

Crime and Punishment or Bible Rap

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[0 : 00] Well, if you were to take your Bibles and open to page 4 to Genesis 4, and as you do that you should know that it is the grade 8 boys Bible study group that is to blame for the snow.

They prayed for it on Friday, so there you have it. Page 4, Genesis 4, you may know there's been a great deal of hype and hoopla about Richard Dawkins' new book, *The God Delusion*.

Dawkins, as most of you will know, is a scientist from Oxford and he says that the greater part of evil in this world should be laid at the feet of organised religion and particularly the Christian church. He says that belief in God is like a virus for the gullible, something that we have to get over right now. He reminds me actually of my grade 8 geology teacher who said that science alone can be our saviour, that if only we were just more clear thinking and clear eyed, we would be rescued from our darkness and superstitions.

He was teaching in a church school too, which I always found just slightly hypocritical. However, I haven't read much of Dawkins' book but I've read a number of reviews, one from a card-carrying atheist who says this, Dawkins seems to suffer from highly selective blindness to the evil use of science.

[1 : 33] We live after the century of Hitler and Stalin for goodness sake. And this person said, Dawkins has an almost complete and total blindness to what Christianity teaches.

Now, the reason I mention him this morning is because he is the perfect Genesis 4 man. Because you see, at the heart of what it means to live outside of the garden is to separate the vertical from the horizontal.

It's to say that the really important stuff of life is the stuff here now that I can taste, touch and see. Everything else is just, glory to me in the highest.

Let's leave God out of the picture. And in Genesis 4 we see that sin spreads and the way it spreads is this. It produces people who say this.

I am going to find my own way back into the garden, thank you very much. The only problem with this world is you. Or God if he makes me feel guilty.

[2 : 40] I am going to get my own way back to the tree of life. We know that there is something wrong right from the start of the chapter. If you go back and have a look at chapter 4 verse 1.

We read, Adam knew his wife Eve and she conceived and bore a son saying, I have gotten a man with the help of the Lord.

You hear what Eve says? I have gotten me a man. I did it. And the verb means I acquired. I literally manufactured this man.

And then God gets a mention just somewhere in the distance there. Eve has begun to believe the philosophy God helps those who help themselves. And just so as everyone understands what this is about, she names her son Cain, which means acquired.

Same thing. It means, it sounds like possessed, success, manufacture, succeeding, acquiring.

[3 : 44] And Cain's life is a monumental and ultimately pathetic attempt to separate the vertical from the horizontal. He keeps trying to separate his relationship with God from everything else, particularly his relationship with his younger brother Abel.

So, you see, Cain plays the part of a religious man. He goes to church and when the offertory comes round, he gets, digs in his pocket, he's got a bit of spare change, he throws it on the plate. And when he comes out and he finds that God has accepted his brother's offering, he is indignant that God can decide the terms of what is acceptable. And we know that Abel, his younger brother, has given to God the best of what he had, the firstborn of what he had, the very top, the cream of what he had, as a symbol because Abel believes that everything he has comes from God, everything I am comes from God and it ought to be used for the glory of God.

And Cain looks at him and Cain hates him for it and despises him for it. Cain is like very many religious people who give God the leftovers and the dregs, of course. I want the very best for me. I've got to make sure my family gets ahead. I've got to make sure I get my retirement, my fat retirement in place first and then the second house in place first. [5 : 07] Then I can contribute to charity so long as I get my name on the plaque. Is that a bit unfair? I think that's fair. The trouble is, you see, God keeps interfering with Cain.

God keeps speaking to Cain. And every time he does, Cain's heart is gripped with a deeper and deeper and a furious resentment. How dare God accept my brother and refuse my token gestures, which was very generous.

I mean, God ought to be grateful that I even took an interest in him in the first place. And in the end, Cain's anger at God spills over in bloody murder of his younger brother.

He cannot imagine that God sees what he's doing and he takes Abel's life without remorse. And friends, it has to be that way, doesn't it?

I mean, if I am going to play God and if I am going to decide what the rules of right and wrong are, if you get in my way, the most instinctive and natural thing for me to do is to be rid of you.

[6 : 14] But we've got to see that Cain's murder of Abel is a strike against God. That's what's going on here. And immediately it happens, you see, the amazing kindness of God to Cain.

But what does Cain deserve? Well, what he gets from God is a command that he now has to wander, but also God's promised protection.

Cain gets a bit whiny and he says, Oh, it's too hard. Pity me, pity me. And God says, I'm going to protect you and anyone who touches you, I will revenge seven times. And he goes further and further from the garden.

And so we come to today's passage, which is chapter 4, verses 17 to the end. And Cain wanders far from the garden and he is full of self-pity and he is full of an enormously productive and creative energy of anger.

And in this little section, 17 to the end of the chapter, there are two lines, two descendants. There are two cultures, if you will, two ways of living in this world, two ways of relating to God, and they are both perfectly described by Eve's words.

[7 : 28] The first line is the Cain line, the Cainite culture. And Eve has already described it by naming him in verse 1, the one who acquires and possesses and controls.

This is a very important passage for us to understand and we must all feel very sorry for those who are still at home in bed who cannot be here to hear this. And I'm tempted not to put it online.

There's got to be some value for coming out in the snow, hasn't there? We should toy with that. Or we should take out the juicy parts. And no, no, no, let me keep going.

What this passage does is it teaches us how to understand the culture in which we live, how not to overvalue it and how not to undervalue it.

It's a deeply complex passage because the culture, every culture that we live in is a deeply complex entity. There's a paradox that happens in culture.

[8 : 27] The further humanity moves away from God in sin and darkness, there's also a rise in prosperity and the arts, business and agriculture.

Let me put it the other way around. Increasing technology and science and the arts does not just simply lead to human advance. It is always accompanied by a desperate attempt to cut God out of the picture so that we can say glory to me in the highest.

You see this through the passage. Just look at verse 17 as we begin. Cain knew his wife and she conceived and bore Enoch and he, Cain, built a city and called the name of the city after the name of his son Enoch.

Do you see what's going on? That is the exact opposite what God commanded him to do. God said, you will be a wanderer and I will protect you and Cain says, forget about that.

I cannot trust you to protect me. I have to protect me. And so he builds not only a house and some walls, he builds a city. Out of guilt, out of fear of what people are going to do to him.

[9 : 34] He is agitated and anxious and he is highly successful. See, he constructs walls around himself to protect himself from others.

And in an act of tremendous arrogance and anxiety, he names the city, I'll name the city after my son so that no one will ever forget me.

What an important man I am. I reckon Freud would have had a field day with Cain, don't you? You know, his fear came from his guilt because of what he had done to his brother and it drives him into this amazing productivity and his anxiety and his ambition gives him tremendous success and he surrounds himself with the tokens of his prosperity to show that he doesn't need God anymore. And then we have Cain's line. Cain's line are given to us in those middle verses and can I say how well David read those names. Goodness. Until we come to Lamech, who is the seventh generation from Adam, in verse 19, Lamech took two wives.

The name of the one was Adah, which means, I hesitate to say this, it means ornament. And the name of the other is Zillah, which means pretty sounding voice.

[10:52] And I'll come back to this. Adah, but I won't put it on the internet. Adah bore Jabal. He was the father of those who dwell in tents and have herds.

His brother's name was Jubal and he was the father of all those that play the lyre and pipe organ. Zillah bore Tubal-Cain and he was the forger of all instruments of bronze and iron.

The sister of Tubal-Cain was Na'amah. Now, Lamech is the poster boy for the Cainite way of life. He's living the dream. He has got all he wants combined with cruelty, self-centeredness and vengeance. He lives in open defiance of God and the first thing we read about him is that he is a polygamist.

He takes two wives. In direct contradiction to the will of God, revealed to us back in chapter 2, verse 24, direct violation of God's will and direct degradation for women.

[11:55] See, because the rise of culture is also marked by this spiritual degeneration and it usually shows itself first in the sexual area. But there's something wonderfully complex about this rise of culture and Cain's boys.

It's not all darkness and degeneration. You know, these instruments and abilities of culture, they are God's very good gifts. Agriculture and the arts and technology.

And they are used, they can be used for great human good and welfare and even for the glory of God. And they are, they lead to prosperity. But there's a dark side. So we read about the three sons of Lamech, Jabal, Jubal and Tubal Cain, which would have made dinner time interesting, calling the three boys, don't you think?

All those three words, Jabal, Jubal, Tubal, all come from the word to produce. These boys are inventive, resourceful, productive, high achievers, A grade students, on the honours list, doing everything outside school they ought to do.

Jabal, we read, is the father of agribusiness. He doesn't just have his own little flock like Abel did. He develops systems of animal husbandry and food production, a very good gift from God, yes?

[13:18] Jubal is the first musician and artist. And the instruments named here are used later on in the Psalms to praise God. The arts and music, fantastic expression of God's grace.

Don't you love it when we have children sing to us in church? I just, I love that. I sit this side and I look out and I've got to tell you, every one of you is smiling when the children are singing, not just the parents.

Even though the children are on completely the wrong page when they're singing, doesn't make any difference whatsoever. It's a beautiful thing. The point is this. Here in the middle of Cainite, in the Cainite city, the city built in defiance of God, there's music and there's drama and there's painting and there's artistic expression.

to the family of Cain. To the family of Cain and the line of Cain is held by God's grace even in their rebellion and even in their alienation from God.

Even though they have tried to cut God off, God continues to pour out his good gifts into their lives. Yes, it's true. High culture is most often used to romanticise evil.

[14:29] And yes, it's also true that neither low culture or pop culture or high culture can bring us redemption or can bring us any closer to God whatsoever. Yet, it's God's blessing of common grace and it's not just reserved for his people.

He shares it with all his people, even those who hate him. And Tubal Cain, the last son, is the father of industry and technology. Interesting hyphenated name, don't you think?

Why not just Tubal? Jabal, Jubal and Tubal. He gets a cane on the end of his name and it is an ominous name because he is the father of technology and when we hear Lamech's song, we'll hear why.

You see, the growth and development of technologies, they are all taking place in the Cainite culture, completely without reference and mention of God. The technology and the arts and the sciences, they're not directed toward the good and welfare of others. They're not directed to the glory of God. They are directed towards my glory. They began in murder. They finish in murder. And of course, technology, arts and food production, of course they can be used for the good of others.

[15:50] But you see, when the vertical horizon becomes everything, when the vertical horizon eclipses the, I'm sorry, when the horizontal horizon eclipses the vertical horizon, science and technology just become an exercise in self-promotion and it leads ultimately to the Tower of Babel.

I have a neighbour who is a nuclear physician, genius. He has saved many lives because of his brilliant nuclear medicine diagnostic skills.

I was thinking about him this week when we read about the Russian spy who died of nuclear poisoning. A grain of nuclear stuff was put in his sushi, 250 million times more toxic than cyanide. It can be used for evil, it can be used for good. But it's when we come to Lamech's song we see the end of a culture divorced from God. Let's look at this song, verses 23, 24.

Lamech said to his wives, Adah and Zillah, hear my voice, you wives of Lamech, hearken to what I say. Listen up. I have slain a young man for wounding me, a young man for striking me, if Cain is avenged sevenfold, truly Lamech, 77 fold.

[17:11] This is a truly terrifying scene. It is full of anger and rage and testosterone and some Bible commentators say that it ought to be put to rap.

Here are his two wives, already humiliated by polygamy. He takes them and he puts them in a room and he sings to them this ecstasy of revenge.

I'm proud of killing a child, he says. What's in store for them, do you think? And at the heart of his song is the raw pleasure in the fact that he has murdered a child because the child dared to lay a hand on him.

And he's not just content to debase marriage and to devalue life, but he turns at the end of the song and he mocks God and glories in his own revenge.

He says, God can only avenge Cain seven times, but if you come to me and if you lay a hand on me, I will avenge myself seventy times seven. But what is so striking about this song is that this celebration of violence comes to us in a poem, in a song.

[18:26] We must not miss this. Lamech's boast of his own raw violence is a piece of art with great human energy and creativity.

You see that the appearance of art in the Cainite culture is associated with this murderous man. It has all the vitality of human energy in it, but it's the vitality of a murderer.

See? Lamech personifies what it is to be cut off from God, to cut oneself off from God and to use music and poetry and self-expression to just exalt oneself. And it's good.

I mean, in one sense, it's good. He would have won the Cainite idol contest, wouldn't he? Simplicity, energy, clarity, but it's a celebration of evil and of exponential revenge.

And what is so interesting to me and to all of us, I think, is that Jesus himself picks up these words in the Gospels, doesn't he? Remember? When Peter comes to him and says, how many times must I forgive my brother?

[19:31] Even seven times? Jesus says, I tell you, not seven times, but 70 times seven. The avalanche of revenge can only be met by an avalanche of forgiveness.

It is only the death of Christ and the forgiveness of Christ that can change a human heart to forgive the violence and revenge that have been committed against us. Yesterday, a number of us men had the privilege of the men's breakfast of meeting Rexha, him.

As a boy of 12 in Cambodia, he was taken with his family to be executed by the Khmer Rouge. He watched his father slaughtered.

he watched his mother slaughtered. And he himself was hacked and left for dead in the grave between the body of his father and his brothers and his sisters on top of him. And when he climbed out of the grave that night, he vowed to himself that he would seek revenge because it is part of the honour of the family to seek revenge on those who have killed the family.

And he led a life of revenge and he sought to become a police officer after the revolution finished and he was a failure as a police officer and he escaped to a Thai refugee camp and finally he came to Canada.

[20 : 48] And when he came to Canada, a group of Christians in Toronto welcomed him with open arms. He'd never been loved in this way before and he came to faith in Jesus Christ and that's when the work really started.

How can I possibly forgive these people who've killed my parents and all my family? and he talks about the years of agony of flashbacks and nightmares and he did a degree in theology and then he did a master's degree in psychology to understand something of this and he said to us yesterday, how can I forgive?

The only way I can forgive is through the strength of Jesus Christ. It's the only thing that can do it. And wonderfully he went back to Cambodia to teach in Phnom Penh and as the forgiveness of Christ kept washing over him he decided to seek out those who had killed his family and he went up to the village in which his family was killed and at the end of the presentation there's a photograph of him with the man who killed his father.

He's got his arm around this guy, he's giving him a Bible, he's giving him medication, he's giving him clothing, he's extending the forgiveness of Christ to him. And there's a second photo of him with his arm around the man who killed his mother doing exactly the same thing.

And Rexha has now moved into that village and he has planted a number of Christian congregations in those Buddhist villages which are under persecution and he has also built a school for the children of the village and the children of those two men who killed his parents go to the school.

[22 : 25] It is an avalanche of forgiveness and it is the only thing that can deal with violence. There is a different way of dealing with a culture of violence and pain.

It's not the way of human achieving, it's the way of human receiving. And that takes us just for a moment or two into this second line, this second family in the last two verses of the passage.

Verse 25. Adam knew his wife again and she bore a son and called his name Seth and she said, God has appointed, gifted me with another seed instead of Abel for Cain slew him.

And to Seth also was born a son. He called his name Enosh at that time. Men began to call upon the name of the Lord. These two beautiful rays of light at the end of this passage. Have you noticed the change that happened in Eve?

The beginning of the chapter she said, I've gotten me a man, help of God. And now at the end of the chapter she says, God has given, granted me a child. It's all of grace.

[23 : 39] He owed me nothing. He has done this out of his love for me and this birth is a demonstration that his purposes are going forward and her faith now begins to shine through.

Very interesting in chapter 5 verse 3 we read, it's Adam who names Seth. Until now Adam has done nothing to take responsibility but now he steps forward for the first time and he names the boy Seth and it means God gave.

And when Eve says, God has given me a seed, she is remembering back to 3.15, to that promise that God made that he would send a seed who would deal with evil and it is a very, very sweet moment.

She knows God is working his purposes, she trusts his grace. And how does Seth and his family live in that violent culture? Very simply, he and his family begin to call upon the name of the Lord. And to call upon the name of the Lord is to bring the vertical and the horizontal together. It's to see that everything I do, all of my life is lived in the presence of God.

[24 : 50] Everything I am, everything I do, everything I have, everything I am is his. And to call upon the name of the Lord means to speak to him, which is why we pray together as a parish first Tuesday of every month.

It's to speak about him, which is why we pray and support our TIDSA as a training program. And the thing for us is that right here, friends, right in the midst of the Cainite city, in the midst of the Cainite culture, there is a group who is growing in trust for the promises of God, who is praying and praising and proclaiming the name of the Lord because they belong to another city, the one we heard about in the second reading.

In the midst of the culture, in the midst of the Cainite culture that worships at the shrine of prosperity and art and technology, that devalues marriage and exalts violence, there is a group that is trying to figure out how to use this art and technology for the promotion and glory of the name of God to call upon his name.

And I think that is the greatest gift that we can offer any culture. And it is the most important thing that you can do as an individual or we can do as a church. It is simply to call upon the name of the Lord.
Amen.