



Sermon Series and Text:
The Gospel According to Genesis - Genesis 4:1-16

Key Scripture Passage

Genesis 4:1-16

Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, "I have gotten a man with the help of the Lord." 2 And again, she bore his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a worker of the ground. 3 In the course of time Cain brought to the Lord an offering of the fruit of the ground, 4 and Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions. And the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering, 5 but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his face fell. 6 The Lord said to Cain, "Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? 7 If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it."

8 Cain spoke to Abel his brother. And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him. 9 Then the Lord said to Cain, "Where is Abel your brother?" He said, "I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?" 10 And the Lord said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground. 11 And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. 12 When you work the ground, it shall no longer yield to you its strength. You shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth." 13 Cain said to the Lord, "My punishment is greater than I can bear. 14 Behold, you have driven me today away from the ground, and from your face I shall be hidden. I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me." 15 Then the Lord said to him, "Not so! If anyone kills Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold." And the Lord put a mark on Cain, lest any who found him should attack him. 16 Then Cain went away from the presence of the Lord and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden.

Commentary on This Week's Text

The twentieth century stood as the unchallenged century of violence (and the twenty-first century is continuing in the same vein). The modern state has proven itself the greatest killer of all time. By 1990, state violence (war, collectivist pogroms, revolution, and "ethnic cleansing") had been responsible for the unnatural deaths of 125 million people during that century, which is more than the state had succeeded in destroying in all of human history up to 1900. Much of the blame for violence, for example, the genocide in Cambodia, can be laid on intellectual figures like Marx. But our own culture in many ways actually leads the way in homicide. Last year in Detroit, for example, there were 413 homicides, which alongside a decreasing population resulted in a murder rate of 45 per 100,000 people, a rate which ranks right alongside some of the most dangerous, drug-violence-ravaged places in the world like Honduras and El Salvador. Today more children than ever are dying at the hands of their abusive parents. Feticide is booming, with (staggeringly) over 54 million abortions since 1973. Names like John Wayne

Gacy, Jeffrey Dahmer, and Ted Bundy are part of our national vocabulary. So we as a culture (and especially we Christians who have the revelation of God's Word regarding the heart) cannot turn our backs on these grim realities.

Here in Genesis 4, homicide is the centerpiece of the story. But this is far more than a record of the first murder. It is about "the way of Cain" (Jude 11), the corruption and slide of a heart away from God into grievous sin that leads to death. It is a story of depravity and yet grace. Moses has exercised great literary care in constructing the story because again, as in the Creation account, sevens and multiples of sevens are used to shape the narrative symmetry. Within verses 1-17, the name "Abel" and the important designation "brother" each occur seven times. "Cain" occurs fourteen times. And whereas in 1:1-2:3, the name "God" (*Elohim*) occurred 35 times, from 2:4 to the end of chapter 4, the words "God," "the LORD," or "the LORD God" occur a total of thirty-five times. The careful Hebrew scholar Gordon Wenham observes: "The last verse of chapter 4, 'At that time people began to call on the name of the LORD,' thus contains the seventieth mention of deity in Genesis." From which we can conclude that there is vast intentionality in this narrative as it instructs us about the essential nature of all mankind. The story of Cain and Abel calls for us to observe well and to take its instruction to heart.

The account begins with a burst of optimism: "Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, 'I have gotten a man with the help of the LORD'" (v. 1). Eve's pregnancy certainly must have been a source of joyous wonder to the couple. The Hebrew for "man" (*ish*) is not used anywhere else in Scripture to describe a baby boy. The baby's gender was that of Adam. This was another *ish*! Eve said in effect, "God made man, and now with the help of the Lord, I have made a second man!" She rightly saw Cain as a work of God. Her words were an implicit declaration of faith. Adam had believed the promise of Genesis 3:15 and so had named her Eve: "The man called his wife's name Eve [*Life*]", because she was the mother of all living" (3:20). And the new mother praised God with a newly charged faith. Eve conceived again and "bore his brother Abel" (v. 2a). As Derek Kidner notes, "His name signified a lack of permanence or meaning and alluded unwittingly to his life being cut short. Nevertheless, Abel's birth doubled her joy. Eve had become the mother of two sons. Three men filled the earthly horizons of the mother of all the living. Hope welled high in the first family."

Prelude to Murder

We know nothing of the boys' growing-up years other than that Cain followed in his father's footsteps as firstborn, becoming a farmer, while his little brother became a shepherd. So both had honorable professions.

Crisis

We don't know if the brothers were in the habit of making offerings or if the text describes their initial presentation of offerings. Very likely this was not the first occasion because the opening words of verse 3, "In the course of time," nearly always denote a precise period of time, here likely referring to the end of an agricultural year when sacrifices would be presented. In any event, their offerings perpetuated a crisis: "Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a worker of the ground. In the course of time Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground, and Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his face fell" (vv. 2b-5).

Why, we wonder, was Abel's offering accepted while Cain's was not? And why did Cain become so angry? It is often supposed that the answer is simply that animal offerings were more acceptable to God than grain offerings, that blood sacrifices are superior to harvest offerings. But this is certainly mistaken, because the Old Testament Scriptures honor both types of offerings. Moreover, the context says nothing about the priority of blood sacrifice. The answer lies in the text of verses 3 and 4 because whereas Cain only brought "an offering of the fruit of the ground," Abel brought the best of the flock, "the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions" (v. 4). Cain evidently was indifferent about his offering, but Abel was careful about his. The rabbinic commentators note that "fat" and "firstborn" mean that Abel gave God the pick of the flock.

The difference was that of heart attitude. Cain came to God on Cain's own self-prescribed terms, but Abel came to God on God's terms. Cain's spirit was arrogant, as the subsequent story will reveal. The writer of Hebrews provides further insight into the brothers' hearts, indicating that Abel's offering was one of faith. "By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts. And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks" (11:4). Cain's was not an offering from faith. He presumed to define what his sacrifice would be. He was the captain of his own heart. God would have to take him and his offering as it was. Cain's error was what latter prophets such as Micah would rail against. "Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6: 7-8). But Cain was singularly unjust, unmerciful, and decidedly not humble!

The giveaway as to Cain's sinful attitude was his countenance: "So Cain was very angry, and his face fell" (Genesis 4:5). Cain could have taken the divine disapproval of his offering as the gracious communication that it was and humbly asked for God's forgiveness, promising never again to fall to such sin. But he did not. Blazing resentment toward God welled in Cain, which strangely (or should we say predictably?) was directed at his brother Abel.

Intervention

God gently responded to the seething man with remedial questions. "The LORD said to Cain, 'Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted?'" (vv. 6-7a). Literally God said, "If you do right, there is grace." But, in an effort to deter Cain from acting out of his anger, God painted for him a frightening but still hopeful picture: "And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it" (v. 7b). God personified sin as a beast crouching at the door about to pounce on him. If Cain did not master it, he would be its victim. The sin at the door was Cain's own sin (the beast was within him), and its interior growth cycle would do him in. "But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death" (James 1:14-15). The consequences of Cain's action would be more far-reaching than the initial sin itself. Cain stood at the edge of Hell. But sadly, God's graphic words about sin as a crouching beast bounced off his hardening heart, and in monumental willfulness he began his descent into the pit.

Murder

The stark simplicity of the homicide accentuates the horror of the deed. "Cain spoke to Abel his brother. And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him" (v.

8). Haste and violence pulse in this short description. “Brother” is twice used in the text. This is not only a homicide but a fratricide. This was Cain’s little brother who, no doubt, was very much like him since both were direct offspring of the mother and father of the human race. Abel’s flesh felt the same. Abel’s eyes were mirrors of his own. There were no guns or bombs to depersonalize Cain’s murder of his brother. Did he crush his skull and watch him die? Did he cut his throat with Abel’s sacrificial knife and bleed him like a sacrifice? Did he choke Abel with his own hands until his eyes lost their light and there was no breath? His young brother was a good man, a “righteous” man according to Hebrews 11:4. Jesus would even call him a prophet (Luke 11:50-51). But Cain killed him with his own hands. Why? Because he hated Abel? Yes, but also no.

“Why does Cain murder?” asks Bonhoeffer rhetorically. “Out of hatred for God,” he answers. Murder is an act of hatred toward God for making or accepting another who offends us or troubles us or is favored with gifts and honors we do not have or stands in our way. That’s precisely the way it was with King David, the murderer of Uriah the Hittite, as evidenced by his astonishing confession to God: “Against you, you only, have I sinned” (Psalm 51:4). David’s God-awareness was not because he was unaware of his guilt toward Uriah and Bathsheba. Rather, King David saw within himself the cause of his horrendous crime: It was with God that he was offended because God had limited his freedom by forbidding him the wife of Uriah the Hittite. David’s crime was directed at his restricting God. According to Jesus we are likewise exposed by our own hatreds because they are spiritual homicides ultimately directed at God — however private they may seem (Matthew 5:21-26).

Postlude to Murder

Confrontation

God was immediately on the spot, just as he had been with Adam and Eve after the fall. When God challenged Adam, Adam told the truth, if not the whole truth (3:10). But Cain told an outright lie. “Then the LORD said to Cain, ‘Where is Abel your brother?’ He said, ‘I do not know; am I my brother’s keeper?’” (4:9). Cain’s flip, indifferent reference to his dead brother revealed a heart already hardened in its depravity. Wit became the murderer’s refuge. Paul would write, “Since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness” (Romans 1:28-29). Then the voice of God thundered over Cain: “And the LORD said, ‘What have you done? The voice of your brother’s blood is crying to me from the ground’” (v. 10). Abel’s cry would not be silenced. Now Cain learned something he had not previously considered: Abel’s body, though covered with earth, could not be totally hidden, for his blood screamed out to God. The Genesis commentator Gerhard Von Rad writes, “According to the Old Testament view, blood and life belong to God alone; wherever a man commits murder, he attacks God’s very own right of possession. To destroy life goes far beyond man’s proper sphere. Spilled blood cannot be shoveled underground; it cries aloud to heaven and complains directly to the Lord of life.”

Judgment

So the curse fell like a divine hammer blow: “And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand. When you work the ground, it shall no longer yield to you its strength. You shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth” (vv. 11-12). Contrary to how God dealt with the original fall of Adam and Eve, this is actually the first instance in Scripture where a human is cursed. Cain now shared this tragic distinction with the serpent (the language is the same as in 3:14). But he would not merely

become a wandering bedouin — the curse went beyond that. All his relationships with his family were broken. He was a lifelong pariah. The earth upon which he depended for food, itself would be his enemy. Cain, who had once worked the soil, had watered it with his brother's blood. That blood had cried against him from the soil, so that he was banned from it forever — to wander over it as an enemy of the earth.

Grace to the Murderer

Cain's response provides the first lament recorded in Scripture: "My punishment is greater than I can bear. Behold, you have driven me today away from the ground, and from your face I shall be hidden. I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me" (v. 13-14). Poor Cain falls to pieces under the weight of the penalty of his sin! But not because he felt any compassion for Abel and his parents, or even because he had sinned against God. His cry was one of terror and self-pity. He, the wolf, feared that he would be devoured. He knew that with the expansion of civilizations, some during his long life would seek to avenge Abel's blood. He felt fear and self-pity, but no remorse

God's mark

Yet amazingly God heard him and responded, "'Not so! If anyone kills Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold.' And the LORD put a mark on Cain, lest any who found him should attack him" (v. 15). God promised Cain that any vigilante would be severely judged, and then he marked Cain with a distinctive sign. In one sense the mark did not lighten his punishment, because a premature death would have shortened his awful sentence. Nevertheless, the fear of a violent death was removed. The nature of Cain's sign has been the subject of endless speculation. Some have supposed a tattoo, others a special hairstyle. One of the ancient rabbis argued that the sign was a dog that accompanied Cain on his wanderings. The dog assured Cain of God's protection and frightened attackers. By all estimates God's mark, whatever it was, was an amazing grace. Cain was cursed and separated from God, yet guarded by God. Cain's life still belonged to God. He bore God's image, however disfigured that image was. This was the utmost mercy that God could do, and does, for the unrepentant. "Then Cain went away from the presence of the LORD and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden" (v. 16).

There is astounding grace right here in one of the darkest scenes in Genesis. Observe that the Lord did not abandon guilty Cain. When Cain arrogantly brought his sparse offering to God, and God saw his evil anger, God did not turn away from him. That is grace. God, in fact, engaged Cain in a fatherly manner with probing, remedial questions. God did not leave him exposed to Satan, sin, and death without recourse. Such grace. God then exhorted Cain to withstand temptation. Again, grace. After the murder, the Lord listened to Cain's unrepentant, self-pitying plea. Finally, God placed a sign upon Cain that protected him for the remainder of his natural life. Amazing grace! Did Cain repent? Probably not. The New Testament Scriptures uniformly speak of Cain in the negative with phrases like "the way of Cain" (Jude 11) and one "who was of the evil one and murdered his brother" (1 John 3: 12). His life is contrasted with "righteous Abel" (Matthew 23:35). Nevertheless, we do not know what ultimately happened to him. He may have responded to God. Cain was not beyond God's grace.

On this side of the cross, the Scriptures tell us that in coming to Christ, we come "to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that *speaks a better word than the blood of Abel*" (Hebrews 12:24, italics added). Abel's blood rightly calls for vengeance. But Jesus' shed blood shouts forgiveness to all who come to him. So there is great hope for us all. Jesus' blood will wash away all the hidden sins of those who come to him. And his blood also atones for our

public sins, whatever they may be. No one is beyond grace because “the sprinkled blood [of Jesus] speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.”

Not what these hands have done
Can save this guilty soul;
Not what this toiling flesh has borne,
Can make my spirit whole.
Thy grace alone, O God,
To me can pardon speak;
Thy power alone,
O Son of God, Can this sore bondage break.
“Not What These Hands Have Done” - Horatius Bonar

Questions for Group Discussion or Personal Study

- Many of us have personal stories or know someone who has been effected by the reaches of violence and violent crime. How should we as believers look at violence in the world and what it tells us about the condition of the human heart?
- When it comes to why God accepted Abel’s sacrifice and had no regard for Cain’s, often times the explanation given is due to the fact that Abel offered a blood sacrifice from his herd, while Cain offered a sacrifice from his harvest. Why is this explanation insufficient and most likely incorrect? What were the real reasons for the difference in how God viewed the brother’s sacrifices? What does this reveal about what God desires from sacrifices to him? Do you give God your “best” sacrifice, or do you give to him from what you have left over?
- God obviously knew that Cain was angry as a result of the sacrifice incident, and He obviously knew that his anger would be misdirected towards his brother. What is God’s warning to Cain and how does God offer Cain a way of grace out of his anger? Do you view sin as a beast that is crouching at your door that desires to devour you, or do you view it as something that you can manage and control?
- It seems a simple question, but why does Cain really murder Abel? In what ways are we like Cain in his sin when we ourselves commit sin?
- What are some parallels between God’s interaction with Cain after the murder and how He interacted with Cain’s parents after the fall, and how is Cain’s reaction different from his parents?

- How is the curse that God proclaims in this passage different from the curse that he proclaims to Adam and Eve after the fall? And yes how was the righteous divine curse still gracious in its execution?
- There is a great deal of imagery that exists between the story of Abel and his murder and the death of Jesus. How is Abel's death a foreshadowing of the death of Jesus and how does Jesus' blood "speak a better word than the blood of Abel?"

Family Catechism and Scripture Memory

New City Catechism Question: *"What does God require in the fourth and fifth commandments?"*

Answer: ***"Fourth, that on the Sabbath day we spend time in public and private worship of God, rest from routine employment, serve the Lord and others, and so anticipate the eternal sabbath. Fifth, that we love and honor our father and our mother, submitting to their Godly discipline and direction."***

Scripture Memory Verse: *"Each of you must respect your mother and father, and you must observe my Sabbaths. I am the LORD your God."*

Song of the Week: *"But God"* - The Village Church

Weekly Unreached People Group

Every week, in this space, we highlight an unreached people group somewhere in the world. Please consider spending some portion of your prayer and reading time during the course of the week praying for the highlighted group. Pray that their hearts would be softened, that the Lord would provide laborers to take them the good news of the Gospel, and that they would come to know the glory of that Gospel and of Christ himself and be saved. Pray also that your own heart would be softened for the reality of the nearly 6,000 people groups that have not heard the Gospel and consider what part the Lord is calling you to play in fulfilling our common command to be about making disciples of all nations. (Source: The Joshua Project - joshuaproject.net)

This week's unreached people group are the **Musahar of India**

Population 2,779,000	% Christian 0.00%	% Evangelical 0.00%
Largest Religion Hinduism (100.0%)	Main Language Hindi	Progress No Known Believers

Introduction / History

The Musahar are considered one of the lowest of the Dalit groups within India and suffer tremendously from their status in society. Their name is derived from two words meaning "rat

catcher" and is likely attributed to them for their tendency to eat rodents in times of dire need. They are short in stature with a long narrow headshape and broad nasal features.

What Are Their Lives Like?

Numbering two million in mostly in the states of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh they have large families and live with several generations in the same household. A Musahar village is almost always filled with children. Though they will frequently speak Hindi, the local trade language, they will speak Angika or Awadhi at home.

Land ownership is rare and most will work as agricultural laborers, day laborers or forest and fishing. The women also work in agriculture or other unskilled labor such as stitching leaf-plates.

Education is not valued and literacy is extremely low with literacy rates running 2-6%. Often times they will drop out at the primary level due to social or economic factors. Modern development programs have had little impact on them as few if any of the sparse allocated resources designated for them every reach them in their need. Many times their wages are paid in crops and they trade in the market place through barter.

What Are Their Beliefs?

Traditionally they follow their tribal faith and will worship their family deity, the village deity as well as the gods of the wider Hindu faith.

What Are Their Needs?

Due their extreme poverty they live far from towns and cities which have proper health care. Nor do they have the capacity to travel to avail themselves of these facilities. The result is a desperate health care situation. Child mortality and maternal mortality are high and the life span is short which is exasperated by high rates of alcoholism among the male population.

Much of their condition is a result of their low position in the caste hierarchy. They are considered untouchables and treated with disdain by all other sections of society. Any attempts at economic advancement will be taken away from them or destroyed and they have little or no capacity to retain property rights. Their constitutional rights of education and food subsidies are routinely denied through corruption and caste based policies. They are powerless and voiceless, unable to change their situation alone. Sadly many Musahar women are kidnapped or sold into prostitution in the major metropolitan cities. Without recourse this becomes their new life, oppressed, abused and forced to suffer in silence.