

# Genesis 4:17-26, 5:1-8, 28-32

*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: 15 October 2023

Preacher: Benjie Slaton

- [ 0 : 0 0 ] All right, well, if you're feeling some of the weight of things in the world, you aren't alone, I feel it too. Life is sometimes too difficult to try to figure out, you know.
- The best people get cancer. The worst people get rich. Innocent people get killed by terrorists sometimes. It's maddening to live in this world.
- But I think Genesis 4 reorients our hearts to be able to see that in the midst of these confusing times, we can still discover God's grace.
- So that's what I want to look at from Genesis chapter 4 as we continue in our series. So I'm going to read this section from chapter 4, starting in 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.
- [ 1 : 0 5 ] To Enoch was born Erad, and Erad fathered Mehushael, and Mehushael fathered Methushael, and Methushael fathered Lamech. And yes, I've been practicing.
- And Lamech took two wives. The name of the one was Adah, and the name of the other, Zillah. Adah bore Jabal, and 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 the pipe. Zillah, who bore Tubalcain. He was the forger of all instruments of bronze and iron.
- The sister of Tubalcain was Nemah. Lamech said to his wives, Adah, 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.
- [ 2 : 0 7 ] 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 was born a son, and he called his name Enosh. At that time, people began to call on the name of the Lord. Friends, this is God's word, and he gives it to you because he loves you, and he wants you to know him.
- This is a weird passage. You know, you've got all these weird people, these genealogies. There's a lot of passages like this in Genesis, and most of the time we just skip over them.
- But it's not good to skip over them because genealogies and passages like this in the Hebrew mindset are like little treasure maps. They have things to, little gifts to give you if you have the patience to deal with it and look into it.
- But they're oftentimes a little bit, you know, they're easy to pass over. So we want to be looking for clues for the authors, for Moses' central message in all of what he had for the people of Israel.
- [ 3 : 2 2 ] Here's what I want you to hear this morning is just three things. That we live in this world that is a mixture of good and evil. That's the first thing. There's a mixture of good and evil. I want to talk a little bit about why it's so hard to live in a world that is mixed with good and evil and where we can find hope again.

Okay? So life is a mixture of good and evil. Let me give you a little context for where we are. You remember Adam and Eve? They sinned back in chapter 3 and God made a promise. Yes, in this world there was going to be difficulty.

Sin now was going to afflict their lives and yet there was hope. The hope was the promise. The promise that God would return one day. There would be a descendant of Eve who would crush the head of the serpent.

There would be a hero that would be raised up. But here's the weird thing from that passage, Genesis chapter 3, is that the hero from God would be raised up alongside the descendants of the serpent.

There would be two side-by-side lineages. Two side-by-side kingdoms going through history. Not political kingdoms, but spiritual, invisible kingdoms made up of people who reflect and serve different masters.

[ 4 : 43 ] On the one hand, you've got those of the serpent who serve the serpent. Satan who serve themselves. And then those who serve God. Two kingdoms. The kingdom of man.

The kingdom of the serpent. And the kingdom of Jesus. The kingdom of God. Two side-by-side kingdoms. And Genesis 4, right here, shows how that begins to get worked out in the lives of two people.

Cain and Seth. And what you see is, at least in Cain, you get more detail about Cain. What you see is that in Cain's life, it's mixed with good and evil.

It's really interesting. So let's look at the evil first. The bad. With Cain. So Cain. Cain, he gets sent out of the garden. He gets judged by God. Well, not Cain sent out of the garden.

Adam and Eve sent out of the garden. And Cain kills his brother Abel. He gets judged by God. But it tells us that he still went out and he married. He had children. His first child was Enoch. And so how did Cain celebrate the birth of Enoch?

[ 5 : 45 ] He built a city. Because, you know, that's what you do. And he built a city and he called it by the name of his son Enoch. And isn't that fascinating? You remember what Cain's curse was.

Back in verse 14 or verse 12, it says, you're going to be a fugitive, a wanderer on the earth. Cain's life was going to be a life of alienation. He was going to be a fugitive.

He was going to be a wanderer. But instead, he built a city. Now, I want to come back to this whole city making thing because there's some interesting stuff there later on. But at the very basic level, Cain was trying to push back on the effects of the curse of sin.

The curse of sin had on him. Instead of wandering, he wanted to gather in. He wanted to be safe. He wanted to build himself a home. In some ways, he names it after his son. In some ways, this city that Cain builds is kind of like a monument.

It's like a tombstone. You know, a monument to what he values in life for him and his family. This city. After Enoch, though, there's a few more descendants.

[ 6 : 53 ] And then we come to this guy named Lamech. Now, Lamech, the first thing we find out is he takes two wives. You know, we know that in the ancient Near East and even in Israel, polygamy was practiced.

And it shows up right here. But polygamy was never meant to be God's way for people. In fact, the fact that Moses mentions that Lamech has two wives here is not a way of Moses saying that this was normal and okay.

This was a signal to the people of Israel that things had gone off the rails. Already, by Lamech's time, there was a degradation of even the most fundamental thing about humanity being marriage.

Humans were taking advantage of one another already. And you see it. It gets worse. Do you see verse 23 and 24? It's really amazing. Like Adam, Lamech writes a poem.

But instead of Adam's poem for Eve being a love poem, this is like a vengeance poem. Adah and Zillah, hear my voice, you wives of Lamech. Listen to what I say.

[ 8 : 03 ] I've killed a man for wounding me, a young man for striking me. If Cain's revenge is sevenfold, Lamech's is 77-fold. It's so juvenile. You know? It's like he made up this taunt just to brag to his lady friends about how strong he is.

You know, you kind of imagine him singing this to himself in the mirror or on a TikTok video or something while he's flexing. I mean, it's really juvenile. Lamech is put right here to show the degradation, the effect, the degrading effect that sin has had on all the people.

It takes just a couple of generations to go from Adam and Eve to Lamech. Lamech, you know, what it says, what God's curse for Cain was, that if someone kills Cain, he's going to be revenged sevenfold.

And Lamech picks that up and he says not only is it seven, but it's 77-fold. It's a way of him saying, look, I'm an even bigger deal than Cain. I'm worse than Cain.

You thought Cain was bad? Look at Lamech. Already things have just degraded. But it isn't only evil. That's what's so interesting about this passage.

[ 9 : 18 ] There's surprising good here. Did you notice verses 20 to 22, they talk about Lamech's sons and their contribution to the world. You've got Jabal.

He was a rancher. That's interesting. You remember what Abel's profession was? He was a rancher. He grew animals. And so now Jabal is taking up Abel's profession.

You've got Jabal and you've got Jubal. He was a musician. He made instruments. He played music. He was an artist.

Then you've got their brother, Tubal Cain. That's what we thought about naming Andrew, but we decided not to. Tubal Cain. He was a craftsman. He made tools. He made weapons. Here's what's interesting.

They're talented people who are contributing to the development of culture and society. But why is it here? Why in the world does Moses think that the people of Israel need to see this?

[ 10 : 20 ] Well, I think because there's a doctrine that we have behind this. It's called the doctrine of common grace. Common grace is different from saving grace.

The way that God saves us. Common grace is God's good gifts for all people. Even Jesus says that the rain falls on the just and the unjust alike.

What he means is that even those who reject God, even those who rebel against God, even those who fight against God's people are still treated better in this life than they deserve.

They're still treated better. See, it's Cain's descendants that are developing the culture of the world. I mean, think about it. Technology, in art, in science, in business, in urban development, all kinds of things that we take for granted in our world are getting started right here, not by the people of God, but by the people of Cain.

That's a fascinating thing to realize. It's Lamech's sons. Common grace is how we can understand how the world works.

[ 11 : 35 ] That we can see people who have evil intent, and yet there are still things about them that represent human dignity, things we can affirm. We can see people who have the best of intentions who still do evil and wicked things.

And it makes us, as Christians, be able to stand back and look at even complicated scenarios, like what's happening in Israel, and be able to affirm where we can affirm and deny where we need to deny because of God's common grace.

See, common grace is what makes a sinful world bearable to live in. But it is God's saving grace that makes this world right again.

Common grace can never make this world right. It's only God's saving grace. Okay, so that's this mixture of good and evil in the world that the text is bringing out.

But why does that feel so hard for us to live in? Well, I think there are two reasons. The first reason is this. The first reason it's so hard to live in a world with good and bad mixed in is because evil really does sometimes win.

[ 12 : 45 ] And we envy it. Evil wins sometimes. Look at verses 25 and 26. Adam and Eve had another son to replace Abel.

They named him Seth. And Seth is Seth in contrast. You've got Cain's line over here, and you've got a lot of detail about it. But then Seth just gets, you know, just a little bit.

Now, chapter 5 talks more about Seth's line. In fact, you can read on in the bottom. It's going to ultimately get to Noah, where we're going next week. But Seth's line here doesn't get a lot of attention.

You know, what in the world did Seth contribute to culture? We're talking about culture and the contributions and art and technology and science and music and all this stuff. What did Seth contribute to it? Not very much, it appears.

All we're told is that in those times, people called on the name of the Lord. Seth was from the line of Eve, the line of promise. But Cain, from the line of the serpent, they were different kingdoms, different masters.

[ 13 : 52 ] And yet, because of common grace, Cain's line looked pretty darn good. I think I might have liked to live in Cain's city, rather than out in a bunch of tents with Seth.

They were making progress. They were building culture. They were advancing technology. And yet, Seth, by contrast, looks so unimpressive, doesn't he? I think Psalm 73 that Rob read for us earlier really articulates this well.

Look back at Psalm 73. The psalmist says this, verse 3. I was envious of the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

They don't have pangs till death. Their bodies are fat and sleek. Which, by the way, just so you know, whenever it talks about people being fat in the Old Testament, it's a sign of blessing.

In a world where people died of starvation, to have a little extra on you means that you were prosperous. God had blessed you.

[ 14 : 56 ] I would be very blessed in the Bible. It's a little bit that I got going on me. They are not in trouble as others are. They are not stricken like the rest of mankind.

Their pride is their necklace. Violence covers them. Their eyes swell out through their fatness. Their hearts overflow with folly. They're laughing. They're having fun.

They scoff and speak with malice. Loftily they threaten oppressions. They set their mouth against the heavens and tongue struts through the earth. Therefore, they say, how can God know?

Is there no knowledge in the Most High? Behold, these are the wicked, always at ease. They increase in riches. And look at me, all in vain. I've kept my heart clean.

I've washed my hands in innocence. And all the day long, I've been stricken and rebuked every morning. You see, we live in a world where it is not so simple as something we often say.

[ 15 : 54 ] Things like, well, you know what? Be a good Christian and life is going to work out for you. You know, be a good Christian. Be a good Christian and you won't face tragedy.

Be a good Christian and you won't lose your job. You won't lose your wife. You won't lose your life.

You see, this mixture of evil and good in the world means that things get really complicated because the evil guys sometimes win.

The worst people get rich. The best people don't sometimes. And so think about the Israelites who were receiving this word from Moses.

Where are they? They're sitting in the desert. Yeah, they've gotten freed from Egypt and then they like just eat manna every day. They're not super happy about it.

[ 17 : 02 ] They're kind of salty, you know, as you might be living in the desert. Because what they were told was, what they were told was, God is good enough for you. God's going to give you everything that you need.

And yet for 40 years, they're walking around the desert wondering if that's really true. They're looking around at other cultures, other societies. They're building cities. They've got, you know, they've got money.

They've got power. They're doing everything right. But you know what? Look at us. It's not working out very well for us. The bad folks seem to be doing okay. And that's where we live.

You see, if our message to the culture, if our message to our young people is, be a good Christian and life is just going to work out for you, which is not a bad thing to say.

Life does work out better. But if that's our only message, that doesn't last long before you realize that your friends and your neighbors and people have pretty doggone good lives.

[ 17 : 59 ] You see, we are Christians not because it's going to make things better for us now. We are Christians because this is true. Because the story of the world through the eyes of the scriptures culminating in Jesus is the most true story.

Because we believe that there is no other satisfying answer to this world of trouble. We are Christians because the scriptures answer more of the complexities of our life than anything else does.

But boy, it can be hard to believe that. And so we get envious. And we begin to realize that you can't just split the world up into the good people and the bad people, the people we're for and the people we're against.

It's more complicated than that. We begin to realize, as Alexander Solzhenitsyn said, that the line separating good and evil passes not through states or through classes or between political parties, but right through every human heart.

You know, this helps us explain why even good churches can go through bad times. Even people who are faithful to God fail.

[ 19 : 12 ] Even people who have the best intentions fail. So that's the first reason, is that evil often wins and we envy it.

The second reason is that this mixture is hard because we grasp at good things and try to make them into ultimate things. We grasp at good things and we want to make them ultimate. C.S. Lewis, he uses in Screwtape Letters, he puts this in the mouth of wormwood as a way to deceive us.

Listen to this. This is fascinating. See, prosperity knits a man to the world. He feels that he is finding his place in the world, while really the world is finding its place in him.

His increasing reputation, his widening circle of acquaintances, his sense of importance, the growing pressure of absorbing and agreeable work, build up in him a sense of really being at home on earth.

See, the disequilibrium of living in the world as it is, with all of its complexity, with all of the things we don't understand, with all the things that make us afraid, the way that we deal with that is by grasping on to things that give us some sense of solidity.

[ 20 : 31 ]    Something that will make us feel safe. Something that makes us feel like we're home. We grab on to success at work. We grab on to money that we can spend on our homes to make us comfortable, or on travel to excite us, or entertainment to numb us.

We grasp on to our kids achieving, or to our kids just being well behaved, better than other kids. We grasp on to things that make us feel okay in a hard world.

You know, I wonder if you ever have the self-awareness when you're sitting on your couch at night, like the day is done, and you're just scrolling through your social media.

Do you ever have the awareness to say to yourself, that maybe what I'm doing is grasping for something here? As I scroll, as I listen to my podcasts, as I eat food that I don't need, as I Netflix, as I get consumed by a new relationship, or have anxiety over my kids' choices, that they're all desperate attempts to make myself feel okay because of the things that I cannot control that are outside of me, and feel overwhelming.

When I was a kid, one summer we had this pass at one of these big water parks, and I loved going. I went all the time. And they had a lazy river.

[ 21 : 59 ]    You've been to water parks like this with the lazy river, and I would just float in the lazy river for, you know, hours. But one of the things that was always annoying about the lazy river, and you might remember this is, when you want to get off.

You know, you're floating, you're cruising along, and you want to get off, and you see, right on the left over there, you see the stairs coming, you see the rails, and you're coming towards them, and you're angling towards it, and you're going, but then you go too fast.

There's other people there you're having to navigate. There's all the inner tubes, and you grab a hold for the railing, but you can't hold on to it because you're moving too fast. You're grasping for it, and then as you pass it, maybe you try to swim back upstream, but it doesn't work because it's just pulling you further and further downstream.

That's what it feels like as we grasp a hold of things that are never going to quite be able to give us a solid sense of footing.

We're grasping for things that won't work. It just doesn't work. Alan Noble, the book that I've been trying to get people to read in his book, *You Are Not Your Own*, he reflects just on this, and he talks about Cain building a city.

[ 23 : 12 ]    Listen to what he says about Cain. He says, It seems that Cain did not trust God to keep his word, that God would protect him, that he chose to rely on the power of walls to keep him safe.

Instead of God's promise. At its core, the impulse to build cities is the impulse to protect oneself, to be self-sufficient, to provide all that we need to flourish as humans.

The city for Cain is, first of all, the place where he can be himself, his own homeland, that one settled spot in all his wandering.

The second thing it is, it's a material sign of his security. He is responsible for himself and his life. Cain's city is a claim that he is his own and he belongs to himself.

Boy, that resonates for me. Where do we find hope for God's grace? Where do we find hope? Well, we are not our own. That's where it starts.

[ 24 : 28 ]    The belief that you are your own and you are the master of your own destiny is the first place to start. We have to reorient our hearts to believe that we are not our own.

That's the entire point of the book of Genesis, is that you do not belong to yourself. You belong to God. God has determined all of your days, all of your actions, all of the things that he has for you.

He has determined for you. We are not fully self-determinant like we want to think. See, I've said it before that the reason that God had Moses write Genesis over these 40 years while they're in the desert, it was not only so that God could get Israel out of Egypt, but so that God could get Egypt out of Israel.

God wanted to take Egypt out of the souls of his people. Go back to verse 26. You saw that what Seth's family began to call on the name of the Lord.

You remember, that's a key thing for Moses. You remember Moses, before he went to Egypt to rescue his people, he met God at the burning bush, and God said, I want you to go tell Pharaoh.

[ 25 : 41 ] And he says, well, you know, that's a great plan, God, but, you know, here's what I'm worried about. I'm worried about, they're going to ask, wait a minute, who are you? Who sent you? How do we know this is real?

And God said, here's how they're going to know. You tell them my name. Tell them my name. I am Yahweh. I am the covenant God. I am the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob.

I am the God of your fathers. I am the God who was, who is, who is to come. You tell them my name. That's how they'll know that I've sent you. You see, Moses wanted the people of Israel to know that long before they were slaves in Egypt, long before they were wandering in the desert, long before things had turned bad, the people of Israel called on the name of the Lord.

They were fundamentally people of hope. They were hoping to see God's promise of grace come to them. And that's why when Jesus shows up, the first thing that we recorded Jesus says in the book of Mark is, the kingdom of God has come.

That's what Jesus' message was. Everything that you had hoped for, it's come now. Everything that you've been longing for, you've built cities to make yourself safe, but Jesus has come to give us an eternal city.

[ 27 : 04 ] Jesus has come to redeem these things, these good things that we've made into ultimate things. He's come to make them right, to bring his kingdom to bear, and he wants us to trust him in the midst of it because there is hope.

See, that's what hope looks like. Looking, this is the fundamental thing about grace. Grace is fundamentally looking outside of yourself for someone else to save you.

See, grace is not figure out how to make your life better, figure out how to make your kids okay, figure out how to win in life, figure out how to be powerful.

Grace is looking around at the wreckage of our world and throwing ourselves to the only one who can bring life out of it because he's the one who has endured death and resurrection for us.

And he's promised that the power of resurrection lives in us. See, that's what the psalmist, you remember the psalmist in Psalm 73?

[ 28 : 17 ] Look at this. I want you to see this. Look at verse 16. But you remember he's dealing with the mixture of good and evil in the world, and he says, but when I thought about how to understand this, it seemed to me a wearisome task.

Yeah, you bet. Until I went into the sanctuary of God, and then I discerned their end. Truly, you set them in slippery places.

You make them fall into ruin. How they are destroyed in a moment, swept away utterly by terrors, like a dream when one awakes. O Lord, you rouse yourself. You despise them as phantoms.

When my soul was embittered and I was pricked in heart, I was brutish and ignorant, like a beast towards you. You see what he's saying is, when I entered the sanctuary, my heart was reoriented, and I began to see with clarity.

I began to have hope. They may seem strong and successful now. They may seem like they're winning, and yet the rebellion against God will always meet with death and ruin.

[ 29 : 36 ] See, for the psalmist, for Seth, for his descendants, for Moses, for Israel, for us, each of us is invited into the sanctuary to view again the glory of God that has come into the world.

That is the nature of grace, is that God has not left us alone in a world that we cannot wrap our head around. God has not left us alone to just be subject to the powers that are around us.

God has not left us alone, but he has come in in the person of Jesus to make things right again. And that's our hope, and we can discover that hope in Jesus.

I think there's, I'll end with this. There's one question I want you to think about if you want to take stock of your own soul and the things you grasp for.

Think about like Cain. Cain built a city as a monument to himself. You know, have you thought in a while, most people have done this, you know, every so often for themselves.

[ 30 : 42 ] Have you thought about what you want to put on your tombstone? What do you want it to read? You know, Elias Benji Slayton, husband to the lovely Natalie, you know, that would be good.

Parent to respectful, well-adjusted, successful children, we hope. One day, maybe. Starter of super awesome grace and peace church.

You know, what are we going to put on it? Are you satisfied that all of your life could be boiled down to one sentence? That Benji Slayton called on the name of the Lord?

Are you satisfied with that? Because if you're not, you might need to look at the grip that you have on those other things of your life.

Because I don't think your grip on them will be enough for you. Let's leave it there. Let me pray.

[ 31 : 48 ] Lord, our hearts grip upon anything we can grasp to make ourselves feel better. This is such a difficult world to live in.

We pray, Lord, that you might make us people who willingly give ourselves over to you in faith. That we might have hope in the grace of Jesus that has come to us.

In fact, we might be able to say, would it be true of us that we not own, it was not so much us that grabbed a hold of you, but that you grabbed a hold of us by your grace.

Would you do that in Christ's name? Amen. Amen.