

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] Our gracious Father, thanks so much that you continue to speak to us through your word. And so far we pray that as we look at it this morning that you would give us minds to understand it and hearts that would again rejoice in light of it.

For we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, I'm guessing most of you have at least heard of Sesame Street, if not watched it. Does anyone grow up watching it? I've got to watch it. Yeah, some people. My favourite character was Snuffleupagus, you know, the elephant. He's not, mostly because he had breathing issues and I've got sinus issues so I can relate to him. But does anyone know who the mastermind behind Sesame Street and the Muppets is?

Jim Henson, that's right. And when asked about the show, this is what he said 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 if you agree. It's, yeah, it happened at nine o'clock. It was a rhetorical question, but some people answered nonetheless. Yeah. Are people basically good?

[1 : 07] Or would you agree more with perhaps one of the presidents, former presidents of the US, Rutherford B. Hayes? So on the next slide, he says, wars will remain while human nature remains.

Or even more starkly, on the next slide, a Chinese philosopher, a famous Chinese philosopher, said, human nature is evil and goodness is caused by intentional activity.

In other words, we're naturally evil and have to work at doing good. I wonder which you'd agree with. Of course, if children are anything to go by, then human nature is possibly more bad than good.

I mean, as I've said before, do you ever have to teach children to be naughty? Or does it just come naturally? Two of our children were fighting the other day. I won't say which ones, but I said to them, do you two ever stop fighting?

To which one of them replied, yes, when we're watching TV. It's not the answer I was hoping for. But what is humanity like? Are we basically good or bad?

[2 : 09] Well, today we come to Genesis chapter 4 and the way of Cain, which is a phrase out of Jude's letter, actually. And for the writer, the way of Cain seems to represent the way of humanity.

Cain is the central character of the chapter. He is the focus 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 of Genesis that the writer is talking about, the first generations on the heavens and the earth, or in the heavens and the earth.

And these first few chapters are foundational for all of humanity. So let me just briefly show you the structure of Genesis. I've left this out previously. Let me show you today.

So if you turn back in your Bible to chapter 2, verse 4, just turn back one page to chapter 2, verse 4. Chapter 1 seems to stand alone as the God of creation.

We learn a lot about God from chapter 1 in particular. And then chapter 2, verse 4, the writer says, This is the account of the heavens and the earth, dot, dot, dot. Now this phrase that says, this is the account of, is literally, these are the generations of the heavens and the earth.

[3 : 19] And the writer repeats that phrase 10 times through the book of Genesis. And by doing so, he groups certain chapters together. So if you turn back to chapter 4, or even chapter 5, verse 1, he repeats the phrase there in chapter 5, verse 1.

He says, this is the written account, or the book, of the generations of Adam. And then it lists the generations of Adam. And if you turn over the page again to chapter 6, verse 9, the top of the page, he says it again.

These are the generations of Noah and his family, dot, dot, dot. Do you see this phrase that is repeated throughout? He uses it to group certain chapters together.

And in the early part of Genesis, he groups chapters 2, 3, and 4 together. And as we've seen, these chapters are not just about the first generations of the heavens and the earth, you know, Adam, Eve, Cain, Abel.

They are foundational chapters for all of humanity. Remember how we saw in chapter 2 that humanity was made up of male and female and created in right relationship with creation, with each other, and with God.

[4 : 29] And then we saw last week, chapter 3 showed us that because of sin, all of humanity is now under judgment and is in broken relationships with creation and with each other and with God.

In other words, chapters 2 and 3 are about real people, but who represent all of humanity. And because the writer includes chapter 4 in this section by, you know, those phrases, it seems he again uses the real person of Cain to make a point about all of humanity.

Cain is the central focus of the chapter and he seems to represent mankind. In other words, the way of Cain, says the writer, is the way of humanity. Outside the garden, under sin.

And it begins with Cain and the repetition of sin. So point 1 in your outline, verse 1 in your Bible. Adam made love with his wife Eve and she became pregnant and gave birth to Cain. She said, with the help of the Lord, I have brought forth or acquired a man.

Lady, she gave birth to his brother Abel. Now Abel kept flocks, sheep and so on, and Cain worked the soil. Now notice here how the two boys are spoken of.

[5 : 39] At first, Eve seems to celebrate Cain's birth while she says nothing about Abel's. Do you notice that? The writer tells us about Abel's birth only in passing.

And what's more, the name Abel actually means nothing. Breath. Meaningless. Empty. Can you imagine naming your kid Abel?

There you go. Those are going to name more kids. Abel. Meaningless. Can you imagine how much fun Cain could have with his brother? Cain could say 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 he be the offspring of Eve who would crush the serpent's head that we saw last week?

Remember chapter 3 verse 15? God promised that one of Eve's offspring, a child of Eve, would crush the serpent's head, free us from sin. Could Cain be that person?

[6 : 43] Could he do better than his parents? Well, before we see what he does, secondly notice what Cain's name means. There's a footnote in your Bible next to Cain's name that tells us his name sounds like the word for acquired.

And that's because in verse 1, Eve literally says, I'll put it on the next slide so it's easy to see. She literally says, I have acquired a man with the Lord.

And so Cain is given the name Cain because it sounds like acquired. But notice Eve's comment here. It's a strange way to speak about the birth of your child, isn't it? When our son Tim was born, Michelle did not say that I have acquired a man.

Actually, she shouldn't say much at all. She's too exhausted. But Eve says that she's acquired a man. It's odd, isn't it? What's more, Eve's statement actually begins with herself.

In the original, it says, I have acquired a man. And the words, with the help of, are actually not part of the original text. And so she could be saying, I've acquired a man with the help of the Lord, which is a good thing.

[7 : 49] Or, as I've got on the slide, she could be saying that I've acquired a man just as with the Lord. In other words, Eve's statement here could be claiming that she has made a man just like God made a man, Adam, back in chapter 2.

She could be claiming to be equal with God again, just like she did last week in chapter 3, where she played God and wanted to determine what was good and evil for herself that God did.

And so while Eve celebrates and puts her hope in Cain, the way this is written already casts 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 parents, who gave in to temptation, who played God, and were ruled by sin.

So let's find out. Verse 3. First notice here that God, even though he's banished Adam and Eve from the garden, from his presence, he's still keen to have a relationship with people. And so he accepts these offerings from Cain and Abel, except there's a problem. He does not look with favour at Cain's offering, does he? Why?

[9 : 40] Well, verse 7 says, because Cain has not done what is right. And so the obvious question is, well, what has he done wrong then? Some people say it's because he offered fruit or vegetables instead of, you know, a lamb roast meat.

I saw another slightly amusing cartoon, not as good as last week's one, but on this next slide it says, Is this better God? Cain tries with animal-shaped vegetables.

But in the Old Testament, God accepts both types of offerings, animal and vegetables and so on. So it's not about the type of offering, rather, the only hint we get in the text is that it's about the quality of the offering.

So in verse 3 and 4, we're told that Abel offered God some of his firstborn and their fat portions, while Cain offered just some of his crop. In other words, Abel offered the best of what he had, while Cain just offered some of what he had.

Which means, by the way, by implication, that Cain kept the first fruits of his crop for himself. He kept the first, the best for himself, as though he is God, as he deserves it.

[10 : 51] And again, this is the essence of sin that we saw last week. And so on the next slide, remember how I wrote sin with a capital I? It's about doing what I want, as though I am God. That's what Cain seems to be doing here.

I won't give God my best, I'll keep it for myself. I'll do it my way. And so in the New Testament, on the next slide, we read in 1 John 3, Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother.

And why did he murder him? Because his own actions here in the offering were evil, and his brothers were righteous. See, Cain does not treat God as God.

That's why the New Testament calls his actions evil. And is this not true of people today? Is this way of Cain not the way of humanity? Our natural tendency is not to treat God as God, not to give God what is right, what he deserves.

Even people who might believe God exists, like Cain did, don't then have faith or trust in God as their personal God, like Abel did, such that they obey God and give God what he deserves.

[12 : 00] I remember being on a beach mission on the coast of New South Wales, where we'd go to a caravan park over Christmas and we'd run activities and we'd share the gospel with the campers and so on. And we'd get lots of people coming to our activities, largely because they were free.

But when it came to hearing a short Bible talk, there'd be lots who'd just suddenly have to go home for lunch or just leave. There was no natural tendency to want to hear from God.

There was no natural human tendency to treat God as God. In fact, one elderly couple we met during visitation. They lived at the caravan park in a unit.

They welcomed us in. They were lovely people. And when they found out we were Christians, she said with some excitement, Oh, I've got a Bible. And she went and grabbed the Bible off the shelf and showed us. I said, Oh, how do you go at reading it?

Because, you know, we all know reading the Bible is hard sometimes. And she said this. She said, Oh, we don't read it. We just like to have it. Even people who like the idea of God don't naturally treat God as God, you see.

[13 : 06] Don't listen to him or want to honor him. No, no. The way of Cain here in Genesis is actually the way of humanity in the world. And yet God still wants a relationship with us.

And so God shows grace. Notice verse 7 again. And God gives Cain both another chance and a warning. He says in verse 7, If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? I'll accept you.

Do what is right and I'll accept you. And then he gives a warning after the other chance. But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door, desires to have you, but you must rule over it. So will he? Will Cain rule over sin, crush the serpent's head, or will he be ruled by sin? Well, point to verse 8. Now Cain said to his brother Abel, Let's go out to the field.

And while they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him. Then the Lord said to Cain, Where is your brother Abel? I don't know. He replied, Am I my brother's keeper? Instead of ruling over sin, Cain is clearly ruled by sin, isn't he?

[14:12] He gives in to his anger and kills his brother. It leads to the first murder of history. What's more, this rule of sin has grown worse. So while last week Adam ignored God and ate the forbidden fruit, this week Cain ignores God and commits cold-blooded murder, premeditated.

His own brother. Last week, Adam said to God when he was confronted, Oh yeah, yeah, I did eat the fruit, but it was his fault and your fault for putting her here, kind of thing. He kind of half admitted it.

But this week, what does Cain do when confronted by God? I don't know. Just lie straight out. And then, how's it going? God, am I my brother's keeper? Come on, what do you expect from me? Sin is getting worse, you see.

And again, this way of Cain is the way of humanity where humanity is ruled by sin. Such that while people may want to do good, they inevitably do bad.

The next slide is a, oh, we'll skip that one. On the next slide is a guy called Gary Holmes, who I've read is a loving father.

[15:19] And yet, last December, 23rd of December last year, so not that long ago, he was arrested for road rage. Apparently, a lady was driving too close to him and he didn't like it. So, he let her, he pulled over, he let her pass and then deliberately followed her.

And then, when she stopped at a stop sign, he got out of the car and then shot his gun at the car. And she did not get hit by the bullet, but her three-year-old infant did and was killed.

Now, that's an extreme example, of course, and people are capable of doing good, don't get me wrong, but what I'm saying is the natural tendency of humanity is to be ruled by sin, to give in to anger and so on.

I mean, even our natural tendency on the road, when we are cut off, is not to say, oh, that's okay, I forgive you, have a blessed day, many happy returns to you. Is it?

Even we as Christians, it's very easy to give in to sin. Of course, for us as Christians, Christ has set us free from the rule of sin. We're not technically ruled by sin anymore, and I'll show you that at the end.

[16:33] But it still tells us that our natural tendency is to be ruled by it, to give in to it. And the point is, the way of Cain is still the way of humanity, where people have rejected God as God and are ruled by sin.

And that leads to all sorts of pain and violence, whether in relationships, within the family, or even on a bigger scale, between countries and races, or even religions. And it also leads to judgment. 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.

When you work the ground, it will no longer yield its crops for you. And so you're going to be a restless wanderer on the earth. Now last week, the ground was cursed because of Adam's sin. This week, Cain himself is cursed because of his sin. Last week, we saw that Adam could eat the fruit of the ground, the plants of the ground, but by the sweat of his brow it was going to be hard work.

[17:42] This week, it's going to be impossible work. God says, it's not even going to yield crops for you, Cain. And so, Cain, who once was a farmer, can no longer be a farmer.

Instead, he is to be a restless wanderer on the earth. And I found this rather astounding. Instead of taking the punishment that surely he knows he deserves, he then complains about it.

Have a look at 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 and I will be a restless wanderer on the earth and whoever finds me will kill me, he says.

Now, I don't know about you, but when I first read Cain's response, I thought, are you kidding me? Mate, you killed your brother, you deserve to die, you're getting away lightly and yet you're complaining about it.

It's incredible. Of course, Cain's real concern is being killed himself. If he is driven from the land, away from the garden of Eden where God's presence was, then he would be away from God's protection.

[18:48] And so, he's worried about then being killed. 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.

No one knows, by the way, what this mark is. Presumably, it was something that other people would cause other people to think twice about picking a fight with Cain unless they get it back seven times worse.

Now, maybe it was a scary tattoo or something, I don't know. But the point is, the mark is really a mark of grace that Cain did not deserve this protection from God.

And so, Cain wanders off for what must have been a number of years before the population grew and then he met his wife and started a family. And so, humanity grows.

[19 : 51] And yet, as it grows and advances in civilization, it seems to, well, decline in sin. Point three, verse 17. Cain made love to his wife and she became pregnant and gave birth to Enoch.

Cain was then building a city and he named it after his son, Enoch. And to Enoch was born Erad and to Erad the father of Methusel and Methusel was the father of Methusel and Methusel was the father of Lamech.

Notice here in verse 17 that Cain builds a city and settles down. Now, what was his punishment supposed to be? Do you remember? He was supposed to wander. By the way, the word for city here can mean big or small.

I assume it's a pretty small city's village. But it's a picture of defiance against God again. Instead of being a wanderer, no, forget it, I'm going to settle. I've had enough, I'm going to settle down. And then he builds a city and he names it not after God but after his son Enoch which means dedicated. Here's another statement of Cain's independence against God. And what's more, Cain's stubborn sinfulness spreads and worsens as his family grows and advances.

[21 : 02] So look at the following verses in 19 to 24. Lamech married two women, one named Adar and the other Zillah. Adar gave birth to Jabal and he was the father of those who live in tents and raised livestock.

So he began husbandry and so on. His brother's name was Jubal. He was the father of all who played stringed instruments and pipes, the beginning of music and culture. Zillah also had a son, Tubal Cain, who forged all kinds of tools out of bronze and iron, the beginning of technology and industry and so on.

Tubal Cain's sister was Neymar. And then 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 seventy-seven times. See, here Cain's family grows and progresses in civilization.

As I said, there's the building of a city or a small city. There's advancements in raising livestock. There's invention of stringed instruments and the arts. There's technology and industry with new tools.

[22 : 09] And yet as humanity advances in culture, it declines in sin. As it progresses in civilization, it regresses in relationship with God.

So in verse 19, Lamech goes against the created order and marries not one woman but two. And then in verses 23 and 24, he boasts to his two wives about how he has murdered a young man or literally a child.

Perhaps a teenager. And now killing a young man or a child for wounding him is a gross overreaction, isn't it? It's over-the-top revenge. And like Gary Holmes who committed that road rage.

But Lamech basically calls it the new normal. He says, well, look, if anyone killed Cain, they would get seven times vengeance but for me now, it's going to be 77 times vengeance.

This is the new norm. And so this young man, he wounded me and so I gave him 77 times vengeance. I killed him. This over-the-top revenge is now the new norm, it seems.

[23 : 15] And of course, Jesus would have something to say to us as Christians about what is the norm and not 77 times revenge but 77 times forgiveness. but here the way of Cain and humanity is to progress in civilization and at the same time to regress in sin, to decline in sin.

And again, is this not like our world today? On the next slide, I saw an article which said, 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 Australia and in Victoria seem to be progressing. We want to be a state that leads the way and so what do we do? We get rid of CRE from schools. We introduce Safe Schools Program which is anti-God. As we progress in civilization, we regress when it comes to God, don't we?

Or we have advanced as a culture in civilization yet we have advanced in violence. And so, one writer says that in the last century, the 1900s, there was more violence and unnatural deaths than all the other centuries put together since Christ.

[24 : 42] So, the 1900s, we're still in the 2000s and the 21st century. So, in our most advanced centuries so far, the 1900s, we had the most violence and unnatural deaths than all the centuries put together.

You see, the way of Cain in this chapter is sadly the way of humanity in this world, outside the garden under sin. So much for Cain being the one who would crush the serpent's head and rule over sin.

But because again, God wants a relationship with those whom he has created, he again shows grace. Look at how the chapter ends in 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 named him Enosh. At that time, people began to call on the name of the Lord. Notice how Eve speaks of the birth of this child.

It's not, I have acquired, it's God has granted. And she names this child Seth, which means granted.

[25 : 54] In other words, this is God's grace giving her, graciously granting her another child. What's more, the word for child here is the same word used for offspring back in chapter 3, verse 15, the one who would crush the serpent's head.

You see, there is hope here. God's grace in Seth, this new offspring of Eve, might be the one to crush the serpent's head and free us from the rule of sin so that we can call on the name of the Lord in worship.

And that's the kind of picture we have in verse 26. Who comes through Seth? Enosh, whose name is another Hebrew word for man. And what does Enosh or mankind begin to do?

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 creation, with people. And he will bring it about by his grace. God's grace is seen throughout this chapter and indeed throughout the Bible.

[27 : 00] And here it's through this child of Eve. The serpent's head will not be crushed by people's power where I have acquired, but it will be crushed by God's grace.

For God's grace will grant another child of Eve in Seth's line who it turns out of course to be Jesus. So on the next slide, Luke traces Jesus' ancestry back through Enosh and Seth and then Adam. Jesus is the descendant of Eve from Seth's line whom God graciously gives for us. For as we've heard in our second reading on the next slide from Hebrews 12, that the blood of Jesus speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

Abel's blood in Genesis demanded justice and judgment for Cain and his sin. Yet the blood of Christ speaks of grace and forgiveness for us and our sin.

What's more, it's by Jesus that we are freed from the rule of sin and judgment, free to worship God. And so as Paul says on the next slide in Romans 6, sin shall no longer be your master because you are no longer under law, but under grace.

[28 : 08] You've been set free from sin and you become slaves to righteousness. And then God gives us his spirit so we can resist sin and not let it rule over us.

And it's all by God's grace as the bottom reference says. We've been saved by God's grace, not by us so that no one can boast. And this grace is offered to all people who believe in Jesus.

And so the first question for us this morning as it usually ought to be, do you believe in Jesus? This is the one through whom God's grace comes to us. The one who enables us to no longer be ruled by sin but be rulers of sin to resist it.

This is the one who frees us and saves us from God's judgment. Do you believe in Jesus? 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?

Do we resist boasting, I have acquired as Eve did at the Sather chapter and instead continue rejoicing God has granted as Eve does at the end of the chapter?

[29 : 19] I was reading a book about a preacher and I'll finish with this in the 1600s in America who spoke about the Christians in his congregation and he remembers vividly one lady called Mrs. Richards.

He writes on the next slide, it's a bit hard to read but I'll read it for you. He says, Often I have heard her cry out in such language as the following, this is 1600s, 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 every one to praise and admire such rich and sovereign grace. And it struck me, I mean, we don't normally call ourselves worms today, do we? But here's a Christian lady who understood that without God's grace she was stuck in the way of Cain. But with God's grace she has been given forgiveness, the spirit, she's been saved from the rule of sin.

And so she does not boast I have acquired but she rejoices God has granted. Let's pray. Gracious Heavenly Father, we thank you for this sober reminder this morning that humanity, the way of humanity is sadly the way of Cain.

[30 : 38] And yet we've also been reminded this morning that you are determined to have a relationship with us because you love us. And so you continue to show us grace and most supremely grace in the giving of your Son the Lord Jesus.

Father, help us, we pray, never take your grace for granted but to always rejoice in it. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.