

Cain & Abel

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[0 : 00] Let's turn to that first passage once again, the book of Genesis and chapter 3, and rather chapter 4 I should say, and verse 3.

Genesis chapter 4 and verse 3. In the course of time Cain brought to the Lord an offering of the fruit of the ground, and Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions.

And the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry and his face fell.

The Lord said to Cain, why are you angry and why has your face fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not well, sin is crouching at the door, its desire is for you, but you must rule over it.

And Cain spoke to Abel his brother, and when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him. And the Lord said to Cain, where is Abel your brother?

[1 : 04] You'll probably know by now that this part of the Bible particularly fascinates me. And we have to be very careful, of course, that we don't spend too long on one part of the Bible at the expense of other parts.

But I'm always fascinated by this whole area of the world as God created it in Genesis chapter 1. Humankind as God created them in Genesis chapter 2.

The fall in Genesis chapter 3, in which God, having given a specific, simple, straightforward command to Adam and Eve, our first parents, not to eat of the forbidden fruit, they listened.

Instead of listening to God, they listened to the serpent. And so, by falling and by rebelling against God, they brought sin and all its carnage and death and misery into the world.

And here is the beginning of that carnage and misery in chapter 4 as sin spreads throughout the human race, the then human race at that time, which really was confined in those days to the family of Adam and Eve before they went out.

[2 : 13] And, of course, there are many, many questions that arise. I'm sure that the first question that arises, if we think seriously about these chapters, where was Cain's wife?

And who was Cain's wife? Where did he get a wife from? And some people use that question to try and to contradict the Bible and to say, well, it's ridiculous, isn't it?

How can you say? How can you suggest that we all came from two first parents, Adam and Eve? If that doesn't make any sense, because in order for that to be true, then Cain would have had to marry his sister.

And that is not really feasible. Why isn't it feasible? I don't understand why it's not feasible. If God gave special dispensation, as I believe he did, to the human race at that particular time, and at no other time was that dispensation, was that allowance given, just in order to propagate the human race.

Where else did he get his wife from? Well, there's no other answer. Some people might suggest that in some form angels came down. Well, to me, that's not feasible at all.

[3 : 19] Other people might suggest that God created, he made a special creation. That's not feasible either, because we're only told that God made one special creation, and that was Adam and Eve, from which the entirety of the human race descended.

And so to suggest anything else is not feasible, I think the simplest of all answers, although we're not told, the simplest answer is simply that God gave special dispensation.

I don't understand why people, they home in on these smaller problems, problems, and they're able, they use them to dispense with some of the great issues that are brought up with the Bible. Issues that affect us, our standing with God. The reason why this world is as it is. The Bible gives an explanation as to why the world is the way it is.

And men and women, of course, choose to dispense with that marvelous explanation in order to home in on lesser issues. Well, that's one of the questions, of course, that come up. But one of the things that fascinates me about this chapter is to imagine the difference that Adam and Eve would have experienced trying now to live in a fallen, sinful world, as opposed to the world that they once knew when they were created, which was a world of perfection.

[4 : 37] Now, none of us have ever experienced such a world. All we know is the world as it is, with all its misery and sadness, as well as its joys and happiness.

We know that the world is a mixture of joy as well as misery. But Adam and Eve would have been able to look back, and time and again there would have been that thought, what if we had never fallen?

There would have been that enormous sense of regret on their part. Oh, why were we so incredibly foolish to have listened to the serpent and to the serpent's lies in leading us on the wrong path?

And what's happened as a result is exactly what God said would happen. In the day that you eat thereof, you shall surely die. And from that moment onwards, there would have been an enormous difference in atmosphere, in thought, and the whole spirit of Adam and Eve would have changed altogether.

And it would have lasted with them for the rest of their life. Now, we don't have that experience, because you and I live in a fallen world in any case. And we can't look back. We don't know what a perfect world is like.

[5 : 50] We've never experienced it. We've never experienced the unbroken, unstained happiness that Adam and Eve would have once experienced for however long they lived in that perfect world.

But they would certainly have experienced the contrast. I believe there was no greater contrast in the whole of the human race than the contrast that Adam and Eve experienced between living in a perfect world and living now in a sinful world.

And that would have manifested itself in all kinds of different ways. One of the ways, of course, was from then on, work would have now become tedious to Adam.

That's what God promised. That by the sweat of your brow, by the sweat of your brow, you shall eat bread till you return to the ground.

For out of it you were taken, for you are dust, and to dust you shall return. Another way they would have experienced it would have been their own relationship. I believe more than anything else.

Their relationship between husband and wife, which was once perfect.

[6 : 57] No arguments. No fallouts. No differences of opinion. Everything from that up until that point was focused in glorifying God and in discovering the world that he had created and that he had given to them.

Now there were the fallouts. Now there were the difference in chemistry, the difference in personality, and one of them doing something that the other one would disagree with.

And there would be the mood swings and the arguments and all of these things that are part and parcel of our human life and our human relationship. From then on, life would have taken on a different complexion altogether, a completely different complexion altogether.

And it would have been the same as Cain and Abel grew up. They were the first to be born in this world. Adam and Eve were not born. They were the first parents, but God created Adam as an adult.

And he created Eve as an adult. But Cain was the first man to be born, the first baby to be born.

And it really fascinates me, even when you think of that, how Eve would have experienced the very difficulty that God promised Eve to the woman.

[8 : 16] He said, I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing. In pain you shall bring forth children. And so on. For her childbirth, which was always meant to be an unbrokenly joyous experience, was now a painful experience.

Although, at the end of that experience, there was the joy of a baby having been born into the world, as many of yourselves have experienced, even in a fallen world.

That while there is pain in childbirth, there is the joy of, and that's a sign and a mark of the goodness and the grace of God. But even so, what must it have been like to learn in a newly sinful world what it was like to bring up children, to care for a little baby?

I mean, I suppose that all of you who, or as many of you who have had children, would know that there is support, usually from within the family, or within this health service, nurses, midwives, all of

these things, experts in how to care for a baby.

Well, she wouldn't have had any of these things. No, she wouldn't have needed them in a perfect world. But because the world was now a fallen world, she was subject to the fear and the insecurity and the chance of an accident.

[9 : 35] And she would be subject to the worry that you and I know and the concern that we have over our children. And all of these things would have been true for them.

And you can only imagine what it must have been like. And each time, there would have been that sense of regret, that sense of sorrow, because they were responsible for bringing sin and all its component parts into the world.

Well, it was the same as Cain and Abel grew up. We don't know of their experiences as boys, as young boys together. This chapter fasts forward from their birth to the time that they were adults. And indeed, it fasts forward from what they did, from what they chose to do for a living. Cain was a worker of the ground. He was a farmer. And Abel was a shepherd.

He was, Abel was a keeper of sheep. Now, there was nothing wrong with any of these. But it strikes me, of course, that these are the very areas that we make much of in our modern Western world, which has largely forgotten and turned its back away from God.

[10 : 49] Our careers have become everything to us. And a society that has turned its back on God has lost that sense of proportion in which God must take the central place.

And instead, our careers take the central place. The way in which we make money and the way in which we live takes the central place. Now, I'm not saying it's not important to have a career. I'm not saying that at all. But God must take the central place. And when we have a career, it must be for the glory of God. And if we're believers today, then our careers must be oriented and pointed towards the glory of God.

As Jesus said, seek first the kingdom of God. The problem is that we don't seek first the kingdom of God. We seek ourselves and our own happiness and our own fulfillment in the first place rather than the glory of God.

And we cease to depend upon God. And sometimes in the course of history, God strips away everything that we depend upon in order to show us that we actually, at root, are desperately in need of him.

[11 : 56] But the Bible, you'll notice at the beginning of this chapter, skips over Abel's career and Cain's career in order to get to the most important issue in life, which is where we stand with God.

That's what the Bible is concerned about. It's not saying that our jobs aren't important, but it's saying that the most important thing of all is where we stand with God. That's what this chapter is all about.

That's what Abel's sacrifice was all about. It was all about him and his relationship to God. And all the way through the Bible, that's the central issue.

It's the central issue with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, the prophets, and on through Jesus. Jesus came into the world in order to redeem us, as we're going to see this evening, to redeem us from sin and to put us right with God and to bring us into a relationship with God.

That's what this chapter is all about. Now, I want us to look into that then. I want us to look into the two questions. First of all, what is it that Abel tells us?

[13 : 02] What does Abel tell us in the scriptures? And the reason I say that is because Hebrews chapter 11 says, by Abel, he still speaks.

And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks. Now, what does Abel have to say to us? But I want us to ask another question as well. And by so doing, I go to 1 John and chapter 3 and verse 11 in which we are very simply told this, do not be like Cain.

So, Abel has something to tell us even although he's dead and Cain has something to tell us by way of his example as to how not to live and the kind of spirit that he had.

So, I want us to ask these two questions. What does Abel have to tell us and what does Cain have to tell us? First of all, if we go to Abel and first work through the process of this chapter in which they brought each of their sacrifices or their offerings to God.

Now, that tells us before we go even any further, it tells us that God himself, although he had evicted Adam and Eve and their family out of the Garden of Eden, he did not give up on them.

[14 : 14] It's very clear that God continued to relate to Adam and Eve and their family and to reveal himself to them. how else did they know how to worship?

By sacrifice. God must have made known to them that the only way in which he could be approached was by an offering and of course that offering is the subject of the whole of the Bible. You understand the idea of the offering and you understand the Old Testament and you understand the New Testament as well. God had therefore spoken to them, he had continued with them and made known to them that in order for them to worship God and be right with him they must bring an offering and here's the account of what they did.

In the course of time, verse 3, Cain brought an offering to the Lord, an offering of the fruit of the ground. Now we're not told any more than that except that it was vegetables or some crops of some kind.

Verse 4, Abel also brought the firstborn of his flock. So this time his offering was an animal. Cain's offering was vegetation and Abel's offering was an animal, the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions.

[15:29] Now here's where the point comes. And the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering but for Cain and his offering he had no regard.

Now that's where the chapter revolves around, these few words. Cain brought his offering to the Lord and he offered it up, he offered it up, his was vegetation or some kind of fruit or vegetables or whatever and Abel brought his offering which was a sacrifice, which was an animal.

Now the question is this, why did God accept Abel's offering and not Cain's? Let me tell you the importance of that question.

The importance of that question is simply this, it's the difference between, first of all, whether our worship today is true worship or whether it's not. But more importantly than that, it's the difference between whether you and I are right with God or whether we're not.

Whether we're lost, like Cain was, or whether we're saved, like Abel was. Whether we come to God in the right manner or whether we come to God in the wrong manner.

[16:41] Now you'd look at this chapter at face value and it appears as an onlooker that both of them, apart from the substance of their sacrifice, after all, what's the difference? Are you going to say that because one person, Cain, brings vegetation or vegetables to the Lord and the other one brings a sheep to the Lord, is that it?

Is that the difference? No, it's not. It goes much deeper than that. Is it something to do with the selection of their sacrifice? Is it something to do with the fact that Abel brought the firstborn of his flock?

Obviously he had taken the time and the trouble to go throughout his sheep and to pick the very best. Well, I reckon that's got something to do with it, but it's not what lies at the heart of the question.

What lies at the heart of the question is simply this, is what Hebrews chapter 11 tells us, and it was simply this, verse 4, by faith, Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts.

I don't know how God made clear that he was accepting one sacrifice and not the other, but where the Bible makes it abundantly plain, that it was by faith, that one of them approached God by faith, by faith.

[18:12] In other words, if you could see on the inside of these two men, you look at the outside of them, they're both doing pretty much exactly the same thing. So you see them both as religious men, men who are worshipping God, and as far as we're concerned, they're both pretty much the same.

What's the difference? But God sees the inside, inside, and he sees that there is a radical difference, that one man is completely different from the other man, and it is the condition in which one man approaches God that makes all the difference.

That's why we read, did you notice as we read it, the Lord had regard for Abel, and verse four, do you notice, the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering.

Abel comes first, because the offering is a result of the condition in which Abel comes to the Lord, and if he doesn't come to the Lord in that right manner, in that right spirit, with a right heart, that's pointed and oriented and that hopes and trusts in God, then the sacrifice is wasted.

that's why elsewhere in the Old Testament, when God's people, when Israel tried to make out that just because they were observing the right things from the outside, they were bringing sacrifices regularly to the Lord.

[19 : 44] God said, I hate your offerings, I hate your sacrifices, because they're not brought to me in faith. Faith is the difference between Abel and Cain.

Cain, his approach to God was just a matter of form. He did everything that was right from the outside. And that's what made him so angry because he had done all the right things from the outside.

He had ticked all the boxes, as we say. He had crossed all the T's and dotted the I's and everything was okay in its right place. But his heart was far from God.

He had not listened to God and he hadn't learned what it was to trust in God and to love him with all his heart. But Abel was radically completely different and that's why God had regard for Abel and his offering.

In other words, if I can put it like this, if God had said to Abel the same way as he said to Abraham hundreds of years later, leave your country, go to a land in which I tell you, and there is the land I'm going to get.

[20 : 49] Abel would have done it. Anything that God had said to him to do, as far as Abel was concerned, God was the center. He loved the Lord with all his heart and mind and soul and strength and that's what it means to be a Christian, to love the Lord with all your heart and soul and mind and strength.

I know that our love is not what it should be. I know that our love is so imperfect and it falls and fails so many times and yet a Christian can say the center of my life is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ.

I wish I could obey him better and I wish my life was more attuned to his will and yet I can still say I love him because he first loved me and Abel I'm quite sure was as conscious of his own failures as anyone else was and of course that's why the sacrifice to him, the offering was so important because it was God's provision he was able to see that God had provided for him a way of forgiveness a way of forgiveness the sacrifice and I want to say this again I've said it before some people talk about the Old Testament as if God's people worked to be saved in other words that when they made a sacrifice this was their attempt to earn their way into their own salvation that was never the case at all sacrifice in the Old Testament was God's provision so that where his people came to him by faith laid hold they rested and trusted in the sacrifice as God's provision for the removal of their sin and even more so furthermore they did so believing in the promise of God that one day there would be one great sacrifice in which all their sins would be removed and we know what that sacrifice was it was the death of the

Lord Jesus Christ so there was a real sense in which Abel somehow or other was able to lay hold on God's word and he knew as he came and as he brought that sacrifice to God he knew that God would take away his sins he didn't know what we know he didn't know that one day God would send his son into the world and that it was the son of God Jesus he didn't know all of these details that we know but he knew that somehow or other that God that this sacrifice pointed to the mercy and to the grace of God and that one day God would remove his sin now we'll come back to that in a few moments let me just go on to Cain because when Cain discovered that God did not accept his sacrifice the same way as he accepted Abel's instead of coming to the Lord and there must have been communication it's quite clear even from this chapter that there was perhaps regular communication between

Cain and Abel and the Lord now he could have come to the Lord and he could have asked him what am I doing wrong how is my heart wrong he could have asked him what the Philippian jailer asked the apostle Paul what must I do to be saved instead he took the option of bitterness and resentment and hatred now it's easy enough for us to say well he shouldn't have done that but it lies within each one of us every single one of us has the seed in our own hearts of that same bitterness and that hatred of one another now you say well that's a bit severe well let me ask you a question why does the apostle John in chapter 3 and verse 11 writing to the church no less he says do not be like Cain if it was impossible for us to be like Cain then he wouldn't have said it in other words if I'm going to read that chapter correctly and if I'm going to look at my own heart I'm going to have to admit that the seed of what

[25 : 04] Cain did lies within me and that's an awful thought isn't it it's an awful thought but you imagine just imagine that instead of living in a world where we were restricted by laws and a sense of what's right and wrong instead of that we were living in a world with very few people there and where you really could do something without anybody finding out that's a different scenario

altogether isn't it I wonder how we would live in such a world I wonder what we would do if it wasn't for the fact that we know people would find out about it ask yourself that question it's a very searching question isn't it and it's a question that goes right to the heart of who we are and it goes to the heart of our relationships with one another as well because the seed of what Cain did was a seed of bitterness and resentment and jealousy you see we think jealousy is a kind of a trivial sin it's not there are many places in the Bible where covetousness and jealousy actually actually turn out to be what about what David did when he wanted Bathsheba and when he slept with

Bathsheba and the whole thing spiraled out of all control and eventually ended up with Bathsheba's husband being killed what about Naboth and Ahab when Ahab allowed himself to become obsessed with what Naboth had and he possessed this vineyard that he possessed that Ahab wanted just a simple Ahab had everything under the sun he was the king and yet all he wanted was one little vineyard that belonged to someone else and he became so obsessed with it he allowed that's the same as what Cain eventually he arranged for or rather his wife arranged for Naboth to be killed he lost his life over one vineyard that's the same as here you would think isn't it that even reason itself would say well whatever he does he mustn't kill his brother but that's what it started off with a thought and that's why the Lord said to him he warned him he met him God knew perfectly well the way that Cain felt and the kind of brewing of anger that was existent in his heart and he went to him and he said be careful

Cain be careful because if you choose it's your choice you've got two options here you can choose to do what's right in which case so be it but if you don't then sin is crouching at your door look at the way he puts it sin is lying at your door it's like an animal lying in wait for you you know what every one of us is in the same position this morning facing that same choice and as we come to God's word this morning God is always warning us of the evil that lies within our own hearts which has believe me no limits we are capable of anything at all in the right circumstances and he says the same thing to us are we bitter this morning have we allowed some thought some resentment some jealousy some covetousness to creep into our hearts and our minds and has it brewed has it developed has it grown nobody else knows about it but it's grown well you know you don't know what the end result will be so that's why we absolutely have to learn to cope with it and to deal with it in the right way now before it gets any worse that's what

Cain refused to do because he chose to allow that sense of outrage and that anger see the problem with anger is it defies reason and rationality and common sense common sense will say well why is he going to kill his brother but that didn't come into it it's like the crowds when they bade for Jesus blood there was no reason for them to have him crucified no reason but their emotion of the crowd had got to the point it was fever pitch and all they wanted was to crucify him the most irrational thing in the world for them to crucify the very one that they had come to believe as the messiah but that's what they did and that's what we're capable of don't ever underestimate what you're capable of see we're so used to thinking of ourselves as nice decent human beings and to a large extent I'm sure that's true because we live in a world where we're conditioned by the environment around us but the bible tells us what we're really like what we're really like and what god sees inside us that's why we need to be right with god that's why like cain we should have instead of going away from god and doing exactly the opposite of what he said we should have we must submit to the lord and listen to him and allow him to change us and to wash us and to clean us by the blood of jesus christ so do not be like cain that's what john tells us do not be let's examine ourselves and let's look at our own hearts and let's ask where i am going wrong and is there anything that is that is giving rise to bitterness and resentment in my own heart because after all the seed of murder is someone who you simply wish didn't exist now that brings it down to a different level doesn't it someone who you just wish wasn't there and i hope that we have the grace today to come to the lord and say well here is what i confess here is where i need to be healed and here is these these are the issues that need absolutely need to be sorted out in my life now i want us to end today by looking at abel's legacy abel's legacy and i know that time has run out but i just want to see that see this because i want all of this to end with the lord jesus christ and what he did on the cross because and that is exactly where abel's legacy leaves us and for this i'm going to go to hebrews chapter 12 i'm going to read it for you and read for that we have come to verse 24 and there's this this great verse where where the apostle he makes the gospel clear once again after he has been drawing the comparison between the old testament and the new testament and the sacrifices that the people of israel made in the old testament comparing it with the one for all single sacrifice that jesus made when he laid

down his life on the cross he says this we have come to jesus verse 24 chapter 12 the mediator of a new covenant and listen to this to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of abel in other words the apostle is trying to focus our attention on the blood of jesus christ and whenever we read we're going to see this this evening whenever we read over the blood of jesus christ he's talking about the death of jesus the blood that was shed on the cross that is where our only hope lies that's where the payment of our sins took place and the apostle is doing this by comparing the sacrifice of jesus with all of the sacrifices in the old testament which of course were inferior in that they only pointed they pointed forward to this blood that jesus was going to shed one day now here's what he says he says that speaks a better word than the blood of abel what is the blood of abel here's a thought i'm going to leave with you for the rest of the day what is the blood of abel a lot of people think it was the blood that was shed when cain killed him the blood that was absorbed into the ground and that became a kind of personification of an unjust death and those who believe that it was abel's blood they believe that in a sense his blood cried out for vengeance i don't believe that you can disagree with me i don't believe that i believe that when the apostle talks about the blood of abel in he in this passage he's talking about the blood of abel's sacrifice the blood of the lamb that abel killed in order to make a sacrifice to the lord now why do i believe that because that is the first recorded official sacrifice in the bible and from that day onwards every one of god's people in a similar manner they approached god through that same way the blood of the sacrifice and what the apostle is saying here in hebrews chapter 12 is that all of these sacrifices beginning with the sacrifice that abel made beginning at the beginning of the old testament looked forward and hoped and typified they foreshadowed the blood that jesus was going to shed when he laid down his life on the cross and of course that is the only hope for every one of us this morning and that's where we leave it that's where abel points us even in abel's death we're able to look back on a man who approached god by faith and who by his life and by his death pointed forward to the coming of jesus christ and to his death on the cross and abel knew perfectly well i believe that his sacrifice would never take away his sin but he did it in faith faith in jesus christ same faith as i hope you and i have this morning as we look to him as we trust in him as we trust in his finished work on the cross as we trust in his blood the blood that was shed at calvary as the payment for our sin because the blood of jesus christ cleanses us from all sin it's the only place where our sin is once and for all cleansed past present and future so abel speaks to us this morning and he asks us are we washed are we cleansed in that same blood let's pray our father in heaven we want to praise and thank you for your grace and your kindness and for the way in which the whole of the bible makes clear the way that jesus would come one day and he would as god and as man come into the world as our mediator as our savior and in which he by laying down his life voluntarily and willingly taking our sins upon him on the cross so he would pay that price we ask lord that you will give us that faith that not only rests in him but that listens to him and obeys him and follows him we pray that you will bless the rest of this day to us in jesus name amen we're [36 : 47] going to you