

Genesis: *The Curse of Cain*
Genesis 4:9-16

Before we return to Genesis 4, I want to remind you that this will be our last message in Genesis for a while. For the next two Sundays, I will be with our Senior High students on a mission trip to Cantel, Guatemala; so, you will be hearing from Pastor Greg next Sunday and Pastor Tami on the 13th. Then, upon my return, we will kick off our Digital Fast series. Again, please take advantage of the materials that we are providing for the Digital Fast series, including a very well written devotional for each of the 28 days that we will be fasting from our phone consumption! I will also remind you that next Sunday, July 6th marks the first Sunday that our SKC attendees will be out of the SKC sanctuary due to renovations. Because it is a holiday weekend, we have invited our SKC attendees to join us at OP, so please show them a warm welcome and feel free to park on the grassy knoll if we run out of parking spaces!

Alright, let's return to Genesis 4. Remember that the firstborn son of Adam and Eve, Cain, became enraged with his brother Abel when God showed regard for Abel and his offering and did not show regard for Cain and his offering. Even after God mercifully encouraged Cain to resist acting upon his anger, Cain leads his younger brother out into the field and kills him. It's a brutal story that is representative of how sin quickly corrupts the human soul and brings devastation to families, and this morning we will return to Genesis 4 to see what comes of God's confrontation with Cain following his murderous behavior. Please stand and let us read Genesis 4:9-16:

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.

My message will fall under four subheadings: 1) From Bad to Worse; 2) The Cry of Abel's Blood; 3) The Curse of Cain; and 4) A Better Word.

I. From Bad to Worse

One of my favorite movies is *The Mission* (show movie icon), released in 1986 starring Robert DeNiro and Jeremy Irons. In the beginning of the movie, we learn that DeNiro is a ruthless slave trader who loves only two people in his life: his wife and his younger brother. One day DeNiro returns home from hunting humans, only to discover that his brother is having an affair with his wife. In a fit of sheer rage, DeNiro draws his sword and slays his brother in cold blood. Within minutes, however, DeNiro is overwhelmed with the horror that he killed his beloved brother, and his grief leads him to eventually become a totally different person. *The Mission* is a Cain-and-Abel-like story; however, there is one significant difference. Whereas DeNiro's character is tortured by the grief of having killed his own brother, Cain shows absolutely no remorse for his crime.

Consider Cain's cold-hearted response when God confronts Cain in vs. 9: Then the Lord said to Cain, "Where is Abel your brother?" He said, "I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?"

Keep in mind, Cain is not having this conversation with his parents. Cain is not having this conversation with the police. Cain is talking to God—the Creator and Ruler of the entire cosmos; and Cain is LYING to God. Cain knows exactly where Abel is...he's buried in the field where Cain killed him. And even worse, Cain snaps back at God with the rhetorical question, "Am I my brother's keeper?"

Given his response, we can only conclude that Cain's heart has been fully corrupted by sin. Sin now owns Cain, just as God had predicted.

Jesus said in John 10:10 that the Enemy comes to steal, kill, and destroy...and that's exactly what Satan accomplished through Cain. Cain took a human life; he killed one who was created in God's image. This is what sin does.

God's created order is one of life; sin opposes God and inflicts death.

God's created order is the establishment of a loving family; sin leads Cain to destroy his own family.

God speaks the truth and His word is Truth; sin corrupts Cain's heart, and Cain is now full of lies.

Church, when we lie to God, we are lying to ourselves, and we can be quite sure that our sin is about to go from bad to worse. Lying about our sinful behavior compounds the evil and leads to a deeper level of corruption in our souls, and we see that happen here with Cain. Cain was filled with rage, and it led him to murder his own brother. As horrible as his crime was, we might hope for some kind of a redemptive end if Cain shows genuine remorse and tells the truth to God when asked, "Where is your brother?" Instead, Cain compounds his sin, he lies to God and thus reveals the horrific evil that has taken hold of his soul.

Note also how sin celebrates individualism. Cain shouts back at God, "Am I my brother's keeper?"

Church, everything about God's created order, including our Lord's Church, points toward collective responsibility. In fact, we have been tasked to be our brother's keeper! As Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 12, "When one suffers, the whole body suffers. When one rejoices, all rejoice." In Galatians 6:2 Paul writes, "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ." Sin, however, rejects collective responsibility. Sin isolates and celebrates individualism. Sin's famous motto is, "Not my problem!"

Sadly, I see this expression of sin far too often, even in the church...even in me. When we see the homeless on the street corner, we turn away and those words come to our minds: "Not my problem." When our brothers and sisters in the urban core lament the violence and crime that plague their neighborhoods, we turn away and think, "Not my problem." When we know that our neighbors are far from Christ and face eternal torment and separation from God, we go on with our self-centered lives, secretly agreeing with Satan's suggestion that the souls and pains of others are simply, "Not my problem."

Church, don't judge Cain...remember that this story is representative of sin's power to quickly and completely corrupt the human heart. We must not come to this story thinking that we are much better than Cain; instead, we must be willing to allow this story to convict us of how much we are SO like Cain. Apart from Christ, we are sin-sick souls; and we are all a lot more like Cain than we want to admit. We are quick to lie to ourselves and to others about our sin. We even lie to God. And we are quick to celebrate our individualism at the expense of others...even our own brothers.

Cain is our representative, as were his parents. But note: there will be a reckoning for those who sin against their brothers. God is not fooled by our lies, nor is He deaf to the cries of those who have suffered injustice. That leads to our next subheading:

II. The Cry of Abel's Blood

In vs. 10, God responds to the lies of Cain: And the Lord said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground." Note that God asks Cain the same question He asked of Cain's mother: "What is this that you have done?" Again, God doesn't ask because He doesn't know. God asks the question to convict the sinner of her/his crime. It is a rhetorical question, and one that expresses divine disapproval and judgment. Cain has done the unthinkable, and His crime is not hidden from God. There is no use denying the crime, for God sees all that happens under the sun; and what is more, God hears the cries of those who suffer injustice.

Note what God says here in vs. 10. God reveals that "the voice" of Abel's blood cries out to God from the ground. This is an incredibly important insight.

Church, the Bible reveals that the essence of all human life is in "the blood". Ask your physicians, and they will agree. Everything about a human's life depends on the blood. Here and throughout the witness of scripture, however, we get the sense that all blood belongs to God because all of life belongs to God. This may be why Israel is forbidden to ingest the blood of any animal. Blood belongs to God. And when it comes to the blood of those who bear God's image, God hears their "blood" cry out to Him when there has been an a deadly act of injustice. God literally says, "The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground."

God always hears the cries of those who suffer injustice. He has never once ignored the cry of the tortured slave or the Jewish girl as she was thrust into the gas chamber. He has never once ignored the cry of the battered wife or an honest man who was swindled of his life savings.

“Vengeance is mine, saith the LORD.” We all grew up hearing that verse from Deuteronomy 32:35, and Paul quotes that verse again in Romans 12:19 where he writes: “Vengeance is mine; I will repay, says the Lord.”

God is not deaf to the cries of those who suffer injustice. A horrible reckoning is coming at the end of the age for those who shed innocent blood and those who preyed upon the innocent. For Cain, a portion of that reckoning is coming immediately.

This leads us to our third subheading...

III. The Curse of Cain

This story in Genesis 4 is the first in which we see the shedding of innocent, human blood upon God’s earth, and we get the sense that the spilling of innocent human blood upon the ground is a horrific act of violence against God and God’s created order. Think about what we have learned: Given that man was formed from the earth, we can assume that the relationship between the blood of God’s image-bearers and the ground from which they were formed was intended to be sacred and revered. So, when Cain sheds the blood of his brother upon the ground in an act of murder, we learn that the ground “swallows” the slain blood of Abel, and this brings about the curse of Cain. In vss. 11-12 God states:

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.

If you recall, the ground in general was already cursed as a result of Adam’s sin at the end of Genesis 3. Due to Adam’s disobedience, the ground will now produce thorns and thistles, and Adam will have to work the ground by the sweat of his brow to produce food to feed his family. But note: the cursed ground will still produce for Adam, though not as God had originally intended prior to sin.

The curse of Cain, however, is a different story. Due to shedding innocent blood upon the ground, God curses Cain from the ground. This is the first instance of God cursing a human being, and this curse is very serious. Abel’s innocent blood at the hand of his own brother has so offended God that Cain shall forevermore be cursed from the ground. God states that the ground shall no longer yield its strength to Cain—thus rendering Cain a fugitive and a wanderer for the rest of his days on the earth.

I want you to note that, in some respect, not only is God offended by the shedding of innocent blood, but the ground itself is offended by the crime. Our translation states that Cain is cursed “from” the ground, but the sense here is that Cain is also cursed “by” the ground which has opened its mouth to receive Abel’s innocent blood. The ground will not forget Cain’s crime; nor will the ground forgive Cain’s crime. The cry of Abel’s blood is one of vengeance, and the ground will curse Cain, just as God has cursed Cain from the ground.

This concept of the ground holding a curse against those who shed innocent blood is developed further in Numbers 35:33-34 where God says to Israel: ³³ You shall not pollute the land in which you live, for blood pollutes the land, and no atonement can be made for the land for the blood that is shed in

it, except by the blood of the one who shed it. ³⁴ You shall not defile the land in which you live, in the midst of which I dwell, for I the Lord dwell in the midst of the people of Israel.

Throughout the entire Bible, there is a great and mysterious relationship that exists between God and the land; one that we do not have time to explore this morning. That said, we should take very seriously that the shedding of innocent blood *pollutes* the land, and the curse of the ground where innocent blood has been shed is a very real and serious reality, even to this day. According to Numbers 35, there is no atonement for the land where innocent blood has been shed except the shed blood of the murderer. Justice is the only atonement that can purify the land from the pollution of innocent blood.

Many years ago, I entered into a deep and meaningful relationship with two very special people in our congregation, Dave and Carolyn Unruh. Dave has since gone to be with the Lord, and Ms. Carolyn now lives in Orlando with her daughter. In the course of our time together, I observed how Dave and Carolyn loved Jesus, and I came to see how their story was a remarkable testimony of how God works powerfully through those who love Him and have been called according to His purpose.

One of the ways that God chose to work through Carolyn was unlike anything I have ever seen, but given our text this morning, I want to share a part of her story with you. Many years ago, when the southern part of Johnson County was in the early stages of being developed, God would awaken Carolyn in the middle of the night, along with a few of her friends who were also prayer warriors and disciples of Jesus, and He would send them on an assignment. I remember Carolyn telling me of a specific evening when she and her friends were all awakened at 2 a.m., and they understood that God was calling them to go out and pray over a certain piece of land. In faithful obedience, according to Carolyn's testimony, they took oil and walked the land, repenting over any curse that may have been sown into the land due to the shedding of innocent blood, and pleading the blood of Jesus over the land as an atonement that might lift the curse and purify the land. At the time, they had no idea why they were being sent out in the middle of the night to pray over that particular parcel of land. However, just a few days after completing their assignment, Carolyn learned that an elementary school was scheduled to be built at that location! Upon hearing that news, Carolyn set out to learn everything she could learn about the history of that ground. She eventually discovered that several souls had been lynched there many years ago. That was only one of many properties that Carolyn and her friends had been sent by God to repent over right here in the state of Kansas.

Based upon Carolyn's testimony and what we just read in Genesis 4 and Numbers 35, I have since come to believe that the blood of those slain in an act of injustice continues to cry out to God from the ground, and the curse of that innocent blood continues to affect the ground until atonement has been made.

You might be amazed to know how often people come to us as pastors, seeking help to cleanse their homes from a curse that lies upon the land where they live. I know that will cause some of you to raise an eyebrow, but I'm simply telling you what I know and what I have experienced firsthand--as have the majority of EPC pastors that I meet with regularly from around the country. There are countless stories of a cursed land throughout the world; and even

to this day, Christians will pray over and repent over whatever piece of land they purchase before building a home or a church. Why? Well, I think we can agree that there has been A LOT of innocent blood shed upon the soil upon which we live here in America, not to mention here in our own city. According to God's Word, the land is polluted by the shedding of innocent blood. And the land doesn't forget.

Thankfully, unlike the land, God is not only perfectly just, He is also perfectly merciful. And that leads us to our fourth and final subheading...

IV. A Better Word

Following God's judgment of Cain, Cain responds in vs.13: 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.

Cain's flippancy and arrogance deflates like a balloon upon hearing the judgment of God. He is horrified. Cain laments that God's punishment for killing his brother is too much to bear. He is worried about the fact that he is losing his land, that God will no longer look on him with favor, and that members of his family will attempt to kill him in retribution for the life of his brother Abel.

Notice anything missing here? Remorse. Cain shows no remorse for his sin, no regret for killing his brother, no lament for Abel or his parents who will surely grieve the tragic death of their second-born son. Instead, Cain simply laments for himself. He is worried about his own suffering because of God's unusually harsh and (to be quite honest, unfair!) punishment that is just too much for poor Cain to bear. Are you kidding me?

Church, as much as Cain bothers you...remember that he is our representative. Cain represents the vast majority of sinful human beings who worry more about their potential punishment than they worry about the victims of their injustice.

Like so many of us who are corrupted by sin, Cain still believes the lie that God is not being fair. Can you see that? Having just buried the body of the brother he murdered in cold blood, Cain has the gall to suggest that God's punishment for murder is unfair...it's unreasonably harsh...it's putting poor Cain's life at risk! Can you believe this guy? And yet, are we not just like Cain?

You don't think so? Let me ask you a question: what doctrine in the Bible bothers you the most? Is it not the existence of hell? Do you not sometimes doubt the goodness of God because unrepentant souls will face the horrific justice they deserve? Then Cain is your representative! Cain deserves far worse than the sentence God has given him. Like Adam and Eve, Cain deserves death...he deserves hell. Cain murdered his own brother in cold blood! But observe the self-deception of a corrupted heart who has the arrogance to judge God while the blood of his murdered brother still drips from his hands! This is the human condition; and we are not so unlike Cain...sadly.

Even so, we must marvel at the mercy of God. Given the total corruption of Cain's heart—even in light of Cain's complete lack of remorse or repentance—God extends mercy to

the unmerciful. We read in vss. 15-16: 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.

Having justly cursed Cain for his murderous behavior, God extends mercy to Cain by preserving his life. God promises sevenfold vengeance upon any person who would take justice into their own hands against Cain; and, to guarantee Cain’s preservation, God places a mark upon Cain to protect him from any attack.

Now, I know God’s choice to spare Cain and then protect him from others taking vengeance for Abel’s murder may seem confusing for some of us, but don’t miss the revelation of God’s character here in Genesis 4. God is always, always, always perfectly just and perfectly merciful. We see a beautiful picture of God’s nature and character here in Genesis 3 and Genesis 4, right?

Still, you are asking a reasonable question: Where is God’s justice? Is the curse of Cain sufficient to atone for the innocent blood of Abel? No, it’s not. But God makes it clear that He will not allow other image bearers to wreak vengeance upon Cain for his sin. Vengeance belongs to God; yet the shed blood of Abel continues to cry out for vengeance? So where is the justice for Abel’s death?

Church, we already know the answer, right? God has a plan. God will place upon His Son the vengeance that Cain deserves, and the vengeance that my injustice deserves, and the vengeance that your injustice deserves, and the vengeance that all of our injustice deserves, so that as guilty image bearers of God, should we repent and place our hope and confidence in the finished work of Jesus on the cross, we might be forgiven and cleansed from our horrific acts of sin and injustice. Jesus will finally, once and for all, satisfy God’s wrath and vengeance that is due those who deserve hell. That’s the Gospel.

But here’s the deal: Cain will have to, one day, deeply and sincerely repent of his sin against God and his brother. Jesus said it clearly to his listeners, twice, in Luke 13:3-5, “If you will not repent, you will perish.” Sadly, we have no reason to believe that Cain will ever repent. Based upon his attitude and behavior, we don’t get the idea that Cain ever repented; but, by God’s mercy, the opportunity to repent and receive unmerited forgiveness was afforded to Cain—just as that opportunity has been afforded to us.

Church, there is a profound passage of scripture in Hebrews 12 that points all the way back to this moment in Genesis 4. The writer of Hebrews is celebrating the finished work of Jesus and the unshakeable Kingdom that the faithful will one day inherit, and in vs. 34, as he concludes his powerful description, he points to “Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.” Can you see the contrast?

The blood of Abel speaks one word: VENGEANCE. The shed blood of the innocent cries out to God from the ground, and their cry will not be ignored. VENGEANCE and JUSTICE is coming for Cain, and Hitler, and Stalin, and slave traders, and slave owners, and city leaders, and corrupt

business leaders, and abusive parents, and heretical pastors, and all of us who, like Cain, have sinned against God and sinned against the innocent without a stitch of remorse or repentance. That will be a *horrible* day...it will be a day that will last for eternity. Hell is real, and hell awaits the unrepentant. God will answer the cries of the innocent; and the guilty will be punished. That is the word of Abel's blood, and that is exactly what we see here in Genesis 4. Though God spared Cain the full weight of his punishment for a time, we learn in Numbers 35 that there is only one way to atone for the shedding of innocent blood...and that is the shed blood of the sinner.¹ The penalty of sin is death...eternal, horrific, vengeful death that never ends.

But here's the good news of the Gospel: God made Him to be sin who knew no sin, that we might become the righteousness of God.² Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant, God's Perfect Lamb, bore the guilt and shame of the murderous firstborn. He shed His perfect blood on our behalf as well; and His blood, sprinkled upon repentant sinners, speaks a better word than Abel's. The blood of the Lamb speaks one word, and it is the most hopeful word for sinners condemned to hell: it is the word, "Forgiveness."

Brother Cain...Sister Cain...stop judging God, and listen to God's judgment of you! There is blood on your hands...there is blood on mine. We have all participated in acts of injustice; we have all raged against God's character; we have all cared more about the punishment than we cared about our crime; and all our sins led to the crucifixion of God's only Son, the only man born to a woman who was truly innocent. And yet it is the perfect, innocent blood of Jesus that cleanses us from all righteousness³ IF, and only if, we repent with sincere and contrite hearts, looking to the atoning work of Jesus on the cross as our only hope for the forgiveness of our sins. If you refuse to repent, you will one day feel God's vengeance, and that is not anything I would wish upon my worst enemy. Friends, confess your sin and your Cain-likeness to God today. Do it now and seek the forgiveness that only comes through the blood of Christ on your behalf.

Then, as those who have been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb, let us set aside our selfish lives of hyper-individualism, and let us embrace our collective responsibility to care for our brothers and sisters in their painful and often unjust circumstances. Let us never again believe the lie that it's NOT MY PROBLEM. Instead, let us contend for those who cannot contend for themselves. Let us carry each other's burdens⁴ willingly and with compassion. Let us devote ourselves to the common good as ambassadors of God's reconciling work in the world. Let us break the curse that lies upon our land through prayers of intercession, repentance, and the imputed righteousness that is ours through Christ Jesus.

To be clear, that means getting entangled in the lives of people who have needs, people who are hurting, people who are difficult, people who use words and believe in things that offend us, and people who don't always say "thank you." That means paying attention to your own brothers and

¹ Numbers 35:33-34

² 2 Corinthians 5:21

³ 1 John 1:19

⁴ Galatians 6:2

sisters right here in our congregation who have felt needs that are going unmet but are too humble and timid to make those needs known...they're just hoping someone will ask.

Church, we have received mercy through the blood of Christ that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel, so let us respond with mercy, generosity, sacrifice, and grace in a world full of Cains, amen? Will you pray with me?