

Innocent Blood

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Down here in Baldwin County, we don't often get the opportunity to build a snowman, but I'm sure you know the principle: a snowball gets bigger when it rolls. What begins as a small snowball in a child's hand can quickly turn into a ball too large for one to pick up.

Sin works in the same way. One small act of sin, one small act of rebellion, disobedience, and disbelief begets sin. Sin accumulates. It gathers momentum, creates opportunities for more sin, and next thing you know, it's gained mastery over you.

That is the danger that we are given an example of in today's passage.

Setting the Context

But before we get into the text, let's set the context of where we are within the narrative. God has created the universe, he created mankind in special relationship with himself, and man disobeyed God. In the face of this disobedience, sin entered into the world but with it came a promise. God tells Adam and Eve, you will surely die for your disobedience, but

reconciliation and life will come through your descendent. Adam responds by naming his wife Eve in the hope of the life to come, through faith in the promise.

The Son

Genesis 4:1–2 ESV

Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, “I have gotten a man with the help of the LORD.” And again, she bore his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a worker of the ground.

So Adam and Eve follow God’s original call to be fruitful and multiply. In a step of faith, Eve bears a child and she rejoices with the words “I have gotten a man with the help of the Lord.”

This reverse Adam’s words upon receiving Eve, “she shall be called Woman because she was taken out of Man.” And now the man has been taken out of woman!

1 Corinthians 11:12 ESV

for as woman was made from man, so man is now born of woman. And all things are from God.

Cain, the man, is born to Eve with the help of the Lord, and we see that all life comes from God. This is important for two reasons: First, God has strengthened Eve for labor

outside of the Garden and given her a son. Second, God is the author of life - no life is an accident.

It is also interesting to note that another translation is possible, albeit not likely to be the correct intended meaning, for the words “I have gotten a man with the help of the Lord.” The literal words are “I acquired the man together with YHWH” which some have understood to mean, I have received the man of YHWH. Regardless of if this is the intended meaning, Eve’s sentiment is clear, “Surely this is the descendent promised to deliver us!”

But let’s not forget about the other son: Abel.

After Cain, Eve gave birth to Abel. Cain followed in his father’s footsteps as a cultivator of the soil, and Abel tended to their sheep.

The Offering

Genesis 4:3–5 **ESV**

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.

The narrative implication has been set, the son is here, hope has come, and then we come to the offering. Cain offers some of his harvest, and his brother, Abel, brings his offering, the firstborn of his flock with the choice portions offered to God. God accepts Abel's offering and rejects Cain's.

Cultural Context:

Cain is the firstborn, in the ancient world, the firstborn is a significant position in the family. As the firstborn, he should be God's chosen one, the inheritor of Adam's legacy and inheritance. Yet we see God's mode of divine election is countercultural. God accepts Abel's offering, showing favor to Abel over Cain. And we will see this pattern repeated with Isaac instead Ishmael, Jacob instead of Esau, Judah instead of his Reuben, Simeon, or Levi. And ultimately Jesus instead of Adam. God is the Creator, and He may choose whomever He wills to fulfill His will.

Theological Context:

The text does imply a difference between the two offerings. The problem is not that Cain offered vegetables instead of a living sacrifice. Both are appropriate and good offerings, and one is not more significant than the other in a gratitude

offering.

The difference is the heart behind the offering. We see Abel offer the firstborn of his flock with the fatty portions, which is the best part of the offering. Cain, however, is said to have given some of his harvest. We don't want to read too much into what isn't said, but in contrast to the firstborn of the flock, some fruit instead of the firstfruit is significant. Cain did not give the firstfruit of his harvest, and this reflects a heart issue, not an offering issue.

The author of Hebrews provides this commentary:

Hebrews 11:4 ESV

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.

Abel offers up his offering by faith, while Cain does not. And God will take the opportunity to expose Cain's heart.

The Question and Invitation:

Genesis 4:6–7 ESV

The LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? 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, and you must rule over it."

God asks Cain why is he angry and downcast. Instead of rebuking Cain or telling him that he is not God's chosen one, God offers an invitation to obedience: do well, and you will be received. Do not give into sin. I can see you are angry, but do not let that anger lead you into sin. God confirms that Cain has free will to act, but Cain's actions reflect the reality of sin and man's inability to do well in his own strength.

The Response:

Genesis 4:8 **ESV**

Cain spoke to Abel his brother. And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him.

God told Cain, the choice is yours, do good and be accepted, or do evil and give yourself over to sin. Cain responds to this invitation with hard-hearted vengeance. Cain reveals the reality of the heart that God already sees. He rejects the invitation to do well, and he gives into the sin crouching at the door. Like the snowball rolling across the snow, sin accumulates and grows in Cain's heart.

Cain was angry at being rejected. He is given counsel from God, but Cain does not turn from his anger. His anger becomes hatred, and his hatred gives way to murder.

Cain lures his brother Abel out into the field, and he strikes

him down. God does not remain silent.

The Confrontation

Genesis 4:9–12 **ESV**

Then the LORD said to Cain, “Where is Abel your brother?” He said, “I do not know; am I my brother’s keeper?” And the LORD said, “What have you done? The voice of your brother’s blood is crying to me from the ground. 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.”

Like with Adam and Eve in the Garden, God gives Cain the opportunity to confess and repent, but like his father, Cain deflects. Cain lies to God, “I don’t know, and it’s he’s not my problem.” God asked where is your Abel, and Cain answers with “he is not my responsibility.”

Yet the constant referral to Abel as Cain’s brother implies, yes you should care for your brother, not because you’re the firstborn, but because he is your brother! The status as firstborn only heightens that familial responsibility.

God gives Cain the opportunity to admit wrongdoing. After the question, God is silent for a moment, and Cain lies to

God and disregards his brother, whom he has just murdered.

God is not ignorant, and God confronts Cain.

“What have you done!” Not a question, an accusation.

You have killed your brother and his blood cries out from the earth, so now you are cursed.

The Curse

This is the first time that a human is cursed in Scripture. In Genesis 3, the serpent was cursed, and the land was cursed, but here, Cain is cursed. Cursed with the ground that it may not yield him a harvest, and cursed to wander the earth.

Genesis 4:13–14 ESV

Cain said to the LORD, “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.”

This response further reveals the heart of Cain. The serpent was silent, Eve was silent, and Adam was silent. Each were guilty and deserving of their punishment.

Cain is not silent. Cain tells God that the punishment is too

great, and ironically, Cain feels it is unfair because he will be vulnerable as a wanderer and likely killed. The murderer fears the same fate as his victim, as his own brother.

Cain's heart is stone cold and selfish, yet God still shows mercy.

Genesis 4:15–16 ESV

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. Then Cain went away from the presence of the LORD and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden.

God shows mercy to Cain and exiles him further east, and God protects Cain with a mark.

In Genesis 9, God will reveal that any who takes the life of another man deserves death, yet here God as judge reveals something about who He is. He is merciful, gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.

Cain's murder of Abel was an act of jealousy and envy, but it was also a direct attack on the one whom Cain really wanted to kill - God himself. Cain was angry that God rejected him, and so Cain killed one created in the image of the God who created him.

Cain did not give an offering out of thanksgiving but out of

pride.

Abel offered God his firstborn out of thanksgiving and faith to the God of creation. Abel lived by faith and received salvation. Cain looked to himself and rejected God, and the result was alienation and exile.

Sin begets sin

But the we come to Cain's lineage, and we see the affects of sin on the family.

Genesis 4:17–22 **ESV**

Cain knew his wife, and she conceived and bore Enoch. When he built a city, he called the name of the city after the name of his son, Enoch. To Enoch was born Irad, and Irad fathered Mehujael, and Mehujael fathered Methushael, and Methushael fathered Lamech. And Lamech took two wives. The name of the one was Adah, and the name of the other Zillah. Adah bore Jabal; he was the father of those who dwell in tents and have livestock. His brother's name was Jubal; he was the father of all those who play the lyre and pipe. Zillah also bore Tubal-cain; he was the forger of all instruments of bronze and iron. The sister of Tubal-cain was Naamah.

The seventh in the line of Cain is interesting.

Genesis 4:23–24 ESV

Lamech said to his wives: “Adah and Zillah, hear my voice; you wives of Lamech, listen to what I say: I have killed a man for wounding me, a young man for striking me. If Cain’s revenge is sevenfold, then Lamech’s is seventy-sevenfold.”

From Cain’s lineage comes not only violence but boasting in that violence. Lamech is a polygamist who takes pride in his wickedness. His son Tubal-cain is noted as forger of weapons and tools, and it seems that Lamech utilizes those metal tools to inflict vengeance on those who offend him young and old. Whereas God declares a sevenfold judgment on any who harm Cain, Lamech declares for himself a seventy-sevenfold vengeance.

The lineage of Cain reflects an intensification of wickedness and sin. We see God warn Cain, do not give yourself over to sin, and Cain does not listen and the results are increasingly wicked descendents culminating in Lamech as one who takes pride in his cruelty and wickedness.

The Hope Restored

The descendent that Eve hoped would restore humanity murdered his brother and was exiled.

At this point the original audience in Israel is on the edge of

their seat! The firstborn is rejected and the second son is dead, where will the promised seed come from?!

Genesis 4:25–26 ESV

And Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and called his name Seth, for she said, “God has appointed for me another offspring instead of Abel, for Cain killed him.” To Seth also a son was born, and he called his name Enosh. At that time people began to call upon the name of the LORD.

We see God give Adam and Eve another son, named Seth who is in the likeness of his father, Adam.

Genesis 5:1–3 ESV

This is the book of the generations of Adam. When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God. Male and female he created them, and he blessed them and named them Man when they were created. When Adam had lived 130 years, he fathered a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth.

Seth was born to Adam and Eve as a son of God, and we see from Seth’s lineage, his descendents worship and call upon God, upon YHWH.

So at the close of the generations of the heavens and the earth, we see two sons: a son of God, Seth and a son of Adam or a son of the man, Cain. From the descendents of the son of man, we see violence and corruption reign. From

the son of God born according to the promise to Eve, we see worship to YHWH.

Seth was born to replace the chosen son who was killed in order to continue the lineage to the promised descendent, and Abel does not get much attention outside of the information that he was a keeper of sheep and Cain's brother, but let's conclude by discussing the significance of Abel in the big picture.

Abel as a type of Christ

The child that the world would expect to be chosen murdered the child who God had chosen. Abel was favored and accepted by God, and his murder seemed to undermine God's whole plan of redemption.

But this isn't the last time that man's sin and envy would seem to mess up God's plan of redemption.

In the Gospels, we see the same thing through the eyes of Pontius Pilate. When Jesus is brought before him for trial, it is written:

Matthew 27:18 **ESV**

For he knew that it was out of envy that they had delivered him up.

The parallels are not hidden:

| Cain saw that his brother's offering was accepted by God

| The Jews see that Jesus is publicly accepted and honored by God

| Cain becomes enraged with envy

| The Jewish leaders are filled with envy at Jesus' popularity and authority

| Cain kills his brother

| The Jews hand Jesus over to Pilate to be crucified.

Jesus himself points out the significance of Abel and all the prophets whom the Jews killed:

Matthew 23:34–35 ESV

Therefore I send you prophets and wise men and scribes, some of whom you will kill and crucify, and some you will flog in your synagogues and persecute from town to town, so that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah the son of Barachiah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar.

This brings us back to the problem of life under Adam. We

are all born under the domain of the world. We are born as Cain, each and every one of us. You may say that you have never and would never kill your brother or anyone for that matter, yet Jesus tells us:

Matthew 5:21–22 **ESV**

“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’ But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be liable to the hell of fire.

For most of this sermon, we sit here and think, “Ah man, Cain is the worst! I’m so glad, I’m not like him.” But we’re not Abel, we’re all Cain. We are all guilty of killing not only our brother, but the firstborn of creation, the Son of God. His blood is on each and every one of our hands.

We are all guilty of murder like Cain.

But just as God’s plan for redemption did not end with Abel’s murder and Cain’s exile, our story of redemption does not end with the crucifixion.

The devil may have thought that he had won when Christ breathed his last breath, but the moment Christ entered into death, it was defeated. Satan was defeated, and victory was declared in the resurrection.

Jesus Christ implemented a new covenant.

Hebrews 12:24 ESV

[you have come] to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

You are guilty of murdering the Son of God, but whereas the blood of Abel cried forth from the earth “guilty, guilty, guilty,” the blood of Christ, when applied by the Spirit through faith, cries out “forgiven, forgiven, forgiven.”

Let us pray.