

Where is Your Brother?

Series: What God Wants To Know
Brad Bailey – September 14, 2014

Continuing the series we began last week...entitled "What God Wants to Know."

Last week... "Where are you?... do you know the position you are in of being separate from me... from the very source of life and love?

Today we are confronted with another of the life defining questions God asks...

"Where is your brother?"...and equally implied..."Where is your sister?"

I want to allow each of us to let that question speak to us for a moment.

As it does...it has a way of becoming deeper in what it raises.

(Pause)

Now the Biblical narrative of our human roots... tells of what unfolds between two of the offspring.

Genesis 4:3-13 (NIV)

³ In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the LORD. ⁴ But Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The LORD looked with favor on Abel and his offering, ⁵ but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast. ⁶ Then the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? ⁷ 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 master it." ⁸ 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. ⁹ Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?" "I don't know," he replied. "Am I my brother's keeper?" ¹⁰ The LORD said, "What have you done? Listen! Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground. ¹¹ Now you are under a curse and driven from the ground, which opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. ¹² When you work the ground, it will no longer yield its crops for you. You will be a restless wanderer on the earth." ¹³ Cain said to the LORD, "My punishment is more than I can bear.

> This is the next scene the Scriptures after human fore parents began to try to live independently from God... tried to find life in their own autonomy and authority. What we see is...

When we are no longer living in union with the source of all security and significance... immediately how we see others is corrupted and sown with conflict.

What unfolds is more truly our human story than we might like to think.

It begins with two bothers... two brothers who are different.

One, Abel, is a herdsman...shepherd...and the other, Cain, is a farmer.

We all know something about how such differences can divide us. Differences that often reflect something rich ... can divide us when we let them.

They bring their offerings to God. **One found approval...but the other didn't.**

There are **various ideas about why** God may not have found Cain's sacrifice acceptable.

Perhaps it's simply because of the lack of quality (no reference to the 'best' as their was with Abel)...perhaps because Abel brought that which represented the giving of life and blood.... And only a life given can atone. **What's clear** is that **something is not right in Cain's heart.** [1]

As God engages Cain...it becomes clear how defiant Cain is.

Cain refused to truly face and engage what God is saying. We may wonder **why he was even coming** to bring an offering in the first place. **Strange...but not so unusual.**

Any of us can with a form of outward goodness...but refuse to truly submit to God. (Jesus quoted the prophet Isaiah (29:13), and spoke of those who "honor him with their lips...but whose hearts are far away."(Matthew 15:7-8.)

As those who can do the same, we do well to see that just as with Cain,

> **God looks at the heart of worship. What God sees in our worship matters.**

We will never be able to hide behind our religious activity or social persona.

But it **all leads** to the **question that is dropped** before Cain...**like a 10 ton rock... dropped before us.**

"Where is your brother?"

How does Cain meet the obvious? He says he doesn't know. An outright lie to avoid responsibility. And then he adds his obvious defiance and says further: saying "Am I my brother's keeper?" It's almost like Cain is making it sound like he's in some way offended that God would ask him where Abel was. It's like he's saying to God, "Why on earth would you even expect me to know such a thing. I have no responsibility toward him."

How does God respond to this posture? Does he begin to discuss the merits of Cain's position? God pulls back the curtain of Cain's blindness:

"What have you done. His blood cries out."

In case it's not clear...God is saying: "Yes. You are responsible for your brother." [2]

Of course neither Cain nor we are responsible for everything that happens to others...or to what they may choose to do. But we are responsible for how we relate to them.

Throughout the Bible, there is a consistent thread that insists we are all one human family. We are all brothers and sisters; we are all children of God.

We read in the Bible that our sense of brotherhood should go beyond our friends and families and actually include our enemies as well.

Today we have become hyper-individualistic. We tend to put premium on the rights of the individual to make their own decisions. What often is lost...is the responsibility that we **DO HAVE** for one another. There's the growing idea that: "You do what you want to do and I'll do what I want

to do, and we will all get along just fine.” While that might sound nice on the surface, when that philosophy gets played out, it defies the way that life really is.

- For example, if I decide that I want to send a **text message while I’m driving**, there’s a good chance that I may cause an accident that cannot be avoided by others and I could ruin someone else’s life.
- It’s why people might care about **what coffee they buy**...and spend a little more to purchase Fair Trade coffee so that the farmers can earn a living wage.

Even the areas of life we deem most personal...and not entirely private...such as sex and money. They reflect part of what builds communal life.

In his sermon, “Remaining Awake Through a Great Revolution”, delivered at the **National Cathedral in 1968**, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. captured the essence of God’s question to us, “where is your brother?, when he said [3]

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr

“Through our scientific and technological genius, we have made of this world a neighborhood and yet we have not had the ethical commitment to make of it a brotherhood. But somehow, and in some way, we have got to do this. We must all learn to live together as brothers or we will all perish together as fools. We are tied together in the single garment of destiny, caught in an inescapable network of mutuality. And whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly.”

Those words still lie as a calling to us here today in Los Angeles...and across our globe.

When a young black man is shot without clear cause in Ferguson... we are not responsible for his being shot...but we are responsible for caring about the issues it raises... the fears that many feel.

What was at work in Cain’s heart that could lead to the murder of his brother?

Some have suggested that the names tells us something of what they represent...what is at hand. The name “Cain” seems to reflect a dominant man as it can carry the meaning of a spear...or one who acquires. Abel by contrast, mean “breath.” It is the same word that is used in the Book of Ecclesiastes which describes man as just a breath that is here today and gone tomorrow...that is nothing. [4]

> How can one kill their brother? When they see them as nothing.

A bit dramatic?

In truth it runs through all our inhumanity. [5]

- **Slavery...made easier by deeming others as animals...feeding them in troughs.**
- **Or in the case of human trafficking...objects of profit in labor and sexual exploitation.**
- **Those of Jewish race...become defined as an inferior race that threatens the Aryan race...and finally associated with rodents...in language and**

propaganda. They are no longer seen as bearers of God's image...but as something to be rid of...nothing.

- **During the 1994 Rwandan genocide Hutus referred to Tutsi's as cockroachesnothing.**
- **Whatever one's political views are regarding abortion, I believe there is something tragic in calling the creation of a new human life something else... a nothing that doesn't need to be seen.**
- **Islamist extremists can identify a group as "infidels"...their lives no longer must be respected....they become nothing.**

Who can become nothing to you and I?

The little kid in the classroom... that perhaps we joined others in deciding "he's just here to be picked on"...so others can feel stronger. When someone becomes "an immigrant" rather than a man..."the homeless" rather than a person who has no home. oppressed... it's possible to dismiss those who appear so vain in a similar way... as nothing.

How about the person you are angry with? Jesus says:

Matthew 5:21-22 (CEV)

You know that our ancestors were told, "Do not murder" and "A murderer must be brought to trial." ²² But I promise you that if you are angry with someone, you will have to stand trial. If you call someone a fool, you will be taken to court. And if you say that someone is worthless, you will be in danger of the fires of hell.

In our hearts we may all be guilty of murder.

How can this happen?

We get a **clearer understanding** when we **hear what God first says to Cain.**

God cares... he sees.... And he speaks to the heart...

⁶Then the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? ⁷If 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 master it."

Saying in essence.... **"This is not about your brother...but your own heart."** And then he warns him... **"If you don't embrace your own responsibility... you will never overcome your insecurity... and you will be taken by sin."**

Ex – I have seen this with my kids....that all their own responsibility is re-directed towards the other. **They can't face being bad so they get mad.**

The root of hatred is not a matter of differences... nor anger in general (that too is a symptom)... but rather one's own insecurity with God. What pulls us into a

mindset of superiority is always distance from God. Those who are most rooted in God are those most able to relax and relate across differences.

We commonly think that those who rule over others do so simply out of a sense of superiority. However, the very pretense of superiority is more ultimately rooted in insecurity.

(Which dogs bark the most? The little ones...the little terriers!)

Any sense of superiority is a way of defending our deeper insecurity....whether conscious or not.

The honest truth is that when I engage a black man...there is a difference...a difference that reflects things I don't fully understand.. so I feel insecure. The same is true in relationship to my wife as a woman. Men find women so different they can feel powerless...and respond oppressively.

The root of the problem is insecurity... the fear we have about our own lack of security and significance...that causes us to see others as a threat.

> Christ calls us back into life re-rooted in God, which he provides for us, and which will lead to relating to others as equals in God-intended family.

1 John 3:11-12, 14-19; 4:7, 11, 19 (NIV)

This is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another. ¹² Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother's were righteous. ...¹⁴ We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death. ¹⁵ Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him. ¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? ¹⁸ Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth. ¹⁹ This then is how we know that we belong to the truth, and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence...

⁷ Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God... ¹¹ since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. ...¹⁹ We love because he first loved us.

Jesus is calling us into the life and love of God...into the reality of community in which we honor the common unity of God.

As John describes... **love for others flows from God.** Change must begin with God. It does not mean that there are not many aspects of brotherhood felt... but God is source and the uniting source that unites us beyond all differences.

(Normally we unite in some common affinity and are divided by differences.)

Today... God asks us: Where is your brother? Where is your sister?

What have you done with them?

Have the differences become a threat?

Has your own insecurity become a source of superiority?

Have you made them less than equally human...

Is there blood crying out?

Jesus put some clear way we live this out before us.

Are there people you pass you could help?

> Make a commitment to see them and help them.

Is there anyone you are angry with...in conflict with?

> Jesus says go to them like a brother.... Or sister...honor them with sincere desire to honor each other. Restore conflict in a way that reflects the bonds with others...quickly and directly...rather than attacking and avoidance.

Are there people you are different than... that you need to relate to as equal members of God-intended family?

> Share our lives in the gathering of common unity with others.

This is why our small group life... Home Churches are actually the most fundamental expression of the church. They represent the gathering of lives as family.

Gathering with others to honor God as our father...is the most spiritually potent thing we can do. God told Cain that it was the work of evil that was trying to consume him in separation from his brother. John wrote of Cain being lead by the evil one.

The ruler of this world... has set to see all God's children divided...lost.

So when we meet together...actually share our lives as family... we are being defiant of the evil that is at hand.

In fact...here's a suggestion. When someone at your workplace or other circle...asks you what you did the previous evening...tell them you were participating in a counter-cultural subversive gathering to defy the powers that rule this world."

You are sure to have a great conversation. But you will also be grasping the significance of meeting together.

Gospel / Communion:

Community is not something we simply create on our own...it already exists in God... and is extended to us in Christ.

One brother rose up and killed another...so in Christ one brother rose up and gave himself to give life back to all brothers and sisters who would receive it.

He has given us the right to be called children of God...brothers and sisters.

He is the common unity...the common grace... out of which we must decide if we are going to be united with.

That is what is represented in communion...the common covering by his blood.

Resources: Rev. Marci Huntsman,

Notes:

1. The "POSB Commentary" says "The clearest explanation as to why Abel offered an animal sacrifice and was approved by God is that God did institute salvation by animal sacrifice with Adam and Eve. Adam and Eve were bound to have taught their sons to approach God through animal sacrifice. But only Abel approached God properly. Cain, as so many down through history, rebelled and did not."

Similarly I appreciate this summary of thought from John Kapteyn:

What was Cain doing wrong? NIV notes say that is because Abel put more thought into the offering than Cain did - that Abel picked the fat portions of the some of the firstborn of the crop. He gave the best. True but the problem is deeper than that.

I thank Michael Horton in book "In the Face of God" for talking about this problem. He says the problem has to do with how we worship God, even how we meet God and come to Him.

Later on in the desert with people of Israel we are told that the main sacrifice was to be the fat portions of the firstborn of the flock - but did Cain and Abel know that?

Well in Gen 20, after the flood, we read that Noah took some of all of the clean animals and birds and sacrificed burnt offerings to the Lord - and the Lord smelled the pleasant aroma and said in His heart that he would never again destroy all living creatures as He had done.

Although we are not told directly, in those early days God had already told man to make sacrifices and what these sacrifices were to be. As I checked out Horton's thoughts, I found it interesting to note in Gen 10:20 that Noah was a man of the soil just like Cain had been - yet he offered sacrifices just as God had told Him to.. The point of making animal sacrifices is clear throughout the Bible - Heb 9:22 says "without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness". True in OT with animal sacrifices and in NT and today with shedding of blood of Christ.

2. Such responsibility is affirmed in Ezekiel 3:18-20 (NIV)

When I say to a wicked man, 'You will surely die,' and you do not warn him or speak out to dissuade him from his evil ways in order to save his life, that wicked man will die for his sin, and I will hold you accountable for his blood. ¹⁹ But if you do warn the wicked man and he does not turn from his wickedness or from his evil ways, he will die for his sin; but you will have saved yourself. ²⁰ "Again, when a righteous man turns from his righteousness and does evil, and I put a stumbling block before him, he will die. Since you did not warn him, he will die for his sin. The righteous things he did will not be remembered, and I will hold you accountable for his blood.

3. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., "Remaining Awake Through a Great Revolution," 31 March 1968, National Cathedral, Washington, D.C.

4. Regarding the meaning of the names Cain and Abel, the Hebrew word for Cain has some breath of meaning...including "acquire" and "spear". The Hebrew name of Abel, *hebel*, meaning "breath," is a metaphor used when designating something as quickly gone, like a single breath of air.

Abel is pronounced *hevel*, which means, of all things, "breath", or more precisely, the steam that escapes one's mouth on a cold winter's day.

Hevel is a word that appears elsewhere in the Bible. Its most common string of occurrences is in the Book of Ecclesiastes. The word *hevel* is, in fact, the first word in that book: "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity", says Solomon in Ecclesiastes. Except what he's really saying is "*hevel havalim..*".

Everything is *hevel*, everything is "breath".

5. NPR book review - 'Less Than Human': The Psychology Of Cruelty - March 29, 2011

<http://www.npr.org/2011/03/29/134956180/criminals-see-their-victims-as-less-than-human>