

Genesis 4:1–16

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[0 : 0 0] Again, our passage this morning comes from the book of Genesis, chapter 4, verses 1 to 16. If you're able, please stand for the reading of God's Word.

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.

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 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 contrary to you, but you must rule over it. Cain spoke to Abel, his brother.

[1 : 1 0] And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him. 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. 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. 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. This is the word of the Lord.

[2 : 1 0] Thanks be to God. You may be seated. Let me pray.

Our Heavenly Father, we now give ourselves to understanding this word, especially so in light of the world in which we live.

In Christ's name, amen. Amen. The fatal spiral of Eve's firstborn son should cause even the strongest among us to stagger and sway.

What starts with the birth of Cain, quote, look at it, verse 1, by the help of the Lord, concludes with Cain going out, quote, look at it, verse 16, from the presence of the Lord.

And as Cain coils downward, do you not see our own experience to be in motion with him? We've all joined what you could properly call the Cain Collective.

[3 : 19] We are one universal band, twisting ever downward on the crumbling flagstone footpath from wonder to ruin. And the events that led Cain to commit murder and opt for a world away from God are as painful as they are plain.

You'll see in the movement of the text, it moves from an act of worship, then warning, which is followed by what have you done? And at the end, the plight of the wanderer.

It is an absolute freefall, as though Adam and Eve's exit from the garden were not bad enough. Now we, like onlookers, see how worshipers become wanderers, how churchgoers end up as street killers, how members of a family know themselves to be murderous fugitives who, on their own accord now, in distinction from chapter 3, flee home.

And how in Cain we find a prototype for our own homelessness. The book of Genesis, evidently, is not yet done outlining the consequences of our sin.

Chapter 3 had that searching question, where are you? Which linked our union with Adam in sin against God. But in chapter 4, where is Abel, your brother, now linking us with Cain and committing mortal sins against one another?

[4 : 41] Let me put it as clearly as I can, as the Bible is unfolding the consequences of sin, having been untethered to the vertical, the horizontal is now entirely unhinged.

How did we fall so far and so freely of our own accord? And where does the human race now turn, given our collective dismissal of God and our discharge of weapons against one another?

With this sermon, I want to confront the homicidal direction of our plight. And let me be clear at what I'm aiming at on the ministry of Christ Church Chicago for our future.

It's this. Only an embrace of the Christian gospel will prove strong enough to reverse our violent course. It will take the Christian gospel to reverse our violent course.

Put differently, only Jesus can ultimately point us in the direction toward home. Put more completely, only the Holy Spirit can teach a man to love others instead of murdering them along the way.

[5 : 54] So come with me through the freefall of our Cain collective. Part one, from worshiper to where is Abel your brother. That's the first nine verses.

From worshiper to where is Abel your brother. For Cain, the fatal act, ironically, began at church. It was set off in offering faulty worship.

Unless, of course, we're meant to make much of these terms. The latter half of verse 4 captures it well. Listen to what it says. And the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering, he had no regard.

The text gives you two brothers and the conflicting consequences of their respective acts of corporate worship. And the writer isn't concerned to satisfy your curiosity or even mine over what made the difference.

Unless, of course, you're to make much of that line, and Abel brought, here it is, the firstborn of his flock and their fat portions. Those qualifiers on the offering, whereas Cain merely brought something.

[7 : 09] So perhaps Cain was careless. Perhaps he was willing to attend a worship service, but deep down didn't really think devotion toward God was worthy of anything that he ought to really be thinking about.

It didn't demand anything but his second best. Let me put it this way. Perhaps form was there, but faith was not. A man who was willing to go through the motions and no more.

And notice, on the way out of church that morning, it seems that God was standing at the back door, ready to greet all of those who had come. And he speaks a word to the young man, Cain, before he could get back out into the open air.

And it moved then from worship to warning. That's the next step down the stairway. Take a look at verses 6 and 7. Then the Lord said to Cain, Why are you angry?

Why has your face fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? If you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is contrary to you, but you must rule over it.

[8 : 10] Evidently, that day at church, it didn't end with the hoop of celebration. It ended at the back door with a word of warning. It's as though God wanted this strong young man to know that gaining God's regard was worth seeking.

Let me say something to all of you young men. You need to know that gaining God's regard is worth your seeking out.

That having God's favor is important. That he is worthy of your efforts to sort out how he wants to be worshipped. And the text is equally clear that Cain had already sensed that God was displeased with him while he was in church.

Take a look at verse 5. But Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry and his face fell. Cain knew God wasn't happy with him.

Cain knew God wasn't really pleased with what he had brought. He knew it in his heart. He knew, quite frankly, that his heart wasn't in it. That he didn't care all that much even if God knew it.

[9 : 22] Cain was exasperated with the idea that he needed to give himself to learning how to rightly relate to God. And so it says his face fell. It's the same way young faces fall in churches all over the globe today.

When forced to sit in worship brought by parents who are trying to instruct them in the spiritual and moral trainings of the scriptures. You've seen the look.

You've lived the look. I remember having the look. You've seen it in the posture of the person who is here, but not here.

Eyes to the floor. Face down. Muscles taut. Words few. Mind elsewhere. Their only salvation comes with the words of the benediction. Finally, they breathe.

Sweet release. Up, out, away from God. And away from those despised ones. Those ables of my own day. Who in this setting attend the same act that I do.

[10 : 21] And appear to have secured some favor. And yet God, God. Catches Cain by the door. With a word. That's the first movement in how we've gotten to where we are today.

We get angry with God. Which results in envy toward our brother. Which is followed by our emotions getting the best of us. Let me put it differently.

Our countenance falls. Depression comes. Our heart hardens. Then, bang! Matters into our own hands. Anger. Envy.

Depression. Manslaughter. The vertical having been severed. The horizontal untethered. The heart unhinged. Homicide. It's that fast.

And it's right there in the text. Look at verse 8. Cain spoke to Abel, his brother. And when they were in the field. Cain rose up against his brother Abel. And killed him. Cain killed Abel. And our streets yet today are still filled with blood.

[11 : 22] Let me give you the statistics. According to the Tribune and another website. That tracks these kinds of things in my own city. In 2020, Chicago saw 769 homicides.

A number that exceeds all but one year in the last two decades. 274 more than the previous year. In our fair city. 2020 saw 4,033 shooting victims.

Up from 2,598 the year before. Already in this year. In the month of January. We have seen 51 homicides. The highest number.

We have seen 51 homicides. The highest number in more than four years. We live in a city where someone is wounded every 3.12 seconds.

Where someone is murdered every 15 minutes and 51 seconds. In Inglewood alone. We have already seen homicides numbering 38 homicides.

[12 : 27] And 39 people wounded. In Woodlawn. 30 homicides and 10 wounded. 94% of the homicides were committed by gunshot.

This week alone saw 5 people shot and killed. 27 wounded. To say nothing of the increase in crime, muggings. And the thing that we all get concerned about, of course.

Are carjackings. All of which leads to the haunting voice of God. Who is a preacher. And he can find us whether we're in church or not.

Hear his voice in verse 9. Then the Lord God said to Cain. Where is Abel your brother? Where is Abel your brother?

That's the question on the mind of God. As he looks down upon the human race. That has walked the road from worship. Through warning. Into wasted.

[13 : 27] Where is Abel your brother? Now the question that God asked Cain. Is the one he ought to ask Chicago. And Cain should have been able of saying. Why he's right here with me Lord. Or he should have been saying.

Well I've just spoken with him. And he told me he's on his way shortly. And you and I should be able to say the same thing today. That we are taking care of our brother.

That we are looking out for one another. That we are loving rather than hating. That we are working for one another's welfare. We should get the horizontal right. We should love our neighbor as ourselves.

We should be able to say. Black space. Live space. Matter space. Simply because they do. We should be able to say. All Asian space. Are space.

All right space. Because they are. And when not conversing on a particular need. That requires our attention. We should not be trying to denigrate. Or undermine that rightful attention to the need.

[14 : 32] We should also be able to say. All space. Live space. Matter space. Because they do. Blue lives matter. Black lives matter. Red lives matter. Brown lives matter. Yellow lives matter.

White lives matter. His life matters. Her life matters. Our lives matter. You matter. Which would mean no murder?

God shows up. And he asks. If he should show up. And asks Christ Church Chicago. Where is Abel your brother? God help us.

To respond in any other way. Than well hello God. Welcome to our church today.

He's. She's. Right here with me. I cannot fathom. The shame.

[15 : 32] I would feel. As your pastor. If any among us. Should say. Well. Tell me God. Who is my neighbor?

Or as Cain put it. In his own vernacular. In the back side. Of verse nine. Take a look at it. Am I my brother's. Keeper. This is an ultra conservative.

Ungodly line. Of anyone who divorces. The horizontal. From the vertical. The physical. From the spiritual. The my brother. For our father. And yet.

Like Cain. We live. In such a world. A world. Quite capable. Of a footfall. From one. Flaking. Flagstone. Step to another. Ever downward.

A faulty heart. Of worship. And ignorance. And an ignoring. Of his warnings. A wasting. Of those. Who were created. In his image. An abhorrence. Of his command. A brazen.

- [16 : 28] Willingness. To get into the face. Of God. Even. We are awesome. Creatures. Are we not? Terrifying. Ones.
- From created. In his likeness. To countenance. Fallen. To face down. To chin raised. And callousness. Divulged. In hatred. Toward God. And our. Fellow.
- Man. From worshiper. To where is. Abel. Your brother. Yet our text.
- Isn't done. As if that isn't. Bad enough. Our fall. Goes even. Further. Take a look. There. In verses. 10 to 16. Worshipper. To where is. Abel.
- Your brother. Becomes. What have you done. All the way. To wanderer. Do you see it? The what have you done. Of verse. 10. And the Lord said.
- [17 : 23] What have you done. The voice of your brother's blood. Is crying to me. From the ground. And there you find. Wanderer. Do you see it? Verse 12.
- You shall be a fugitive. And a wanderer. On the earth. Verse 14. I shall be a fugitive. And a wanderer. On the earth. Verse 16.
- Then Kent. Cain went away. From the presence. Of. The Lord. It is worth highlighting. That the blood of Abel. Is crying out to God.
- From the ground. For justice. To be. On the side of God. Is to be the one. Who longs for. Asks for. And requires. Justice.
- It's worth visualizing. Also. What these terms are. For being a fugitive. And a wanderer. They are used together. In Isaiah 24. In verses 19 and 20.
- [18 : 21] And I want you to see. These two words. Paired together. Once again. This time. Not in regard to Cain. But in regard to the earth itself. The Isianic text reads. From chapter 24.
- Verse 19. The earth is utterly broken. The earth is split apart. The earth is violently shaken. Here come our terms. The earth staggers. That's. The verbal form of fugitive.
- Like a drunken man. It sways. That's the verbal form of wanderer. Like a hut. It's transgression lies heavy upon it.
- And it falls. And it will not rise again. To be a fugitive. Is to be the one who staggers. To be a wanderer. Is to be the one who sways.
- The words depict the plight of Cain. As resembling the visual image. Of a drunken man on our streets. The homeless one. Which ought to give you a view.
- [19 : 19] A different view of the man. When you see him. For God here likens it to Cain. And through him. God here is likening it to all of us. We are. We are.
- You are. I am. We are. The Cain collective. You and I are one. The one. In the gutter. And what a contrast. To where the Bible first began. You remember it. The spirit of the Lord.
- Was said to be what? Hovering over the face of the waters. And as our text concludes. Our own wandering is now. Over the face of the earth. And while the spirit stood tall.
- And poised. And ready to make all things good. Very good. We are the progeny of our own making. We stagger. We sway. We are the intoxicated indigence. And that of our own ego.
- And anger. We are the progeny of our own. Is there any hope. For the human race. Is there any hope for us.
- [20 : 16] Our city. Our families. Our mourning. Our convicted. Is there any hope for you.
- And me. In overt terms. You have to look at this text. And say. Not so much. At least not from this text alone. Surely the fact that God is still.

Still speaking to Cain. Gives us some measure of hope. The fact that he didn't just annihilate him. On the spot. But it's not a lot. Is it? I almost feel like I'm trying to work my way up to hope.

The fact that he's willing to question him. Or to prod him. Or to give him a chance to come clean. Might say something. About mercy. Unless of course. He would have ended up being a vindictive God. To take him out anyway.

Not much hope. And the mark of God is there. That's about as strong as you're going to get. On the mercy of God. And it's difficult to understand. What's meant by it.

[21 : 18] But certainly it signifies protection. To bear on your body the mark of Cain. Does not mean to have God's curse. It means that somehow. Although you committed homicide.

It isn't worthy of your own death. And he's willing to carve out a space for you. In this wandering world. Where there's still justice to be done for you. Even though justice is being executed out upon you.

And yet the overall picture here is bleak. Let me just take you down the slide as fast as possible. Verse 1. The slide moves.

We are given birth by the help of the Lord. But we all set out from the presence of the Lord. So where do we go for here? Or better yet for the sake of time. What hope does the Bible put forward as it goes on from here?

And for that I want to point you to how this text is picked up on by the writer in the book of Hebrews. Come with me. Will you?

[22 : 17] On your phone. In your Bible. Travel from Genesis 4 to Hebrews 12. All the way on the back side. Into verses 18 through 24.

You'll find that our text is used by the writer there to make a point. And the point is made in verse 24. There it is.

And to Jesus. The mediator of a new covenant. And to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel. Now what's going on here?

How is the blood of Christ better than the blood of Abel? Certainly that's what the Bible is saying.

Is there something more that we're to be on about than simply the idea of justice? Is that what the Bible is implying? Let's think through it together.

[23 : 17] According to the writer of Hebrews, the answer must be yes. He's preferencing a blood of Christ as better than what's required from Genesis 4.

In other words, that the church is actually on about something more larger. Let's put it in the sense of completeness. Fullness. Than simply the work of creating a more just society as essential as that is.

Let me explain what that could possibly be. Notice in Hebrews, and keep your eye there. Just travel it all the way back up to verse 18. Two covenants in this section are evidently being compared.

And according to verses 18 and following, The covenant God made with us at Mount Calvary is better than the covenant God made with us on account of Abel's blood at Mount Sinai.

The blood of Abel is tied to an old merciful covenant for justice. It cries out to God from the ground for vindication and rightful vengeance.

[24 : 31] Justice. For the Bible knows where there is no justice, you know no peace. But the blood of Jesus is tied to a completeness in God's covenants.

An unfolding of how the new covenant swallows up the old into something more wonderful from every vantage point.

And his blood, that is Jesus' blood, is crying out for something that evidently justice on its own is incapable of accomplishing.

Now what could that possibly be? Because wouldn't we have it all if we had it? Well, let me put it this way.

As the blood of my Savior's wounds fell upon the ground that day at Calvary and hit the ground, they produced something better than the cries of that ground on the day that Abel's blood saturated the earth.

[25 : 40] And this is what that was. When the blood of Christ fell upon the ground, justice had been upheld.

God was holding him accountable for the human race and her sin gone awry.

Let me put it to you this way. Payment for the Cain collective had been made. A perfect substitute for our wayward wandering had been found.

And more than that, in him vindication has been secured. God's mercy, here we go, can now be known.

And even to the worst among us, the most callous in the line of Cain, who lives in our congregation, can be pardoned and begin anew without a forfeiture of justice, but through a blood that accomplishes something justice can never do.

[27 : 03] So hear me on this. This is why I'm convinced that the message of the gospel is not only necessary in the cause of making a better society, in the work of securing justice, but because it's the source of power through which any long-lasting change can take place.

Let me just slow down on this. Without our message of the gospel, the world may exact a more righteous payment, but it will never collect cultural change.

We will simply go on requiring retribution. We will not be able to produce reconciliation, perhaps even reparations, but with never repairing a breach.

In the name of Abel, we can march the streets to hold someone accountable, but we can never make that person capable. Without Jesus, what we have is the ability to punish.

We cannot procure change. What I'm saying is that our collective pursuit of justice is altogether incomplete without the cross. We are like rain when we walk, falling on ground that is so hard that it is incapable of penetrating.

[28 : 17] We are like sun that when it shines only finds the little flowerets to yet be under burlap. We are like a cow in a field that experiences that of giving birth, but only to a stillborn calf.

That is what we are capable of doing without my God or his son and his blood. And why do I say this?

To be pessimistic? To say we don't labor or long or work for justice? Oh my word, please, no. Don't hang me on the sound bite.

Because I'm old enough to have seen our work at it before, fall short? No, although that is really true. Those of you who are young are yet to experience the halting reticence and reservations in your own mind when you see the minimum effects we'll actually be able to produce.

Those aren't the reasons I'm saying this. I'm saying this because my understanding is that human nature requires internal heart change. And no amount of shoe leather can take you home on your own.

[29 : 33] Without the gospel of Jesus, every needed human gain is limited in range. You only get, let me tell you, you only get as far as a righteousness of recidivism.

A created world where we encounter the cold truth that we continue to go our own way. But with the gospel, with Paul's gospel, with the apostolic gospel, with my gospel, my gospel can take a thief and turn him into a man who not only stops stealing and pays his own way, but also begins to provide for others who can't seem to make a way.

My gospel does that. Which brings me to an irony. At the murder of George Floyd, which we're now back at the trial, aren't we?

Many of us, myself included and my family, we stood on that day. Rightly, in my opinion, felt compelled to march.

And upon arriving, we were instructed, as you should be, by those who tell you what the day is on about. You're joining an event. You're not running it.

[30 : 49] You're laboring for what you understand has happened. You're not having to secure all these things around it. We are bigger than this, are we not? We were told at the starting line that this was not the time for posters other than on justice.

In fact, we were actually told that this is not the time for posters or chants regarding the name of Jesus. Only placards on justice would do, which I understand.

I've run enough things in my life to know that you can't get off message. I didn't have a problem with it. But let's jump out of that experience.

No justice, no peace. But I'm a Christian. And I'll tell you another placard. No Jesus, no chance.

The irony is strong enough to make a man weep. Here's what I have learned.

[31 : 55] I'm turning 60 next month. Here's what I have learned. Both sides can succumb to the same air. Both sides are succumbing to the same air.

And I'm not just declaring some truth to you. I'm discipling you in the truth. Both conservatives and progressives. Both can hold to a failed logic that thinks we can separate the spiritual from the social.

The horizontal from the vertical. The vertical from the horizontal for the progressive. The horizontal from the vertical for the conservative. They're both doing the same things.

Or I should say are capable of doing the same things, but from a different starting point. One cries out for us to love our neighbor or love God. But by their voice and by their actions, they neglect the blood, the sweet blood of Abel.

They neglect the sweat and the tears that would reveal a real love for neighbor. The other cries out from the ground for a love of neighbor. But it forgoes the blood and the love of Jesus who would introduce us to God.

[33 : 05] Both sides committing the same air. And what is that air? A dismembering, a dismantling, a pulling apart of the two great commandments.

Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind. And your neighbor as yourself. And Jesus, on that cross, alone, in a moment, demonstrates the righteousness of God and the mercy that can be found.

And so let me pair our text with Christian truth. You have been given birth, verse 1, by the help of the Lord.

And you, like me, like us all. Well, we have, verse 16, set out from the presence of the Lord. And we live in a world now where the bifurcation is nearly complete.

Give me vertical or give me death. Give me horizontal or give me death. And the church sits in the middle and says, let me talk to you about the death of my Savior.

[34 : 20] Where justice and mercy meet. What is needed is God's great answers.

Indeed, we need God's great questions. Here are his questions in close. Where is Abel, your brother? And what have you done?

And to that, Jesus says, well, who are my brother, my mother, my sisters? And looking around, all those who receive his word and begin to live out those commands, which send us into the world in Christian love.

Let me tell you, you must be given new birth by the help of the Lord. For only by this will you have any hope, will we have any hope of walking a different staircase, one that would lead us back into the presence of God.

Our Heavenly Father. Genesis, the progeny of the heavens and the earth.

[35 : 56] These texts have been like wave upon wave that resound and break upon our backs and throw us into hard concrete like sand.

We have dismissed you. We now see even the demise of our neighbor. Lord, have mercy on our soul.

Amen. Amen.