

Hope Deferred

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[0 : 01] Well, would you please take your Bibles and open them up this morning to Genesis chapter 4. It's my privilege to preach this morning and continue our series in Genesis. We've made our way to chapter 4, and I told you the first three chapters would be a slow walk through the garden.

Now we're outside of the garden, and we're going to pick up our pace just a little bit. So we'll read all of chapter 4 this morning, and I plan to hit on chapter 5 as well. But as we stand and read God's Word, I will read chapter 4, verses 1 through 26.

So when you've found it, let's stand in honor of the reading of God's Word. Genesis 4, 1 through 26. Now Adam knew his wife, Eve, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, I have gotten a man with the help of the Lord.

And again she bore his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a worker of the ground. 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, Cain, why are you angry?

[1 : 17] Why has your face fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it.

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

He said, I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper? And the Lord said, What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground. And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand.

When you work the ground, it shall no longer yield to you its strength. You shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth. Cain said to the Lord, My punishment is greater than I can bear.

Behold, you have driven me today away from the ground, and from your face I shall be hidden. I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me. Then the Lord said to him, Not so.

[2 : 22] If anyone kills Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold. And the Lord put a mark on Cain, lest any who found him should attack him. Then Cain went away from the presence of the Lord and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden.

Cain knew his wife, and she conceived and bore Enoch. When he built a city, he called the name of the city after the name of his son, Enoch. To Enoch was born Irad, and Irad fathered Mahujael, and Mahujael followed Methusel, excuse me, and Methusel fathered Lamech, and Lamech took two wives.

The name of the one was Ada, and the name of the other, Zillah. Ada bore Jabal. He was the father of those who dwell in tents and have livestock. His brother's name was Jubal.

He was the father of all those who play the lyre and pipe. Zillah also bore Tubal-Cain. He was the forger of all instruments of bronze and iron. The sister of Tubal-Cain was Nema.

Lamech said to his wives, Ada and Zillah, hear my voice. You wives of Lamech, listen to what I say. I have killed a man for wounding me, a young man for striking me.

[3 : 34] If Cain's revenge is sevenfold, then Lamech's is seventy-sevenfold. And Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and called his name Seth. For she said, God has appointed for me another offspring instead of Abel, for Cain killed him.

To Seth also was born a son, and he called his name Enosh. At that time, people began to call upon the name of the Lord. The grass withers and the flower fades, but the word of the Lord endures forever.

Father, we praise you for your word. We praise you for the promise of your word, of the gospel of Christ. And we pray now as we sit to receive your word, would you speak to us today?

We pray in Christ's name. Amen. You may be seated. One of my favorite verses comes from the book of Proverbs.

It's Proverbs 13, 12. It says this, Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a desire fulfilled is a tree of life.

[4 : 42] Now, I first memorized this verse when I was in college, and I thought about it often in the months that followed, especially as Amanda and I got engaged, and we had a promise to be married.

We put our hope in that coming day, and there's this long waiting period where it felt like each and every day that passed, that hope was deferred. And we see the same thing with expectant parents, don't we?

Now, you're expecting a child, but there's this built-in waiting period of about nine months where you're hoping and longing and waiting for that coming day, but hope day after day, month after month is put off, it's deferred, until the moment finally comes and the baby is born, and you get to hold that newborn baby in your hands, and nothing is like that experience of a longing finally fulfilled, a desire fulfilled.

It's a tree of life, the Proverbs says. Last week, we saw in the midst of the judgment of God for sin, God made this big promise in Genesis 3.15.

You remember what he said, Genesis 3.15. This verse is a key verse for the whole book of Genesis, but not just the book of Genesis. As we go through the Scriptures, what we see is that this promise is unfolded throughout the rest of the Scriptures leading up to the birth of the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

[6 : 03] Here's what he said. God said to the serpent, I will put enmity between you and the woman, between your offspring and her offspring. He will bruise your head, and you will bruise his heel.

This promise in the midst of the judgment is hope, and in the midst of this brokenness in the garden, God will send someone born of the woman who will come and crush the head of the serpent.

This promised offspring is going to come, and he's going to make all things right. He's going to come and fix what's been broken by sin. And this promise is what gave Adam and Eve hope, even outside of the garden in a sin-cursed world.

But here as we come to our passage this morning, now in chapter 4, tragically, this hope is deferred. In fact, for a brief moment, it looks like there's no hope at all.

The hope in a snake-crushing son of the woman has been snuffed out with the first murder in human history. And as we read this account, as we read this chapter, we're left wondering, will God's promises come to pass?

[7 : 13] Will God bring forth this promised offspring of the woman? For a moment, it looks like the offspring of the serpent is winning the battle. Will God's promise prevail even in the midst of darkness?

Well, what we see, the answer that we get here from Genesis chapter 4, and as we zoom out throughout the rest of the scriptures, is that God's promise always prevails. So let's look at our text this morning.

And first, what we see here is hope provided. Hope provided. Look there with me to verse 1. And again, remember where we are, the context of this passage.

We are now outside of the garden. Adam and Eve have sinned against the Lord. They've been thrust out away from the presence of the Lord. They're banished from the garden of Eden.

And yet, even there in a sin-cursed world, we see that God provides hope for them. In obedience to God's command, to be fruitful and multiply, they have children.

[8 : 18] These children are offspring of the woman. Eve conceived and bore Cain, and again she bore another son, his brother Abel. So now, now we have two image bearers born into the world.

And now in light of this promise that God has made, we have two distinct possibilities. The question is, will either one of these children be the snake crusher? Will either one of these be the one who will come and set right what's been destroyed by sin?

Now that God has made this promise, every offspring of the woman comes with this weight of expectation and anticipation. Could this be the one?

Some of y'all I know follow the royal family. And I don't have anything to do with it. I don't understand people that follow them as closely as they do, but I know some people really, really do. And you know that every time a child is born into the royal family, there's all this attention and just focus given to this child.

Why? Because of the possibility that one day this child who's just been born, this baby may one day grow up to be the king. They may grow up to be the queen.

[9 : 32] This child may grow up to rule and to reign. The same anticipation is given here. There's a sense of anticipation. Every time a son is born of the woman, will this be the one who will come and reign and rule and defeat sin in the grave?

Will he be the one to crush the head of the serpent? And hope is provided here with these two children. What we see, though, is from the very beginning, these two children take two very different paths, don't they?

And isn't it funny how two kids born of the same parents, raised in the same environment, can come out so different from one another, with different personalities and different interests and different skill sets.

So we see that play out here with Cain and Abel, don't we? Verse 2 tells us Abel is a keeper of the sheep. He's a shepherd. Cain is a worker of the ground. He's a farmer.

And just notice already here with this new earth, with these new people, a very minimal population here in the world, we're already beginning to see diversity and gifting and skill set and variety on display, aren't we?

[10 : 48] Verse 3 tells us these two brothers, with their two different vocations, bring to the Lord two different offerings, and the Lord has two very different responses.

Now, here's the tension in the passage. Look there with me. Cain brings an offering of the fruit of the ground, and Abel brings an offering of the firstborn of his flock with the fat portions.

And how does the Lord respond? Look there. The Lord had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering, he had no regard.

And we should ask, well, why not? Why is the Lord accepting one offering and not accepting the other? It makes complete sense to me, at least on the surface, given their vocations.

Abel's a shepherd. He brings some sheep. Cain is a farmer. He brings some fruit. Why would the Lord regard one and not the other? We're going to answer that.

[11 : 50] But before we do, I want you to notice here, we should notice that it is the Lord, it is the Lord who decides what offering is acceptable to him.

The Lord dictates what is and what is not right and good and acceptable worship. We need to understand this, especially in our man-centered society, that worship ultimately is not catered to our preferences.

True and genuine worship is not about us and our wants. It is about the Lord and his wants. True worship isn't man-centered.

It is God-centered. And the question of true worship is not ultimately what's pleasing to me. It's what is pleasing to the Lord. And here we see a basic fundamental distinction here between true and false worship.

We read a passage earlier in Hebrews that I think helps us understand the difference. And I'm going to read it again here. Hebrews 11 verse 4 says, By faith, Abel offered a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous.

[13 : 09] God commending him by accepting his gifts. And through his faith, though he died, still he speaks. By faith, Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain.

Two brothers, two vocations, two offerings, one is accepted, one is disregarded. What's the difference? Only one was offered up to the Lord by faith.

True and acceptable worship in the sight of the Lord must come from a heart of faith.

Without faith, it is impossible to please him. True and acceptable worship must come from a heart of faith, meaning a heart that trusts him, latches onto him, loves him, honors him, seeks him above all else and disregards self.

That's what faith is. These two offerings, ultimately, they reveal two completely different postures of the heart. This is the difference between faith, which is trusting God, and self, works, trusting self.

[14 : 27] It's the difference between a heart that seeks the Lord and a heart that just comes and does whatever you think you have to do. Go through the motions. Do you realize that two people can sit in the same place and sing the same songs and hear the same scriptures and receive the same sermon and come to the same worship service and one person's offering of worship be accepted and the others not?

You may say, well, I'm here, I'm standing, I'm singing, I'm giving, I'm doing all the things. Why would God accept one and not the other? The difference, I'll say it again, the only acceptable worship in the sight of the Lord is worship that comes from a heart of faith.

we need to ask ourselves, as we come in, as we gather for worship, as we prepare ourselves for this holy moment of receiving the word of the Lord, of offering up praise to him, are we offering up a sacrifice of praise that comes from a heart of faith or are we simply checking the box, going through the motions?

We see here God has provided hope with these two children and already we see their paths begin to diverge and what we see happens next is that tragically this hope that was provided for a moment is deferred.

So second, second, we see hope deferred. Look there with me to verse five. Verse five, it says, Cain, in response to the Lord disregarding his sacrifice, how does he respond?

[16 : 10] Cain is very angry, it says, and his face fell. And the Lord said to Cain, why are you angry? Why has your face fallen?

If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, here's the warning, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it.

Now your version might say something like, its desire is contrary to you. It's the same idea, isn't it? We saw this language in chapter three. You can flip back there or look back there to verse 16 of chapter three and you remember from last week, Eve, it said, Eve, your desire will be for your husband, but he will rule over you.

And so now, just like with Eve's desire, to rule over her husband, now God warns Cain, sin wants to rule over you. Sin wants to overcome you.

It wants to overpower you. It is coming to destroy you. But he tells Cain, you must rule over it. This is a test here, isn't it?

[17 : 20] This is a moment of opportunity, a moment of testing, rule or be ruled. Kill or be killed. Hunt or be hunted.

John Owen, he used to say, be killing sin or sin will be killing you. This is what Cain is facing here. All hope hangs in the balance.

Will Cain prove to be obedient to the Lord? Will he trust and obey the word of the Lord? Will he keep the possibility alive that perhaps, maybe, just maybe, he will be the one to triumph over sin?

Here we see verse 8. All hope in Cain is shattered. He does not rule over sin.

Sin rules over Cain. Cain spoke to Abel, his brother. I don't know what he said. I don't believe it was pleasant. And when they were out in the field, Cain rose up against his brother, Abel, and killed him.

[18 : 26] This is the first murder in human history. Now we read something like this and we're almost, we're just so numb and desensitized to violence. We live in it every day.

We see it every day on the news. We read about it. We hear about it. There's violence all around us. We're just so numb to the weight and the heaviness, the heaviness, the severity of the sin.

This is the first murder in the history of mankind. And just look how far we've fallen in just a short period of time. Cain proves to be a sinner and a murderer and a rebel to the word of God just like his parents before him.

But even more than that, the deeper issue here is that Cain proves himself to be an offspring of the serpent.

And Cain and Abel may be physically members of the same family. They're brothers physically by blood. But spiritually speaking, they are from two entirely different families.

[19 : 30] One is of faith and the other is faithless. This murder. We have to understand this story in chapter 4, this murder of one brother against another.

This is the first chapter of the unfolding conflict between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. And for just a brief moment, it looks like the offspring of the serpent is winning.

It looks like hope is lost. And for just a brief moment, Adam and Eve are wondering how in the world will God's promises come to pass? In one act of violence, Cain has snuffed out hope that either one of these children might be the snake crusher God has promised.

For a moment here, hope is deferred. Hope is crushed. And we should notice how familiar all of this story sounds. This is a replay of what Adam and Eve just experienced in the garden, isn't it?

Did you notice the similarities here between these stories? That we saw a replay of the sin. Cain disregarded the word of the Lord just like Adam and Eve did. And we see a replay of the Lord's pursuit of the sinner.

[20 : 46] Verse 9, The Lord said to Cain, Where is Abel your brother? Do you hear the echoes? Where are you, Adam? Who told you you were naked? We see a replay of the sinner hiding his sin.

I don't know. Am I my brother's keeper? This woman you gave me, she gave me the fruit. The man and the woman hid and covered themselves. You see the echoes here.

Cain hides his sin from the Lord, but it goes a step further, doesn't it? He lies straight to the Lord's face. We see a replay of the Lord's judgment on the sinner.

The Lord said, What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground, and now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand.

When you work the ground, it shall no longer yield to you its strength. You shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth. All of this is a sad reenactment of the garden, which shows us that this problem of sin is not just an isolated incident.

[21 : 55] And it doesn't even reset with each generation. We don't come in on a blank slate. This problem of sin is a virus. It's a sickness.

It's a power that enslaves and corrupts. It's passed down from generation to generation, and things are not getting better here. They're getting worse. You wonder, why in the world the world we live in is so broken?

You watch the news and you see the violence that we see every single day, and you wonder, how could anybody hate somebody so much? The answer is, we sin because we are sinners, both by nature and by choice.

We have inherited the same sin that Cain has inherited from his brother, from his father, Adam. And yet, just as we saw in the garden, we see here, despite it all, replayed once again, God is merciful to sinners.

Verse 13, Cain grieves his judgment and says to the Lord, my punishment is greater than I can bear. You've driven me today away from the ground and away from your face.

[23 : 12] I shall be hidden. I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth. And he worries, whoever will find me will kill me. But listen to this, the Lord responds with this provision of mercy.

Not so. If anyone kills Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold. The Lord mercifully put a mark on Cain, lest any who found him should attack him.

And then Cain went away from the presence of the Lord, like Adam and Eve before him, and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden. Abel is gone.

Cain is banished. Neither one of them are the snake crusher that God has promised. And again, the question comes to the forefront.

Will God accomplish what he's promised? Will the promises of God prevail even in this bleak darkness? forgiveness? Third, third, we see hope is restored.

[24 : 17] Look there with me to verse 17. Hope is restored. Here, starting in verse 17 and through the rest of the chapter and then even on to chapter 5. Again, the question is, will the promised one come through Cain?

We know that Cain's a murderer. We know that Cain is wicked and Cain belongs to the offspring of the evil one but could it be that the snake crusher will come through his line?

And what we see here in the rest of chapter 4 is two distinct legacies. Look there with me at the legacy of Cain's line. Verse 17. Cain knew his wife and she conceived and bore Enoch and when he built a city he called the name of the city after the name of his son, Enoch.

Enoch bore Irad and Irad, Mahujael and Mahujael and Methusael and Methusael Lamech. Lamech took two wives. One was Ada, the other Zillah.

Ada bore Jubal He was the father of those who dwell in tents and have livestock and his brother's name was Jubal and he was the father of those who play the lyre and the pipe. Zillah also bore Tubal Cain and he was the forger of all instruments of bronze and iron and the sister of Tubal Cain was Nema.

[25 : 33] Do you hear what he's tracing here? He's outlining the legacy of the line of Cain and by all accounts the contributions of the family of Cain are impressive, aren't they?

These are city builders and the first musicians come from this line. Forgers of instruments and tools, these guys are making some monumental contributions to the world.

We see development here of culture and art. They make incredible contributions to this developing society, don't they? But despite these contributions, what we see is that ultimately at the root, the legacy of Cain's line is wickedness.

Look there to verse 23. Lamech said to his wives, he's a polygamist. Well, this is new. This is a new development of sin and wickedness.

Sin is progressing. The virus is spreading. He says to his wives, Ada and Zillah, hear my voice, you wives of Lamech. Listen to what I say. I have killed a man for wounding me.

[26 : 45] He's not just a polygamist, he's a murderer. And the murders don't stop with Cain. He has a legacy of violence. It runs in the family. I've killed a young man for striking me.

He's not just a murderer. He's vengeful. He's bloodthirsty. This isn't equal justice. It's not an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. He kills a young man for wounding me, a young man for striking me.

This is over and above the top. You hurt me, I kill you. Again, we see sin and wickedness is multiplying here on the earth. Things aren't getting better.

They're getting much, much worse. And he boasts in it, doesn't he? If Cain's revenge is sevenfold, then Lamech's revenge is seventy-sevenfold. He's arrogant.

Boastful. It's a mixed bag here with Cain's legacy, isn't it? Some very good, some incredible, wonderful, good contributions mixed up with great wickedness.

[27 : 49] And we can look at our own culture and see the same thing, can't we? Men and women of all stripes, believer and non-believer alike, are capable of making incredible contributions to society.

Even non-believers are capable of making incredible contributions to art and culture and science and technology. And as they do so, what they're doing, willingly or not, whether they're aware of it or not, is they are imaging forth, they're representing, they're shining forth the glory of God, even non-believers.

When Stephen Hawking explains astronomy and physics, now we may, with our limited understanding, disagree with some of what he says, but even in the exercise of the brilliance of his mind, he's demonstrating some of the glory of God.

John Lennon and Paul McCartney, an atheist and an agnostic, when they come together and they write a song, the whole world recognizes that's beautiful. It's wonderful.

It's art. It's music. And yet, they reject him and their use of the gifts of God. This is called common grace.

[29 : 11] But, despite their incredible contributions, because at the root of their offerings is not faith, before the Lord, ultimately, it is disregarded.

Ultimately, here, as we trace the line of Cain, what we see is his legacy is wickedness. But here in verse 25, look there with me. once again, hope is renewed.

It says, Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and called his name Seth. For she said, God has appointed for me another offspring instead of April.

For Cain killed him. another offspring. Again, hope is restored. Hope is renewed here through the line of Seth.

And look at his legacy. It's not ultimately art or medicine or music or science or any of this. Verse 26, what's his legacy? To Seth also was born a son, and he called his name Enosh, and at that time, people began to call upon the name of the Lord.

[30 : 32] This is the first formal, gathered, official Yahweh worship in the history of the world.

The legacy of Seth's line, like Abel before him, is one of faith and genuine worship of the Lord.

See here the distinction. Do you see it? See here the difference between these two lines? I want you to see here the difference between faith and faithlessness.

Between wickedness and righteousness. between duty and delight. Between boasting in self and boasting in the Lord. Between external impressiveness and a singular devotion to please and worship the Lord alone.

Do you see the difference? The question for us this morning, church, is which one will we be? To which family do you belong?

[31 : 46] belong? Every single one of us and every single person in the world belongs to one of these two distinct families.

We are either offspring of the serpent by nature or we are children of God by grace. And what's the difference between the two? Faith in the promise of God.

We are saved by grace through faith. You know, that's the same way any Old Testament believer was saved too, by the way. They are saved by grace through faith in the promises of God.

The only difference is they are looking forward to when this promise might one day be fulfilled while we get to look backwards to Christ Jesus in the gospel and see how every promise of God finds our yes and amen in Him.

Here with the birth of Seth, hope is renewed, but unfortunately for Eve, as we know as we zoom out from this account, it is a long way to go here before that desire is fulfilled. The rest of the Bible will trace these two lines and these two conflicting families.

[33 : 01] The seed of the woman against the seed of the serpent and the seed of the serpent will continue to try and try and try and try to snuff out the seed of the woman.

But through a long and painful and bleak history of sin and apparent hopelessness, the good news of the gospel is that God's promises always prevail.

I want you to just look at chapter five with me and take a look at this genealogy and I realize even as I say that, right, some of you are afraid.

I know that this is part of what you just skip over this in your Bible reading plan. I get that, I know. But what I want you to understand is that this list of names here is not just tracing history.

These genealogies are tracing promise. Put your finger there in Genesis five and I want you to turn over to Luke chapter three. And here we find another genealogy.

[34 : 08] And these two long lists of names, they trace the very same promise. They tell the same exact story.

the only difference is that Genesis five ends with hope deferred, but Luke chapter three shows us desire fulfilled. All of chapter five is summarized there in Luke chapter three.

We have to read it backwards, the bottom to top. God to Adam, Adam to Seth, Seth to Enos, Enos to Canaan, Canaan to Mahalel, Mahalel to Jared, Jared to Enoch, Enoch to Methuselah, Methuselah to Lamech, Lamech to Noah, Noah to Shem.

That's where Genesis five stops. But here in Luke three, it keeps going. And we trace this promise deferred, this hope deferred, ultimately to Noah, eventually to Abraham, from Abraham eventually to David, from David eventually down the line until we get to Joseph.

And from Joseph and Mary to Jesus, the Messiah, Luke is telling us, finally, at long last, in Jesus, the promise has been fulfilled.

[35 : 29] Our desire has been fulfilled in Jesus. Jesus is the one who will come, now we know, through the line of Seth, and crush the head of the serpent.

The question for us this morning, church, is this, will we trust him even if for a moment hope is deferred? Will we trust him now by faith even when we cannot yet see him by sight?

Will we trust him to return and put an end to sin and death and darkness in the devil even while here and now are so often so overwhelmed by these things here and now?

Will you trust him by faith that despite the darkness and despite the opposition, despite the apparent hopelessness of the moment, despite the delay, that God's promise will prevail?

This conflict between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent, it hit its climax at the cross of Christ. And in a moment of darkness and apparent hopelessness, for a moment it looked as if all hope was lost.

[36 : 47] The serpent struck the heel of the son of the woman and all were left wondering, will God's promises come to pass? At the cross of Christ it looked like the serpent had won, like the battle had been lost.

Will God's promises prevail even in the midst of darkness? And the answer that we see is yes! God's promises prevail in Christ.

Christ Jesus rose from the grave and crushed the serpent's head so that now by faith, sinners like us can be transferred, delivered from the domain of darkness and might become sons and daughters of the living God.

By faith in the promised seed of the woman, despite the darkness and apparent hopelessness of the present, we believe by faith that his promises will prevail one day soon and very soon church.

The Lord will return. Sin will be no more. Death will be finished. That cursed serpent will be done for good.

[38 : 01] The sheep will be separated from the goats. These two families, these two spiritual lines will be separated at last and the children of God will be separated from the children of the enemy.

The dead will be raised and we who know him by faith will live with him forever in a new and better Eden, a new heavens and the new earth.

Is this your hope church? Will you trust his promises promises? Even in the midst of darkness? Father, we praise you that all of the promises of God find their yes and amen in Jesus Christ.

We praise you that even now as we live in between some promise and fulfillment, Lord, we pray that we would live by faith and walk by faith, that we would look back to the cross and the resurrection and be reminded that you have been faithful to us already and surely you will be faithful again.

Lord, we pray now, Lord, as we stand to worship you, would we worship you by faith? We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.