

Genesis 4:1-5:32, selected verses  
“Honey, what happened to the kids?”

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Adam made love to his wife Eve, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Cain. She said, “With the help of the LORD I have brought forth a man.” <sup>2</sup>Later she gave birth to his brother Abel.

Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil. <sup>3</sup>In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the LORD. <sup>4</sup>And Abel also brought an offering—fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The LORD looked with favor on Abel and his offering, <sup>5</sup>but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast.

<sup>6</sup>Then the LORD said to Cain, “Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? <sup>7</sup>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.”

<sup>8</sup>Now Cain said to his brother Abel, “Let’s go out to the field.” While they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him.

<sup>9</sup>Then the LORD said to Cain, “Where is your brother Abel?”

“I don’t know,” he replied. “Am I my brother’s keeper?”

<sup>10</sup>The LORD said, “What have you done? Listen! Your brother’s blood cries out to me from the ground. <sup>11</sup>Now you are under a curse and driven from the ground, which opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand. <sup>12</sup>When you work the ground, it will no longer yield its crops for you. You will be a restless wanderer on the earth.”

<sup>13</sup>Cain said to the LORD, “My punishment is more than I can bear. <sup>14</sup>Today you are driving me from the land, and I will be hidden from your presence; I will be a restless wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me.”

<sup>15</sup>But the LORD said to him, “Not so; anyone who kills Cain will suffer vengeance seven times over.” Then the LORD put a mark on Cain so that no one who found him would kill him. <sup>16</sup>So Cain went out from the LORD’s <sup>17</sup>Cain made love to his wife, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Enoch. Cain was then building a city, and he named it after his son Enoch.

...v. 18 forward, describes the descendants of Cain, including those who were nomads, those who were musicians and those who crafted tools out of iron and bronze. In other words, we see the development of culture.

v. 26 At that time people began to call on the name of the LORD.

I am not going to read aloud Chapter 5 in its entirety, however it recaps the genealogy of Adam through the generations up to and including the birth of Noah and his three sons.

[PRAY]

Our family has received some good news—our Son Chris and his wife Grace are expecting baby #2 in the spring. In other words, our three year old grandson Caden will become a big brother. Recently I watched him while his parents did several errands, including a stop at the doctor’s office where they learned the sex of the baby. When they arrived home, they were all smiles.

“Caden, you’re going to have a little sister!”

“Noooooo,” Caden moaned. “Brother!!!”

And so it begins--while the baby is yet unborn--Sibling Rivalry. I could tell you a lot of personal stories about being the youngest of two sisters, but I promised my sister I wouldn’t! I’m sure many of you could tell stories of your own! Comedian George Burns once said: “Happiness is having a large, loving, close-knit family...that lives in another city!”

Sibling rivalry is part of our human condition, as it has been since Adam and Eve had two sons. But as we shall see, this episode is about more than sibling rivalry. These two brothers, Cain and Abel, are very different individuals. They have different skills/interests/livelihoods. *One is not better than the other.* Cain is a farmer like his father. The younger brother Abel, is a shepherd. In an act of worship, each one brings an offering representative of his livelihood. Abel’s gift is deemed acceptable by God, but the gift offered by Cain is not. No reason is given, we are simply not told why one gift is acceptable and the other is not.

It may not have been the gift itself that was the problem. It might have been the attitude with which the gift was given...that might have been the problem. But this is speculation.

What we *are* told is that when Cain’s gift is rejected, found unacceptable, he becomes angry and depressed. I think that’s understandable, don’t you?

*<sup>6</sup>Then the LORD said to Cain, “Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? <sup>7</sup> 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.”*

Clearly there is something not “right” about what Cain has done. God offers yet another chance: “if you do what is right, will you not be accepted?” This is a rhetorical question, the answer is obvious. Yes, if one does what is right, one will be accepted. God also issues a warning: *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.*”

This is interesting imagery of “sin crouching at your door”. A doorway is an entryway, a threshold...we make choices daily about entering and leaving various places, some where we actually live and spend a great deal of time. ***The doorway represents a significant life choice.***

And there “sin is crouching”, “desiring to have you”.

God says: “...but you **must** rule over it”. This is an imperative. It is ours to master. We **can** overcome evil with good. (Romans 12:21) **We have the power to choose! Just as Cain had the power to choose.**

Mastering sin is far from easy, for a number of reasons. First, as indicated by the scripture, wild animals are powerful and sin is likened to a wild animal in search of prey. Once overtaken by sin, we can become slaves to it, and it can master us! The one power that is stronger than sin and death itself, is the power of Christ. Christ alone conquered sin and its power, through his death on the cross. Christ offers strength and hope in the face of temptation. And the community of faith offers support, encouragement and prayer for “doing what is right”.

**Cain was at the threshold—a doorway of decision.** He could cry out to God for help or go down the pathway of destruction, taking anger to its worst extreme: revenge. He invites Abel out to the field and in an act of premeditation, he murders his brother.

This is a bizarre series of events, to proceed from worship to murder!

What affect does worship have on us? Do we experience God’s grace in this place? Do we experience forgiveness? Do our hearts and actions move us toward more loving and gracious relationships with those closest to us? Do we fall more in love with the Savior and with those for whom Christ died?

May worship transform us!

In the next scene, God inquires: “Where is your brother?”

Even this is grace...God knows...but allows room for Cain to own up to his actions.

There is yet another opportunity to “do what is right”!

Instead Cain responds coldly: “I do not know. Am I my brother’s keeper?”

First, he lies. Next he denies his familial responsibility, and in doing so, seals his fate.

I have a friend named Steve who is one of four brothers. As expected, he says they often got into squabbles and fights. One day his mother was breaking up yet another fight, when she demanded:

“So who started this?”

His brother Wes turned around, pointing to Steve and cried:

“He hit back *first!*” Ah, the “blame game” again. But in the Biblical story, Cain blames no one. He is to blame.

As One who is holy and righteous, nothing remains for God, except to judge Cain. The judgement is severe, to the degree that initially Cain says “it is more than I can bear”, fearing that he himself will be murdered.

**Surprisingly there is more grace:** While Cain is banished, sent away from God’s presence, he is marked by God. The implication is that Cain still belongs to God, and anyone who might harm him would also come under God’s judgement.

It is as if God says: “Cain your life is a mess, but no one better mess with you!” God provides protection for Cain, which is far more than Cain provided his younger brother. Cain does **not deserve** God’s protection—but that is exactly **what Grace is**—the undeserved gift of God, this time in the form of care and protection!

Sibling rivalry has been around from the beginning. The following is a true story of two brothers, Alvin and Lyle Straight. They grew up in Minnesota and were close as brothers could be. But fast forward.

When the brothers are in their 70’s, they are living 500 miles apart. They have not spoken or seen one another in ten years.

Alvin, living now in Laurens, Iowa, has lost his driver's license because of impaired vision. When a call comes indicating that Lyle, Alvin's estranged brother, has had a stroke, Alvin determines to find a way to visit his brother and make things right. His creative solution is to hitch a makeshift trailer to his 1966 John Deere riding lawn mower and set out on a 500-mile trip that will take him in excess of six weeks. Camping out in fields and backyards made available by hospitable people he met along the way, Alvin Straight slowly but surely made his way toward his destination. After crossing the Mississippi River and entering Wisconsin, Alvin camped out in a church cemetery, kindling a campfire between tombstones.

The pastor of the adjoining church sees Alvin from his office. Thinking he is homeless; the pastor brings him a plate of hot meatloaf and mashed potatoes. "I can't help but notice your rather unlikely mode of transportation," the pastor said, eyeing the riding mower. Alvin made mention of his brother who lives in the area. The pastor recalls having met a man by that name while making calls at the hospital but admitted that he didn't recall the man making mention of having a brother.

"Neither one of us has had a brother for quite some time," Alvin explained. "Lyle and I grew up as close as brothers could be. We were raised in Morehead, Minnesota. We worked hard. Me and Lyle would make games out of our chores. He and I used to sleep out in the yard most every summer night. We talked to each other till we went to sleep. It made our trials seem smaller. We pretty much talked each other through growing up."

"Whatever happened between you two?" the pastor asked.

Alvin teared up as he explained: "The story's as old as Cain and Abel. Anger. Vanity. Mix that together with liquor, and you've got two brothers who haven't spoken in ten years.... Whatever it was that made me and Lyle so mad, it doesn't matter anymore. I want to make peace and sit with him and look up at the stars like we used to do."

The brothers were reunited, their relationship was reconciled; and able to one more time, sit under the nighttime sky and watch the stars.

Friends, the story of Cain and Abel, the story of Alvin and Lyle, is our story. It is the story of humanity. For millennia, parents have been asking each other: "Honey, what happened to the kids?" You may be an only child, but our sinful, human condition affects ALL of our relationships—not just with our parents, our siblings,

our children, if we have them. It also affects the relationships we have with spouses, neighbors, friends, co-workers. No relationship is spared. That is the bad news.

Here is the good news in this story.

When we are at the threshold, with the crouching power of sin nearby, we are free to choose. May we choose to do the right thing - choose life - choose reconciliation - choose forgiveness.

We learn in the NT that, as believers, the One who is in us, is greater than the one who is in the world (I John 4:4). Jesus teaches in Matthew 5, that if we come to worship while at the same time our brother—or anyone for that matter—has something against us, we are to leave worship—go and be reconciled to that person—and then return to worship. Jesus teaches this in the context of the Sermon on the Mount, as he reinterprets the commandments, this one being the 6<sup>th</sup> one, ‘You shall not murder’.

We stand at the threshold. We are free to choose—and we will experience the consequences of either choice—of reconciliation or estrangement.

Cain chose to continue to go his own way, further separating himself from his family and his God. There is more good news here, as God does not lose interest in Cain or give up on him. If God does not give up on Cain, how can we give up on those who have hurt us, those from whom we are estranged? Sadly, this estrangement has become the norm.

The Apostle John goes further, linking love with life and resurrection. <sup>14</sup>*We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love each other. Anyone who does not love remains in death.* <sup>15</sup>*Anyone who hates a brother or sister is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life residing in him.* <sup>16</sup>*This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters...* <sup>18</sup>*Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.*

Indeed, by God’s grace, may we truly love one another.

[Pray]