

# Genesis: 4:1-16

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] If you've been with us, you know that we've been in a series on Genesis, and I know that Benji has told you this, but Genesis was not written as the events of Genesis happened.

It was written after the fact to a people who had experienced slavery, who'd had their identity stripped from them, and Moses is writing to them under the inspiration of God to tell them who they are, to remind them who they are created to be.

That's Genesis 1, Genesis 2, Genesis 3. Why is there sin? Why is this world so messed up? Why is it a wreck?

Genesis 4 is where we're going to get today. It's a story of two brothers, Cain and Abel. It starts to get at the questions of, what does my twisted up, messed up, sinful heart look like?

Why do people do terrible things? Why do I want to do terrible things? Why did Egypt do terrible things to me?

[ 1 : 0 6 ] Genesis 1 through 4 are some of the most beautiful literature in all the world because they answer some of the most primary questions that we have as human beings.

So with that, Genesis 4, a story of Cain and Abel, the two brothers. Now Adam knew his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, I have gotten a man with the help of the Lord.

And again she bore his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of the sheep, and Cain a worker of the ground. In the course of time, Cain brought the Lord an offering of the fruit of the ground.

And Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions. And the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his face fell.

And 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.

[ 2 : 1 1 ] 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? And he said, I don't know. Am I my brother's keeper? And the Lord said, What have you done?

The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground. And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. When you work the ground, it shall no longer yield to you its strength.

You shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth. Cain said to the Lord, My punishment is greater than I can bear. Behold, you have driven me today away from the ground, and from your face I shall be hidden.

I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me. Then the Lord said to him, Not so. If anyone kills Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold.

- [ 3 : 16 ] And the Lord put a mark on Cain, lest any who found him should attack him. Then Cain went away from the presence of the Lord and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden.
- Let's pray. Father, your word is good and true, and at times it's painful. It is hard to look at these words and read them and to know that they are truer about us than we would like to think.
- They hit closer to home than we might ever imagine. This is not a story about those brothers out there who are foolish. This is a story about us, your people, who are infatuated with sin, obsessed with ourselves, desire nothing more than to see ourselves elevated.
- Yet your kingdom is one where people are brought low, one where you raise up the meek and the lowly, one where you honor those who are less esteemed. So God, would you show us your kingdom this morning?
- It's in your name that we pray. Amen. The first pastor I worked for was Dick Cain. Dick, now actually some of y'all might have met him.
- [ 4 : 34 ] He works at First Pres in downtown Chattanooga, but at the time we worked together at a church in Chattanooga, or in Tuscaloosa. And we only worked together one year, but Dick's a joyful, great man. And he loved to tell a story about how one time he was traveling down to South America, and he was going through customs, and the agent at the customs desk looked at his passport and said, Cain?
- Why did you not change your name? To him, anybody who had the name Cain was shamed and needed to immediately change their name instead of carrying that around with them.
- And Dick looked back at him and said in words probably better than he knew at the time, but he said, that's who I am. That's who I am. And that's who we are.
- We are Cain. We are the ones who need to be rescued. You see, Genesis 4 is not just a case study about the first murder.
- Genesis 4 is a case study about life. Obviously, Genesis 4 comes after Genesis 3. You'll remember that Adam and Eve, they're kicked out of the garden. They're literally sent east.
- [ 5 : 50 ] Here at the end of this section, it says that Cain settled in the land of Nod, which was east of Eden. In a way, all of us, even today, we are still wrestling and grappling with what life looks like in a land east of Eden.
- As we desire and long for the city of God. Right? Cain and Abel's parents knew perfection. They knew goodness and beauty and delight in its most true forms.
- And ever since, we've been longing for something great. We've been longing for home. Here, Cain and Abel experience life east of Eden just like we do.
- And they're going to find that in this land, there are always a few realities that are present. These are not going to be the points to my sermon, although they probably should be. But these things are laced in and out of Genesis 4 in a way that's just beautifully poetic.
- Sin, grace, and salvation. Those elements are at play in your life this morning. They are at play in Cain and Abel's lives. Sin, grace, and salvation.
- [ 6 : 56 ] Sin, grace, and salvation. Genesis 4 is the first place that sin shows up in the Bible that has real, lasting human consequences. Right? It shows up first in the Bible only because it's right after Genesis 3.
- Genesis 5 has more coming. Genesis 6 after that. Every chapter in the Bible is marked with sin from this point forward. And it's easy here to spot the sin. Right? You heard it.
- Murder. And sometimes I get a little frustrated with the fact that Cain and Abel's story is so overshadowed by the murder because the murder overwhelms our senses.

But it's the sin that's easiest to see, but it's not the only sin that's there. Right? Sin is easy to spot when it becomes murder. Sin is easy to spot when it becomes adultery.

Sin is easy to spot when it becomes theft. But the larger message of Genesis 4 is that God is becoming a teacher and a counselor for his people.

[ 8 : 01 ] And he's trying to get his people to see, can you see sin when it's in its seed form? Can you see it when it is small? Before it grows and manifests.

Right? That's the language that he uses here. God comes to Cain and he says, sin is crouching at your door. Its desire is contrary to you, but you must rule over it.

Why do we crouch? You know, when I talk to kids, you'll often see me out there in the lobby or wherever I am with kids, but a lot of times I like to get down low and crouch and talk to them at this level.

You know why I do that? I don't have to do it much for fifth graders at my height because they're like kind of eye to eye. What's up? But I get down low so I look less intimidating.

So I look at them eye to eye and I feel safer to them. Sin crouches so it feels less intimidating. So it feels safer.

[ 9 : 04 ] When I'm playing hide and go seek with kids, oftentimes I'll find a place to hide and I'll get behind something and I'll crouch down low. Why? In hopes that they don't find me.

That's why we crouch. That's the message that God has for Cain about sin. He wants him to know that sin will always try to make itself appear smaller and less dangerous than it actually is.

Sin will always want to try to hide out in a corner of your heart where it will not be discovered and you won't even notice it. Crouching, God says, is as much a part of the nature of sin as green is to grass or as delicious is to queso.

It's just a part of who it is. It's a part of what sin is is that it crouches, that it's very nature. But what is true about everything that crouches? It eventually has to stand up.

It eventually springs. A tiger that's crouched down springs up eventually. Right? I don't stay crouching forever. That would be kind of weird. I don't stay hidden forever. That's why I'm here.

[ 10 : 18 ] Right? I come out. Crouchers eventually stand up. If sin were personified, it would be this. Sin would try to get in in an entry-level position where it could have a corner cubicle and not really be noticed and that it would not be satisfied until it was CEO.

Sin is never satisfied with small endings. It always wants something bigger. It will eat the whole thing if you give it to it. That is the nature of sin and God wants Cain to know that.

And so what's his warning to Cain? You must rule over it. Cain, you cannot see your own heart. These things are crouching. They're hidden. They don't want to be seen.

But trust me. I see your heart. Do you know that God sees your heart too? That God knows the things that are out to get you before you do?

Now we can trust him with that. God doesn't say these things to scare you but to awaken you to life outside of Eden. To life east of Eden.

[ 11 : 30 ] These are like the words of a father who sees his daughter about to hurt herself and says, Sweetheart, stop. You must stop.

This will hurt you. Sin is crouching. Its desire is to consume you. You must rule over it. Sin is also a razor's edge.

Maybe Cain thought that he could kind of control sin. Right? Some of us think that we can control sin. Sin, when it's in its seed stage, when it's in its crouching stage, we often think that we can control it.

Right? I'm just going to be a little bit greedy. I'm just going to have a little bit of prejudice or a little bit of pride or a little bit of sexual sin.

And it's true. In the beginning, we can have some control over those impulses. But you know, as well as I know, that it's just a razor's edge.

[ 12 : 27 ] And it is too easy to fall over. Sin creates a force in your life. It takes a shape and it wants to have you. If you do sin, it will do you and it will consume you.

Do you know what your crouching sins are? It might be a good thing to reflect on this week. Just to think about what are the small things that always just seem to blossom and become bigger things when I don't have control of them, when I'm not inviting the Lord in, when God's not talking to me about these things and I'm not listening.

What are those things that just tend to grow and come up and spring on me? That'd be a good thing to reflect on. Maybe it's, you think, I'm not a workaholic.

I just enjoy my work. Or I'm not greedy. I just really, really enjoy nice things. Or I'm not lazy. It's just a lot easier to not do things. What are the crouching sins in your life that can sneak in and be unnoticed?

Notice also in this passage the gentleness of God's grace. If you put yourself in the mind in the sandals of an ancient Israelite who's just come out of Egypt, your world would have looked very, very different than 2023 Udo.

[ 13 : 45 ] Let's just say that. All right? You would have just come out of a land where they worshipped 1,400 gods. Right? 1,400. I can't even remember 1,400 people's names.

1,400 gods. It's terrifying. If you've ever been to another place in the world where they worship multiple gods, it is tragically scary.

Like, unnervingly scary. I've been to some of those places and it feels otherworldly and disorienting and really, really confusing. But you know, we do this in modern evangelicalism too.

Right? We try to fight against this in grace and peace land, in our church. Right? Sometimes we think that the New Testament God is one of love and mercy and kindness and that the Old Testament God is one of wrath and judgment and hatred.

That God is just like this moral monster who requires complete obedience to merit love. And then, all of a sudden, we get to Matthew and Jesus is a nice guy.

[ 14 : 50 ] He's kind and gentle and he can now be good to people. And that is garbage. That is complete and utter garbage. From the very first page of the Bible to the very last page of the Bible, our God is a God of grace and goodness.

And we see that in Genesis chapter 4. God refuses to be labeled either as a God of judgment or as a God of mercy. He is not a cosmic policeman.

He is a God of grace all the way through. Whether we meet him in Genesis or Exodus or Proverbs or Philippians or Revelation, he is the same God all the way through.

He's unchanging. Notice how God graciously enters into this tragedy. He arrives before the murder.

God doesn't arrive at the scene of the crime. God arrives before Cain does anything. And he looks at him. He says, why has your face fallen? Literally, why are you depressed?

[ 15 : 53 ] Why are you so sad, Cain? God becomes Cain's counselor. God initiates with Cain. God loves Cain first.

You know, when I go to see my counselor, he always asks me questions that I know that he knows the answer to. But he asks them anyway.

It frustrates me. Like, why are you asking me that? You know the answer to that already. But he wants me to say it so that I can own it and live into the actual reality that I really live in.

And that's what God is doing for Cain here. Why is your face fallen? God knows. He's just asking Cain to take ownership of the crouching sins in his life. And Cain refuses.

Do you understand, Cain, where your anger is coming from? Do you understand where the wrath that you feel is coming from? God's grace then begins to uncover and shine light on the truth for Cain.

[ 16 : 54 ] We do not know why or even how God showed favor to Abel, but literally what the Hebrew text says is that Abel was respected by God.

And Cain sensed that he did not have the same level of respect with God. And here's where the story gets really interesting. As if it's not already pretty interesting.

You know, we named our second child Caleb. We thought about some other names. I think, what did we think of it? We thought about Andrew was one name that we threw out there, but we kind of decided that Andy Ammon was not, didn't sound very good.

I think we threw away Zach was out there, but I was like kind of semi-confident that Sarah had a crush on a guy named Zach at some point. So I wasn't like super excited about that one. But we said it on Caleb, and you know why we said it on Caleb?

Because it sounds good. Because Caleb, Ammon goes together. No other reason. No other significance. But, that was not so in the days of Cain and Abel.

[ 17 : 59 ] Every name had significance. And here's what their names meant. Cain's name meant fruitful, productive, and successful. And Abel's name meant worthless and a nobody.

This is no accident. Eve was through the roof excited about Cain. She was not so excited about Abel. Cain was the golden child of the family, and Abel was the failure.

Notice that we even get hints of this in the first two verses of chapter four. It says this, Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, I have gotten a man with the help of the Lord.

And again, she bore his brother Abel. Cain gets 24 words, and Abel gets seven. Abel's like a footnote in the family.

And so, by the point that we get to the murder, these boys are likely around the age of 30, so three decades have passed, and Cain has built his identity on being the golden child of the family, on being the fruitful one, the successful one, on being better than his brother Abel.

[ 19 : 15 ] And that's the problem. That's the problem. Cain's identity was structured in relation to something other than God. And so, when God came in and disrupted that whole paradigm that Cain had in his mind, Cain had a choice.

Like, we all have a choice when our paradigms get disrupted. We can accept it, we can reorient ourselves, or we can destroy something.

And Cain chose to destroy Abel and his relationship with God. The essence of sin is building your identity on anything outside of God.

How would you answer the question? I am who I am because I am beautiful, lonely, funny, successful, smart, worthless, poor, likable.

We can build our identities on positive and negative things. But any of those things are outside of what God says is most true about us that we are his children.

[ 20 : 26 ] And when you have those moments, you've had these moments, I have too, where God graciously comes in and messes with it, starts wrenching it out of you.

Like, when you realize that you're not as beautiful as you once were, your heart can either accept it, you can reorient yourself, or it can destroy you.

If you're in sales or run a business or something and you have a year that wasn't as successful as last year, you can accept it, you can reorient yourself, or you can allow it to destroy you.

The same thing happened to Cain. Hey, fruitful Cain, I'm going to respect your little brother more than I'm going to respect you.

Accept it, reorient it, or sin is crouching at your door, and his desire is to destroy you. You see, the murder is not the problem. The murder is the predictable outcome of a heart turned inward on itself that was challenged by God, would not accept it, would not celebrate another, would not reorient itself, and it came uncrouched, uncoiled, and it destroyed another person.

[ 21 : 46 ] Cain, for all of his destruction though, was not completely lost. Right? He was actually talking to God. Cain knew that God existed.

That's a lot more than we can say about some people in the Bible. He was talking to God. So why did God not accept his offering? For that answer, we need to go forward to Hebrews chapter 11, verse 4.

You don't have to turn there, I'll tell you what it says. It says that Abel offered in faith, and Cain did not. What does that mean? Abel offered in faith, and Cain did not.

We can assume that Cain and Abel knew the story of what happened in the garden, right? Every child gets to the point in their life where they look at their parents and they say, hey, how did y'all do get together?

How did this whole thing get started? Can you imagine the stories that were told? Well, well, son. Let me just tell you what happened. I was dust, and then all of a sudden, no, it would have been a wild story.

[ 22 : 53 ] They would have known the story of the fruit. They would have known the story of the thorns, the story of the serpent, and the story of the one who would come to crush the head of the serpent who was to come.

That was their family history to that point. God, and so what Abel does when he brings his offering to God is he offers it in faith, saying, God, thank you.

Thank you that you did not destroy my family. Praise God. You're going to send somebody to crush the head of the serpent. This is amazing. Now, there's another way to make an offering.

It's not in faith, but it is in expecting something. Right? Y'all have had this experience. You can give a gift in one of two ways. You can give a gift because you simply love the person you're giving a gift to, and it doesn't matter what their reaction is.

You just want to give them a gift because you love them. And there's another way of giving a gift where you give it and you're like, I really hope that they love me for this gift. I really hope that this says something about who I am.

[ 24 : 02 ] And that's how Cain is to earn God's love. Some of us still do this. Let's put it this way.

If we are not living in the constant reality of God's grace, then our coming to church, our offering, our praying, all of that, somewhere at the root, is about getting God to love us.

And refusing to realize that he already does. If that's you, you're not alone. The elder brother in Luke 15 did this, the grumpy Pharisees did this, and Cain did it in Genesis 4.

And before you get defensive, remember what my old boss said to the customs agent, but that is who I am. The remnants of Adam, the remnants of Cain have been passed down to us.

But there's good news. Because after Hebrews 11 comes Hebrews 12. And Hebrews 12 says this, Jesus' blood speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

[ 25 : 18 ] Generations and generations after Abel, another Abel would come. Who is that Abel? It's Jesus. Jesus came. Who killed Jesus? The Cains.

The one who thought that they were super successful and super powerful and super fruitful. Killed the one that they thought was inferior. The one who threatened their identity.

They killed him. Why? Because God favored, respected Jesus more than them. And the Pharisees, the scribes, they either had to accept it, reorient themselves, or destroy something.

And they chose to destroy Jesus. But here's the good news for Cains like us. God did not give Cain what he deserved.

Right? I go over this story in our kids' communicants class every single time I teach it. What did Cain deserve? Death. Right?

[ 26 : 25 ] We would at least expect God to say, hey, here's a prison that I built for you. You need to go live in there so you don't kill anybody else. But that's not what God does to Cain. He comes to him.

He answers Cain in his lying and his pride with mercy and protection and grace. And he can do it because there was a better word coming.

Right? What does it mean that Jesus' blood speaks a better word than the blood of Abel? Here's what it means. When Abel's blood cried out from the ground, what it cried out was a word of judgment, of guilt for Cain.

Jesus' blood, when it cries out, it does not cry out for your judgment. Even though, like Cain, your sin deserves death.

Jesus' blood cries out, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do. It is mercy and grace that God gives you, and that is why God could be merciful to Cain.

[ 27 : 38 ] God put a mark on Cain's body and sent him off so that nobody would destroy him, so that nobody would kill him. Otherwise, vengeance would be taken upon them.

That mark protected one man, Cain. Jesus, the better Abel, had marks put on his body for us, the Cains.

Right? When nails were driven through his hands and feet, when the thorns were pushed down onto his head, when he was whipped across the back, he was marked.

But his marking didn't protect him. The marks on Cain protected him. The marks on Jesus did not protect him. But they protect us, those who would have faith in Jesus.

In the Bible, the Cains always hate the Abels. But the Abels never, ever, ever hate the Cains. They loved them.

[ 28 : 43 ] And that's what Jesus did for us. How do we get there? Let's close with this simple thought. Cain had an opportunity to reflect on his family history every single day.

To know that the reason that he even existed was because of the grace of God. That his family was here. That he could offer something to God because God was merciful.

Yet he chose to pull inward and base his entire identity on the fact that he was better than one other person. And it destroyed him.

Brothers and sisters, we have an opportunity to do that. Or we have an opportunity to do what Abel did. To understand that even though the world might call us worthless, even though the world might say that we are not enough or that we're defunct or defected in some way, that God has given his perfect sacrifice for us to bring us to himself.

And the deeper that that narrative sinks into our hearts and is allowed to have center stage in us, we'll become softer people. We're able to love the people around us who are canes, who want nothing but our destruction.

[ 30 : 08 ] We can love people. We can love our neighbors and love them because Jesus loved us first. Let's pray together. God, we are delighted by your word.

Lord, sometimes it is terrifying to know just how serious our sin is and could be if left unchecked. God, some of us have experienced that in our own lives.

We've done things that are horrible, tragically terrible, that we are ashamed of. And yet, God, we have this story of how you interacted with a man who did something tragic.

And you cared for him instead. And you did that because of what your son would do one day, the better able whose blood would speak a better and more gracious word about who we are.

So God, I pray that you would impress that upon us. That we would know more deeply today how much we are cared for and loved and adored by our Savior.

[ 31 : 13 ] God, it's in your name that we pray. Amen. Amen.