

Two Brothers

Genesis 4:1-15

We finally finished studying about the fall of man into sin in Genesis 3, and now in chapter 4 we come to the history of man. Unfortunately, though, the history of man is the history of sin. So the first actual event recorded in human history after the fall is a true crime story, the story of the first murder. So within that first family, within that first generation, among the very children of Adam and Eve, we have the first murder.

The Lord's grace remains operative, as I mentioned last week, that life goes on. God didn't bring a total and immediate end to the human race. Instead, we have a baby. The first baby. A baby boy named Cain. Actually two baby boys. Two brothers.

v.1 "Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, and said, "I have acquired a man from the LORD." 2 Then she bore again, this time his brother Abel."

Those two boys will actually demonstrate a principle that you see throughout the rest of Scripture, that among the human race, there are two lines. One is the line of God's people, those with whom he is well pleased. And the other is the line of those who will live and then die under God's judgment. Cain and Able. Then among the children of Abraham, Isaac and not Ishmael. Jacob and not Esau. Then it becomes Israel and not the Gentiles. "My people," and "not my people." Now we would use the labels, believers and unbelievers. Christians and non-Christians. Ultimately, of course, that division harkens back to the curse God pronounced upon Satan in the form of that serpent—there will be the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent.

Thus we come face to face with sin, in the flesh of fallen man.

v.8 "Now Cain talked with Abel his brother; and it came to

pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him."

That is our focus this morning, and while I affirm wholeheartedly that this is a true historical account, that this even actually happened in the lives of real people names Cain and Abel, I want to understand these two boys, or young men, in the context of the whole of human history. In other words, this isn't just a crime story about a murderer names Cain. Rather, much more broadly and comprehensively, it is an story about human sin.

So let me begin with an important point, something that becomes evident in this text. The point is this, that,

I. THE ROOT OF SIN IS IN THE HUMAN HEART.

Sometimes people read about Cain and Abel and think to themselves, what really happened? What was the motive? Why was the Lord unhappy with Cain, and why was Cain so angry? I think all of those questions can be answered in our text, and that answer will show us the root of this horrible sin of murder.

Now, first of all, don't forget. Cain and Abel are both sinners, born in sin and by nature, children of God's wrath. They inherited Adam's sinful nature, and the guilt of his original sin. So it's not that one was good and the other evil. The reality is that they were both evil, both fallen creature subject to the curse of death.

And yet, we see,

A. Faithfulness of Abel.

Faithful in bringing a sacrifice. And don't miss that, because that is only way a sinful man can be found acceptable in God's sight. Only by a sacrifice. And for Abel, it was a blood sacrifice, a

sacrifice of death by an animal substitute.

v.2 “Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. 3 And in the process of time it came to pass that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the LORD. 4 Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. And the LORD respected Abel and his offering.”

I don't think we can say that Cain's sacrifice was unacceptable simply because it wasn't an animal, because the actual sacrifices weren't yet prescribed, and Cain was a farmer, “a tiller of the ground.” It makes sense that he would bring an offering from his crops. That wasn't the fault he displayed in his sacrifice, and we'll talk about him in just a minute. But it is worthy noting that Abel's sacrifice was an animal, and animal whose blood was shed so that Abel could offer a sacrifice to God.

Now, we're not yet given any explanation of how they knew to offer sacrifices, but as God's revelation continued, the principle is made so explicitly clear,

Lev. 17:11 “For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul.”

That verse is then quoted in,

Heb. 9:22 “And according to the law almost all things are purified with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission.”

Thus we can assume and conclude that God had written that principle upon the hearts of Cain and Abel. Because of sin, sacrifices were necessary. To speculate just a very little bit, it is entirely possible that under Adam's leadership, regular offerings of sacrifice were given to God at the entrance to the Garden of Eden, for the flaming cherubim are always closely associated with

the throne of God and thus his presence. It is significant that later, under Moses, the throne of God in the Holy of Holies, the mercy seat, was overshadowed by two golden representations of the cherubim. It was there that once every year the high priest entered with the sacrificial blood of atonement to sprinkle over the mercy seat.

So with some presumption that there had been repentance and faith after the awful fall into sin, Adam and his family may well have been offering sacrifices at this place appointed by God to meet with his people. They were worshipping God with those sacrifices. And in Abel's case, we can declare his faithfulness to God in the offering of those sacrifices because of what we read in,

v.4 “Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. And the LORD respected Abel and his offering.”

God accepted Abel's offering, respected there means that he looked upon it with favor. Literally it means that he gazed upon it, he looked upon it, he considered it, with interest, and with approval! In other words, Abel was faithful in his worship of God, by offering an acceptable sacrifice. And I can say all of that confidently because we are given New Testament confirmation,

Heb. 11:4 “By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks.”

A more excellent sacrifice. A righteous sacrifice. So we read in Matthew 23:35 about “the blood of righteous Abel.” And after the fall, we know that a man can be righteous only by faith, thus Abel's sacrifice was offered in faith. And so,

1 John 3:11 “For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another, 12 not as Cain who

was of the wicked one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his works were evil and his brother's righteous."

So Abel's sacrifice was righteous. He was faithful. But Cain's "works were evil." Thus we come to see,

B. The foolishness of Cain.

Here is what is recorded in Genesis.

v.3 "And in the process of time it came to pass that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the LORD."

As I said before, I don't think we can say that Cain's sacrifice was unacceptable simply because it was of the ground, since he was a man who worked the ground, a farmer we would say. And, in later Mosaic legislation, grain offerings and cereal offerings would be prescribed by God. But what we do read in our text is that God didn't accept it, God wasn't pleased with the offering.

v.5 "...but He did not respect Cain and his offering. And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell."

We also know that there was a reason for God's disapproval, as we read by contrast that, "By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain." We don't have the exact details, but what was missing from Cain was the faith which Abel exhibited. There was no faith, his heart was not right with God. And that is the root of sin.

I believe the text gives us some idea of the problem. Abel's sacrifice is described in verse 4 as "the firstborn of his flock and of their fat." In other words, the very best he had is what he offered. Cain's offering was given in contrast to that, such that we can rightly assume it wasn't the best, not the firstfruits even of his grain. Maybe just what was left over. Maybe just a token. And

"the Lord did not respect it." It was not pleasing to the Lord.

That's the foolishness, the evil, of Cain. Offering to Lord a sacrifice that was not an offering of his whole heart. We could say he was just going through the motions, offering a sacrifice that did not represent the living sacrifice of his whole life offered in loving devotion to God.

I am always struck by David's example in 2 Samuel 24, when he went to buy the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite in order to build an altar to the Lord, and Araunah offered it to him as a gift.

2 Sam.24:24 "Then the king said to Araunah, "No, but I will surely buy it from you for a price; nor will I offer burnt offerings to the LORD my God with that which costs me nothing." So David bought the threshing floor and the oxen for fifty shekels of silver. 25 And David built there an altar to the LORD, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings."

The foolishness of Cain is that he did not offer his life, he did not sacrifice his life. He just went through the motions. And to use the words of Jesus at this point,

Mat. 16:24 "Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. 25 For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. 26 For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?"

As we continue reading in Genesis 4, we read,

v.5b "And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell."

No doubt anger born of pride; selfish, hypocritical pride. He was mad because God accepted Abel's sacrifice but not his own.

Sinful jealousy is wrapped up in that pride. Even self-pity. “His countenance fell.” His face was downcast. All because of his own sin, sin for which God holds him accountable.

v.6-7

What really stands out there, in the broadest sense, is,

II. HUMAN RESPONSIBILITY FOR SIN.

God doesn't say to Cain, “I'm sorry you feel so badly.”

Instead, he lays upon Cain the responsibility for his own actions. And he rebukes Cain for the failure of the sacrifice he offered.

v.7 “If you do well, will you not be accepted?”

It's your fault. It's your sin. The point is that,

A. God holds us accountable for our own sin.

That is a lesson that needs to be emphasized to this day. We can't claim excuse for our sin, we can't justify it because of circumstances or even what others might do. Rather, if you offer to God the acceptable sacrifice of your whole life, if you “lose your life for Jesus' sake, if you would die to yourself instead of living for yourself, you will gain God's blessing and approval.

“If you do well, will you not be accepted?” That's not works salvation, but rather a declaration that the testimony of a living faith will be pleasing to God. You are to live by faith, trusting God, not living by the wisdom of your own sight. And when you fail to do so, when you sin, God will hold you accountable. That's Cain.

The point is quite plain,

v.7b “And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door.”

If you don't serve God, if you don't honor God with the sacrifice of your life, “sin lies at the door.” If you don't devote

yourself to the honor and glory of God with the whole of your life, then you will end up giving yourself to sin. There is no middle ground, as much as you and I like to find a middle ground upon which to settle. Serve God wholeheartedly, or you will be given to sin. That's why Jesus declares that the first and great commandment is this,

Mat. 22:37 “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.”

There is nothing new in that, as Jesus quotes from the law of Moses, the very law that was written upon the hearts of Cain and Abel, which Abel so sinfully ignored,

Deut. 10:12 “And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways and to love Him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, 13 and to keep the commandments of the LORD and His statutes which I command you today for your good?”

Even further, in this context with Cain's sin,

B. God explains the bondage of sin.

Sin will kill you. It will enslave you.

v.7b “And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it.”

What ominous words, words we ignore to our own peril. This is the nature of sin, “its desire is for you.” That is, its desire is to rule you! To enslave you. Sin will become so addictive that you do what it says, as if you can't do anything else. The Apostle Paul calls that the bondage of sin.

Rom. 7:8 “But sin, taking opportunity by the commandment, produced in me all manner of evil desire...11 For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it killed me.”

That's what sin does. That's the danger of sin. It kills you. It brings death.

That is what God is declaring to Cain. Your sin will kill you! And that is what God says to us to this day. And that is what I proclaim to you as I preach. Your sin will kill you!

James 1:14 "But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. 15 "Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death."

v.7b "And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it."

Sadly, Cain doesn't rule over his sin, but his sin rules over him. It does become full-grown. And it does bring forth death. In this case, the death of his brother. So we see,

III. THE END RESULTS OF SIN.

This account shows us what happens when you don't deal with sin when it begins, when sin is allowed to exist and then take over, when the desire has conceived and brought forth sin in its full-grown manifestation. Here it is the full-grown sin of murder.

The sin of murder came from the heart of Cain, and that heart was filled with jealousy. Cain was jealous because God looked with favor upon Abel's offering and didn't accept his. Such jealousy begets violence! Here, what we could label domestic violence. Violence within a family.

A. Murder as the ultimate sin against one another.

v.8

Don't forget Jesus' declaration of the root of sin in the human

heart.

Mat. 15:17 "Do you not yet understand that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and is eliminated? 18 But those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man. 19 For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. 20 These are the things which defile a man, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile a man."

Murder, as the ultimate sin against your brother, traces its origin to your heart. So as we study Cain, don't forget what Jesus taught his disciples,

Mat. 5:21 "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.' 22 But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, 'Raca!' shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of hell fire. 23 Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, 24 leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift."

With Cain, however, notice sadly,

B. The foolishness of human excuse.

v.9 "Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is Abel your brother?" He said, "I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?"

Such a fool...excusing himself from any responsibility with regard to his brother. And though the answer to that question is not explicitly expressed in that verse, the obvious answer from God is YES! So Cain's question, intended to be a rebuke, is actually self-condemning. "Am I my brother's keeper?" Yes, says

the Lord. Yes you are! You are responsible for your brother, to love him as yourself! That's the second great commandment. You are your brother's keeper.

Gal. 5:14 "For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

Mat. 22:37 Jesus said to him, "'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' 38 This is the first and great commandment. 39 And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' 40 On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."

James 2:8 "If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you do well; 9 but if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors. 10 For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all."

Thus Cain incurs,

C. The punishment of sin.

The consequences of sin, from the hand of God.
v.10-12

Those are words of condemnation, carrying at least the implication of eternal judgment, that Cain himself would come to represent all those who remain unbelievers throughout their lives on earth and die under the wrath and curse of God's condemnation.

Yet, even in that context, we can observe,

D. The restraining grace of God.

v.13-15

Cain remained a human being, whose life was protected by God's grace along with all other human beings. So Cain's judgment and death would not be at the cruel hands of his fellow fallen men, but rather only from the hand of God. His life was protected, he was allowed to live apart from the capricious revenge of others, but before God he remains the representative of all those who would do evil without repentance, only to face the wrath and curse of almighty God. And God removed him from his presence,

v.16

The descendants of Cain will remain in this world, until Jesus returns. And because of them, many of God's people will suffer. The Apostle writes this of those sufferings by true believers, giving thanks for them,

2 Thes. 1:4 "...that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you also suffer; 6 since it is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you, 7 and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, 8 in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, 10 when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe, because our testimony among you was believed."

So we know what will become of the descendants of Cain. And we are thus exhorted,

1 John 3:10 "In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother. 11 For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should

love one another, 12 not as Cain who was of the wicked one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his works were evil and his brother's righteous."

But you who believe, you who trust in Jesus and offer your life as an acceptable sacrifice to God, this is what you must know,

Heb. 12:22 "But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, 23 to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, 24 to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel."