

Cain, Abel & Baby Jesus

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[0 : 0 0] Father, we thank you for your word. We confess before you, Father, that we often just quickly flip through your word, just gaze or listen to it lightly, gaze lightly with our eyes, listen lightly with our ears, and that we don't allow your word, Father, to settle into our heart and our mind and our will.

We don't trust your word, Father, to settle into our mind, our heart, our will. So that we are preoccupied with our own thoughts. Father, you know our frailty and still you love us.

You know our rebellion and still you love us. We ask that you would gently but deeply pour out your Holy Spirit upon us this morning so that we might gaze upon your word and listen to your word and that your word might have its healing and forming and challenging role in our lives.

And all this we ask in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior. Amen. It's not a good thing about me, but some things really, really sort of bother me.

And I think I've mentioned it before. I listen to Christian radio sometimes. In fact, it's usually Christian radio on at our house. And my daughter, who'd come back from university, was asking me if I'd noticed that a particular show had changed on Sunday night.

[1 : 2 7] And I realized that I hadn't noticed that. And I was trying to think about why it was. And then I realized the reason why I hadn't noticed that this show had changed on Sunday night. And that's because at some point in time on Sunday morning, afternoon, I always turn the radio off, even though it's usually on sort of in the kitchen area.

And it's because I think there's like four shows in a row about contagious enthusiasm. And I end up, by the time I've listened to it the second time, I want to go postal. Too much unbridled enthusiasm and positive thinking just starts to really, really, really irritate me.

Because it just, I don't know, there's just something. I hope I'm not offending anybody here. Those of you who I'm offending, it just shows you how deeply you have to pray for me, that I can be set off by people just wanting to always be, have cheery voices, huge smiles, only talking about positive, pleasant things, and just encouraging us to be good.

And that makes me go postal after a certain point in time. It shows that there's something going on inside of me. I probably need counseling, but I turn it off. Because it's having the exact opposite effect on me than the people who are making the show are intending it to.

And this sort of complicated aspect of human nature, or at least my human nature, but I think all of us have certain things that people intend it to maybe make us smile, or happy, or do something, but it creates the opposite reaction.

[2 : 5 2] This type of complicated aspect of human beings is well illustrated, and great wisdom is presented in the passage, which John just read a few moments ago.

So I invite you to take your Bibles and turn with me to Genesis chapter 4. Genesis chapter 4. And as is every Sunday, if you're a guest here, you don't have your Bible with you, there's always some Bibles here at the front by the stage, and you're welcome to use the Bible, keep it.

It can be a gift from us to you if you want. You can return it afterwards as well if you want. And it's the famous story of Cain and Abel. Some of you might have noticed when John read Am I My Brother's Keeper, that is one of those snippets of biblical tradition which still would be sort of known in our culture.

People might not know where it came from. They might use it out of context, but it's a snippet of that biblical heritage which still exists in our culture.

And so it's going to talk... Anyway, let's read. Genesis chapter 4, verses 1. We'll look at it again. Now Adam knew Eve, his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, I have gotten a man with the help of the Lord.

[4 : 06] 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.

Just a pause here. In older times, people liked eating fat. It was highly valued if something had lots of fat. I mean, now it's sort of a guilty pleasure when we're pouring on the bacon and the cheese on our burger with lots of filling in it so that none of the fat runs out of the hamburger and we feel slightly guilty about it.

But in older times, and in many parts of the world today, it would still be viewed as something precious. The fat was important. Back to verse 4 again. And Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions.

And the Lord had regard, had favor. That's sort of another way to translate it. And the Lord had favor for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering, he had no regard.

He did not have favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face fell. The Lord said to Cain, Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen?

[5 : 28] If you do well, will you not be accepted? In other words, will you not have my favor upon you? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door.

Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it. Now, I should have sort of paused there at a certain part. But some of you might wonder, why is it, like, why on earth is it that God liked Abel's sacrifice, and he didn't like Cain's sacrifice?

I have to confess that for many, many years, when I would glibly go over it, I thought that the reason that God liked Abel's sacrifice was because it was an animal sacrifice, and you sort of pointed to the cross.

And Cain's was just, you know, grain and fruit and nuts and stuff like that, and didn't point to the cross. But I later on realized that that actually can't possibly be the reason, because if you go on and read Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, you'll see that, in fact, there's a whole series of Old Testament offerings that, in fact, just involve grain and the fruits of the earth.

So it's not as if there's something special about the animal and something bad about the grain. And so, you know, somebody might wonder, well, why is it that God sort of liked one sacrifice and didn't like another?

[6 : 49] One of the things when you read Old Testament stories and New Testament stories is, as we read it, to understand that no response is, that no particular response is required by the text.

Like, we might become very familiar with the fact that a certain response occurs, but you should, we can always ask the question, well, out of all of the possible responses, why did the person choose that response?

So here's what I mean. I'm married, and let's say I bring home to my wife one day a gift, and I bring the gift to my wife, and her face falls.

She gets sad by it. Okay, well, one moment. I have a whole range of responses to this, don't I? Like, if in fact, if I bring my wife a gift, and her face falls, and she seems to be displeased with it, why would I fly into a rage at her?

Like, why would I be angry at it? Like, I mean, I could ask her, like, why are you upset? Well, I didn't like you spending so much money, or something, or it reminds me of something.

[7 : 59] I mean, I could ask her, I could ask her, what could I do to make the gift acceptable? I could ask if I could take this gift back, and exchange it, and buy another gift. I mean, if I did something to offend her with the gift, I could apologize.

Like, there's all sorts of responses to that, isn't there? So, in fact, what happens when, in this story, when Cain's gift is not accepted, his response to God reveals why it is that God did not accept the gift.

Here's the first insight from the text, if you want to put that up on the screen, Mike. The first insight from the text. A problem with me? I want to put God in my debt. A problem with me?

A problem with you? I write these in such a way that if you write them in your notes, if you write these in your notes, it doesn't say, a problem with George. But if you write down a problem with me, then you realize that you're writing it as a problem about you, about me.

That it's, in fact, it's a far, far deeper-rooted problem than we realize. You see, what Cain is doing is he's trying to, in a sense, manipulate God.

[9 : 13] Like, don't we understand? Here's another thing about gifts. It matters to us, doesn't it? Why somebody gives us a gift? It matters to us. Like, if somebody gives me a gift, and I think, oh, that's really nice.

You know, maybe they've been, I don't know, really obnoxious, they've been really, really rude, they've been angry, and they give me a gift. And then, you know, I think, well, that's sort of curious. Why are they giving me a gift? And then, like, you know, an hour later, they say, oh, by the way, I need a letter of recommendation from my pastor.

Could you write me a letter of recommendation? Well, that would be a very transparent attempt to try to bribe me, to try to change my mood, to try to make me feel like somehow I'm in their debt, or change my impression of them.

And so, even if at a human level, we understand that the motive behind the giving of the gift matters, then how much more does it matter for God? But the fact of the matter is, is that we regularly think, naively, that whether it's being involved in a liturgy, or reading our Bible, or somehow or another, that we do it, not so much necessarily because we love God, or trust God, or trust his sovereignty, or trust his goodness, desire to know him, desire to give him honor, desire to show our dependence upon him, do anything which is what God desires, but instead we do it expecting some type of result.

Maybe because we've done something bad, and it maybe helps us with our conscience, it calms our conscience, or, you know, I, you know, I, you know, we come to church not because we want to sing God's praises, and open the Bible, and hear from him, but we want an hour of calm and quiet to collect our thoughts, so we can handle a busy week.

[10 : 55] An hour of calm and quiet to, you know, to calm our thoughts to handle a busy week. Like, we do it because of me, because of I, because of, you know, whatever reason. And, and, and that's what's going on here in Cain, is his response shows, that in fact, he's not actually that interested in God.

In fact, here, if you put the next point up, Andrew, here, here's the spiritual principle behind the text. The first thing is very important, that the problem is very important, but here's the spiritual principle.

In true worship, first I bring myself, and then I bring myself and my stuff. In true worship, first I bring myself, and then I bring myself and my stuff.

In fact, at a, at a, at the level of the Hebrew, and in the, and the, and the cultural context, we actually get a bit of a hint about that. In, in the book of Hebrews, chapter 11, verse 4, it talks about how, uh, Abel's sacrifice was accepted, because it came out of faith.

In other words, it came out of a desire, to have a relationship, with the living God, where, uh, Abel acknowledges that God is God, and he is a creature, Abel is a creature, and that God, Abel desires to somehow, honor that, illustrate that, to represent that, to, to, to know God.

[12 : 13] He's not only bringing himself, he brings himself to God first, in a matter of trust, but then he brings his stuff with him, and, and that's seen in the, in the, in the, in the actual story, because Abel brings the best, and gives it to God, off the top.

He doesn't sort of wait, until he has, uh, a thousand, livestock, and then after he has lots of livestock, for himself, he then takes, you know, a few unimportant ones, or a little bit of, you know, so-so ones, I guess if, you know, we, I don't know, we put a little, you know, wash it up a bit, and fluff its hair, it'll look all right, for God.

He, he takes it at the beginning, he gives the first fruit, he gives the very, very best, and he gives the best portion, of the meat, to the, the very, very best, and in the original language, Cain just sort of gives some of his stuff.

It's like he has a whole barn full of stuff, and he says, oh gosh, I've got to go to God, uh, I don't know, I, um, you know, and he says to his wife, you know, you don't like turnips, I don't like turnips, let's give turnips to God, okay?

Uh, we'll give God a whole pile of turnips, uh, we won't miss them, and, and God will be pleased, you know? And that's, that's what's going on in the story. And, um, but, so Abel understands it, he actually, he, he doesn't understand, he just knows that God is God, and he wants to give of himself to God, and he gives himself first, and he brings along his stuff.

[13 : 32] It's a very, very fundamental principle. If you're a guest here today, this is my opportunity to say to you, uh, that one of the things that we do here as part of our worship is collect an offering. And, and why do we collect an offering?

Well, first of all, we want to bring ourselves to God, and then we want to bring ourselves and our stuff. That that's like a spiritual principle about growth. Because stuff matters, right?

Stuff matters to us. And so, if we're bringing ourselves to God, we want to bring the stuff that matters to God as well. And so, if you're here, and you're a seeker, or you come just, you know, for whatever reason, uh, and you're a guest, especially if you're a guest that you're, you haven't given yourself to God first, I really, you know, keep coming to our church as often as you want, and never put any money in the plate.

Uh, that's completely fine with us. In fact, it's probably better for you not to. Uh, because you see, what God wants first is, is me. What he wants first is you. And then, as, as, as I give myself to God, and he, and, and, and I start to know God, and I start to know who he is, and his goodness, and his mercy, and I start to be healed, and freed up by that, then it, it starts to become obvious to me that I need to bring my stuff to him.

So, let the plate pass. Uh, we'll keep passing the plate, uh, in our services because it is part of worship. It's a, an important spiritual principle, but at the same time, um, you know, give ourselves first, then, then our stuff.

[14 : 55] Now, um, some of you, um, um, one of the things that, uh, also sort of bothers me about Christmas is, uh, I, boy, this is like a bad day for Christian radio.

Um, one of the things that bothers me about Christian radio, at least in this city, is how they almost play as many secular Christmas songs as, as Magic 100, uh, or, uh, 88.5, Live 88.5, uh, you know, the alternative music station, or any other station.

Uh, and, and if you listen to secular music songs, and I, you know what, you're going to think I'm like the Grinch. I, I really am not like the Grinch. I don't want to be the Grinch, but I'm just trying to, here's the thing about secular music songs, is it makes it look as if, what's Christmas about?

Christmas is about snow, about family, uh, about coming home, uh, it's about being good, and it's about being kind, and it's about being generous, and that's what Christmas is sort of all about.

And, uh, and one of the funny things about this secular understanding and idea behind Christmas is that it, it, it sort of promises certain things about home and goodness and kindness and getting along, but then when we actually go home for Christmas, we deal with all the grumpy, angry, selfish people who irritate us for the rest of the year.

[16 : 21] I'm not talking about my own family, okay? Uh, maybe they're taught, maybe that's what they think about me, I don't know, but, especially after I'm sort of grumpy about secular Christmas carols. and, and, and, but you know what I mean, on one hand, Christmas carols promise something, but if you actually try to follow the secular Christmas carols, it reveals something very, very different.

And, you know, some families are really, really great, and hopefully, well, let's all pray for great families. But you know what I mean, often, you know, maybe it's at work, and you go to a Christmas party, or you have a neighborhood Christmas party, and, and you realize that, boy, some people, they're just obnoxious.

Like, you sort of hope that you don't get caught in a corner with them. Like, that idea of human goodness is often not revealed at Christmas parties, and at Christmas time. The rushing, and the pushing, and the grabbing, and the materialism, and there's all sorts of stuff about Christmas that reveals the opposite of what Christmas songs seem to promise.

And, and one of the reasons I'm doing these unusual introductions to the Christmas story is because these unusual introductions help to reveal the meaning of Christmas, the biblical meaning of Christmas, and also are just very, very rich insights about what is that goes on in us as human beings.

And, and this can be seen in something, the story that maybe some of you are wondering at, which is, just, well, let's go back and look at the text. Go back up to verse five, this part about how Cain gets angry at God.

[17 : 50] Go up to verse four. For 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?

Or, as I said, sort of, my favor will rest upon you. And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door, its desire is for you, but you must rule over it.

Now just put your finger there for a second. This is sort of very, very interesting. God actually has been very kind and merciful to Cain. He's basically telling, warning Cain of a great danger, and he's definitely leaving the door wide open for Cain to change his heart in such a way that he can know God, and that God will know him, and that Cain can know God's favor.

And so God speaks to Cain, and in the story, how is it that Cain speaks next? Like, how does he speak to God? Okay? God has spoken to Cain.

[19 : 02] How does Cain respond? Well, notice this in the text. It's very, very subtle, but very, very important, and very interesting. Verse 8. Cain spoke to Abel.

He doesn't speak back to God, but he speaks back to God in a sense by speaking to Abel. Cain spoke to Abel, his brother, and when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him.

That's, look at verse 9, how it continues. Then the Lord said to Cain, where is Abel your brother? And Cain said, I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper? And the voice, and the Lord said, what have you done?

The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground. And just sort of paused. You see that? It's a very, very interesting dynamic. Abel, I mean, Cain brings the turnips and, I don't like Brussels sprouts, brings the turnips and the Brussels sprouts.

I like turnips. I don't like Brussels sprouts. Brings the turnips and Brussels sprouts and offers them to God as his offering. And it throws in, like, you know, an apple or something because he likes apples, just to, you know, hide the fact that it's a whole pile of Brussels sprouts and offers them to God.

[20 : 23] God realizes what's going on in Cain's life, speaks a word of mercy to Cain. Cain's response is, Cain's response is, anger at God.

God speaks his word of mercy to him and Cain goes and rather than speaking back to God, he speaks to Abel to lure him into a field to kill him. Put up the next slide.

A problem with me, I have an anger at God that is expressed as an anger at myself and others. A problem with me, I have an anger at God that is expressed as an anger at myself and others.

There are some of us who maybe are insufficient that don't get angry when we should. maybe we've been so deeply inundated by our culture to accept certain types of indignities against us that when there might, should maybe be a type of a moment of appropriate anger, it's gone.

That's a bit of a problem, probably not as much of a problem in our culture as we think that it is. The more problem, the more, the more common problem is that while there might be a place that something happens where there's, you know, a type of a, being upset at the, at the wrongness and the injustice that there is an appropriate response to evil that can also go along with anger.

[22 : 02] But for most of us, we can't just stay with that appropriate response to the evil, but the anger grows within us. And for many of us, there are deep areas of anger in our lives that can easily come out.

Maybe it's Rob Ford, the mayor of Toronto, and as soon as I mention that to some of you, you get mad. Maybe it's Thomas Mulcair of the NDP, and I just mentioned him, and you get mad.

Maybe it's Stephen Harper. Maybe it's the president of the United States. Maybe it's, I just have to mention, ex-wives or children, and instantly there's anger that's right there underneath the surface for you.

Maybe it's even good things. Maybe it's even things like, I mentioned, sex trafficking or abortion or violence against women or racism.

And instantly there's this anger which is there. And we might have, even as Christians, very, very sophisticated theological reasons as to why our anger is justified.

[23 : 32] And maybe even we would say, boy, if you knew my ex-wife, if you knew my kids, if you knew my husband, if you knew my boss, if you knew my employees, if you knew my neighbor, you would be angry as well.

But the Bible here reveals something which modern psychology and counseling completely and utterly ignores, and Christian counseling and psychology, which is just aping secular counseling, completely and utterly ignores, that in fact, ongoing, habitual, residual wells of anger within us are revealing to us that we aren't really angry about the things that we think we're angry about.

You and I are angry at God. The problem with me, I have an anger at God that is expressed as an anger at myself and others.

I guess I could have put and or others. That would have been more appropriate. That's what the text is revealing. Cain tries to buy off God.

God calls him on it but does it in a very gracious way so that it can all be fixed. Cain doesn't even speak to God. He speaks to his brother and kills him. Cain is consumed with an anger at God and he takes it out at anger and murder at his brother.

[24 : 54] And there's a very, very important takeaway for us here. that in fact if some of us are dealing, if we are aware of the fact that ongoing deep anger that gets revealed, one of the things we need to do is call out to God and say, God, why am I angry at you?

And one of the things that we need to do is ask ourselves, ask the fathers to pour out his Holy Spirit upon us, that he can reveal to us the idols that we're serving, the lies that we're believing, or the sin that we're guarding.

that is at root of our anger against God. If we put up the next slide, here's the other important thing for us, is that God is never, ever, ever, anger driven.

One of the things that comes all the way through the story, God is never, ever, ever, anger driven. One of the problems that we have as human beings is because we have this deep-seated, these, you know, and some of us don't have it, you know, maybe some of us, anger is never going to be a bit of a problem for us, but those of us who have realized that there's anger in there, we, you know, you know, the sign of anger beyond the very, very narrow momentary appropriateness of it is a sign of our enmity towards God.

It's an indicator of it, using sociological language. It's an indicator of a deeper problem. And it's part of our problem that we have in coming to God and talking to God and worshiping God and giving ourselves and our stuff to God is that we sort of, at one level, transpose, transfer, project our own anger at God to God and how he relates to us.

[26 : 45] But in this story, God is never, ever, ever, anger-driven. read the Old Testament. He is never, ever, ever, anger-driven.

Now, we're going to have to wrap it up in a couple of minutes. Some of you might be wondering, George, those are all very, very interesting things. But, you know, I have two things, George. First of all, this is a Christmas sermon and you haven't mentioned anything about Christmas at all yet.

But the other thing, George, is, come on, let's look at this story for a second. You know, I remember that other part. I remember the story a little bit. where are the other people to kill Cain?

Cain's going to start a city? Like, where are the people to start a city? And those are very, very good questions. But here's the thing about the stories in the first 11 chapters of Genesis in particular.

And, you know, this would be one of those things that if Andrew or Mike were to take my tape and cut it at the right spot, it would make me look like I'm saying something very, very bad and wrong.

[27 : 46] So you have to hear the whole part of it. But, you know, the stories in Genesis are a little bit like a joke. Okay? They're a little bit like a joke. I'll show you what I mean.

Some of you have heard this before. It's my favorite Anglican joke. How do you explain the different Protestant denominations to a Roman Catholic or an Eastern Orthodox? You know, somebody comes from a place where there's only Eastern Orthodox, they come and discover all these Protestant churches, how on earth do you explain Protestantism to them?

And it's very, very simple. You say, well, the Salvation Army pick you up out of the gutter. the Baptists, they get you baptized and started in the Christian life. Presbyterians, they're really good at educating you.

And so, you know, Christian Reformers are really good at educating you. Methodists, they get you really fired up with a concern for holiness. Pentecostals and Charismatics are really spectacular at freeing you up in worship and teaching you how to sing.

Anglicans, they introduce you to society and culture. And then the Salvation Army pick you up out of the gutter. Now, you see, the thing about this is, obviously, in this story, that's not all about Anglicanism.

[28 : 50] You know, I haven't mentioned the 39 articles. I haven't mentioned, you know, Wilberforce and C.S. Lewis and John Stott and the godly Anglican heritage. You know, you could say, oh, George Emerson, all this stuff. You know, Methodists, you know, Baptists, they don't just baptize you.

You know, okay, but what's the point of, how does a joke work? You just take this little tiny moment and you trace along the thread to make a point. How is that a parable work?

A parable, when Jesus tells a parable about the seeds and the sower, you know, it's just, he's trying to make, you just take the tiny little narrow point as it goes from moment to moment to moment to get the point. How does a metaphor or an analogy work, you know, or an illustration?

You take this, that one aspect of the story or the image which matters and you leave the rest of it behind. And that's, in a sense, what's happening with Genesis chapter 4. We have lots of questions about the text, that the text is not interested in answering.

It doesn't want us to pause to try to figure out these other things, it's just wanting us to follow along as the text makes a series of very, very important points. One overarching point, which is that as the enmity, as human enmity towards God and rage toward God increases, that God is always merciful.

[29 : 59] That's the overwhelming story of the text, but even as it goes along there's just always a fine type of point and it's not, just like my little joke about Anglicanism doesn't intend to explain the 1662 Book of Common Prayer and the 1552 Book of Common Prayer and the 39 Articles and the Ordinal with its Preface and her whole godly heritage doesn't do all that stuff, does it?

Just a little tiny point, that's what Genesis 4 is doing. And in fact, it's quite breathtaking in the rest of the text, how, let's just read it very quickly. Look back at verse, skip over to verse 17.

God has put a mark on Cain, it's an act of mercy. Verse 17, 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.

Enoch was born Irad, and Irad fathered Mahujahel, and Mahujahel fathered Methushahel, and Methushahel fathered Lamech, and Lamech took two wives.

The name of the one was Adah, and the name of the other was Zillah. Adah bore Jabal, he was the father of those who dwell in tents and have livestock. His brother's name was Jubal, he was the father of all those who played the lyre and the pipe.

[31 : 17] Zillah also bore Tubal-Cain, he was the forger of all instruments of bronze and iron. The sister of Tubal-Cain was Nahmah, Lamech said to his wives. Adah and Zillah hear my voice, you wives of Lamech, listen to what I say, I have killed a man for wounding me, a young man for striking me, if Cain's revenge is sevenfold, then Lamech's is seventy-sevenfold.

It's very, very, very curious how this, the Moses writing the book of Genesis, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, making all these fine things. It's very, very interesting.

In a world that attributed the development of farming and music and metallurgy to the gods, God's word is saying it has nothing to do with the gods, there's only one God.

And it's very, very interesting that in the Old Testament in this language here what characterizes building a city is it means one of two things, it either means building a wall that you could defend or building a tower that you could go in to defend.

In other words, it's talking about a place to defend against war. And it shows part of the mystery or the riddle of cities all in this little tiny thing, it shows the mystery and riddle of cities that on one hand, civilization has things like music and metallurgy and fine crafts and animals and husbandry and all that thing which is connected to civilization, yet at the same time that civilization grows, war grows, which is why you need a fortress.

[32 : 48] And it sort of shows the riddle and the mystery of cities and civilization, and it opens up the whole way for Christians to understand what it means to live in the city, that on one hand, the city does have these things like music which are good, yet the other time it seems to be, there seems to be, as civilization increases, there seems to be an increase of violence and war at the same time, and there's a mystery to the fall, and a mystery to our rebellion against God, and a mystery as to how it bends and changes human nature, music and munitions, culture and clash and violence.

men. But at the end of it all, it also shows, by the way, that polygamy is a result of the fall. But then at the end of it, it shows how Lamech kills a man just because he'd been slightly hurt, and then Lamech boasts, aha, God protected Cain by promising seven-fold retribution.

I am safer than Cain because you mess with me, I will exact 77 times punishment on you.

I am more powerful than God. Don't fear God, fear Lamech. I take wives as I will. I have my sword and my violence, and it will protect me.

I am more powerful than God. that's how the text ends. In fact, there's a very, very interesting counterpoint, which will then lead us into Christmas, that with Cain's rebellion, God warns Cain that sin is growing and desires to work in him.

[34 : 41] And then by the end of the story, we see that Lamech's understanding of the way that Lamech wants to deal with sin is to become more powerful than God. In fact, if you put up the slide, a problem with me, sin is a power that towers in me and over me, and in response, I want to tower as God.

So the story is showing. God warns Cain that there's sometimes that there's sins that just seem to grow and grow and grow and grow and get bigger, and they desire to overwhelm me.

Yet at the same time, my response to things that want to overwhelm me is that I desire to tower as God. Both are responses of hell, not of heaven.

Our response is, put up the next slide, please. God is sovereign and good, even in judgment, and offers mercy. All the way through the story, mercy is always offered by God.

All the way through the story, God is always sovereign. And if we just think about those different responses that in true worship, first I bring myself and then I bring myself and my stuff, God is never, ever, ever anger driven, and God is sovereign and good, and even in judgment, offers mercy.

[36 : 15] That's who the living God is. Put up the final slide, please. Running out of time. The birth of Jesus is not the prelude to tragedy, but the beginning of God's gracious gift of shalom.

To turn into Luke chapter one, to Luke chapter two. And in Luke chapter two, we have Luke's account of the Christmas story.

chapter two, and look at verse eight. And in the same region, there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear.

And the angel said to them, fear not, fear not, fear not, right? Their shepherds are projecting their anger drivenness, and their lack of the belief that God is not good, and they project that on anything that comes from heaven.

And the angels say to them, fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

[37 : 32] And this will be a sign for you. You will find a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, shalom, among those with whom he is pleased.

In other words, on those with whom his favor rests. It's the very, very same language of the sacrifice that was used of Cain and Abel. The very same language that the angels used to describe Jesus.

They describe the state of, I mean, what the story of Cain and Abel shows is it reveals human enmity and anger towards God. And it reveals to us our tendency to desire to deal with enmity and anger and any type of sin that overwhelms us by being able to be like a God and towering over it, getting bigger and bigger and bigger over that sin.

And the Bible here is revealing something completely and utterly different, that God enters the human story not by towering, but he enters it as a baby. And in fact, he enters it as a baby to live his life and ultimately to die upon the cross as a means to reconcile us to God.

But we see with the birth of Jesus the entering in of something that only God can do for us and that we cannot do for ourselves and we cannot do in terms of our relationship with God, that while that which characterizes us is being trapped between enmity, often unrecognized, and a desire to tower over the things that seem to overwhelm us, which also keeps us distance from God, but that God brings into the world his means of shalom.

[39 : 18] And shalom means something different than the experience of emotional peace. Shalom means a setting right, a reestablishing of order, a reestablishing of creating a balance, a change not first and foremost of emotion, but a change of reality and structure.

And God is bringing his shalom into the world. That shalom will be won upon the cross, but he's bringing his shalom into the world, the means by which we by faith in him can know God's favor and his acceptance and be reconciled to him.

That's what Christmas is. It's not a prelude to tragedy, but the beginning of God's gracious gift of shalom. Let's stand. Father, we, you know those of us this morning who struggle with anger.

Father, you know those of us who have never even considered that the anger that we feel when certain names are in the world. We ask that we never even thought, Father, that it's hiding in anger that we have at you.

We ask, Father, that you would reveal to us the idols that we are serving or the lies that we are believing or the sin that we are covering up that make us angry at you.

[40 : 54] Father, we ask desperately. We do not want to be angry. We do not want to be anger-driven. We give you thanks and praise, Father, that your son came to bring your shalom and that when we become your children by adoption and grace on one level, already that shalom now characterizes us.

Yet, on the other hand, it still needs, Father, to take depth in our experience. And we ask, Father, that you would reveal to us the idols and the lies and the sins. Reveal to us why it is that we are angry at you and bring your shalom to bear in our lives, that we might be free of anger, that we might live free, not towering over others, but free as your doulos and your servant.

Grow in us, Father, a sense of your immensity and the immensity of grace and the immensity of your shalom. And help us, Father, to desire not to tower over other people, but to be a servant of you, a servant of your shalom, a servant of grace, a servant of the gospel.

Father, that is the truth for which we were meant, to be your doulos, not to tower. So, Father, may your Holy Spirit work within us to heal us this Christmas time and every day until we see your Son face to face.

And all this we ask in the name of Jesus, your Son, and our Savior. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.