

My Brother's Keeper

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[0 : 00] Please do keep your Bibles open to Genesis chapter 4 on the bottom of page 3 of your Bibles. I've really been very blessed as we've been going through these sermons on Genesis by hearing all the teaching.

And so I'm very grateful to have been asked to speak on Cain and Abel. Very encouraging chapter in Genesis here. And of course, we're in a section now in Genesis. We're leading, we've come out of Eden and the fall and we're heading towards God's call to Abram.

And so we're looking at a section now where we see in these chapters human sin intensifying. And we begin here with this story with Cain and Abel. And as we go through these chapters, we're going to see a pattern of divine activity.

We're going to see sin being met with judgment and grace. And that's how I want to look at this chapter. Just look at the sin and how God judges it and meets it with grace.

Looking at these chapters, it's a bit like being in one of those dark and gloomy towers in a medieval castle. I don't know if anybody here has ever wandered in one of those. When I lived in Wales, we had a ruined medieval castle quite near our backyard.

[1 : 15] And we used to love walking in the tower. Of course, in these dark cavernous towers, there's an inner spiral staircase which goes up and down. And as you go back down into the gloom, it's dark, except for these little shafts of light from the arrow slit windows that were left in there.

And so you just see these little shafts of light breaking the gloom. And that's what we want to do when we look in these chapters of Genesis. We need to look for the shafts of light which penetrate the gloom.

In Genesis chapter 3, you may recall that God promised an offspring from the woman which would bruise the serpent's head. And so as chapter 4 opens, we begin with a cry of triumph from Eve.

As her firstborn enters the world, Cain is born and she says, I have gotten a man with the help of the Lord. Perhaps she is thinking that this is the offspring born to bruise the serpent's head.

Perhaps with Cain, this new lion has been born. Perhaps this will be the seed through which the Lord will work His purposes to crush Satan. And then we see she has another son, Abel, and no comment is made there.

[2 : 27] And then these two young boys grow into very different men. Cain is a farmer, Abel a pastoralist. Of their early lives and personalities, we know little.

Except in verse 3, we see that they both bring offerings to the Lord. Cain of the fruit of the soil, Abel of the firstlings of his flock and the fat portions.

And we see that the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering, but not for Cain and his offering. And this is the event which sets up everything that is to follow.

But as we begin, we might pause and wonder why the Lord accepted the one sacrifice and not the other. It is true that if you read Leviticus, you'll see that animal sacrifice is the backbone of the sacrificial system.

But grain sacrifices are also part of that system. Now, something deeper is going on here. And fortuitously, the Bible tells us and interprets this event for us.

[3 : 28] We see in the text a difference between the two offerings. Cain brings an offering of the fruit of the ground. And we're meant to really say that he brings whatever. He brings something.

Whereas Abel brings the firstlings of the flock and their fat portions. He brings the best. But that distinction actually shows something much deeper going on.

And the writer to the Hebrews tells us what it is. In Hebrews 11 and verse 4, it says, By faith, Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he received approval as righteous.

And so it's through faith, Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice. And that's commenting on Hebrews 11 and verse 1, which says, Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

And so what that means is that Abel offered his sacrifice in faith, in response to God's word. God had at some point earlier, but not recorded for us in the text, revealed to this family his instructions that they should approach him in this manner.

[4 : 39] That they should offer sacrifices. And it was Abel's faith in God's word that was the ground for his righteousness. His sacrifice was acceptable because he responded in faith to God's word.

Not so with Cain. And that's what we all need to see in this story. It is the response of the heart to God's word. The response of faith in God's word.

That is the response which marks the holy people of God in the Bible, through whom the Lord works out his purposes. But, alas, the text does not allow us to linger here.

And the story quickly focuses upon Cain, which brings me to my first point, which is sin. Sin, the man who would be God. We see that in verse 5, Cain is consumed with anger and jealousy.

And the amazing thing that God does is this. He speaks to him. He reaches out to him. The Lord brings his word to Cain.

[5 : 50] And look what he says there in verse 7. If you do well, will you not be accepted? If you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you.

But you must master it. Now, there's a couple of things you want to see here. First, look at how God defines sin. Sin is like a monster that wants to devour.

It is a powerful force that wants to destroy and enslave you. To take away your free will. But sin also needs to be mastered.

Now, that does not mean that we overcome sin by the strength of our character or will. But it does mean that if you choose sin, you are going to slide down a slippery slope that will have terrible consequences in your life.

So you've got to get a grip before that happens. Before you become a slave to sin. And we must see just how terrible and serious a thing sin is.

[6 : 51] It is a terrible, monstrous thing with terrible, monstrous consequences in human lives.

Second, will you notice that God is bringing His Word to Cain as a warning before he falls into serious sin to prevent him from getting ensnared in sin?

I was in the locker room at the club where I work out and heard two guys talking about religion the other day. And one said, you know, the thing I like about Christianity is it's really simple. You screw up and you're out.

I was going to get involved in conversation, but I felt disadvantaged at that moment. But I'm sad that he came to that conclusion about Christianity or has received that message somehow about Christianity because the opposite is true.

God is bringing His Word to Cain before the sin gets out of control, before it gets serious. In love, God is reaching out to Cain to prevent him from sinning, to give him a choice.

To respond in faith to His Word. Or not. People think that God is all about ruining our fun or taking away our free will, but the opposite is true.

[8 : 07] The opposite is true. He wants us to live lives of blessing. That's why He provides boundaries. That's why He brings His Word. See, this is one of the things God does in His Word.

He sets boundaries and He shows us what sin is so that we might avoid it. And that is love. You can eat of all the trees of the garden except this one.

See, He wants to spare us much heartache and suffering if we will respond to faith in His Word. And so He brings His Word to Cain in the situation and Cain is faced with a choice about how to respond.

And so as verse 7 gives way to verse 8, we go to commercial break and we wonder, what choice will Cain make? What will Cain do? Will he respond in faith to God's Word or not?

Will he respond with obedience or not? Sadly, we know the outcome. The man who has heard God's Word chooses darkness.

[9 : 21] It was too much to obey God. God's Word wasn't enough for Cain. He wanted to be God. He wanted to set the rules himself. And so he chose.

He acted in defiance of God and goes out. Lures his brother into a field and murders him. It is a deliberate act of murder.

That is the choice he made. Terrible consequences will follow in his life and in his family from this choice.

But let's stop for a moment before I move on and see what sin is. In its origin, sin is your response and mine to God's Word. It is a choice we make in relation to God's Word.

I mean, the contrast couldn't be clearer between Cain and Abel. Abel who responded in faith to God's Word and Cain who responded with disobedience.

[10:21] Now, it's true that when it comes to sin, sometimes we can't help it. But that's because we've become enslaved to sin. Sin has devoured us and we're slaves.

Isn't it ironic? It's sin that takes away our freedom of choice. Not God. Lovingly, wonderfully, God has given us His Word so that we might know and serve Him, receive mercy at the cross of Jesus, and steer our lives away from sin.

sin. But it is always a choice we make. Sin is disobedience to God's Word.

Sin originates always in disobedience. But once that first choice happens, sin wants to devour. Sin wants to destroy. That's why St. Paul talks about our condition without Christ as being slaves to sin. Christ wants to make us slaves to righteousness. It is Christ who rescues us. It is Christ who transfers us from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light.

[11:38] Sin lies. It promises gratification, but its intention is to ensnare and to destroy. Jesus broke that power and brings us into His kingdom.

Brings into His light all those who will respond to Him in faith. Sin. The man who would be God.

See, that calls all of us to examine our own lives at that point of choice.

Because that's where sin is. That's where it is. Well, that moves me on to my second point, which is judgment. God will be God.

As dark as the story is, there is something of a shaft of light in the way God now deals with Cain.

For having sinned, Cain must now face judgment.

He must now face the consequences of his sin. Because that's what God does. He judges sin.

Which, of course, is logical because sin is disobedience against Him. And in verse 9, God addresses Cain.

[12:43] Where is Abel? Perhaps, even now, an opportunity for Cain to acknowledge his sin, to repent, to beg for some kind of mercy. But no. Sin has so taken over his heart, he responds defensively, Am I my brother's keeper?

Why are you bothering me with this? Of course, God knows exactly what happened and the words of judgment echo those delivered to Adam and Eve. What have you done?

What have you done? But sin has intensified since chapter 3 and so does the judgment. The blood of Abel cries out from the ground.

It was not only an offense against God and against Abel. It was an offense against the earth. Adam and Eve were going to have to work hard from the earth. But now, the earth will not yield its fruit for Cain.

He's denied his livelihood. Adam and Eve had to leave the garden but they could settle down outside. Cain would have to go. He would know no settled life again.

[13:44] He would be a fugitive and wanderer on the earth. Adam and Eve could still have some kind of relationship with the Lord but Cain will have to leave the presence of the Lord. Their relationship is broken.

That's the consequence of sin. And Cain's response is hardly gracious submission to the Word of God but self-pity. Look at verse 13. Oh, my punishment is more than I can bear.

I mean, he's afraid now. He's going to be a target. And so graciously, God puts a mark on him and places his protection over him. It's the most God could do for this unrepentant murderer.

And so, chillingly, we read in verse 16, Cain went away from the presence of the Lord. It is over as far as God and Cain are concerned.

The plans and purposes of God to crush the serpent's head will not include Cain or his seed. Why? Because Cain chose.

[14:49] Because Cain responded to God's Word with sin. You see, God will be God. He judges everything. He sees everything and He judges sin.

And that surely is a ray of light in a dark situation then and now. Because if God just let it all slide, then it would mean literally that all hell would break loose.

Or if God was powerless to deal with sin, then the human situation would be completely hopeless. But nothing has changed as far as the Lord is concerned. He judges sin. And that means that sin never has the last word. Ever. God is serious about dealing with sin. And He does so because sin is disobedience against Him. And this is a promise and a warning to us all. Look what happened. Cain lures his brother out to the field and murders him. No one was looking. No one needed to know. [15:55] But of course, God saw. God knew. And God judged. And how God operated then is how God operates now. It's just as true today.

And we need to know this. We need to know that God is God. He sees what is done in secret. He sees the hearts of men and women.

And He judges sin and will deal with it in our lives. So let's not deceive ourselves. Sin is not some private matter.

Yet for all that, God's protection goes with Cain. His mark. Even the sinner is not beyond grace.

Even the foulest sinner is not beyond the Lord's reach.

See, things changed for Cain. Nothing changed for God. Let's remember that too. And that leads me to my last point and my conclusion. Grace. God will be God.

[17:01] Because for God to be God, there must be grace. It must be there. There is grace in Abel's response to God's Word. There is grace in God's Word to Cain and in God's protection over him.

But the real grace lies in the lines that follow. In verses 17 to 24, they take up the descendants of Cain. And it makes for really depressing reading.

Polygamy enters in. And look up at verse 23 there, the top of the column on page 4. You'll see his descendant Lamech sings a song in honor of Cain. I mean, this guy is Cain 77 times over.

Cain is his hero and he sings this song. I have slain a man for wounding me, a young man for striking me. If Cain is a veg sevenfold, Lamech 77 fold. Not much to go on there.

You can hardly see God working through these people, can you? And what happens then is verse 25. Adam and Eve have another son called Seth who replaces Abel, the one who responded to the Lord in faith.

[18:10] It's a new line. There is no future for the line of Cain in the purposes of God. The line of Seth is now the line through which God would work.

And we see in verse 26, it says, At that time, men began to call on the name of the Lord. And you see, the line of Seth is the line from which Noah came and then Abraham, men who responded in faith to God's Word.

And from the line of Abraham comes the nation of Israel that God promised Him. From the line of Abraham comes King David. And from David, Jesus was born.

The offspring who would crush the serpent's head. The one who would break the power of sin and death. And so you see, from the beginning of Genesis to the birth of Jesus to the end of time, God has not ceased to care for human beings.

He never stopped dealing with sin. He never stopped working His purposes out for the salvation of the human race. There is always more grace.

[19:20] Grace upon grace. And what we are called to do, like Abel, like Noah, like Abraham, like Mary when the angel came to her, is to respond in faith to His Word.

Imperfect though they were, imperfect though we are, to respond in faith to His Word, even the Word made flesh, Jesus, our Lord.

Amen.