

Cain and Abel

Genesis 4:1-26

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This morning we want to study the story of Cain and Abel. Genesis, as I'm sure you are aware, is a book of origins, of beginnings. Our English title reflects that fact. The Jews called this book "In The Beginning," after the first few words in the first verse. They likewise accepted the fact that this book was the origin of truth. Almost everything which you find developed throughout the rest of Scripture is found in seed form in this opening book. In order to understand much of the truth as it is found elsewhere in Scripture, we must understand this book. It is a seed plot for all of the major doctrines or teachings in Scripture.

In order to understand chapter 4 of Genesis we must see something of the context in which it is found. That is a fundamental law of Bible study. We need to know what the setting of the passage is. Scripture is not a homily of ideas disconnected from one another, but rather a reasoned, logical presentation of truth. Therefore it is important that we understand what precedes this chapter.

As you know, the first three chapters of Genesis are a statement of creation and of the fall of man. In chapter 1 you have the account of the creation of the earth, with God as the primary figure: "In the beginning *God* created the heavens and the earth." In chapter 2 you have a restatement of creation with man this time the key figure. Man is mentioned last in the account not because he is least but because he is the apex of creation. He is the one for whom all creation was made, and he was intended to dominate it, to rule over it, to exercise his dominion in the world which God created for him.

But then in chapter 3 you have the intrusion of another principle, the principle of sin and death. There you have the story of the fall of man. And in this chapter there are recorded for us a number of consequences of the fall. First, with respect to the woman, in verse 16 of chapter 3 God says,

**"I will greatly multiply
Your pain. in childbirth,
In pain you shall bring forth children;
Yet your desire shall be for your husband,
And he shall rule over you,"**

He says there are two consequences for the woman which have occurred because of the fall. The first is that children will cause her pain. The reference to pain is not so much in terms of childbearing but of child rearing. The whole process of bringing children into the world and raising them is a painful process, as you mothers well know. Children are a pain. Secondly, she is to have an ambiguous relationship to her husband. She will desire him - her desire will be for him. The Hebrew word means "to run after." It comes from the word for leg; it means "to pursue." She will pursue her husband. He will be the center of her affections, the object around which she is inclined to center all of her life. And yet she will try to dominate him. So he will have to rule over her There is no longer reign-with-consent, but he must rule. These are two results which befell the woman because of the entrance of sin and death into the world.

In verses 17 through 19 Moses recounts what God said would happen to the man:

**"Cursed is the ground because of you;
In toil you shall eat of it
All the days of your life,**

**Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you;
And you shall eat the plants of the field;
By the sweat of your face
You shall eat bread,
Till you return to the ground,
Because from it you were taken;
For you are dust,
And to dust you shall return."**

The first thing which occurs is that his vocation now begins to frustrate him. The ground bears thorns and thistles. It doesn't yield easily to his hand. It becomes a constant source of irritation and frustration, and therefore he is inclined to be preoccupied with his vocation, as men so frequently are. Secondly, death enters the human race, a fate which Adam of course shares in common with all of humanity: "You are taken from dust, and to dust you shall return."

The rest of the Bible, beginning with chapter 4 and running right on through the Scriptures, and in fact all the rest of history, is simply a further revelation of the truth of what chapter 3 tells us; that violence and suffering and pain, murder and death, are the plight of men. That is our lot. And none of our technological capabilities can undo what occurred because of the fall. We are a fallen people. Our plight is grave indeed.

But in chapter 3 you also have recorded the results of the fall as it relates to the serpent. The serpent, you know, was the instrument which Satan used, the creature through which he spoke. So the curse is pronounced symbolically on the serpent as a means of conveying what will happen to Satan.

Verses 14 and 15:

**And the Lord God Said to the serpent,
"Because you have done this,
Cursed are you more than all cattle,
And more than every beast of the field;
On your belly you shall go,
And dust shall you eat
All the days of your life;
And I will put enmity
Between you and the woman,
And between your seed and her seed;
He shall bruise you on the head,
And you shall bruise him on the heel."**

Two things are said of Satan, First, he will crawl in the dust on his belly. I don't think that this was a new posture for the serpent, necessarily, but a new significance was given to his position. It symbolizes the eternal frustration which Satan will experience. He is always "biting the dust." He is a defeated foe. Secondly, God gives to the serpent the prophecy that, through the woman, the Redeemer would come who would undo the effects of the fall, He is described as the seed of the woman, note, not the seed of man. Here is a prophetic statement about the coming of Jesus Christ, who was born of a virgin, who was the seed of a woman and not the seed of a man, and who did, truly, on the cross, crush the head of the serpent. But in so doing he incurred pain himself - the bruising of his heel.

And so, laid side by side with the plight of man you have the power of God, and his ability to set right what Satan has done to the world. And in chapter 4 we can pick up both of these themes. The story of Cain and Abel presents so vividly the deplorable circumstances of man, his terrible plight And laid side by side with this is the power of God and his ability to set things right, to redeem.

**Now the man had relation, with his wife Eve, and she conceived and gave birth to Cain,
and she said, "I have gotten a man-child with the help of the Lord."**

Anytime a baby enters into family life there is a great deal of rejoicing. And this of course was an especially significant event because this was the first child who had ever been born. Eve, predictably, responds with a

great deal of excitement. And she names her son Cain (or "Ayin" in the Hebrew) - "because I have acquired a man." The Hebrew word means "acquired." There is a play on that word. But she says literally, and this is not picked up in many of our translations, "I have acquired a man, that is, the Lord." If you have an American Standard Version, you will note in the margin an alternate reading which says, "I have acquired a man, the Lord." And almost all ancient translators and interpreters, even Jewish interpreters, agree that this is the way this ought to be translated. Grammatically it makes more sense.

Yet it creates difficulty for them because what this says, literally, is that the man-child Eve bore was, she felt, the Lord himself. You see, Eve understood the promise which had been given to her that through the seed of the woman the serpent would be crushed. And she knew that the seed of the woman would be God incarnate, God born as a baby. So she thought when this child was born that he was Jehovah that he was the one who would set things right.

But he proved instead to be a little sinner himself. In fact, he murdered his own brother. And long before he did this Eve felt a sense of disillusionment, because she named her second son Abel, which means "vanity" or "emptiness." She realized that she had brought into the world a little fallen creature who reproduced the life of Adam, who was not the Redeemer, who was not the solution but was a part of the problem.

All of us who are parents have experienced this. We somehow feel that our children are going to be different. They are not going to be a problem; they are going to do something significant in the world which will radically change the whole course of history. But we discover that they are just little sons of Adam.

When I was in school, I had a friend who lived across the street. He and his wife had a little baby boy, their third, and we had not had any children yet. I went over to look at this little boy and to make whatever appropriate remarks you are supposed to make to new parents. I was trying to express my delight that they had this little boy, and my friend said, "Well, I'll tell you, he's just a little son of Adam!" My first thought was "Boy, that's a little bit crass for a father to say about his son!" But having had three sons, I can tell you that they are all little sons of Adam. They are just like their father! They reproduce the life of Adam. And what a disillusionment this was for Eve! She felt very keenly the consequences of the fall; she felt the pain of raising children.

Now note verse 2:

And again, she gave birth to his brother Abe and Abel was a keeper of flocks, but Cain was a tiller of the ground.

There is a word about their vocations. Abel was a keeper of flocks, but Cain, literally, was "a servant of the ground." He came to realize in his own experience the results of the fall. He no longer had dominion over the earth - he served it, it mastered him. Yet there is no word of disapproval about these vocations. God accepted both.

But in verse 3 and following we have a word about the offerings that they brought from their vocations:

So it came about in the course of time that Cain brought an offering to the Lord of the fruit of the ground, And Abel, on his part also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions. And the Lord had regard for Abel and for his offering; but for Cain and for his offering He had no regard.

We are not told precisely what was wrong with his offering. I am inclined to think that there may not have been anything wrong with the offering itself. The problem was not with the gift but with the giver. There was something wrong with the man who made the offering. Some have suggested that the problem was that Cain brought a bloodless offering while Abel brought a bloody sacrifice. And the Scriptures do say that without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins. But I think that the problem here was not so much the offering itself but the spirit in which the offering was given.

There was something radically wrong with Cain which made necessary the rejection of his offering by God,

and something very right about Abel which made possible the acceptance of his offering. We are told in verse 4 that God had no regard for *Cain* and his offering, but he did have regard for *Abel* and his offering. So it was the man who was disapproved or by God. In I John 3, John says that Cain was of the evil one and that he murdered his brother because his own deeds were evil. There was something wrong with the man himself. And in Hebrews 11, both Abel and Enoch are pointed out as examples of faith. And verse 6 of Hebrews 11 says that without faith it is impossible to please God. What pleases God? Faith does.

What displeases God? Unbelief. Therefore, what was pleasing about Abel's sacrifice was that it was offered in faith, in dependence upon God, in a spirit of abandonment to God. But Cain's sacrifice was rejected because his heart was wrong.

You see, a sacrifice symbolizes the offering up of a life to God. And although the symbol might be proper, in Cain's case the heart itself was wrong. He had never given himself up to God. He had a rebellious spirit. He was unwilling to yield to God's will, and therefore his sacrifice was not acceptable. Symbols have meaning only insofar as there is reality which underlies them. And there was no reality behind Cain's sacrifice.

I had a friend who, a number of years ago, was a missionary to a town in the hills of Kentucky. When he moved into this community he discovered that practically everybody up and down the street flew a flag on national holidays and at other times when it was appropriate. For a while it didn't occur to him to go out and buy a flag, and one day, to his embarrassment, his neighbor came by and rebuked him sharply for not having one. He felt that he was unpatriotic, and that if he did have any allegiance to his country, he would fly the flag. So this young man went out and bought a flag.

Three days later he was awakened by the sound of screeching tires in front of his house. He looked out his window and saw a group of police officers converging on the house of the neighbor who had rebuked him for not having a flag. Some gunshots rang out, and a little later the man came out, manacled to one of the officers. They put him in a car and rushed him off. He discovered later that the man had a still in his basement, and that was making and running moonshine liquor. It struck him how incongruous it was that his neighbor had an allegiance to the symbol but that there was no reality there. He was not subject to his government.

And yet how often we, too, give our allegiance to symbols, as Cain did, but without the underlying reality. Our hearts are wrong. That was Cain's problem. Note what happens, verse 5:

So Cain became very angry and his countenance fell.

The Hebrew word translated "angry" means "burn." Cain burned. It wasn't just a flash of anger, it was deep-seated resentment that he felt. He was really burned up, hostile, resentful, angry, and so his countenance fell. That is a symbol of depression. He became depressed. And I see this pattern in my own life, and in the lives of others that I know. Whenever we refuse to submit our will to the Lord in some area of our life, the inevitable result is a sense of resentment and hostility toward God which results in depression.

Now, depression can come from sources other than sin. It can come from some physical problem, or from some satanic attack upon us even when there is no sin in our life. But depression sometimes does come from the unresolved conflict in our life which is the result of rebellion against God. This is what happened to Cain. He rebelled, became resentful, and fell into depression. But note the Lord's words to Cain, verses 6 and 7:

Then the Lord said to Cain, "Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well will not your countenance be lifted up? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it."

"Cain, if you do well, won't there be a lifting up? I'll restore you again to that place of wholeness and fellowship, to a sense of rightness about life. I'll lift the depression from you. But you must do well, you must do what is right." You see, that is what the Lord wants. Whenever we sin, and sin always has consequences in our life, the lord says to us, "Dave, if you do well if you do what is right, there will be a lifting up. I will restore you, I'll bring you back to the place of fellowship."

There is a passage in John 15 which has been terribly mistranslated. In the opening verses of this chapter Jesus says, "Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, [my translation says] He takes away." And I could get the impression from this that if I don't bear fruit the Heavenly Vine-dresser is going to snap the branch off the vine and cast me away.

But that is precisely what he does not say. The term translated "takes away" really means "lifts up from the ground." It is used in the Gospels in referring to the times when men picked up stones to stone Jesus. They lifted them up from the ground. It is used when Jesus said, "If anyone would come after me, let him pick up his cross and follow me." It means "to lift up from the ground." So what Jesus is saying is this; "If you are unfruitful in your life, God does not cast you away, he lifts you up from the ground." The picture is taken from the vineyards where the vine-dressers would lift the trailing vines off the ground up into the sunlight where health could be restored and they could again become fruitful. That is what God does. When we go back to the place of rebellion and we repent, then there is forgiveness and restoration, there is a lifting up.

But God goes on to say to Cain, "If you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door? and its desire is for you, but you must master it." That is, "Sin is like an animal lying in wait for you beside the door, and it will devour you, it will destroy you. You must master it." We would like just to cruise and to maintain our present level of sin, because it is enjoyable and not too frustrating. But God tells us that we can never maintain the present level of sin. Sooner or later it will overpower us, it will master us. Like a wild animal it will destroy us. Sin must either be ruled or it will rule. There is no halfway place.

Do you realize that here in the book of Genesis, written thousands of years before the New Testament, there is anticipated the same truth which Paul records for us in Romans 6? Paul writes, in verses 12 through 14,

Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body that you should obey its lusts, and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law, but under grace.

Note verse 16:

Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness?

Man was made to be mastered. He will either be the slave of his passions and desires, the slave of sin - or he will be the slave of God, And to be the slave of sin means that death reigns in our life. That is what Paul means by sin that results in death - not physical death, but that deathlike slate which reigns in our life when we allow sin to encroach and to captivate us. So God tells Cain, here in this opening page of human history, "There are really only two alternatives in life: you will either master sin, or you will be mastered by it. There is no middle ground. And if you allow sin to master you, it will take you further and further away from the place of obedience to me and you will actually do things that you never intended to do. But if you do well, if you do what is right, if you repent and go back to the place of disobedience and face that issue judge it, put it away, there is a lifting up and restoration of fellowship." Now notice Cain's response, verse 8:

And Cain told Abel his brother.

Cain knew the truth he even reported it to Abel. He instructed Abel in this new principle. He was conversant with the facts, but he still didn't obey. Because there is a sort of secret pleasure, I suspect, in playing with the flesh, in nurturing some little inner grievance. We've all done it, So Cain refused to respond.

And it came about when they were in the field that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him.

Do you realized that there were only four people in the world at this time? And Cain killed a fourth of humanity! Why? I'm sure he never intended to do it He did it, John said, because he was "possessed by the

evil one". Lie had allowed sin to master him, and he went further than he would ever have anticipated. Verse 9:

Then the Lord said to Cain, "Where As Abel your brother?"

A number of times here he uses this expression - "your brother, your brother, your brother." It indicates the enormity of this sin. "You've killed your brother! Where is he?"

And he said, "I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?"

The particular form of grammar he uses indicates that a negative response is expected "Of course not!" Do you see what happened to Cain? He had become so callous, so hardened, that there was no sense of remorse over the destruction of his brother. His heart was utterly hardened. Verses 10 through 15:

And He said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to Me from the ground. Arid now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. When you cultivate the ground, it shall no longer yield its strength to you; you shall be a vagrant [vagabond] and a wanderer on the earth." And Cain said to the Lord, "My punishment is too great to bear!" [I suspect that this is not an indication of repentance but rather of a dislike for his deplorable circumstances. And they were deplorable!] Behold, Thou hast driven me this day from the face of the ground; and from Thy face I shall be hidden, and I shall be a vagrant and a wanderer on the earth, and it will come about that whoever finds me will kill me. "So the Lord said to him, "Therefore whoever kills Cain, vengeance will he taken on him sevenfold." And the Lord appointed a sign for Cain, lest anyone finding him should slay him.

Several results followed. First, he became a wanderer. There was no place to rest. He was cursed from the arable portions of land where people lived, and he wandered throughout his life. He became a vagabond without direction, without purpose in his life, The Bible records later that he settled in the land of Nod. the Hebrew word means "the land of wandering" no place to rest.

Secondly, he was alienated from his brothers and his sisters, he was cut off from them, And he felt that he was cut off from God. Note that he says, ". . . and from Thy face I shall be hidden." Now, God had not said that. God's face was not hidden from Cain. God never turned his back on Cain; God loved Cain. But Cain felt, as we all feel during times of rebellion, that God had turned his back on him. The problem was that Cain had turned his back on God. So he felt alienated from men and from God. He was paranoid about men - "They're going to kill me, because they're all related to Abel." Of course at the time this was spoken only Adam and Eve were alive, so his fears were unjustified. But for Cain these were genuine fears - cut off from humanity, cut off from God. He became a wanderer without purpose and without direction. And isn't this what happens tons when we continue to harbor resentment and rebellion against the Lord? We feel cut off from others, and, worst of all, cut off from Clod. We lose our sense of direction.

But, did you notice'? Cain was afraid that he would he murdered and so God placed a sign on Cain so that his life would be preserved. No one could take vengeance on Cain. Do you know why? "Because God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." And as long as Cain was living there was hope that he would repent. So God preserved his life, graciously, because he longed to restore Cain again to fellowship with him. His face was always toward Cain; he never turned his back on him. Wherever Cain wandered, that is where the Lord was, And, had Cain come back to that place of rejection, there would have been a lifting up. We don't know if lie did, but if he had done that, and repented, God would have restored him again to the place of blessing that he sought for him.

The Bible is one of the few books that I know of which tells us precisely what sin will do to us. The literature of today, in fact all media, picture sin in quite another way - "It is pleasurable, yes, and as a matter of fact, there are no consequences." But the Bible, because God loves us, tells us the truth about sin. The Scriptures tell us in no uncertain terms that sin will kill us! Sin will separate us from our brothers and sisters, and it will separate us from God, It will leave behind the terrible results that we see in the life of Cain."

But the Bible also tells us that there is a lifting up. When we go back to the place of rebellion and confess that,

and repent, God restores us. I read somewhere recently of a man who had a very difficult problem. He sat down on a tack. And a number of people came by to counsel him. Some told him to intoxicate himself with alcohol or drugs. Another came by and suggested a surgical procedure to sever the nerves so that it would no longer hurt. A Freudian psychologist came by and said, "Really, your problem is a sex hangup." A Rogerian psychologist came by and said, "Now tell me, what do you think your problem is?" On and on it went until eventually someone came with the word of God and said, "Get up off the tack, sit over there, and in the future I will tell you how to avoid sitting on tacks."

That is the way the Bible deals with issues in our life. The Bible tells us, "Sin will kill you - but get up off the tack; stop sinning. Go back to the place of confession, and there will be a lifting up, a place of rest and repose there." And the Scriptures tell us how to avoid sin in the future, because their Author knows the terrible effects that sin will have in our life. And the Scriptures tell us the place of restoration. There is grace and forgiveness and wholeness, there is a lifting up in Jesus Christ. These are great words of encouragement from this ancient book.

Our loving Father, we thank you that you are one who restores, that you understand the nature of our hearts, you understand our weaknesses and our tendency to fall into sin, and how easily sin can possess us and control us. And thank you, Lord, that you love us enough to tell us the truth about sin, and to provide the way to escape. We thank you, Father, that no matter how far we have fallen, nor how enormous our sins may be, there is in you a lifting up. What encouragement that gives us, Lord. We thank you in Jesus' name, Amen.

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