

Genesis 4:17–26

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 21 March 2021

Preacher: David Helm

- [0 : 0 0] Again, that's Genesis 4, 17 through 26. Please stand for the reading of God's Word. 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 Mahujael, and Mahujael fathered Methushael, and Methushael fathered Lamech.
- And Lamech took two wives. The name of the one was Ada, and the name of the other Zillah. Ada 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. Lamech said to his wives, Ada 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.
- [1 : 0 6] If Cain's revenge is sevenfold, then Lamech's is seventy-sevenfold. 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. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.
- You may be seated. Well, good morning, and let me add my own greeting to those of you who are here today.
- It's so wonderful to see so many of you face-to-face, and special welcome to those of you who are online from all over the country and even different parts of the globe.
- And especially if you're visiting today, we just want to welcome you. You know, when we began our series in Genesis, I did so indicating some reasons why I thought it would be profitable.
- [2 : 1 5] And one of them was it would provide for us a foundation. By that, I meant a foundation for how we can better understand the world in which we're living, the reasons for the world being the way it is, and how the Bible carries forward with a message of hope for those who are in the world.
- And the text today will certainly, almost inescapably, without much preaching work or weight to lift, help us understand the world in which we live and why things are the way they are.
- Let me pray. Our Heavenly Father, I now pray that the clarity of this text would be made known through the simplicity of this sermon, that Christ Church, Chicago, might know how to respond.
- In Jesus' name, amen. Today's text presents the concluding act of part one in Genesis.
- This portion of the book that's been running from chapter 2, verse 4, until now, this part that we branded from wonder to ruin, where the phrase, and these are the generations of, really set off what came before and what will come after.

[3 : 41] This fragment of text filled with seven scenes, beginning with the creation of man, and then the woman who together were the embodiment of wonder.

But it didn't last. And so more scenes were written into part one, scenes that depict our descent from wonder into ruin, a decline that you and I share as a consequence of our coming forth from these first parents.

We saw their sin and their shame, and then paradise lost with only themselves, or if you spoke to them, the serpent to blame. We saw that those all gave way to Cain setting out from the presence of the Lord in vain.

But now, this seventh scene read for you today, our ruin, this condition, and the world in which we find it today takes a full and final step.

This is the most complete one yet. We see the making of the city of man, maintained by human pride, meant as a place for us to persist in a wilderness far away from God.

[5 : 00] Make no mistake, although the scriptures teach that God made the world, this text makes it known that we are the world makers. We're quite willing to construct our home on his land.

And if you should ever have the joy of traversing the country or the globe by airplane at night, all you've got to do is look out the window. Have you done it before? And you can look down on humanity's created glory, and you'll find it to be all illuminated with lanterns lit by the wick of our own willpower to remain.

That's the world in which we live. Let me put the full weight of this seventh scene more succinctly yet. Our ruin was not complete until human autonomy constructed an alternate reality.

That's what occurs in the text today. Until our ingenuity learned to bend the created order toward our own independence. Let me see if I can get it even more clear still.

Along humanity's pathway to perdition, this scene provides a panoramic view of our forebears forsaking God's righteousness for a world of revenge.

[6 : 17] Here, here in this text, we now fully replace God's seven-fold work of goodness in creation with our own 77-fold work and resulting of our own creating.

We will be called by our own name and we will be governed by our own word. All of that in the few verses that were read for us today. According to Genesis, it was not enough for us to sin.

It is not enough for us to experience shame. It was not enough to be subject to death or to be forced out from God's sight. It was not enough that we should set out on our own further from his presence.

No, we are not satisfied until we become, as one put it, more than God's and less than men. World makers, culture creators, autonomous, vengeful, and so easily offended, even as we have seen again this week, that we now openly oppress and kill even strangers at will.

I told you last Sunday in the sermon on the text how you go from being a churchgoer to a street killer. And within 48 hours, it emerges once again.

[7 : 33] It happens in our world. The question, how did we descend to this pretend plaisance that we have made for ourselves?

This place that we call home, which is so far away from God's presence, this purported pleasure ground in what is nothing more than the wilderness plains of our existence.

According to the text, and you'll see it today, it came about through three actions which frame the movements of the seventh scene. A city, a civilization, a decree.

Let me throw it even in a longer way. This came about by the making of a city to promote our own name. Verse 17. This came about by renouncing God as our father for Lamech, the godfather.

Verse 18 to 22. This came about by swearing off justice for injustice, righteousness for revenge. Verse 23.

[8 : 44] The decree. Which will land us in the conclusion with where do we go from there. One. You live in a world as it is because at the outset there is the making of a city to promote the welfare of our own name after setting out from the presence of God.

Let me read verse 17 again. Cain knew his wife and she conceived and bore Enoch and when he built a city he called it the name of the city after the name of his son Enoch.

The writer wants you to observe three things that have transpired after Cain set out from the presence of the Lord. His wife conceived and gave birth to a son. He went on to build a city and he called it Enoch after the name of his own boy.

Certainly there is some irony here. I mean just think about what was loaded into that verse. Cain, who was initially afraid for his own life when setting out, has now brought forth life.

Cain, who was to be a wanderer on the earth, came to a point where he was determined to carve out a place that he could call his own. And so this man who, as Helmut Telika calls him, the prototype of our own homelessness, not only built a city here, but one that would bear the weight of his son's own name.

[10 : 13] And this observation is brought home to us by the writer. It should not surprise us. This is what we do. Show me one person you know that's walked away from God who doesn't determine how to go on and make their way in the world.

There's no desperation. There's no giving up. There's a persistence of our will that is quite strong. After setting out from God and moving even further east of Eden, we simply persist.

We persist to make a goal of life on our own and in terms that will make us the measure of all meaning. Historian Lewis Mumford put the significance of the city this way.

Quote, Before modern man can gain control over the forces that now threaten his very existence, he must resume possession of himself. This sets the chief mission for the city, that of creating a visible and regional structure designed to make man at home with his deeper self and his larger world.

It is the essential organ for expressing and actualizing the new human personality, that of the one world man. Sociologist Jack Ellul put it this way, The city is man's greatest work.

[11 : 31] No other of man's works, technical or philosophical, is equivalent to the city. All his works are secondary to the city. Famed architect Frank Gehry put it this way, Architecture should speak of its time and place, but yearn for timelessness.

Anne Rand put it this way, I don't build so that I can have clients, I have clients so that I can build. Lewis Kahn put it this way, The sun does not realize how wonderful it is until a room is made.

That's us. I don't have to tell you that this must come in then why the naming of the city is important.

In Enoch, in calling the city the name of his son, Cain not only merely has a son, but a city who will outlive them both.

For Cain, to name the city after his son, is, in one sense, the ultimate act of immortality. He has exerted his own existence into the world in a way that is bound to outlive his life, say something about it now, but forevermore.

[12 : 53] And where do you dwell? Hundreds of years later, I dwell in the city of Enoch. And who was Enoch? Enoch was Cain's son.

That's what naming does. I don't have to tell you that naming still goes on today. Let me tell you, you provide enough funding, people will put your name on anything. Except Christ Church.

Thank God we named Christ Church, Christ Church. And I don't care how many hundreds of thousands of dollars you want to throw at me for the dome. It's not going to be your name dome.

It's not going to be the knee dome. The Zulker dome. But there's power in a name. You carry yourself beyond your generation with your name.

And it hasn't been lost on people in fundraising. That's why office buildings have names. Football stadiums can get names. Business schools have names. Your name, my name, is not going to be on any plaque.

[14 : 02] That's 62nd and Woodlawn. Christ Church is the name proclaimed. But welcome to what we do in the world without God. We create the city in hopes of perpetuating our own name.

And that's not all. The seventh scene shifts from city to civilization. From verse 17 to 18 to 22.

From naming a city to perpetuate ourselves to trading God as our father for the line of Lamech, our godfather. He really is the first godfather.

This is interesting. The writer provides you, take a look at it, with a genealogy of Cain, but as he comes forth as the son of Adam.

So it's not just a man and a son, but from one man beginning at Adam, we're now out into our text through seven generations. Mirroring, I believe, in some sense, the seven days of God creating and generating the heavens and the earth.

[15 : 12] And as we will soon see, this line very much resembles what later could be said of, depending on your pronunciation, the Medici family in Italy, the Medici family. You can go to the Medici restaurant after lunch today, our church today.

This middle-of-the-century family that was generations long, a dynasty unto itself that emerged, and they were the protector of the land.

They were the curator of the arts. They were the power behind four popes. The world was their world.

But before them was the line of Cain, all the way unto its full flower, with weed-like growth, this one named Lamech, seventh in the list.

But second, notice that these verses also highlight three creations of this God-like family. Look at verses 20 through 22. Adab bore Jabal.

[16 : 21] He was the father of those who dwell in tents and have livestock. Then we're given another brother's name, and then this little line. He was the father of all those who play the lyre and pipe. Then another name.

He was the forger of all instruments of bronze and iron. The writer is obviously wanting you to know something beyond the generational influence of this clan that now rules the world, but the civilization, the tools for living in this world and that which they have produced.

I mean, when you take those three, it's pretty interesting to notice what they are. Cane's line produced the agrarian world that now centers on animal life as our food source rather than plant life as our food source.

Cane's line not only becomes the agrarian equivalent of the stockyards in Chicago, but also the advancement of the arts and music.

And then finally, there are the metals now which begin to emerge in this primitive world that are necessary armament to defend themselves from any who would otherwise kill them.

[17 : 35] I mean, let me put it, the three things of civilization are all there. This is how you now subsist in the world. You have a proper food source, you have a pleasure of the arts and music, and you are adequately prepared to defend yourself from any of your brothers who would otherwise kill you.

Having put his own brother's blood in the ground, Cain and those who follow him now make their way above the ground. That's what civilization does.

It goes up, not down. And is this not the very world we live in? The problem, of course, is that Cain and his family are due east of Eden.

They are far from the garden and the very good relationship they once enjoyed with God, which brings me to a thought on today's notion of culture making. The human enterprise in which we live is largely unaware, Christian and not, that this is what our world is doing.

It is an attempt, a world-making attempt to create and enjoy life but without God. That's what life in the world is doing day by day, 24 hours, seven days a week.

[18 : 56] We are making out our attempt to create and enjoy a life but without God. It does not even know that this life without God is actually something dead.

It's unaware that we have all pulled up stakes and moved out from the garden and set up shop far away from the word and rule of our creator.

And so the temptation for the Christian, one that I think evangelicalism often readily succumbs to, is to blindly, unknowingly, I should say, unwittingly, accept the premise of this world.

Namely, the premise that things going on down here are putting us on the right trajectory to go somewhere very good. We can even perpetuate the falsehood that there is life going on in things that are in fact dead.

I mean, I'm not as sentimental as I once was and if you're still sentimental, be careful over the next three minutes. But let me give you an example even that comes just from our own world, that of art.

[20 : 16] I was reading the Chicago Life and saw an article on Genesis and Rebirth and came to realize that in the city of Chicago there was a project to give dead trees to artists to turn into sculpture so that we would have hopes that things will live again and bear fruit.

One such sculpture is in Lincoln Park, a tall, dead tree, dead, topped off with a large lemon on top by the artist. This is the lemon tree.

And the one who put the artistry up is trying to indicate that there is some hope that things might yet live.

The problem is it's dead. And dead trees don't bring live life.

They don't even give you the shade to hang out under it. It's like a light pole that you've got to pivot around just to let it give you a little shade along the way. Now that doesn't mean that you can't enjoy art but I'm saying that often we succumb to this understanding that we're going to come alongside, we're going to get engaged in the cultural project under the premise that these dead things can bring life and they can't.

[21 : 35] And yet the church can forget all this. We're just as likely to jump into the culture-making game the culture-making game as though we are coming alongside the world to create with them and to think that in doing so we are joining them in ways that bring life.

But when we do this we have forgotten that everything here is dead. And it's dead because we're trying to do it all without repenting and coming to life under God.

Now don't hear me wrong. my dear friend Jeremy Meeks would stand and remind me rightly the problem isn't with enjoying beauty or art. Rather it comes when our appreciations are not properly ordered.

That's significant. And he's right. Our problem in these matters stems from asking art or beauty or your job or your family or your degree to carry more self-actualizing self-fulfilling human flourishing weight than it was ever meant to carry or could carry.

You're only going to be satisfied into a personal relationship with God. And all the rest of the human flourishing is going to be fraught with the fall and with death.

[23 : 03] So people as you go about your day remember the truth of Romans 4 which says quote God who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.

Only God brings life. And so as we engage with our culture while we come alongside it should not be long before we confront the premises under which they labor and the word under which we live.

So that your faith at work actually is tied to expressing your faith at work rather than self-actualizing work as a fulfillment of your faith.

Do you know that there are actually some people out there who actually think that what you're doing now is you're so self-fulfilled in what you're called to do that when you arrive into heaven guess what you get to do? You get to keep on doing it.

And so the picture is painted of an artist who's half done and suddenly dies but when an entering heaven finds himself or herself viewing right through the gates their own painting and the whole palette and all the colors set out as though they get to enter into heaven and do the very thing they were doing.

[24 : 19] Ludicrous I say. Tell that to the plumber who's working today in a basement that's flooded back from the street in human excrement. Tell that to the garbage man who's trying to work his way through the alleys of Chicago three weeks after a snow where trash couldn't be taken out.

Guess what? When you get to heaven your work here will go on there. He's hoping for a different heaven. Only the most educated and the elite and the most privileged of us can believe that that is what human flourishing means.

Human flourishing is repenting from human autonomy and giving yourself to the word of Christ in which you are now rooted in soil which is life.

I'm so saddened to see the church think only in the shallows on these things. People from all over the country going off from church meetings armed with the notion that human flourishing is found in anything other than this gospel.

We must get back to God. The church must begin making more of God. How is God fulfilled rather than myself?

[25 : 40] We must get back to God and not to the city or to the civilizations that carry on from Cain at least in the way that they operate under his convictions. We must confront ever more as we come alongside and this will take confidence.

Christians must be ready to move on the offensive in regard to our view of the world rather than this defensive accommodationism that if I can walk along you long enough under your rubric I might be of some help to you.

Third. The third tag in the movement here moves on not only from city to civilization but now it moves to decree which almost is exactly everything that this text has been moving toward.

We got to the point by giving undue meaning to the city and the enterprise of cultivating human civilizations. Third.

Verse 23. By Cain's murder of Abel while it led us to Lamech. That's what it did. Who swore off justice for injustice righteousness for revenge.

[26 : 49] Look at the decree. Verse 23. Lamech said to his wives Ada and Zillah hear my voice you wives of Lamech listen to what I say I've killed a man for wounding me a young man for striking me if Cain's revenge is sevenfold then Lamech's seventy seven fold.

Wow. Devastating language. obviously Lamech was a man who in a room had a certain amount of presence.

And what a contrastive benediction our world speaks from the one God spoke when he closed out his own creation account. Do you remember after God's seven day creation movement it wasn't too far ago it was the closing line of the prolegomena the introduction before we get to part one but here it is chapter two verses one to three thus the heavens and earth were finished and all the host of them and on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done so God blessed the seventh day and made it holy.

That was the benediction decree at God's conclusion of seven days of creation but look at the decree of Lamech if Cain was avenged sevenfold I will be avenged seventy sevenfold I kill people for wounding me I kill even a minor a young one for assaulting me what's going on here God's righteousness and world at rest Genesis one is now run by the end of part two by a usurper king who rules by revenge and notice what happens then to any sense of justice justice is gone it's not that justice is disproportionately applied there is only injustice death sentence for a hand strike seven minimum sentence seventy seven on my end this is injustice and Lamech through this decree detailed it put it down into the law code of his own land that's the law code of the land of Lamech injustice not justice unrighteousness not righteousness revenge is the way the world works now I told you at the outset that I was here today to try to tell you that this is the world in which we live and the street has a code of its own and so now the full extent of our most ruinous condition has been laid bare sin shame blame forced out willing to set out until now we're willing to set up camp out build the city set forth the civilization utter our own decree gone is

God's word governed now by my word let me put an image on it we live in a world that was determined to cast off the apparel of divine authority and don ourselves instead in nothing save the attire of our own autonomy so what do we do from here I mean you might be glad that part one is concluded Helm killed us with part one can't wait to come back next week part two we got to give Bing a shot let's get something good but the city and the civilization and the Cree must give way to another son who can create a different line and all the people eventually must be fed up enough to lift their voices to a call of a different order let me slow down our text gives you some leaning toward hope and it's in verses 25 and 26 our text gives you in verse 25 another son another appointed one the word there is very interesting and important offspring back to chapter 3 verse 15 a different seed that there might come forth from

[31 : 59] Eve an offspring that is distinct distinctly used by God to bring blessing where Cain's line brings cursing it's a seed that's in distinction from Cain and Lamech and verse 26 also provides you with something of hope look at verse 26 to Seth also a son was born and he called his name Enosh and at that time people began to call upon the name of the Lord what a closing line have you seen now how this text has moved verse 17 the birth of a son and the the proliferation of his name but by the close the birth of another son and a calling out upon the name of the Lord my name there his name by the time we close this little phrase is so beautiful as you prepare to think about what's coming in the week ahead there came a time when people began to call upon the name of the

Lord I bet there came a time I mean imagine living under Lemmick's law code it would be extraordinarily difficult there came a time when people began to call upon the name of the Lord let me trace that call it is something that Genesis will bring in again and again along the way each of the patriarchs will parrot this phrase they will all learn to call upon the name of the Lord and much later when God's people cried out to him from relief in Egypt!

they will be calling upon the name of the Lord for help and an offspring a seed Moses will be born and eventually this is interesting the law code speaking of how to read the Old Testament the law code will indicate an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth which is what an incredibly drastic move toward justice given Lemmach's 77 fold but even that law code wouldn't be enough and eventually Israel's power would wane on the world scene and this call would almost fall into whispers but even so then there became men in the world who contemplated how to restore a measure of justice and they weren't even Christian men I'm talking about the Athenian aspiration back to Greece with the origins of their great republic I'm talking about

Plato's republic who takes up the consideration of who is the just man and what is the just city and who should rule and what is right there's this whole movement in human history to self correct what we have come to see happening in the book of Genesis and so Plato's republic puts forward that the world would need to be ruled by philosopher kings that philosophers only are smart enough wise enough tempered enough idealistic enough virtuous enough to rule in fact that's why they don't run for office because they don't really want to get tangled in all that but in the best world the philosopher kings would rule because they're not so polluted according to the things that drive the rest of us with power they would be untainted by allure later in human history very close to us now you can think about democracies you can think about how the world went from oligarchies where the rich ruled it to democracies where the majority rules it to the fear many people have that tyranny follows where the one rules world of people that are experimenting with what do

I do with the world in which I live let me tell you what I would say from the pulpit from the church I want to offer you something better than Israel's theocracy better than the Athenian Republic better than American democracy or Australian socialism better than oligarchy I'm going to offer you a king who goes by the name Jesus Jesus is life in Romans 10 Paul tells us that whoever calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved Jesus must be our starting point and our ethical standard for ongoing to points hear this in

[37 : 34] Matthew 18 he's asked a question in regard to how long do we have to put up with the people that are bothering us who actually even injure us who sin against us when can I exact justice Peter says do I have to do it like seven times and Jesus says no not seven times that would be the world of Cain 77 times forgiveness to overthrow Lemeck's 77 fold world of injustice Christian ethics are actually required in Matthew 18 for any who follow him and that will help us meet the ongoing need of this hour until he returns to consummate his rule forgiveness is required of all those who have been forgiven

Martin Luther King Jr. put it this way we must develop our capacity to forgive he who is devoid of the power to forgive is devoid of the power to love end quote and so I'm done some of my friends would say I'm going to be in my seat do you think you're ready for that do you think that things are now finally bad enough to warrant this collective call do you think maybe we're getting close to the moment where people began to call upon the name of the Lord or is it not bad enough are we still too fully engaged not fully engaged are we still too only engaged with calling upon the name of our mayor for help or calling upon the institutions of our government for help or calling upon our courts for help these are all good and proper courses of action and the calling ought to continue but as

Christians as a church how many of us have arrived at the place of verse 26 where people began to call upon the name of the Lord for help at what point do we fall on our knees while still marching with our feet when do we lift up our eyes to the hill and cry from whence cometh my help given everything I can observe from my little perch I'll be honest with you I'm not sure we're ready just yet but this I know you'll know we're ready when we arrive collectively at a time when this name thing your name my name gets up and goes you'll know the time has come when you and

I are willing to have our own name come off the side of whatever it is we're seeking to leave here long after we're gone and to encourage you we've got good reason to see the letters of our name disappear from the annals of human history you know what it is he already knows your name our heavenly father we ask now for help we pray for Christ church Chicago as this new forming and fledgling family that has yet to ever sit together help do something by the power of your spirit in our hearts wherein our own souls begin to clamor we have had enough and yet our voices which speak go to your ear oh to be numbered in the generation and time of those who truly experience and know what it is to live when people began to call upon the name of the

Lord in Jesus name I pray amen