

Sin's Power, Christ's Victory

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Preacher: Nick Lauer

[0 : 0 0] Good morning, church. This morning we're going to be looking at Genesis chapter 4. That's page 3 in the Pew Bible, if you want to turn there. We'll be walking through this chapter of Genesis together as we continue our series in these opening chapters of the Bible.

As we turn to Genesis chapter 4, let me pray for us. Oh, Father, what a prayer we have just sung, that you would be our vision, our wisdom, our shield, the heart of our heart, our true riches.

God, we confess that we're often very far from that, and yet thank you that in your mercy and in your grace, you continue to draw near to us and speak to us through your word so that we might really know you and be captivated by who you are once again as we were created to be.

So, Lord, help us now as we come to your word. Give us ears to hear. Give us hearts to receive what it is your spirit is saying to us, your church, now. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Genesis chapter 4.

Let me read this for us. Now Adam knew Eve, his wife, 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.

[1 : 3 3] 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, why are you angry? And 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 contrary to 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.

[2 : 4 1] 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. The Lord said to him, not so. 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.

[3 : 44] And Mahujael fathered Methushael, and Methushael 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 Naamah. 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. If Cain's revenge is sevenfold, then Lamech's is seventy-sevenfold.

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.

[4 : 51] To Seth also a son was born, and he called his name Enosh. At that time, people began to call upon the name of the Lord. So let's do a little test.

I'm going to say a word, and you consider what's the first thing that comes to your mind. And the word is sin. Often we tend to view sin in two ways.

On the one hand, there's the religious or the moralistic view of sin. That is, sin is some particular action or behavior that you know you shouldn't do, but if you try a little harder, you can probably do better.

Usually in this view, we talk about sins in the plural. Lying, cheating, stealing. On the other hand, there's what we may call the irreligious or the permissive view of sin.

And in this view, we usually talk about sin when doing something that's especially fun or pleasurable. Chocolate, so good, it must be a sin.

[6 : 00] Sin in this view often becomes an adjective or an adverb. Sinfully delicious. You know, the interesting thing about both of these views of sin, different as they may appear at first, is that neither one really thinks that sin is that big of a deal.

On the one hand, sin is just an action we need to avoid. And on the other hand, sin is just some sort of pleasurable activity that we should only indulge in every once in a while. But on both views, sin is something ultimately that we can handle.

No great danger. Now, why am I bringing all this up? Well, in Genesis chapter 4, we have the first explicit reference in the Bible to the word sin.

It's in verse 7. And what we see, not just in verse 7, but in the whole of chapter 4, is that our popular views of sin are completely wrong.

Sin isn't merely breaking a few rules or indulging a few appetites. Sin is a destructive power. Sin is a destructive power. Chapter 4 of Genesis is about the power of sin.

[7 : 21] Lao Tzu, the ancient Chinese philosopher, is quoted as saying, there is no greater danger than underestimating your opponent. The reality is, I think most of us are underestimating the spiritual struggle we are in.

We're like the amateur surfer paddling out naively into 20, 30-foot waves and then wondering why we come crashing back to the shore, battered and bruised.

Genesis 4 is here to help us not make that mistake spiritually. So what is Genesis 4 teaching us first?

What we see here is the power of sin in the heart. This is verses 1 through 7. Now, this story may be well known to you. Two brothers, Cain and Abel, two offerings, one from the field, one from the flock, two responses, one regarded, the other not.

What's the difference? Why does God regard Abel's offering and not Cain's? Well, I think the answer is actually found in verses 2 and 3, if we look a little closer.

[8 : 39] Consider, how is Abel's offering described? Abel's offering, the firstborn of his flock, the fat portions. In other words, it's the best of the best.

But how is Cain's offering described? It's just an offering. You see, Abel gives his best. Cain gives a mere token.

And these offerings reveal their hearts. Hebrews 11, 4 in the New Testament, looking back on this story, we'll say, by faith, Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain.

In other words, Abel's faith-filled heart flowed forth in an offering of his best to God. Cain's heart, however, was much more conflicted.

But the Lord doesn't reject Cain because of this. What does God do? God actually approaches him.

[9 : 42] God pursues him with a question. Verse 6, why are you angry? With an invitation in verse 7, come, change your heart, Cain, and you'll be accepted.

There's a path for you to come back to me. And then a warning in the rest of verse 7. If you do not do well, that is, if you do not bring a genuine offering of faith and love, if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door.

Its desire is contrary to you, but you must rule over it. So the first appearance of the word sin in the Bible here in verse 7, do you capture the picture, the metaphor?

The picture is of a predator stalking back and forth, ready to strike, like a lion waiting for its prey, crouching at the door, ready to pounce. The phrase, its desire is contrary to you, we actually saw last week.

It describes a power struggle, a battle. And what this means is this, since the fall, sin is a power that is out to destroy us from the inside out.

[10 : 54] It's like the lid coming off of Pandora's box. When our first human parents rebelled against God, that lid was ripped off and sin is now unleashed, ready to consume.

And doesn't that actually ring more true than our naive views of sin, mere sort of bad behaviors on the one hand, little indulgence in some of the other.

Because after all, haven't you felt that inner battle at times? Imagine driving a car, and every time you want to make a turn, the wheel lurches in the opposite direction, and you have to pull with all your might to make it go the way you want it to go.

Well, you'd think something was pretty wrong with your car, right? But is that not so often? Our own hearts. In Galatians 5, Paul will talk about a war going on in our hearts between sin, our sinful nature, and the Spirit of God.

They are opposed to each other, he says, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. And how does this inner battle become visible in Cain's life?

[12 : 06] Note how he responds to God. He is angry, and his face fell. Two seemingly different responses, but so often they live together.

Anger and self-pity. Can I suggest to you this morning that there is a spiritual battle for your soul going on in your own heart?

Can I suggest that sin is not a game, but a violent beast ready to devour, and if you don't see that, you will live a very spiritually naive life, tossed back and forth between anger and self-pity, and ultimately ending in ruin.

Because sin isn't just a destructive power in our hearts, it's also a destructive power in our relationships. This is verses 8 through 16. Note the power of sin in Cain's relationship with his brother, and ultimately how selfish it makes Cain.

Verse 8. Cain murders his brother. In essence, saying that Abel's the problem, not me. Rather than deal with his own heart before God, which is the real issue, Cain blames Abel, and his anger becomes murder.

- [13 : 29] Verse 9. Cain denies any responsibility for others. Am I my brother's keeper? I'm not responsible for him. Verses 10 through 13. Cain expresses more remorse for his punishment than for his crime.

In fact, he only expresses remorse for his punishment and none for his crime. Did you see that? No regret, no remorse for having killed his own brother, only a complaint that the punishment's too much for him.

In other words, sin makes us care more about the consequences to ourselves than the harm we've done to other people and the offense we've made to God. Last, verses 14 through 16.

Cain would rather be alone than repent. God, in mercy, puts a mark on Cain. We don't know exactly what that looked like, but it basically protected Cain.

It was a visual warning against anyone who would kill Cain in revenge for what he did. And to be sure, Cain would no longer be able to cultivate the ground like he did.

- [14 : 35] Part of God's punishment on Cain is that the ground would no longer yield its fruit for him. You see, the ground once yielded to Cain its fruit. And what was Cain's response? Cain would no longer be able to shed his brother's blood back into it.

So God says, no more. Now Cain will have to hunt, to gather, and to be dependent on others. But rather than humbly accept that this sentence was fitting because of his crime, and rather than humbly repent for what he did, Cain leaves.

He'd rather be alone than actually repent. Do you see how sin is a power that destroys our relationships and so quickly?

The sad thing is that this whole incident happens not ten generations after the fall, not five generations, but one. And is that so far-fetched?

How many marriages dissolve in just a few years? How many roommates have a falling out in just a semester or two? How many friendships crumble in seemingly no time?

- [15 : 44] Now you might be thinking, geez, I haven't killed anybody. Is it really that bad? Well, perhaps you haven't killed anybody. That's a good thing. I'm thankful for that. But there are more ways than murder for sin to ruin relationships.

And the underlying dynamic is still the same. Like Cain, we come to believe that I'm not the problem they are. And after all, I'm not really responsible for them anyway.

And I care more about the consequences of my own harmful actions than the ones I've actually wronged. And I'd rather be alone. I'd rather choose isolation than restoration. And when that happens, we find ourselves doing things we thought we would never do.

because sin is powerful in our hearts and out into our relationships. But third, we see the power of sin in our human cultures.

This is verses 17 through 24. The story of Cain's descendants. We see here the growth of a broad family, the growth of a culture, if you will, a whole interconnected way of being and living and making sense of the world.

- [17 : 03] Now, the first observation that we have to make here is that there is much common grace amidst Cain's descendants. In verse 17, Cain marries, has a child, and they found a city.

Now, we're not told where Cain's wife comes from. This is one of the old sort of like Bible questions of the ages. Where did Cain find a wife? It was just him and Abel. Well, I think it's plausible he married one of his other family members as Adam and Eve kept reproducing and growing in the human family group.

If you want to talk more about that after the service, we can chat about where Cain's wife came from. But it's not important. Genesis isn't really interested in that. The point is, Cain marries, has a child, they found a city, and isn't that exactly what God had originally intended?

For humans to be fruitful and multiply. Common grace. And then in verses 20 through 22, we see Cain's descendants as culture makers.

Dwelling in tents and having livestock. Playing the lyre in the pipe. Forgers of bronze and iron. In other words, we see the advance of agriculture, of arts, of technology.

[18 : 03] These are good gifts. God's common grace hasn't abandoned human culture making. And I think we have to remember this as the church.

Because in any city, in any society, there are going to be these marks of common grace. Things that we can approve of. Ways in which God's hand is still at work. Are you able to identify those things?

Are you able to give thanks to God for those things? To allow those things to actually provide an avenue for pointing our friends and neighbors to the source of those good gifts?

There's much common grace here. But there's also another dynamic at work, isn't there? At one and the same time. What we see also in this sort of brief snapshot of Cain's descendants is that sin becomes systemic.

Lamech, the sixth generation from Cain, the seventh from Adam. And what do we see? Polygamy, violence, pride. If Genesis 4 shows us how quickly sin creates death, it also shows us how deeply entrenched it becomes in our way of being in the world.

[19 : 26] Lamech rejects God's design for marriage and takes two wives. And the rest of Genesis will show us how much pain and heartache such a practice creates. Lamech is a brutal person killing a young man just for a minor run-in.

We had a scrape so I killed him. And to top it all off, he boasts, if Cain's revenge is sevenfold, mine is 77.

And so sin is not some trifle, some game, but a destructive power in our hearts, in our relationships, and even, despite much common grace, systemically invading our human cultures.

So how would Genesis 4 have us respond? If all this is starting to ring true for us, if we're starting to see that sin is this power unleashed, crouching at the door, ready to strike, how should we respond?

Well, first we have to see how God responds. The chapter ends with the birth of another son. Adam and Eve call his name Seth, which sounds like the Hebrew word appointed, and they call him Seth because they say God appointed him in the place of the son they had lost.

[20 : 54] So we see here that in the midst of the ruin, there comes hope. A new branch of the family tree, another offspring. And that word offspring is so laden with meaning when you go back to chapter 3 and see the promise about what God would do through Eve's offspring.

Another offspring is here. A new branch of the family tree, and this time it's different. Seth has a son, Enosh, and people begin calling upon the name of the Lord.

That is, they become a family line that worships God. A new family in the midst of the old. And it's through Seth's line that God's rescue from the power of sin will come.

Ages later, when all of humanity is still captive under the power of sin, a new son like Seth is born. A new start is made. Do you remember how the New Testament begins?

With a genealogy. How many times have you read Matthew chapter 1 and thought, what is going on? The most important work in all of human history and it starts with a list of names?

[22 : 14] And yet, how fitting. Down through the fallen human family, one finally comes to break sin's power and set us free. Jesus comes appointed by God like Seth.

But Jesus will do what Seth never could do. You see, Seth could never really take Abel's place, right? But Jesus, fully human and fully God, could stand in all of our place.

and like Abel, Jesus' innocent blood would also be shed. His own family members, his own people, his own brothers would betray him and in anger and jealousy they would kill him.

But the New Testament book of Hebrews again points something out to us. In Hebrews 12, 24, the writer says this curious word, it says, Jesus' blood speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

Abel's blood cried out to God for justice, did it not? And yet, Jesus' blood cries out to God for mercy. Jesus died the death that we deserve to die.

[23 : 32] He died in our place, the innocent for the guilty so that the guilty could be forgiven. And on the grounds of his death, his perfect sacrifice, when all of sin and death had come upon him at the cross, sin's power was at last swallowed and defeated.

And three days later, Jesus rose from the grave because sin and death could no longer hold him. And after spending 40 days with his disciples, the risen Jesus ascended to the Father and poured out the Holy Spirit at Pentecost so that now we might live, all of us, in the power of his death and resurrection.

This is what God has done in the face of the power of sin. So now, how do we respond to the power of sin shown us in Genesis 4?

Let's walk back through the passage and consider what this hope in Christ, this new power, means as we confront the power of sin first in our hearts. And the reality that we have to address here is quite frankly that we need new hearts.

And that is what Christ provides. The power to be born anew spiritually, to be regenerated as a gift of the Holy Spirit through faith in Christ, to go from spiritual death living under the dominion of sin, to now spiritual life with the Holy Spirit living in us and the Spirit waging war against sin's power.

[25 : 16] You see, when we come to faith in Christ, this frees us not just from the penalty of sin but also from the power of sin because the Holy Spirit now resides within. So the question is, friends, have you experienced this new birth?

Have you turned from seeking to justify yourself and pull yourself up by your own moral bootstraps? Have you stopped trying to do that and have you surrendered your life to Jesus as Savior and Lord?

Until you do that, your battle against sin will be a losing one because you'll never get to the root of the battle.

Yes, you may trade one set of behaviors for another but you'll never get down to the heart of your resistance to God.

You'll never get down to the heart of your self-reliance and rejection of God as your only hope and your only king. And until you've come to be born anew through faith in Christ, only then through the Holy Spirit by grace in Christ will you get down to that root and real change will begin to happen because by the grace of the Holy Spirit you can put sin to death.

[26 : 44] You don't have to give in anymore. You don't have to listen to its voice anymore. You can now set your mind on things above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God interceding for you and you can live a life full of the fruit of the Holy Spirit living within you.

A life of joy and peace and patience and kindness and goodness and faithfulness and gentleness and self-control and above all a life of love.

And that takes us to the second part. What hope is there in the face of sin's power in our relationships? Listen again to 1 John chapter 3. This is the message that you've heard from the beginning of your faith in Christ that we should love one another.

We should not be like Cain who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. We know that we've passed out of death into life because we love the brothers.

By this we know love that he, Jesus, laid down his life for us and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. Do you see the dynamic at work there?

[27 : 54] You see, friends, there's one who laid down his life for you, who looked upon you not when you were innocent but when you were rebellious.

There's one who looked upon you when you were an enemy of God and when I was an enemy of God and who saw us in our sin and our rejection of him and who was willing to call us brothers and sisters when we didn't deserve it.

Jesus comes and says, I am my brother's keeper. I am my sister's keeper. And he's faithful for us and to us to the end.

And so, knowing his love for us, how could we not turn to our brothers and sisters and love them the same? That's what 1 John is saying, riffing on this passage from Genesis 4.

You see, sin wants us to remain self-centered. I'm not the problem they are. I'm not responsible for them. I care more about myself. No, but Christ through the Spirit turns us from self-centeredness outward in love.

[29 : 06] Why? Because we've been loved. sin. And this life of love creates a culture. In the third part of Genesis 4, we saw that amidst much common grace, sin still becomes entrenched in cultural patterns.

But Christ, through the Spirit, is creating a counterculture in the midst of the world's cultures. In the midst of common grace, he's gathering a people to proclaim and embody saving grace.

You see, when Christ poured out his Spirit at Pentecost, he launched a movement of renewal upon the world. And that movement, that counterculture is nothing less than the church.

here, us, you and me, the radical beachhead and spearhead of the very kingdom of God sitting here on these uncomfortable wooden pews.

Here we are. You see, friends, we're not supposed to do this Christian thing alone. We're meant to be a body. We're meant to be a family so that we can display and become something new together.

[30 : 21] A new kind of family in the middle of the world's families. But this one's now not defined by who your biological parents were, but whose father you are.

Whose father has become God is now your father. And now we're all part of the same family in Christ. And together, Jesus says, you're going to be salt and you're going to be light.

Salt to restore, to preserve, to flavor, and light to reveal, and to warm, and to grow. And you know one of the most powerful ways that we live as this movement, as this counterculture of salt and light?

It's through the power of forgiveness. Lamech boasted that if anyone crossed him, there would be 77 times wrath to pay.

But Jesus, perhaps echoing this very passage, said that for his followers, it would not be revenge, but forgiveness that must be extended 70 times 7.

[31 : 32] The church is the place where the cycle of revenge stops, and where even enemies are loved. And friends, that will create a counterculture like something the world has never seen.

Here, under the cross of Christ, loving one another, and loving our enemies. And so, Genesis 4.

The power of sin is real. Let us not underestimate it. Let us not be naive. But let us not over estimate it. The power of Christ working through his Holy Spirit in you, in us, is greater.

Sin is crouching at the door, yes, but Jesus stands knocking at the door. Sin wants to devour. Jesus wants to come in and dine with us and make us his friends.

And through us, together, to go out and set many captives free. Amen? Let's pray. Amen. Why don't we pause for just a moment?

[32 : 52] Take just a moment of quiet before God together. Lord Jesus, I know there are many of my friends in this room who know firsthand what it's like to experience the power of sin.

Lord, many trials, much heartache, many addictions, many broken relationships, many ways in which the culture shapes us. So, Lord, this morning we turn our hands open to you and we ask for your help.

Lord, we surrender to you this morning. And we give you thanks that you have not left us helpless, hopeless, but you have come to us.

Oh, Lord, would you fill us with your spirit this day, Monday, Tuesday, out into this week, out through the rest of this month.

Lord, help us to keep in step with your spirit. Fixing our eyes on you, Lord Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith. So that we might not be oblivious to the power of sin, but that we might walk in daily victory.

[34 : 39] Not through us, but through you, Lord Jesus, our great victor. Lord, we know that you hold the keys to death and hell in your hands. Lord, one day every knee in heaven and earth and under the earth will bow to you and confess you as Lord.

Jesus, that is what we do this morning in anticipation of that great day. We call you Lord. And we pray that more and more you would be the Lord of our lives, that your kingdom would come and your will would be done in us and through us on earth as it is in heaven.

Amen. Well, friends, as the music team comes up, let's respond together by singing in Christ alone, praising Christ for all that he is and all that he's done for us.

Amen.