

Cain and Abel

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[0 : 0 0] whole Bible is how Jesus read the Bible. He understood that the Old Testament represents God's promise, and Jesus' coming represents fulfillment. We sometimes talk about the Emmaus Road principle. Jesus, after His resurrection, explained from all Scripture that Jesus had to suffer and had to die for the sake of God's promise of salvation.

So we understand as we read our Bibles that every theme we encounter, every figure we meet, every image that is presented, every story of life through death, of victory through weakness, in some way or another, is a signpost to Jesus. And so that's what we're going to be looking for and looking at, and I hope that we'll learn together to see Jesus in all Scripture, that it'll help us as we read the Bible for ourselves, it'll help us as we come to worship. And we're going to begin with one of those human origin stories. There is a great fondness these days for origin stories.

Well, here we have the origin story of humanity, because we're taken back to the very first family, and especially we're going to think about the first children born to Adam and to Eve. And as we do so, as we remember that Genesis is all about beginnings, we need to recognize that this represents the beginnings, the genetic code for all of humanity. As we together trace our family tree back here, it will explain much about who are we, why is the world the way it is? But it'll also help us to answer the question, is there hope to be found? So we're going to think about this story as it centers on some key themes. And the first thing we need to recognize is the seriousness of sin.

Now, we're going to see its nature and effects played out in this family story. We're also going to think about the sweetness of God in the way that He deals with sinners, in the way He's ready to extend mercy. And we're going to think about the significance of sacrifice, pointers to God's grace and salvation. And as we do so, we'll see that all of these themes connect us to the person and work of the Lord Jesus. But we begin with the seriousness of sin, and that word picture, that vivid picture, that in some ways terrifying picture that we find in verse 7. As God comes to speak to Cain, He says, 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. And the picture that God gives is of sin as a predator, like a wildcat. Think of a leopard or a lion. So our very basic point is that sin is a savage, destructive force. It is not harmless. It is not a minor issue. It is not something we should freely disregard. And in verse 7, we discover two things about sin. There's two aspects to this picture. First, the tendency of sin to hide. You know, it crouches down. You know, maybe you've either, if you've got a cat, maybe you've watched a cat stalk a bird, or otherwise, think of David Attenborough nature documentaries. Think of the leopard stalking the gazelle. The first thing that happens is it gets out of sight, and it hides in the tall grass until it is poised to strike. So we need to think about the fact that sin hides, but we also need to think about the fact that sin is powerful. It desires to have you. It desires to make a victim of us. But let's begin thinking about the hiddenness of sin, and think about the story that we have just heard. It's a story of two brothers, Cain and Abel, working two different jobs. One is a farmer, one is a shepherd, and the time comes when they bring two offerings to God. Cain brings fruit. Abel brings fat portions from the firstborn of his flock.

And at that point, as we begin to see a difference there, we see a distinct difference, don't we, in God's different responses. Towards Abel, God shows favor. Hebrews 11 tells us that's because Abel came with faith. Towards Cain, there is no favor. And as the story proceeds, we understand that's because his heart is wrong. It may also be, and we'll think about this, that his sacrifice is wrong.

[5 : 20] And we see the truth that sin hides in Cain's life, and God wants to expose it. We recognize don't we, the jealousy in his heart, because God has accepted his brother's sacrifice and not his.

We see the anger that hides in his heart, the pride that is there. God should have accepted my offering also. But sin serves to hide. It gets low so that Cain doesn't recognize its destructive power.

Perhaps we can identify with that. Tending to minimize sin, it's no big deal. I can control sin. But what do we see in Cain? We see all the while he's being consumed by it. It's eating him up from the inside. The jaws of sin are locked around him, and it will lead him to murder his own brother. There's a question that we need to ask ourselves. How does sin hide in my life?

Can I identify the sins that lurk outside my door, ready to pounce and destroy? Sin will always hide.

Like Cain, you know, deep down we're jealous of someone. But we tell ourselves, don't worry, it's under control. We can be bitter about the success others have. And we fail to see the impact that that is having on how we treat other people. We can be angry, just flat out angry about the way that our life is turning out, but we can justify those feelings. And all the while, sin hide like a predator ready to pounce. I've mentioned it before that when we were in South Africa a number of years ago, we had the opportunity to go into a cage and to play with baby lions. When a lion is six weeks old, that's just good fun. But none of us, I don't think, would dream of going into that cage when the lion is full grown. Our sin is not a play thing. It's a predator. And it hides, but it also is powerful. How does the story of Cain show to us the power of sin?

[8 : 06] This origin story is really revealing. It can help to detect patterns of sin. First of all, even with his own mother, we can understand that sin will always tend to devalue God.

If you listen to the way Eve speaks in verse 1, with the help of the Lord, I have brought forth a man. The most significant party in Eve's mind is Eve herself. We know that because the language is very different in verse 25, where when she has another son, she says, God has granted me. Cindy values God. That's part of the power of sin, to strive towards independence of God. That pull to be our own God, to decide our own values. And it's what we see with Cain also, as he ignores and devalues God's word of warning. So sin devalues God. Sin also just flat out disobeys God. I think that's what we see with the sacrifice. You know, the fat portions versus the fruit, and we get the different reactions. So Abel has favor.

If we were to go back to Genesis chapter 3 and to verse 21, we would see something that God does for Adam and Eve. After they fall into sin and they feel a sense of shame, God has them clothed with animal skins. So there is sacrifice that covers over sin and shame. And it seems likely that from that point, God has now established a principle for sacrifice. When we sin, we need blood to cover over for mercy to be found. So either that's what's happened, or it becomes clear to Cain when he brings his offering of fruit that God in effect says, it's not fruit I want, it's a lamb.

So he knows what he should do, but sin's power pulls him to disobedience. Something of the power of sin to pull us into forbidden territory. We know what God teaches, but we enter into those no-go zones. Sin pulls us to break God's law, causes us to disobey.

We also see the power of sin in that sin destroys. Verse 8, as Cain said to his brother Abel, let's go out to the field. And there in cold blood attacks his brother and kills his brother. God's warning is ignored, and what happens to Cain? Cain himself becomes the predator, and righteous Abel is struck down in cold blood. We have the first murder. But we have already seen in the story of this family sin's power to cause destruction, to cause breakdown. In chapter 3, when Adam and Eve fell into sin, we saw the breakdown of the relationship between people and creation. Instead of the garden producing fruit, they don't get to live in the garden and the ground will produce thorns and thistles.

[11 : 21] There is breakdown in the first marriage relationship as they blame one another and they start fighting. And there is a breakdown in the relationship with God because of sin. When God, as it were, comes to talk with them, they run and hide. And here we see further breakdown. This is what sin does.

Sin's power also lies in the fact that it deceives. Verse 9, the Lord said to Cain, where is your brother Abel? I don't know, he replied, am I my brother's keeper?

When God comes and asks the question, where is your brother? It is not from a lack of information. God knows everything. God knows exactly what's happened. God is giving Cain an opportunity to confess sin. But just like his mother and his father, he tried to cover up. He lies to cover up.

He refuses to accept responsibility. And so, in just a few short verses, we see the awful effects of sin being revealed. We have one brother Abel lying dead in the dust, and we have one brother Cain lying to God's face in open rebellion. Sin is a predator. Cain and Abel's story is part of our origin story.

It helps us to explore both the origin of sin, but also to see its deadly effect on our lives. Knowing this is true, what is it that you and I need? If you go back to verse 7, as God comes and warns Cain about this predator sin, he says at the end, but you must rule over it.

[13 : 18] You must rule over sin. How can we in our lives seek to rule over sin? The first thing, it begins with a posture. It begins with an alertness that we need to be on guard to take seriously the danger of sin, to understand that the truth that it will always seek to hide and make itself seem small.

We need to be aware personally of both the external forms of temptation and the internal forms of temptation that are unique to you and to me. So, we must be on guard, and we must also listen to God's Word. This was Cain's failure. He heard God's Word, and he ignored it. But as we are exposed to God's Word, it's as if God's Word would shine a light on the danger that is there before us.

And so, we need to expose our hearts and our wills to the truth of God's Word, to know how He wants us to live. And in part, that means coming to church so we hear. It means reading the Bible. It means listening to our brothers and sisters in Christ as we would seek to share God's Word with one another.

And we need to pray. Jesus taught us to pray, lead us not into temptation. And Jesus taught us to pray, to confess our sin and find forgiveness. Well, if that's the seriousness of sin, the next thing that we need to consider is the remarkable sweetness of God in this story. It's a remarkable pattern in the first family story. Genesis 3 and Genesis 4 in some ways represent mirror images of one another.

And in both of these stories, God comes to rebels, people who have said no to Him and His Word, and He brings judgment. But it's a judgment mixed with mercy. Genesis 3, Adam and Eve, they reject God's rule. They reject God's rule. They disobey God's Word. They mistrust God's motive.

[15 : 26] They question His generosity. And when they sin, they don't cry in confession. They don't seem to plead.

But God comes calling. In Genesis 3, 15, God gives that wonderful gospel promise that one of their seed, one of their family would come and go into the battle against evil and would win a decisive victory, that he would be bruised, but he would win that crushing victory. And as we said, God graciously provided those animal skins to cover their shame. That's how Adam and Eve experienced something of the sweetness of God's justice mixed with mercy. Now in God's dealing with Cain, notice two things. First, notice that God comes as a counselor. Verses 6 and 7, He intervenes early. As soon as He recognizes this anger that begins to boil up in Cain as He sees His face downcast, a sense of spiritual depression. God is not rubbing His hands waiting for Cain to fail. Rather, He comes early, bringing warning because He loves him. And He speaks gently. Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast?

If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? Cain, this doesn't have to be your future. Cain, you know the path that you're on. This doesn't have to be the way. There is the loving warning.

He doesn't leave Cain in the dark. Sin is a predator seeking to have you. He wants to shine the spotlight on the sin hiding in the tall grass. And He shows Cain what positive change would look like.

You must rule over it. Cain, don't let sin control you. Don't just give in to sin and let it destroy you. Instead, get in control of sin, in part, by receiving grace promised and offering a right sacrifice. Cain was disobeying when it came to sacrifice, but those sacrifices offered in faith, they promise forgiveness. They promise mercy. God comes as a counselor. I wonder what's our view of God today. Sometimes it can be all too easy to think of Him as a cold, cruel judge, distant and uncaring. The story of Cain reveals the true face of God. He cares about people made in His image.

[18 : 20] He invites people to turn to Him, to trust Him, to find safety in Him. The Bible says what delights God's heart is not judgment. What delights God's heart is when people come in repentance and in faith, not when people reject and ignore.

The second thing to notice about the sweetness of God is the mark of mercy that is placed on Cain. It's there in verse 15. The Lord put a mark on Cain so that no one who found him would kill him. Now, before that, verse 10, we discover that God cares about justice as He announces to Cain that his brother's blood cries out to him from the ground. The blood cries out for justice.

The fact that God cares about justice gives us hope in a world marked by injustice.

Whenever we hear from our brothers and sisters in Christ who experience intense opposition and persecution, you can almost certainly guarantee that they will place their hope in God's justice, that in the end the judge of all the earth will do what is right, that every wrong will be put right in the end. And so the sentence comes from the just judge, verse 11, now you are under a curse and driven from the ground. We're beginning to see further the impact, the effect of sin. Verse 12, we hear it in the sense of fruitless toil. When you work the ground, it will no longer yield its crops for you. Adam and Eve have already been told the fight for survival is going to be tough. Now it just gets tougher. First planted in the Garden of Eden, enjoying the life of plenty and life with God. But now, so far from the fruitfulness they were made for. We're also told in verse 10 that Cain would be a restless wanderer on the earth. Genesis 1 and 2 again use the image of the Garden of Eden as a home and a place of rest, to be at home with God. But now, as Cain turns his back on God and walks into sin, he is both rootless and restless. And Cain feels the crushing weight of the sentence. Verse 13, my punishment is more than I can bear. And notice two things that he identifies that make it a particularly difficult thing. Verse 14, today you're driving me from the land and I will be hidden from your presence.

Here again is part of the reality of sin. We have a God who is perfectly holy, who can have nothing to do with sin. That's why our own efforts at salvation will never make it because we are always tainted by sin in some way. So sin separates. God cannot be where sin is. And so we see in the end, Cain sent east of Eden, hidden from your presence. And he says in verse 14, whoever finds me will kill me.

[21 : 44] Now he feels a target for attack. There was safety and security for Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. But now there's that loss of security and protection. And you get that sense that Cain is going to live all his life looking over his shoulder in fear. Now, how does God respond?

We see justice, yes. But we see justice mixed with mercy. And again, this is striking. We never hear Cain appeal for mercy. We don't hear Cain repenting of sin. We don't hear Cain saying sorry. In fact, he seems to accuse God of being harsh. So while God can't bring him near, while he remains in sin, he cannot be, God will still show Cain that he cares for him. He is an image bader and he cares.

And he gives him this mark. Verse 15, as he fears for his life, the Lord said, not so. Anyone who kills Cain will suffer vengeance seven times over. He's given, we don't know what it is, but it's some kind of mark of protection. So that anyone who comes across Cain, they will know clearly. And again, we don't know how, but they will know God is looking after Cain. So I'm going to leave him well alone.

It's a mark of mercy. The classic book by Nathaniel Hawthorne, called *The Scarlet Letter*, features a young woman called Hester Prynne, who because of her sin must bear a mark. She has to wear a badge. And it is intended by the religious community to be a badge of shame, to mark her out and to cut her off. But that's not what God's mark is about. Even towards a terrible sinner like Cain, there is a mark of God's mercy and care and kindness. Doesn't that tell us something wonderful about our God? I think on the one hand, it tells us that as a community of faith, we need to follow God's example in showing mercy and care in our relationships. Even when we are wronged, even when somebody is in sin, they are still an image bearer. We have that tension, we are to hate the sin but to love the sinner. But doesn't it tell us too that if God would love Cain, and he did, then he loves us too. There is mercy from God for us too. There is hope in the way even how God treats

Cain. And that takes us to consider our third point, which is the significance of sacrifice.

[24 : 58] So really help us to see the mercy that God offers. Genesis paints, when it comes to people falling into sin, a really ugly picture. We see the impact of sin as it kind of becomes part of our DNA, our genetic code. We see the ripple effect from Adam and Eve to Cain. And then down through the generations, sin and its effects spread to every generation since, including our own.

I think one way, going back to the idea of sin that hides, one way I think that sin can hide, and it can hide as a society, is the idea that some people have that sin is something that's so outdated and so primitive, something that we are beyond and past because we're enlightened people, that we've broken through those barriers that we don't even need to consider it.

Is the power of sin still with us? Is the evidence of sin's effect still visible? Do we have a sin problem?

Consider the last time you switched on the news or you checked out the media. Consider the situations even within your own circles.

Examine your own heart. How else do we explain the brokenness, the hate, the misery that we see all around? As we recognize, and even non-Christian people recognize that sin and guilt remains with us, we need the storyline of the Bible. Because the storyline of the Bible is very honest. It deals with the reality of sin, and it takes it way more seriously than any other view of life. But also, the message of the Bible promises salvation, offers hope, offers redemption through the Lord Jesus.

[27 : 04] And so, we need to hear the story, and we need to learn about the significance of sacrifice. So, we need to think about Abel and how Jesus points us, how He points to Jesus, the greater Abel. So, think about Abel as he comes to offer his sacrifice, as he comes to offer the very best.

He already knows of God's gracious promise that one day one is coming who will defeat the devil, who will defeat sin, who will defeat the power of death, who will bring forgiveness, who will bring a return to God, and by faith he offers a sacrifice, trusting in that coming one.

Abel knew of the sacrifice that God had made so that there was animal skins to cover his sinful parents. He would have heard their story, and he comes to offer a sacrifice based on faith, faith that blood, sacrifice is God's merciful way for sin to be covered over.

And in Abel's story of faith-filled sacrifice, we see the shadow of Jesus. When the author of the book of Hebrews, chapter 11, verse 4, said to us, Abel still speaks, he speaks gospel. He speaks of Jesus, the coming Savior. Just like Abel, Jesus was righteous.

And just like Abel, Jesus was killed by wicked Cain. Cain was somebody who would offer sacrifice one day and kill his brother the next day.

[28 : 56] The religious leaders of Jesus' day would go to the temple and offer sacrifice, and they would have hearts full of pride and hate and murder. Just like Abel, as Jesus dies on the cross, his blood speaks.

But wonderfully, Hebrews 12, 24 told us, the blood of Jesus speaks a better word. Abel's blood cries out for justice against Cain. Jesus' blood cries out justice for sinners who put their faith in him. Jesus' blood declares to his Father in heaven, I have paid the debt in full. Sin has been covered for my people. It would be unjust to punish them too, since I have taken all the punishment. And so the blood of Jesus speaks the promise of forgiveness, no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Abel's blood spoke of justice. Jesus' blood speaks of justice and mercy. Jesus takes on himself the just judgment of God, takes the punishment, experiences the wrath, and gives us mercy, grants us forgiveness, grants us life and peace with God.

So while Genesis 4 explains so much about who we are and why the world is the way it is, it also points forward to hope. It speaks of God's great solution, because it speaks to us ultimately of Jesus, the one who saves by way of sacrifice.

Jesus, the righteous one, the one that we are called to put our faith in, that our sin would be covered, that we would find our way home to our God. Let me pray briefly for us.

[30 : 55] Jesus best came shout out to you because our grace