

Spread of sin

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[0 : 00] So Genesis chapter 4 and we'll be reading the whole chapter. 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.

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.

[1 : 32] 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 anyone 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.

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 Erad, and Erad fathered Mahujael, and Mahujael fathered Methusael, and Methusael fathered Lamech.

[2 : 38] And Lamech took two wives. The name of the one was Adar, and the name of the other was Zillah. Adar bore Jubal. 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 Jubal Cain. He was the forger of all instruments of bronze and iron.

The sister of Jubal Cain was Neymar. Lamech said to his wives, Adar 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. 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.

[3 : 41] At that time, people began to call upon the name of the Lord. Well, will you pray with me as we come to God's word?

Let's pray. Father, I pray that you would help us sit under your word again, and I pray that you would help us have a more clearer awareness of the presence and power of sin in our lives, so that we might look away from ourselves to your wonderful salvation, that we might cherish the cross of Jesus all the more.

So I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, do you know what sin looks like when you see it?

This sounds like a tautology kind of question, but do you know what sin looks like? Do you recognise it when you see it? We're headed this term in Genesis.

I want to give some bearings. We're getting into chapters 4 to 11, and we're going to finish in chapter 15. But 4 to 11, its scope is on the whole world.

[5 : 03] So it's got the whole world in its lens, and it describes the effects of the fall into sin. It builds our awareness of how desperate our situation is.

So if we don't grasp chapters 4 to 11, by the time chapter 12 comes and we zoom right in on one man, Abraham, and his one family, we need to be aware of the effects of the fall so that we're just looking for what God's going to do to restore all things.

So can I encourage you, if you weren't here last week, if you've missed chapters 1 to 3, can I encourage you to go to our website and catch up on that? If you want to learn about the storyline of the Bible, here's a basic storyline in four words.

I think it's four words. Creation, fall, redemption, new creation. I'll halfenate that. But my point is, chapters 1 to 3 cover the first two of those, and so it's really crucial we get a grasp of those chapters.

Very briefly, to jog our memory, we saw that all things are created by God alone, by his word. It's his house, his rules. And we saw that the goal of building all things is to live with us in his house, to be present with us.

[6 : 26] The best thing about Eden was that God was there. He was present. Then Adam ruined the human family, rebelled against God's rule, rejected his love, not believing his word, but believing the lie.

And so we're now in exile. We're under curse. We're not home. We daily feel the effects of that curse in our marriages, in raising children, with our mortality hanging over us.

It all reminds us we need to be brought home. So coming into chapter 4, what spreads into the next generation of the human race?

What do we see in Cain and Abel? Now you might be scrolling your notifications already. Now maybe that's my fault.

Or maybe you're wondering, what does Cain murdering Abel have to do with you? Like you're not a murderer, I presume.

[7 : 38] It's an interesting story. It's graphic. It's violent, kind of entertaining. But we might be thinking, who cares?

In this story, we have the word sin in the Bible. I think we might see and recognise curse around us. We feel it. We're living there. I think we recognise curse and the struggle of life. But do we see sin? Do we recognise it when we see it?

I think this story helps us see sin, its presence and its power. Okay, so the story starts on a really joyful note.

It is a hopeful note. Like it is Eve holding her newborn and she completes her joy by giving praise to the Lord.

[8 : 44] I have gotten a man with the help of the Lord. What should have spread to the next generation in the human race was the image of God, his character.

The setting of the story is worship. Which should just raise our antenna that any presupposition that we have that religion is automatically good, we've got to put a question mark over that.

Both brothers, Abel and Cain, they both bring an offering. This is worship. Abel's accepted, Cain isn't. How do they know that they're not accepted?

I've heard so many speculations this week. We're not told. We don't know. It's obviously not Moses' point in writing it for us. We don't need to know. What we're told is God rejected Cain and his offering.

God accepted Abel and his offering and Cain knew. He knew. Now, you can imagine how Cain felt, can't you? I remember HSC when I was finishing year 12.

[9 : 52] I did a design and tech project. It was this coffee table thing. Anyway, there was this award that went out for good projects.

And my classmate, my teacher said, got this award. And I remember the feeling I had. I was inside. I was smiling on the outside.

On the inside, I was livid. Like, I thought my project was so much better. I tried hard. I thought it was unfair that I was overlooked.

Like, I didn't have to think about that. That was just a gut reaction. I think we can sympathise with Cain here. What's the difference between the brothers' offerings?

The Mosaic Law later on prescribes both crops and animals. I don't think it's in the actual form of the worship itself. They each brought what they could, what they had access to bring.

[10:59] The only difference, the only hint of a difference we get is the very positive description of Abel's offering. One commentator translated it like this. I don't know Hebrew well. Martin's not here today.

Some others who know Hebrew. Here's one translation. He brought the fattest of the firstlings of his flock. He offered the Lord his best.

You know when a man's heart has been captured by a woman, don't you? He showers more. He's wearing better. He's paying money for better clothes.

He'll drive long distances to see her after work and on the weekends. He'll stay up late talking and texting. Sleep is, who cares about sleep?

He'll spare any waking moment. Like his thoughts just revert back to her. Like he's saving up money to buy a ring. His career decisions are all orientated to her now.

[12:06] He seeks to please her. He's giving the best of himself. Now does all that sacrifice feel like duty to that man? Does it feel like he's losing something?

No way. He's giving the best and it completes his joy. It's like a man giving a pledge, the very best. He's saved up so much money for that ring. And on that day, he's giving that, saying, with all that I am and all that I have, I honour you.

I think that's what's going on here. Abel's giving his best and it's a pledge of his full devotion.

Hebrews 11.4 says that it was by faith Abel offered a more acceptable sacrifice.

So maybe he was giving his best in response to God's promise to restore all things. So maybe he knew the promise of chapter 3, verse 15, that there would be a serpent crusher who would restore all things.

[13:24] Maybe. Maybe he knew that promise and he was so grateful and he just knew that day was coming and so he gave his best. Whereas Cain's, we suppose, wasn't done in faith.

Now, a slight maybe over those comments. Something, something was wrong with Cain's motivation. Otherwise, the Lord wouldn't have rejected his offering. Now, what's Cain's response to this situation?

Conviction? Is it, unlike me with that Year 12 project, acknowledgement and pleasure that Abel did well and delighting in that fact?

He deserved God's favour? Is it self-examination? No, he felt entitled to be angry and sad. He's very angry.

It's not just angry. He's livid. He believes he's been hard done by. He's entitled to blessing. Maybe because he's the firstborn. Maybe because he tried, he feels like a victim.

[14:32] Maybe a victim of Abel. Like, just because he went above and beyond, he makes his fairly good efforts look bad.

It's just his fault for going above and beyond. Maybe he feels a victim of the Lord. He's unfair. Like, can't you see I tried? I tried. And the Lord speaks to Cain.

And notice the picture of who God is here. He's not a God. He sits up in heaven with his, like a policeman, with a radar sin gun just going, let's see what he does here.

I'm trying to catch him out. He's coming in and he's speaking early, trying to intervene. He's like a counsellor.

He's like a parent. He wants to give Cain every opportunity to turn this around. And that's what scripture is. He doesn't start with a command, like a ruthless boss that just says, get your act together.

[15:44] He doesn't start like that. He urges Cain to examine himself. Why are you so angry? Why are you angry? Why are you sad? Look, Cain. Look in.

Why? Do you examine yourself when those self-pitying thoughts come?

Or do you blame your circumstances? You blame others. Do you love it when a friend or family member sits down with you and they want to help you examine your motivations?

Do you love that? Or do you just want them to say, no, I just want you to be angry with me? Is it your husband or wife's fault that you're angry?

A poor trip, a pastor, makes an outrageous claim in marriage counselling that your spouse is never the cause of your behaviour.

[16:51] It's an outrageous claim if you believe it. Is it the person's fault for cutting in on your lane that you're angry? Or is it a heart issue?

Look in, Cain. Look in. He's not taking responsibility. He's like his mum and dad, shifting the blame outside himself.

And the Lord shows him the path to go. It's not a competition, Cain. It's not like it's the top 5% who are accepted. If you do well, won't you be accepted?

It's not a comparison game. If you do well. He's an involved father who's lovingly counselling, Cain. And then he gives a warning.

In The Lion King, Uncle Scar, why is he so powerful and evil? Part of it is they underestimated him.

[18:04] Mufasa knows he's the stronger older brother. Little Simba just thinks he's a funny old Uncle Scar, like he's a bit strange and toys around with him.

They underestimate him. That's part of his power. His lies and plots, he wants to rule, he wants to kill.

They underestimate him. That's what the Lord's saying here to Cain. Sin is crouching at the door. That word is like a predator. It's like a tiger crouching in the ground. It looks like nothing. Oh, your sin, it's just this little grudge.

It's not that big. Don't underestimate sin's power. If you think there's a predator waiting for you, you've got half a chance.

[19:07] If you don't think there's a predator waiting for you, you're dead. You're gone. Don't underestimate sin's power and its presence.

Its desire is contrary to you. His self-pity and anger blaming others, it felt for him. It was stroking his, I don't know, pride. It feels for him.

The Lord's warning, no, it's not. It is contrary to you. He wants to devour you and your life and those around you. Don't underestimate it.

Like, have you ever been in despair that you can't talk a loved one out of a destructive path? I find this chilling that the Lord himself can't talk Cain out of it.

Whew. And then, verse 8, Cain uses his God-like ability to speak. He spoke to Abel.

[20:18] Now, speaking, it's an act of relationship. It's an act of connection. But he obviously uses words to deceive.

They hide, his words hide his real intentions. He doesn't want to master sin.

And he becomes a predator against his own brother. The word brother here in this passage appears again and again and again. Even his brother. Abel, righteous, innocent, accepted by God, he is the first human death in history.

Like, the first death wasn't sickness. It wasn't accident. humanity didn't just slowly become corrupt over a bunch of generations.

The very first generation which began with such joy that our origin story, it begins with first degree murder. That doesn't bode well for us.

[21:38] Evil is using words to deceive. Evil is destroying God's good creation. Cain's attack on Abel was even an attack against God.

He was attacking God's image. He was attacking God's approval of Abel. What we see here is Cain doesn't spread the image of God, he spreads the image of the serpent.

The Lord, verse 9, is incredibly patient and gracious. Where is Abel your brother? Now, he knew.

We later find out his cries are going out to him. He knew. What's he doing? He's giving Cain an opportunity to confess. confess. He's giving an opportunity to confess.

Show some awareness of the shame and guilt. But he denies any knowledge of it. How common is that? I remember as a kid lying to David Corderwood back in town.

[23:00] we'd been lighting fires and I smelled like smoke and I walked into his house. He's like, have you been lighting fires?

No. How natural is it? I don't know. And then worse.

Am I my brother's keeper? This is cold. Am I responsible for the well-being of my brother?

Look around you. Am I responsible? Are you responsible? Don't you find it so easy to stop feeling responsible for someone you're angry at?

I'm not responsible to care for that person. It is so quick to stop thinking even amongst the church family to suddenly stop thinking of someone as brother.

[24:12] The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground. The Lord sees. I don't know how many cold cases the police haven't solved but the Lord sees.

There might be sins against you no one else knows about. The Lord sees. Vengeance is mine says the Lord.

But again the Lord is so gracious. His punishment isn't full yet. God is coming.

But it's so mixed with mercy. He is exiled further from Eden, further from the land, further from his family.

He's going to be a fugitive, a wandering fugitive, never at home, always restless. ruthless. But then his character is shown again.

[25 : 21] He's not convicted by his guilt. He just cares about his punishment. That's not fair. That's too harsh.

That's too harsh. Now just a side note in case you're just struggling to get past this.

Like who's he afraid will kill him? I don't know. It's a short answer. But he's assuming here that anyone he meets will know him and what he's done.

Which suggests the earth isn't just fully populated yet. It suggests probably family. He may even be thinking future generations. Family members who will get blood revenge.

But the Lord is gracious. A commentator at Derek Kigner says God's concern for justice for the innocent is matched only by one other thing.

[26 : 27] His care for the sinner. Protection. mercy is the most that mercy can do for the unrepentant.

It's the most he can do. A term we use in theology is common grace.

He doesn't deserve this. It's mine to avenge, says the Lord. It's not your tribes to avenge. It's not your families to avenge.

It's not yours to avenge. It's the Lord's to avenge. And he protects Cain. Now Cain's pride, it continues I think in the act of building a city.

He's meant to be restless wanderer, a fugitive, but now I'm going to settle. I'm going to settle and build a city with my son's name.

[27 : 32] Not in honour of the Lord, but my own name. Now what became of this rebellious Cain? What happened to him and his family?

They prospered. Isn't that, it's really surprising, the description, they prosper. We've got a list of his descendants, and then to Lamech, and his children advance in civilisation.

We've got tents, housing, we've got music and culture, we've got technology, we've got the weapons and implements, civilisation under Lamech's family, which should just warn us a bit that all of creation is good.

It's to be received with thanksgiving, but as we come to the character of Lamech in a moment, it should raise questions, about if all this goodness is linked back to Lamech.

Yes, all things are good, but we need to be so thoughtful about everything now, about the music, about all the good gifts we've got. I think these advances in society, they're actually trying to fight the curse.

[29 : 02] rather than looking to God for rest and hope, it's we can work together to create the good life, to undo the curse.

And so Cain's society advances, but as it advances, it is declining, it is eroding from within its values. And we see that in the character of Lamech.

Out of his self-gratification, in love with his own name, he takes two wives. He's rejecting God's institution of marriage, of between a man and a woman becoming one flesh.

like it's been in Australia's news at the moment, the domestic violence, men using their power to intimidate and control rather than to serve and protect women, that goes back as far as Lamech.

It is as old as that. That marriage is eroded and he boasts, he's just got a disdain for the value of human life.

[30 : 28] He's not ashamed, he kills a youth. Excessive revenge. He injures, I'm going to kill him. It's excessive, it was a youth and he's boasting about it.

Where's the value of human life in the image of God? And he threatens vengeance, 70 times 7.

Marriage and the value of human life is eroded in Cain's society. They can control their surroundings to try and prosper, but they can't control their lives.

They can't keep their lives together. Okay, I want to take a breath and take stock of what we've seen.

Like in light of the patience and mercy of God, like he gave every opportunity speaking to Cain to do well. He wants him to do well.

[31 : 39] He warns him, take sin seriously. It looks hidden, but it is present and powerful. He gives opportunity to confess, and then he even protects.

In light of all that grace, what does sin look like? God's love. Well, it started with half-hearted devotion to God, and yet feeling entitled to blessing.

It looks like envy of another's favour. It looks like self-pitying emotions. It doesn't want to change. It wants to blame.

It doesn't take responsibility to seek to do well in God's eyes. It doesn't heed the warning that sin is powerful and destructive. It doesn't believe that sin's desire is against him when it feels and fuels that self-pitying anger.

Sin looks like deceiving with words, deceiving his brother, destructive deeds, destroying creation against a brother.

[32 : 57] sin rejects God's prompting to confess. It denies knowledge of doing wrong. It repudiates responsibility for my brother's well-being.

I'm not responsible for my brother's well-being. It doesn't care about the crime, just focuses on the punishments. And his society rallies together to try and control their surroundings to give the good life, all the while proud, self-gratifying, taking vengeance in their own hands, eroded from within.

I don't know about you, but I found this story really dark this week. I found it really dark, and I think I found it dark because I can't relate to Cain with the murder itself.

I haven't quite crossed that line, but at every other point I can relate to him. I see myself in him.

I feel myself drawn to his kind of society that wants to seek comfort, controlling your environment, not caring about the values of loving God and neighbour.

[34 : 28] I think this story shows us that sin feels small, it feels hidden, but it's present and it's deadly. well, we've got two more verses, and they give us hope.

Otherwise, we'd be in complete despair, I think. They give us hope. God's promise in chapter 3, verse 15, that an offspring of Eve will crush the lies of Satan, the destructive lies of Satan.

That hope looked dead because Cain looks more like the serpent than God. Abel, who's righteous, is killed, is gone.

And so, we've got in verse 25 and 26, a replacement God provides in the place of Abel, Seth. Eve again praises God's grace.

And while we don't know everything about Seth's family, they might have developed civilisations similar. They might have, we're not told. There's something very different that characterises Seth's family.

[35 : 53] Abel's line. Calling upon the name of the Lord. This family pioneers worship. This family proclaims who God is, the name, all his character, his words.

They're looking to who God is, his words, as their life and their hope. So, the promise of God restoring all things, God goes through Seth.

It continues, it lives on. So, if you see, if this passage has shown your sin more clearly, then the hope given to us today is a promise of God that is much clearer than the promise they had then.

the prophet of the temple. I speak to you before. I don't know. Here's the promise. Anyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

Anyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. Who'd have thought that the Lord himself would become our brother?

[37 : 15] Who'd have thought that the first murder points to our salvation? Who could have imagined it?

Hebrews 12.24 says, Jesus' sprinkled blood speaks a better word than the blood of Abel. Abel's blood cries out for justice.

Jesus' blood cries out for justice, but in a very different way. Abel's accusers deserve punishment.

Jesus' blood, forgiveness. However righteous Abel was, Jesus is the true and better Abel.

He's truly innocent who shed his blood. And what society does his blood create? His society forgives one another, not just seven times, but 70 times seven.

[38 : 33] That Jesus would refer back to this layman. That's the kind of society his blood creates. I think the hope for our society, the hope for our marriages and our families, the hope for brothers and sisters dwelling in peace in this church, the hope for God to rescue me from me, isn't that we

go on blaming things outside of ourselves and our environment.

It's to look within and understand and not underestimate the power of sin lurking in each one of us and then call on the name of the Lord, the Lord Jesus, whose better blood forgives and recreates the society.

Will you pray with me? Let's pray. Oh Lord, there's a sense in which we're just wanting to get on with the story because this section is quite dark and we don't like what it shows about ourselves and about human race.

I pray that you would help us trust that all your word is given to us for our good. Lord, I pray that you would help us look within, help us to pause and not blame others and you help us to listen to your word that you are like a parent, a counsellor who wants us to be accepted and forgiven.

Lord, most of all, we thank you for the Lord Jesus Christ. We thank you that he willingly came and became our brother, that he knew he would be rejected and killed and he did it all for our sake.

[40 : 40] We thank you for his blood. Lord, I pray for each one of us that we would just look to him for that renewal and that peace that we're all craving and I pray in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

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