

The Way of Cain

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

Date: 21 May 2017

Preacher: Andrew Price

[0 : 00] I'm guessing most of you have at least heard of, if not watched, the children's show Sesame Street. Has everyone watched? Yeah, if you've watched, yep.

I don't know who your favourite character is. Mine was always Staphylococcus, you know, the big elephant. I kind of, you know, he always had sinus issues, I could relate to him. But the mastermind behind Sesame Street and indeed the Muppets was a man called Jim Henson.

Yeah, that's right. Now, Jim Henson, when asked about the show, said this on the next slide. He said, if our message is anything, it's a positive approach to life, that life is basically good and people are basically good.

Now, I wonder, would you agree with Jim at this point? Are people basically good? That was rhetorical, but thank you.

Or would you agree, perhaps, with the former president of America, who said wars will remain while human nature remains? Or Chinese philosopher, on the next slide, who says it very starkly, human nature is evil and goodness is caused by intentional activity.

[1 : 15] In other words, we are naturally evil and have to work at doing good. Again, I wonder which you agree with, although I suspect I know now. Of course, if kids are anything to go by, then human nature is probably more bad than good.

I mean, do you have to ever teach your children or grandchildren to do naughty things? Or does it come rather naturally? Two of our children were fighting yesterday. I won't say which ones.

But I said to them, do you ever stop fighting? To which one replied, yes, when we're watching TV. That's not quite the answer I was hoping for. But what is humanity like?

Is it basically good or bad? Well, today we come to Genesis chapter 4 and the way of Cain. Cain is the focus of the chapter. He is the main character of the chapter. And for the writer, the way of Cain seems to represent the way of humanity.

You see, chapter 4 is part of the first section in Genesis where the writer is talking about the first generations of the earth. But these chapters also represent humanity.

[2 : 22] They are foundational chapters. And that includes chapter 4. So let me quickly show you the structure of Genesis. Just turn back in your Bible's one page to chapter 2, verse 4. And here the writer uses a phrase that he will repeat 10 times throughout his book to structure his material.

He says in chapter 2, verse 4, For this is the account of the heavens and the earth. And dot, dot, dot. Now the phrase, this is the account of, is literally, these are the generations of the heavens and the earth.

And the writer will use this phrase, these are the generations of, as I said, 10 times, to group certain chapters together in his book. And so if you come back over the page from which you turned, chapter 5, verse 1, down the bottom of the right-hand side there, we get the next occurrence, which says this is the written account, or literally this is the book, of the generations of Adam.

And then it lists generations of Adam and so on. You see, by using this phrase, he groups chapters together. And in particular, he groups chapters 2, 3, and 4 together.

These chapters are not just about the first generations of the heaven and earth, Adam, Eve, Cain, and Abel, but they're also foundational for all humanity. So for example, chapter 2, a couple of weeks ago, we saw how humanity was made male and female, and created in right relationship with creation, with each other, and with God.

[3 : 53] And then last week in chapter 3, we saw how sin entered the world, and broke all those relationships. Broken relationships with creation, each other, and God.

In other words, chapters 2 and 3 are about real people, yes, but they represent what's happened to all humanity. And because the writer includes our chapter today in this first section, it seems he

again uses the real person of Cain, who's the focus of the chapter, to represent all of humanity. In other words, the way of Cain is the way of humanity, outside the garden, under sin. And it begins with Cain and a repetition of sin.

Point 1, verse 1. Adam made love to his wife Eve, and she became pregnant, and gave birth to Cain. She said, With the help of the Lord, I have brought forth a man.

Later, she gave birth to his brother Abel. Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil. And notice here how the boys are spoken of. First Eve seems to celebrate Cain's birth, but says nothing about Abel.

[5 : 03] Do you notice that? The writer actually just mentions Abel in passing. What's more, the name Abel actually means nothing, meaningless, empty.

Can you imagine naming your son that? Can you imagine Cain, how much fun Cain could have with his brother Abel? He says to Abel, How's your life going? Meaningless. How's your sheep pen? Empty. Eve's celebration of Cain, and Abel's rather unflattering name, seems to suggest that Eve's focus and hope is on her firstborn, Cain.

Could Cain be the offspring of Eve that God promised last week, in chapter 3, verse 15? The offspring who would crush the serpent's head, do you remember? And free us from sin.

Can Cain do better than his parents did? Well, before we find out, notice, secondly, the meaning of Cain. The footnote in your Bible, next to Cain's name, tells us that his name sounds like the Hebrew word for acquired.

[6 : 11] And that's because in verse 1, Eve literally says, on the next slide, I have acquired a man with the Lord. And so she names him Cain, which means I have acquired.

But Eve's comment is a strange way to speak about the birth of a child, isn't it? When our son Timothy was born, Michelle did not say, I have acquired a man.

Actually, she didn't say much at all. She was too exhausted. So, but why does Eve say, I have acquired a man? What's more, notice Eve's statement actually begins with herself.

In the original Hebrew, I have acquired a man. And the words, the help of, are actually not part of the original Hebrew. We've had to guess to kind of work out her meaning here.

And so it could be, she's saying, I have acquired a man with the help of the Lord, which is a good thing. Or it could be, I have acquired a man just as with the Lord.

[7 : 08] In other words, Eve's statement here could be her claiming to have made a man just like God has made a man in chapter 2. In other words, she's claiming to be equal with God again, just like last week in chapter 3, where she played God and took the fruit to determine what's good and evil like God does.

And so while Eve celebrates and puts her hope in Cain, the way this is written has already cast doubt over whether Cain is able, pun intended, whether Cain is able to crush the serpent's head and rule over sin or whether Cain will turn out to be just like his mum and dad.

Well, let's find out. Verse 3. In the course of time, Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the Lord. And Abel also brought an offering, fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock.

The Lord looked with favour on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering, he did not look with favour. So Cain was very angry and his face was downcast. And then the Lord God said to Cain, why are you angry?

Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door. It desires to have you, but you must rule over it.

[8 : 29] And notice here that although God has had to banish Adam and Eve from the garden and from his presence, he still wants relationship with people, doesn't he? And so he's very happy to accept offerings from Cain and Abel.

But there's a problem. God does not look on favour at Cain's offering. Why? Well, verse 7 says, because Cain had not done what is right. And so naturally the question is, well, what is wrong then? Some people say it's because he offered fruit or vegetables instead of meat. I saw a slightly amusing cartoon, not as good as last week's cartoon on the next slide.

And here is Cain saying, is this better, God? Cain tries with animal-shaped vegetables instead. But in the Old... Slow release joke. But in the Old Testament, God accepts both types of offerings, you know, vegetables and meat.

So it's not about the type of offering. Rather, it seems to be more about the quality of the offering. So again, in your Bibles, in verse 3 and 4, we're told that Abel offered God some of the firstborn, the best of his flock, the first of his flock, while Cain offered just some of his crop.

[9 : 43] In other words, Abel offered the best of what he had, while Cain just offered some of what he had. And that means by implication, who do you think kept the first fruits of his crop?

The best. Cain. Himself. And in so doing, he kind of treats himself as God, giving himself the best, rather than treating God as God, and giving him the best as God deserves.

And in the end, this is again a picture of sin. Do you remember on the next slide from last week, where I wrote the word sin with a capital I, because sin is about doing what I want, as though I am God?

This is what Cain seems to be doing here. Ah, look, I'm not going to give God the best. I'll do what I want. I'll, I'll just keep the first fruits for myself, and I'll just give him whatever's left. In fact, this is why the New Testament says, Cain's actions were evil.

So on the next slide, in 1 John 3, we read, You see, Cain did not treat God as God, and Abel did.

[10 : 55] And is this not true of people today? Is this not the way of Cain, not the way of humanity today? Our natural tendency is not to treat God as God, not to give God what is right and what he deserves.

Rather, our natural tendency is to make ourselves as God, give the best to ourselves, and do what we want. Even people who might believe God exists, as Cain did, don't have faith or trust in God as their personal God, as Abel did, such that they obey him and give him what he deserves.

In fact, I remember being on a beach mission in the coast of New South Wales one Christmas. We would run activities in a caravan park for the campers, and we'd have lots of people coming to these activities.

But when it came time for a short Bible talk about Jesus, people would leave in droves. There was no natural tendency for them to want to listen to God, and no natural tendency to treat God as God. And one elderly couple we visited during our visitation hour, they actually lived in the caravan park in a unit. And when we visited them, they welcomed us in, they were very nice, and they said rather excitedly, oh look, we have a Bible, and they pulled the Bible off the shelf.

[12 : 14] And I asked them, how do you go out reading it? Because it's not always easy, is it? Oh, we don't read it. We just like having it. You see, even people who like the idea of God, don't naturally treat God as God.

And so the way of Cain here is the way of humanity. And yet God still wants relationship with us, amazingly. And so he shows grace. Notice verse 7 again, God gives Cain both another chance and a warning.

He says, look, if you do right, will you not be accepted? Here's another chance. Do right, and you'll be accepted. But there's also a warning. He says, sin is crouched at your door.

It desires to have you, to control you, but you must rule over it. And so the question becomes, will he? Will he be the one to crush the serpent's head and rule over sin?

Or will he be like his parents and be ruled by sin? Well, point to verse 8. Now Cain said to his brother Abel, let's go out to the field.

[13 : 20] While they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him. Then the Lord said to Cain, where's your brother Abel? I don't know, he replied, and my brother's keeper, Cain said.

It's quite obvious. Instead of ruling over sin, Cain is ruled by sin. The sin that was crouching at his door grabs him and controls him.

And this rule of sin leads to the first murder of man. What's more, this rule of sin has grown worse. So remember last week, Adam ignored God and ate from the forbidden tree.

But this week, Cain ignores God and commits cold-blooded murder. Premeditated. His own brother, indeed. And while last week, Adam blamed Eve and God, he kind of said, yeah, look, I've been caught, but it's not my fault, it's someone else's fault.

Here, Cain just flat out lies to God. I don't know where he is. And then actually, has a go at God. Look, am I my brother's keeper? Come on, there you go. Again, this way of Cain is the way of humanity, where humanity is ruled by sin.

[14 : 30] It's such that people may want to do good, but they inevitably also do bad. And in fact, humanity as a whole has a tendency to do bad. On the next slide is a man called Gary Holmes.

Sorry, we'll skip that one. Keep going. It's the next one. He's 33 years old and he's a loving father, his father himself, and yet, on the 23rd of December last year, so not that long ago, he was arrested for road rage in the US.

Apparently, a lady was driving too close to him, behind, and so he pulled over, let her pass, then deliberately followed her until she stopped at a stop sign.

He got out of his car and then opened fire with his gun on the car. She was not shot, but her three-year-old infant in the back was and killed.

Now, don't get me wrong, that's an extreme case, and of course, people are capable of doing good. The point is, it's just not our natural tendency.

[15 : 33] Even our natural tendency as Christians, if someone cuts us off on the road, we don't say, oh, I forgive you, bless you, have a glorious day.

Is that how you respond? No, our natural tendency is something else. You see, the way of Cain is the way of humanity.

Of course, as Christians, Christ has set us free from sin, the rule of sin, which means we have his spirit and we should and ought to resist sin. But the point here is the way of Cain is the way of humanity where people have rejected God as God and now are ruled by sin.

And that leads to all sorts of pain and violence, and violence in relationships within families and couples and even on a grander scale between countries and races. And it also leads to judgment. See verse 10? The Lord said, what have you done? Listen, your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground. Now you are under a curse and driven from the ground which opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand.

[16 : 39] When you work the ground, it will no longer yield its crops for you. And so you will be a restless wanderer on the earth. Last week, we saw how the ground was cursed because of Adam.

Now Cain himself is cursed. Last week, we saw that the ground would be hard work. Adam would eat the crops of the ground by the sweat of his brow, we're told in chapter 3.

But now this week, the ground is not going to produce any crops for Cain. It's worsening, you see. And so, he once was a farmer, but now no longer.

It's going to be impossible. And that means he'll end up wandering the earth instead of settling down. And yet, instead of taking the punishment he must know he deserves, he complains about it. See verse 13? Cain said to the Lord, my punishment is more than I can bear. Today you are driving me from the land and I will be hidden from your presence. I will be a restless wanderer on the earth and whoever finds me will kill me.

[17 : 43] Now, I don't know about you, maybe I'm just being a bit harsh here, but when I read that, I just thought, come on Cain, you've killed your brother. You deserve death yourself. You're lucky to be still alive.

How dare you complain? It's incredible. Of course, Cain's real concern is being killed himself. He's not so much worried about being away from God's presence as he is about being away from God's protection.

See, if he's driven from the land away from the garden where God's presence was, then he would have no more protection. And so his real fear is that someone might kill him. And yet again, God shows great grace.

And gives him a mark of protection. Do you see verse 15? But the Lord said to him, not so. Anyone who kills Cain will suffer vengeance seven times over. Then the Lord put a mark on Cain so that no one who found him would kill him.

So Cain went out from the Lord's presence and lived in the land of Nod, east of Eden. Now, no one knows what this mark was. Presumably, it was something that other people would see and cause them to think twice about picking a fight with Cain unless they get it back seven times worse.

[18 : 56] Perhaps it was a scary tattoo or something. We just don't know. But the point is the mark is really a mark of grace that Cain did not deserve. And so Cain wanders from what must have been a number of years before the population grew and he met a wife and then he had his family and humanity from Cain seems to advance in civilization.

And yet at the same time it actually declines in sin. Have a look at verses 17 and 18. Cain made love to his wife and she became pregnant and gave birth to Enoch.

There's two Enochs different to the good Enoch in chapter 5. Cain was then building a city and he named it after his son Enoch. So Enoch was born Erad and Erad was the father of Mahujael and

Mahujael was the father of Methusheel and Methusheel was the father of Lamech.

Here Cain builds a city although the word city can mean a small village as well as a great it's probably a small village here but what was he supposed to be?

What was his punishment? Wasn't it to be a restless wanderer? And so here is Cain again in defiance of God settling down building a city to settle in and he names it after his son Enoch whose name means dedicated and so Cain is again playing God being independent from God I'm going to settle down I'm going to ignore your punishment and I'm going to dedicate my city not to you God but to another person another human my son Enoch.

[20 : 29] What's more Cain's stubborn sinfulness spreads and worsens as his family grows and advances. So in verse 19 At Lamech married two women one named Adar the other Zillah Adar gave birth to Jabal and he was the father of those who lived in tents and raised livestock his brother's name was Jubal and he was the father of all who played string instruments and pipes Jubal invented music Zillah also had a son Tubal Cain who forged all kinds of tools out of bronze and iron this first picture of technological growth in the Bible and Tubal Cain's sister was Neymar and yet Lamech said to his wives Adar and Zillah listen to me wives of Lamech hear my words I have killed a man for wounding me a young man for injuring me if Cain is avenged seven times then Lamech 77 times here Cain's family grows and progresses in civilization they not only start building settlements like a small city but verse 20 there's advancement in raising livestock verse 21 there's advancement in music and the arts verse 22 there's advancement in technology and industry and yet as humanity advances in culture it declines in sin as it progresses in civilization it regresses in relationship to God so verse 19

Lamech goes against the created order and marries two women when it was supposed to be one woman one man and then in verse 23 and 24 he boasts to his wives about how he has committed murder he's boasting about murder about a young man he's murdered or literally the young man word for young man can mean child so perhaps a teenager and killing this young man or this child for wounding him it's gross overreaction isn't it it's over the top revenge and like Gary Holmes who committed that road rage before over the top revenge but Lamech basically calls it the new normal he says well look if anyone killed Cain they would get seven times revenge but now for me it's 77 times he set a new norm and so this young man he wounded me well I gave him 77 times back I killed him it's over the top revenge but it's now the new norm of course Jesus would have something to say to us as Christians about our norm not 77 times revenge but you remember 77 times forgiveness but here the way of Cain and humanity well it's it's an advancement in culture yes but at the same time it's a decline in sin as they progress culturally they regress spiritually and again this is like our world today is it not on the next slide

I saw an article online where it says humanity keeps discovering brilliant new ways to kill itself and it goes on to say of humanity's many notable achievements since the end of World War II perhaps the greatest is simply that we haven't yet destroyed ourselves you see our progress is also regress and not just in terms of killing ourselves but also when it comes to God and so we here in Victoria we're moving forward says the state government and yet we're getting rid of CRE and introducing safe schools program which is not about bullying really but setting a different agenda as we progress we seem to regress you see we invent the internet and with it comes scams and pornography we advance in civilization and yet still have over the top revenge in fact in the 1900s last century we had more violence and was responsible for more unnatural deaths than all the other centuries combined since Christ so in humanity's most advanced century so far we're still in the year 2000s we haven't finished this century so in the most advanced century so far the 1900s was our most violent so far you see the way of Cain in this chapter is sadly the way of humanity in this world outside the garden and under sin so much for Cain being the one who would crush the serpent's head and rule over sin and yet again because God wants a relationship with his people he again shows grace and look at how the chapter ends verse 25

Adam made love to his wife again and she gave birth to a son and named him Seth saying God has granted me another child in place of Abel since Cain killed him Seth also had a son and he named him Enosh and at that time people began to call on the name of the Lord now notice how Eve speaks of this child it's not I have acquired it's God has granted and she names this child Seth which means granted in other words God gave that's what grace is undeserved generosity God gave another child generously by his grace and the word for child here she doesn't call him a man she calls him a child and the word for child here's the same word for offspring back in chapter 3

verse 15 do you remember the offspring of Eve who would crush the serpent's head there is hope again you see that God's grace in Seth this new offspring of Eve might crush the serpent's head and free us from the rule of sin free us to call upon the name of the Lord in worship and that's the picture the chapter ends with in verse 26 for who comes through

God's grace in Seth Enosh whose name is another Hebrew word for man and man what do they do well they begin to call on the name of the Lord in worship you see while the writer is recording for us what happened in history he's also subtly showing us that the way of Cain is the way of humanity and yet he's also showing us that God still wants relationship with his people and he will bring it about by his grace God's grace is seen throughout this chapter and indeed the whole Bible and here through a child of Eve and by God's grace through the line of Seth God will send another one through the line of Seth comes the Lord Jesus so on the next slide Luke actually traces Jesus' ancestry back through Seth to Adam and to God and as we heard in our second reading the blood of Jesus speaks a better word than the blood of Abel

[27 : 21] Abel's blood here in Genesis demanded justice and judgment for sin yet Jesus' blood speaks of grace and forgiveness for our sin and it's by Jesus that we are freed from the rule of sin and judgment free to worship God so Paul says on the next slide in Romans chapter 6 he says that sin shall no longer be your master because you are no longer under law but under grace you have been set free from sin and become slaves to righteousness God has set us free from sin's rule given us his spirit so that we can please him and it's all by God's grace so as Ephesians 2 says you have been saved by grace not by us so that no one can boast and all this grace is for all who believe in Jesus so for the first question for us this morning is do you believe in Jesus do you trust in him it's the one through whom God's grace comes to us and for us who do then do we continue to call on the name of the

Lord in worship do we continue to give God what is right and not just what is left and do we resist boasting like Eve did at the start I have acquired and instead continue rejoicing God has granted let me finish with a story I've been reading a book about a preacher in the 1600s in America who spoke about how the Christians in his congregation were of great encouragement to him and he recalled one lady in particular Mrs. Richards he writes on the next slide I'll read it to you because it's probably a bit small but he says often have I heard her cry out in such language as the following oh the wonderful wonderful grace of God to such a poor unworthy worm of the dust as I am I am astonished to think of it I cannot but call upon everyone to praise and admire such rich and sovereign grace she says we don't call ourselves worms of the dust today do we but here is a Christian lady who understood that without God's grace she was like Cain and so she did not boast I have achieved but she rejoiced God has granted may we do the same let's pray our gracious heavenly father we do thank you for this sober reminder this morning that the way of Cain is sadly the way of humanity and yet time and time again we see in this chapter your grace because you continue to desire relationship with your people whom you've created and so father we thank you for your grace towards us we pray heavenly father that you would help us by your spirit not to be ruled by sin but to resist sin and to rejoice in your grace towards us in the Lord Jesus Christ we ask it in his name Amen