, D.C. What a powerful life. Who seemed to be a nondescript

woman who, by the way, many of you in the room most likely most of us that are watching in this room or in another room or in another campus, most likely we don't know by heart anything she ever said. But by her life, we know some things about her. It's extraordinary, really. This was a woman who put her confidence and her faith and trust in God, even in very difficult times, who taught Sunday School, who helped to prepare the serving of Communion in her local church. An extraordinary lady who we don't really remember anything she ever said. But her life, based in faith still speaks.

The truth is that for you and I what we should remember is that's what faith does. Faith speaks loudly. Even maybe when there aren't words to correspond even sometimes there should be, but even when there aren't words to correspond, faith can speak loudly. And it should for us as well.

Now we've been studying faith, we started last week in this series in Hebrews chapter number 11, which is where we're going to be over the next number of weeks. And in this series, we started to understand some things about faith. We first began by understanding that Hebrews is talking about the object of our faith being Jesus. From chapter one through chapter ten and then into chapter twelve and thirteen we find out that Jesus Himself is the object of our faith.

But we also learned a thing or two about the essence of our faith, because Hebrews chapter 11 verse number 1 talks about it. Notice what it said, it said "Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see." And so we learned that that is kind of the essence of

the definition of faith. But then the writer goes on in verse number 2 to say this: "This (faith) is what the ancients were commended for."

Now, what you have in the remainder of Hebrews chapter 11 is you have kind of this role call of faith heroes. Over and over and over again you've got a number of them and this is not an unlikely thing in the ancient world. This happened quite often. Whenever there was a point to be made, sometimes they would make a list of examples, particularly people that exemplified these things and so what you find in Hebrews chapter 11 is a number of people who are talked about in terms of their faith and how they lived that out, and what that looked like in their world. This is what faith, what the ancients were commended for, these Old Testament saints, as the writer to these Hebrew Christians looks back on, all of these Old Testament saints, he's saying this is what they were commended for. They were commended for their faith. And then they give a bunch of examples.

But then the writer goes on in verse number 3 to remind us of something else. He says, "By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what is visible." In other words, he's correlating the idea of the essence of our faith, to be sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see or to be confident in what we hope for, and assured of what we do not see. And he corresponds that to the very beginning of everything, because no one was around when God made and spoke everything into existence. Nobody was there. How then do we know that it occurred? By faith the writer tells us. He tells us that that is the foundation, that is the beginning point that we have to believe that God exists and that God is the One who spoke into

motion everything that exists. By His own time table and His own processes in a way that He chose, this is what God did and this is the foundation of our very faith.

And then, it begins to go on because we find out that God made everything out of nothing by speaking it into existence. Theologians call this ex nihilo. It's a wonderful term that you can impress people at a party with if you want. But you don't remember it and so you'll have to go back and watch this again to say what was that he said? He said something like Hawaii Five-O, what was that that he said? I can't remember exactly. God made everything out of nothing, and we believe that and we trust that, and we have an assurance of that by faith in who He's revealed Himself to be.

But what the writer is also doing is he's calling our attention to the book of Genesis when he says that, because whenever you start talking about the very beginning of everything, God creating everything, your mind runs back to the book of Genesis. Which makes perfect sense because what the writer is going to do is that the first eight people that he talks about in terms of their faith example are all lifted from the book of Genesis. It's seven maybe formally but I count Sarah, even though she's in Abraham's kind of text? I still count her. So it would be eight if you count Sarah and I do. Sarah, love you. Alright?

But you'd find it interesting, it seems that the writer would start his first example of faith when he's talking out of the book of Genesis, you would think that maybe Adam and Eve would be kind of the first examples, so to speak, but they're not. The first example is a man named Abel. That's who

we're going to look at today and see what we can glean from his life of faith. In fact, verse number 4 of Hebrews 11 says it this way: "By faith Abel brought God a better offering than Cain did. By faith he was commended as righteous, when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith Abel still speaks, even though he is dead."

Now, you might find it interesting that the writer would begin with Abel, you think Abel, we don't even know very much about Abel, I mean why would he start with Abel? Well, if you knew who he was writing to, the writer of Hebrews, if you knew who he was writing to you would start to understand this better. You see, the writer of Hebrews is writing to struggling Hebrew, or Jewish Christians. They are facing persecution both from outside, from the Roman Empire, and even from some of their Jewish brethren, those who were mad that they'd embraced the way of Jesus and claimed Jesus as Messiah and have broken away from Judaism. So they're kind of being persecuted on two fronts. So once you begin to understand that, you start going okay, it makes really good sense that the writer is beginning with Abel.

You remember the story, right? That Cain, his brother killed him, right? Primarily because of his faith. And so this guy, trying to instruct and even encourage these Hebrew Christians is writing to them and starting with Abel's life, because some of them are experiencing persecution from their brothers, so to speak, the Jews.

But you also find out in a hurry that the original readers of this would have also connected this to the Roman Empire. If you have done your history or

read your history and you didn't fall asleep in this particular world history class, you would have known when you studied the Roman Empire and understood a thing or two about the inception of Rome, that even though it's kind of hazy as to what's myth and what's fact, because it gets a little bit hazy for some of the historians, that there were two brothers that were a part of what would ultimately be the beginning of the Roman Empire. Their names were Romulus and Remus. How many of you have heard of Romulus and Remus? Awesome man, some of you are lying, but you look smart. That's cool, some of you are oh yeah, yeah, yeah I know them. Yeah, Beavis and Butt-Head, Romulus and Remus, they all came on on Fox, right? I remember those shows, I remember them, right? I can't believe I just said Butt-Head on Sunday morning, sorry. It was a show, I was just quoting it, I didn't watch it. Ha, Ha. Never saw it. Never saw it in my whole life. Don't even know what you're talking about.

So Romulus and Remus, here's the deal with them. They got into an argument about where they were going to found kind of this city and Romulus said it's going to be over here on these hills and Remus said no, no it's going to be on these hills. And they got into such an argument here's what happened. Romulus killed his brother Remus. And then named the city after himself, Rome is from Romulus. And so, in two different ways you've got this interesting way that the readers of this letter are processing that the writer is beginning with a man who was killed by his own brother. Both for their persecution from their brethren the Jewish people, and from the way that the other persecutors had started, which was a brother killing

a brother. So it's a unique way that they're processing this at the beginning for those of you who are history buffs.

But there are a few things that jump out of the text to us that teach us about faith that we need to grab hold of. And I'm going to give you the first one. Here it is. "By faith, Abel brought God a better offering." Okay. That's the first thing that we learn out of this text. By faith, Abel brought God a better offering. In fact, let me show it to you in the text, it's in the beginning part of Hebrews 11 verse 4. "By faith Abel brought God a better offering than Cain did." Some of you wonder like where does he get his points? From the Bible.

And just as a heads-up, for any of you who are watching who may be watching us on television, I know we have pastors that watch us from time to time online and on television. Just as a reminder, what your people need is they need to hear the Word of God. They don't just need all your cool stuff, they need to hear the Word of God.

So, I'll bet you're thinking to yourself, well, that was real creative professor, where you got that point from. Yup! Right from the text itself. By faith, Abel brought God a better offering.

Well what made his offering better? Well, we need to take a moment and we need to go back into the story for just a minute of Cain and Abel and so we're going to push back to Genesis chapter 4 and pick up the story there. Here's what it says, it says "Adam made love to his wife Eve, (yes, I'm reading the Bible) and she became pregnant and gave birth to Cain. She said, "With the help of the Lord I have brought forth a man." Later, she

gave birth to his brother Abel. And now Abel kept flocks, (so that meant that Abel was somebody who worked, he was like a shepherd, right?) and Cain worked the soil (he was a farmer). 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 - fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock."

Now that's what the text itself tells us about their particular offerings. Now I need to back you up for a second because we know Cain and Abel came from Adam and Eve, right? Two sons of Adam and Eve. Now what's interesting about that is that Adam and Eve I'm sure would have told stories about what life used to be like when they walked with God in the Garden. And I'm sure that they told the story of how they even got to be clothed as they were. They didn't used to be, but now they were. That God saw fit to clothe them with the skin of an animal, and the truth is that Cain and Abel would have known that full well, because they too were clothed with the skins of animals at this time as well, because people were actually wearing clothes at this point because of their shame in nakedness, right? It didn't used to be shame when they walked with God in the cool of the day in the Garden, but now it is.

And so they learned a thing or two about that, and probably understood a thing or two about what proper worship was because they had watched their mom and their dad actually worship the Lord in whatever way that was, because God had instructed Adam and Even in how to do that. And so I'm sure that Cain and Abel not only heard Adam and Eve tell them how God had instructed them to do that, but also they got to watch how they were supposed to do that. So when they show up with these offerings, they



bring offerings from their particular place of work. So for Abel, he is bringing some of the fatty portions of some of the first-born from his flock. And Cain is bringing some of the choice things that are growing from the ground. Flowers and vegetation and whatever else it is that he's growing, alright? It doesn't tell us all of that.

So they both bring their offerings, but yet God looks upon Abel's as satisfactory and looks upon Cain's as not satisfactory. Some would suggest that it's because Abel brought a blood offering. Some would suggest it's because Abel brought some of the first-fruits so to speak of the first-born, that that was what he did. And that's why his was acceptable. But here's the thing. We need to pause. That's conjecture. The text doesn't tell us that. Genesis does not actually say that to us. So we have to be careful for what we read into it. We actually don't know when we read Genesis what made Cain's offering a rejected offering and what made Abel's offering a received offering from the Lord. We don't know from the text of Genesis, so thankfully we have Hebrews. Because Hebrews actually does tell us. By faith. That's the difference between the two offerings.

I am of the opinion that it's possible that both of them, the material that they brought to offer to the Lord may have been exactly as they were described to have done. That Cain brought it from the produce of the land and that Abel brought it from the produce of the cattle, the sheep, the whomever, right? That they brought it in conjunction with the way that the Lord had designed it but only one was accepted because only one, Abel, brought it by faith. In other words, what I'm saying to you is this: I think

that our emphasis on the material of the offering is wrong. That our emphasis ought to be on the heart.

This is taught to us in the Scripture, it's told to us over and over again, isn't it? That the issue of sacrifices even if you do them the right way if according to the Law, if the heart is not in the proper place, that that's not where we want to be. That's not what God desires, right? Notice what Proverbs 15 verse number 8 says. It says "The Lord detests the sacrifice of the wicked." In other words, they may have a wicked heart but they may get the sacrifice exactly right, maybe it's exactly what they're supposed to do by Law, but because their hearts are wicked the Lord detests it. "But the prayer of the upright pleases Him." Because it's coming from a place of faith in the heart.

Or maybe you remember the conversation between Samuel the prophet and Saul the king, the first king of Israel. God had told Saul that He wanted, through Samuel he told Saul, He wanted all of the Amalekites and all of their stuff gone, like gone, see 'ya. No more Amalekites, they don't exist anymore, I want them all gone. I want their sheep, I want it gone, gone, every bit of it gone. Do you get that? Gone. So what happens? Samuel comes to Saul after the battle, says hey, did you do what God said? Yep! Everything's gone. All the Amalekites, all their sheep, everything's gone. He said, really? Samuel says, then why is it I keep hearing baah, baah, why am I hearing that? Is that me, is that me? What's going baah, baah? And Saul's like oh, no, no, I kept some of them because I was going to, I was going to sacrifice them for the Lord. Okay. To which Samuel replies in 1 Samuel chapter 15: "Samuel replied: Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and

sacrifices as much as in obeying the Lord? To obey is better than sacrifice. And to heed is better than the fat of rams." Why? Because in his obedience he is exemplifying faith in the One who told him to do what He told him to do, instead of taking things into his own hands.

Here's what we know about Cain and Abel. Abel came in faith, he did the right thing with the right heart. Cain did not come in faith. He might have brought the right thing, but he didn't bring it with the right heart. Somehow Cain had a plan that was his own. Maybe I'll make my offering more impressive looking. I'll put the flowers up and do, I don't know what he was doing, but one was received and one was not. So by faith Abel brought God a better offering.

But the second thing. By faith, Abel was commended as righteous. This is the second piece that we learn right here. And I get this from chapter 11 verse number 4, which says this: "By faith he was commended as righteous, when God spoke well of his offerings." You say well, okay there it is, Jerry. God spoke well of his offerings. Well, the writer of Hebrews is summarizing for us. He's not giving us the whole story, he's just calling our attention to the story. Cause you're going, you see, it was something about the material of the offering because God commended him as righteous because He said He liked his offerings. Let's go back to the story for a second, Genesis 4, listen to what it says. "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."

You see, what we have to understand here is that we are not talking so much about the material here, we're talking about the people. Because faith is what God commended as righteous in the life of Abel. Not just that he brought the right material, but that faith is what led him to bring the right thing with the right heart. This is what God commended as righteous.

And see, we're here reading in Hebrews chapter 11 about Abel, but chapter 10 in the book of Hebrews tells us that that's how we know that people are made righteous, it is by faith. Listen to what it says in Hebrews 10 just a few verses above our text, "You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what He has promise, for in just a little while He who is coming will come and will not delay." And then here's the quote, "But my righteous one will live by faith. And I will take no pleasure in the one who shrinks back." But the writer says, "But we do not belong to those who shrink back and are destroyed, but to those who have faith and are saved." You see, ultimately he is calling him to a place of faith, because faith is what God commends as righteous.

I don't know if you're like me but sometimes I wonder, like in Abel's mind and in Abel's heart, what was it that Abel was having faith in? Obviously the object of his faith was God, but the definition of faith, it talks about it is the confidence in what we hope for and the assurance of what we do not see. What was that for Abel? Well, again my mind has to go back to the fact that his mom and his dad, Adam and Eve had spoken very clearly about what life was like in the Garden walking with God. Could you imagine? Could you imagine if you're talking to Adam and he gets this far away gazed look in his eyes and says, man, you should have been there. I wish

you could have been there. I mean it was, the relationship was so intimate, it was so precious. But then, I'm sure Adam and Eve chronicled about how they chose to walk their own way, and then they were cast out of the Garden itself. And that outside of the Garden there were flaming swords that were there that would keep out anyone who wanted to return in. Right? You couldn't get in, because you'd die.

So I wonder if what Abel's confidence is is that his confidence is in God in the hope that he might be able to experience a Garden type of relationship with God. That that was his hope. But do you know what he was assured of? Only God could make that happen. Because Abel himself could not enter back into the Garden, this place which was kind of built as a dwelling place for the presence of God. He couldn't enter himself, because of the flaming swords that were guarding the way in. There was no way in, only God could do that. But his faith believed that God could. Even though he couldn't see how that was going to happen.

So, by faith Abel brought God a better offering. By faith Abel was commended as righteous. But thirdly, by faith Abel still speaks. Again, thank you professor, here's what it says, "And by faith Abel still speaks, even though he is dead." Obviously, we're reading a passage of Scripture about him that is speaking to us from his life of faith. Now six thousand years removed from his time, or thereabouts. Even though he's dead, he's speaking.

You know what's interesting about that as well, is that when we go back into the book of Genesis, do you know what else we find and we figure out?

We have no recorded words of Abel. Nothing. We don't know of anything that he said. We only know that his life of faith speaks.

In fact, let's push back into Genesis chapter 4. It says "The Lord said to Cain, 'Why are you angry?' (Obviously, you know, God didn't accept his offering.) "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 to the field." And while they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him. Then the Lord said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?" "I don't know," he replied. "Am I my brother's keeper?" You wouldn't even let your kids talk to you like this, right? And the Lord said, "What have you done? Listen! Listen, Cain! Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground." This is a serious thing indeed. We've got no words from Abel, but we hear his life of faith still speaking to us.

Martin Luther actually said it this way, and I'm kind of paraphrasing at this point. The great reformer. He said, that in his life, Abel was unable to teach his brother about faith. But in his death, he's able to teach the whole world. Even though he didn't say anything. We just see his life of faith. And that's actually what got him killed.

I wonder when I read that portion of Scripture in the book of Genesis, I often wonder, what did the sovereign Judge of all hear coming from the ground from Abel's blood? Because he said, listen! I hear your brother's blood. It's calling out to me. My imagination tells me that what he was

hearing was - justice! And rightly so! Abel had done nothing wrong, and Cain took him out into the field.

And when you read this in the original text, the word that talks about killing him is the same word for slaughtering an animal. That he probably took his brother out into a field, and he cut him open, and he bled him dry, just like they'd do an animal. Slaughtered him.

The response of evil to faith. The response of wickedness to faith. And his blood cries out to a sovereign God - justice! Vengeance! Wrath!

And so, here we are, 6,000 how many plus years after that event, and we are still talking about Abel's faith. Often times we get concentrated on Cain, and what he did wrong, and rightly so, because Jude talks about not taking the way of Cain. But here, our text is talking about Abel.

Even in death, Abel's faith speaks. Listen. So should ours. Our faith should speak loudly. We can combine it with words that demonstrate our faith, but our faith, in our very lives, even if we had not said anything, should speak very, very loudly. And here's why. Because Abel did not have the advantage that we have. Abel did not have the grace that we have. Abel was not able - forgive the pun. Abel was not able to behold what we have beheld. He only looked through the lens of faith and saw hazily in his hope. But we have seen clearly in the face of Jesus. That everything that he hoped for in promise, we have seen in promise fulfilled in Jesus.

And so, for us, we have a better word! In fact, the writer of Hebrews tells us that exact thing, after this chronicle of all these people of faith in Hebrews

chapter 11. In chapter 12, listen to how he tells us what our advantage is. He says, you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the Judge of all, to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

His word speaks a better word than the blood of Abel. So while Abel's blood may call out - justice, Jesus' blood answers - yes! And mercy. While Abel's blood may call out - vengeance, Jesus' blood answers - yes! And forgiveness. And while Abel's blood may call out - wrath, Jesus' blood answers - yes! And grace. Because Jesus has become on our behalf everything that we could desire, because it is through him and in him and for him that we can be reconciled to God.

We have a better word and a better hope because of what he's done. And as a result, do you know what that means? It means that our faith lives should speak loudly.

Let me tell you what they should say. Let me tell you a few things about what they should say. Our faith should speak, and say, first of all, that Jesus alone is the superior offering. Jesus alone is the superior offering. Jot that down. I don't have it on the screens yet, but there it is. All I have to do is ask. Ask and it shall be given to you. Jesus alone is the superior offering.

Here's what I'm talking about. Listen to what Hebrews 5 says. Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said: "Sacrifice and offering you did



not desire, but a body you prepared for me; with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. Then I said, 'Here I am—it is written about me in the scroll— I have come to do your will, my God.'" (This is Jesus.) First he said, "Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them"—though they were offered in accordance with the law. Then he said, "Here I am, I have come to do your will." He sets aside the first to establish the second. And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

You see, ladies and gentlemen, for us, our faith should speak that Jesus alone is the superior offering. Here's what that means practically. Here's what it means practically. Stop trying to impress God with something that's not Jesus. You can't. Cain tried. He tried to impress God with a material offering, but it did not come by faith in the God he was offering to.

And we do that! We try to impress God. Maybe with what we give, a gift that we give, or maybe with our attendance. As if we're showing up, and God's going, oh wow. Man, thank you so much for coming! Gah. I didn't know what I was going to do. And then you walked in, and I was like, wooh! Right? Hey listen, God loves you, and he's delighted that you're here to worship, and we shouldn't forsake the assembly of ourselves together as Hebrews talks about even further along. We shouldn't forsake that.

But let's not pretend that we can impress God with an offering that is not Jesus! He is the superior offering. He was both the high priest and the

sacrifice! He is the only way we can be reconciled to God. This is it! So let's not try and work on trying to impress God, how we look or how we talk, or what we do. None of those things are going to work. God is impressed with his Son. And when we find ourselves by faith in Jesus, God is then impressed with us, not because of us, but because of Jesus! It is not a work of our own. Why? Because Jesus is the superior offering. He is the offering to end every offering. He offered himself once for all. Our faith should speak loudly about that.

Our faith should also speak loudly that Jesus alone can restore us and make us righteous. Jesus alone can do that. Listen to how the writer of Hebrews says it in Hebrews chapter 10 verse 14. For by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.

What was that one sacrifice? Let me give you the picture. Jesus is the one who went under the flaming sword and gave his life so that we could enter in to the presence of the garden of God. This is what Jesus has done on our behalf. That he himself offered his sinless self on behalf of our sinful selves, so that we could somehow be restored to relationship with God, and we could be made righteous. Not in our own works, we could never do that. But only because of what Jesus has done as the sinless sacrifice on our behalf. Jesus alone can restore us and make us righteous.

But thirdly, our faith should speak that Jesus alone can vindicate us. Yes, when Abel was slain, his blood cried out. But his blood cried out to the only one that could vindicate - God. That's how we know it's by faith, even in his death!

And the truth is, ladies and gentlemen, whatever this life costs us, persecution, hardship, trouble, know this. God's gonna set the score straight. He's got his kids. He's got your back. You may not know it, you may not think it. You may think to yourself, I'm not so sure. I guarantee you on the authority of the nature of who God is, He has got you. And, everybody who thinks they got away with it, will not get away with it! God sees it all. He sees it in you, and He sees it in the world. God will bring justice to the earth. His desire is that people would recognize that He has exacted his justice in the person of Jesus, and that when we trust him by faith, we can now be out from under that cloud. There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. None!

But do you know what that means for those who reject Christ Jesus? There is condemnation. There is condemnation. Oh you say, that's not fair. Not fair?! You're talking to the God who is perfect and holy and just! And you're lecturing God on what's fair and not fair?

Jesus said he will bring justice. Listen to what he said in Luke chapter 18. Jesus said, "And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?" Will he actually be able to see people who will trust him for the justice instead of trying to take it in their own hands? Trying to take it in their own hands, and taking the way of Cain? Who's mad at his brother because of his faith, and decides to kill him, and he exacts kind of this vengeance, because he's angry at him. Are you gonna take the way of Cain, or are you going to trust it to God, which is the

way of Abel? That comes by faith. That's a heart condition. Will you do that? Whatever else it is that you face, God's got your back, and he's going to deal justly. You have to trust Him.

In fact, that's why he's encouraging these struggling Hebrew Christians who are going through persecution. He's encouraging them along this line. Hey, God heard Abel's righteous blood. He heard it! Don't worry! God's going to deal justly.

But he tells us he's going to deal justly very specifically in 2nd Thessalonians chapter 1. Listen to this. It's strong. He says, "All this is evidence that God's judgment is right, and as a result you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God." Those who live by faith in Jesus. "...for which you are suffering. God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you and he will give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed. This includes you, because you believed our testimony to you."

Here's what he's saying. I've got my people. I've got the back of my children. And those who reject Jesus, and those who want to kill my people, and those who want to persecute my people, if they don't turn in

faith... if they do, there's grace for them. His grace is wide. There's grace for them. But if they don't, they'll be dealt with injustice. Justice.

Because nobody actually wants to serve a god who's not just. Nobody. We get all feely, like.. Nobody actually wants to serve a god who's not just. You want a god to be just. You want God to be just.

Listen to what it says in Revelation with the end of the martyrs. It says, "When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained. They called out in a loud voice, "How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?" Then each of them was given a white robe, and they were told to wait a little longer, until the full number of their fellow servants, their brothers and sisters, were killed just as they had been."

Jesus alone can vindicate us. It's not our job to take the way of Cain; it's our job to trust Him, whatever comes.

Which leads me to my last point. Jesus alone is worthy of our very lives. Jesus alone is worthy of our very lives.

You know, it was in January of 1956. There were five missionaries to the Auca Indians in Ecuador. An unreached people that were savage to outsiders. These five missionaries were all slaughtered. They were killed, murdered. All of them were in their late twenties, early thirties.

One of them was named Jim Elliot. And his wife, Elizabeth, has written a bunch since his passing. A Godly woman. And she's written a lot of books since his passing. And in one of her books, she started talking a bit about how Jim's life of faith had actually affected people that heard about his death. Listen to a couple of the stories. She said, "Off the coast of Italy an American naval officer was involved in an accident at sea. As he floated along on a raft, he recalled Jim Elliot's words (that he had heard in a news report): Jim said, "When it comes time to die, make sure all you have to do is die." He prayed that he might be saved, knowing that he had more to do than die. He wasn't ready. God answered his prayer and he was rescued. And she tells another story. In Des Moines, Iowa, an eighteen year old boy, after hearing about all of these missionaries being slain and killed, prayed for a week in his room, then announced to his parents: "I'm turning my life over completely to the Lord. I want to try and take the place of one of those five."

Faith speaks! Faith speaks. Here's a question for you. What does yours say? Or when you start to listen, you hear a deafening silence. If your life speaks in faith, it's because of Jesus. If it doesn't speak in faith, it's probably because you don't know him. Lives that have been transformed, that faith speaks.

Maybe for some of us, we need get of some of the things that are always trying to wrestle our faith away. Maybe you've been trying to impress God with your religious activity. And even though it's good, you can't impress Him because there's a superior offering, and his name is Jesus. And God is

impressed with his Son, and only those who find their place of faith in him can be pleasing to the Father.

Or maybe you've been banking your whole kind of spiritual life on a story that your parents or grandparents told you about religious things that occurred in your life before you even can remember them. And you think, somehow, that that's enough. That that's what does it. It does not.

Or maybe you wonder, do you have a faith that's real enough to actually live for God in the now? And do you have a faith strong enough to die for Jesus if necessary?

Faith speaks. Faith speaks. Genuine faith speaks. And genuine faith is accompanied by works. It comes from faith. It's not to earn God's favor, it comes from faith. That we do what we do because of who Christ is and what he's done in our lives.

You see, some of us only have what James calls a demonic faith. I'm just talking now. In James chapter 2, he says, oh you believe there's just one God? Good. Even the demons believe that. You think just believing.. that that's it? He says, I'll show you faith, because it will be accompanied with the activity that corresponds with faith. Not to earn God's favor, but because of the grace that God has done in our lives.

I say this today with a heavy heart, because I genuinely believe in the western church in the United States, that there are a bunch of people that darken the doors of churches every single week, who are just practicing religion and don't really understand faith. They don't understand the

transformation, being born again, being regenerated by the Spirit of God, and what that does in our lives.

Because for some of us, what we call faith can't even get us out of bed to gather with the saints on a Sunday! For some of us, what we call faith, it can't even get us to testify in front of anybody else about Jesus! For some of us, in terms of what we call faith, it doesn't even in communicating any of that to our children! I don't even know if that's called faith. I'm not here to judge, only Jesus knows those things.

But I'm concerned. I'm concerned that in the United States, so often we don't have a faith that is real and authentic enough to live for Jesus in the places that we go, and the places that we work, and the places that we go to school. And we don't have a faith strong enough to be willing to give our life if Jesus says so. Because we're trusting him with the outcomes.

Some of us have been trusting our lives to replacement offerings. And we're worshipping a different god than Jesus. Because we've tried the god of religion, we've tried the god of money, and we've tried the god of comfort, and we've tried the god of pleasure. And all of these things, right? Or we try the god of morality, right? I can just be known as a good person. Good people don't get into heaven! Only people redeemed by the blood of Jesus! That is it!

My heart tells me, in this room, and in our East Worship Center, those under the sound of my voice, on any campus, any place, my heart tells me that there are people that need to be saved by faith. It is through the grace of what God has done in Christ, going to a cross to die for your sins, rising



from the dead to conquer them. And that when you put your faith and trust in Jesus, he transforms you. And you are now leaving a kingdom of darkness and you are entering a kingdom of light. And you are brand new. And there are birthmarks to a believer. They look different. They can be identified in the family of God. I'm not sure that that's the case for everybody. And my hope is that whether you're here, or whether you're on another campus, that you'll respond in faith to surrender your life to Jesus. Let's bow our heads together.

If you're here, and you're thinking to yourself, that's exactly what my need is. That's exactly my need. I need to give my life to Jesus. Would you be honest, wherever you are in the room, and say that's me? Would you just put your hand up in the air, and say that's me, Jerry? I need to give my life to Jesus this day. I need to come by faith and trust my life to Jesus this day. I need to be saved. This is my need. I need to be saved. I need to enter into a relationship with God through his son Jesus. Put it up high. Let me see it. In this room, and any other room. If that's you. There's a bunch of you.

Here's what I want you to do. There was a bunch of you that just put your hands up. Here's what I want you to do. If we've got one of our pastors here in this room, and hopefully there's a pastor in our East Worship Center. If we've got one of our pastors, if they could stand up, are you in here. Anybody? One of our pastors somewhere. Somewhere. Am I the only pastor? We got one here. Dave Kennedy is here. Dave is going to stand here right in the middle. If you just raised your hand, here's what I'm going to ask you to do. Listen. If you just raised your hand, I'm going to ask you in just a second. I'm going to ask you to get up from your seat, meet Pastor Dave

right here in the center. And he's going to take you into a room that's not scary. Okay, there's no dragons or anything weird. We're going to go in there, and he's going to talk to you for just a second, and we've got some prayer partners that want to talk to you. And we want to encourage you in what it means in your journey with Jesus, to receive Christ. I'll need every prayer partner on deck. I'm going to ask you to do it. Don't delay. Don't waste your time. Don't do any of that. I'm gonna ask you to do it. So wherever you were, if you just put your hand up in the air, and said I need to receive Jesus, I want you to come and stand with him right now. Wherever you are. Just come on. Other folks are praying for you. They'll move out of your way gladly. Don't worry. They'll move gladly. Just come on and stand with him wherever you are, don't be ashamed. Right here. Just come stand with him. East Worship Center, same thing. I can't see over there. I've thrown this on them, Lord willing there's a pastor over there, if you have that need over there, I want you to do the very same thing in the East Worship Center. Just come on up here. You need to give your life to Jesus Christ, the one who can change you.

He's the way, the truth, the life, the only way to God. We sang John 14:6 just a few moments ago in our worship. So I thank God for every one of you who are responding in faith. We're gonna take a few minutes, take you outside. If you came with friends or family, they're not going to be in there for twenty years. They're literally right across the atrium if you need to find them. You can come over there. You're welcome to go in there too and sit with them. There's no weirdness or secrecy or any of that. Okay? So I'm going to ask Pastor Dave, go ahead and take them out. You guys go. Let

them know how appreciative you are in this room, the East Worship Center as well. Awesome. We have an additional.. if you're one of our staff, we may need your additional help. Maybe you could slide out with them as well. We would appreciate that.

So Father, thank you for the ways in which you speak. I know You've been so gracious to us. To speak your word to us. That God, that that's really the job, is that we listen to Your word, and we respond to Your word. Because Your word carries with it Your authority and the power of Your Spirit to change our lives. And Father, I pray that on this day, we would be reminded that faith is what You call us to, because without it, we can't please You. And that it changes everything, when we put our faith in the One who has stood in our place, who has become sin for us, so that we might be the righteousness of God. That's because of you, Jesus, not because of us, and we readily acknowledge that. Help us to live our lives by faith. That our lives by faith would be testimony, that our very lives are worth it. That no matter what comes, it's worth it. That You alone, Lord Jesus, will handle all the details. And that You alone, Lord Jesus, are the one who makes us righteous, and who makes us worthy, and who makes us reconciled and restored to God. Only You, because You are the superior offering. May our lives of faith speak to the world that we live in. In Jesus' name, amen.

Alright, you guys. See you tonight. Bless you.