

So if you have your Bible's, please turn to Genesis 4. While you're flipping there, I'll explain that the first Sunday in September we gathered for what we're calling **First Sunday Feasts**. It's a time of worship that we will do on the first Sunday of each month the next one will be October 4th so put mark that in your calendar. During this time of worship, among other forms of worship, we will have a different guy do a 15-minute devotional over a book of the Bible. I did Genesis and challenged everyone to read through Genesis from start to finish. Genesis has been on my mind in my personal study the past few weeks so I thought it would be good to focus on a passage from this book.

If you haven't yet gotten there, Genesis chapter 4 is at the very beginning of the Bible, on page 3 of the pew Bibles. If you or someone you know needs a Bible then please take that as our gift to you.

You've hopefully had a chance to get there so let me read for you **Genesis 4**:

“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. 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 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.” (Genesis 4:1-11)

Well, 2020 continues on and this has proven itself to be a heavy year on many fronts. I don't know if you have noticed this in your own lives or among the people you associate with, but I have noticed that through this covid time, sin has shown itself in ways I've never experienced. Not just personally but look at the news, our headlines continue to show evidence of this.

So when you think about all the heartbreak, whether it's one you've experienced, one you've witnessed, one you've read in the headlines, or one of the countless atrocities and injustices that are happening across the world right now as we worship in this room together. When you take all those, and mix it together it makes a sour cocktail of “how did we get here...when did it get this bad?”

During this time in history I have heard more than one time, people cry out in prayer “Lord, can we just go back to a time when things were better...when things weren't so twisted, when times weren't so hard...Why can't we go back there again, but then the fog lifts and we think, where

would we return to? 1994, 1964, 1344, AD44, Genesis Chapter 4? NOWHERE. There is no time we can return to that we could know a time when sin's sting didn't have its place in our lives.

Here in the time of Cain and Able, we have an opportunity to step into a time when sin was new. Chapter 4 allows us to get a sense how we got to this place where we are now and hopefully in this account find a shadow of hope of how we can live today in the midst of a broken world.

We know that chapter 3 brings sin into this world and Scripture doesn't tell us how much time passed from the end of chapter 3 to the beginning of chapter 4 but you can imagine how excited Adam and Eve would've been when Cain was born.

Just think about it...This was the first man born in the concept of how we understand birth. It's amazing to think about. I remember how excited I was when I was going to be a father the first time, then the second time, and the third time. I had read the books and I had seen the videos on what to do and how to handle the situation. For Adam and Eve, this was BRAND NEW. Imagine what it would've been like for Eve...the first to get morning sickness, the first to feel that little Cain inside of her hiccup.

As a first-born son, Cain probably naturally desired to please his parents. He followed in his dad's footsteps and worked the land. Abel on the other hand was a shepherd.

And I want to look at **verses 3-5** with you right now:

“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.” (Gen 4:3-5)

2 offerings –

1 by Abel, an animal offering, accepted by God

1 by Cain, of the fruit of the ground, not accepted by God

Then we see this response of discouragement and anger by Cain. What's going on? What is the reason for this?

Why was Abel's sacrifice accepted and Cain's rejected? This is the key question of this passage. Why would God accept one man and reject one man? Why would God accept one offering, and reject another?

Maybe this passage tempts us into all kinds of conjecture.

-Maybe we could say, **“Well, maybe it was because Abel gave an animal sacrifice, that was a better sacrifice than a fruit or a plant sacrifice.”** Well, the passage doesn't push us there.

-Maybe we could say, **“It says Abel brought the firstborn of his flock, and it doesn't say Cain brought the first fruit of his harvest, and maybe that's it.”**

I would propose to you, you don't really have to do that kind of conjecture to understand this passage.

Look at the verses with me again: Verse 5 – “but for Cain and his offering he [that is God] had no regard. [now watch this] So Cain was very angry, and his face fell.”

Now all we need to understand what’s going on here is the response of Cain to God’s rejection. The response of Cain to God’s rejection is the dead giveaway in this passage, because if Cain’s heart was in the right place at the moment he gave this sacrifice, rather than his response being anger, his response would have been confession, his response would’ve been remorse, his response would’ve been humility, and repentance. But that’s not the response of Cain.

In fact, his response is pictured even by the way his face looked; you’ve seen that “head down” response before. Now what is all that about?

Listen, you learn something very important about sacrifice in this passage. You see, the problem was not the substance of the sacrifice; the problem was not the process of the sacrifice. The problem was in the heart of the person making the sacrifice.

You see, God isn’t satisfied with just the external acts of worship from us. God isn’t satisfied with just singing and service and fellowship and giving...God wants our hearts.

Turn with me, to Isaiah chapter 1:10-17...amazing words written here by Isaiah:
“Hear the word of the Lord, you rulers of Sodom!

Give ear to the teaching of our God,
you people of Gomorrah!
“What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? says the Lord;
I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of well-fed beasts;
I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of goats.
“When you come to appear before me, who has required of you
this trampling of my courts?
Bring no more vain offerings;

incense is an abomination to me.
New moon and Sabbath and the calling of convocations— I cannot endure iniquity and solemn
assembly.
Your new moons and your appointed feasts
my soul hates; (*could these words be any stronger?*)
they have become a burden to me;
I am weary of bearing them.
When you spread out your hands,
I will hide my eyes from you;

even though you make many prayers,
I will not listen;
your hands are full of blood.
Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean;

remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause.”

See, it doesn't matter how valuable the offering is.

If the offering comes from a heart that is hardened, it is detestable, he hates it.

So why did the Lord have regard for Abel and not Cain? The author of **Hebrews** lets us in on that in 11:4 “**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. And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks.**”

By faith... What does that even mean, faith in what? Faith that God was going to do what He said he was going to do. That there would be a seed from the woman who would come and crush the serpent, saving creation from sin's rule. It was this faith that allowed Abel to truly **sacrifice**.

And when you look at Cain, you shouldn't say, “what an awful man Cain is!” You ought to say, “I have that heart, too! And there are occasions where **I am a skilled glory thief**. In a moment where God should be receiving glory, I take that glory on myself.” That's all of us!

Seems unthinkable that the younger was chosen over the older one. You can almost hear Cain seething, “who was this God, to not accept my offering?! God wasn't pleased with the quality of the crop...He was the one who cursed the ground, so now I'm out there busting my rear end to produce this crop and it's not good enough!”

That's the struggle of Cain. Look back at the words again, as the Lord comes to Cain in this moment of grace and counsel, and he says: **why are you angry, and why has your face fallen?** {Listen to these words} **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.**”

To this, Cain had no response

What does it mean when God says to Cain, “If you do well, will you not be accepted?” God is saying to Cain, “Deal with the issue here, Cain. Deal with your heart. This is not about Abel's offering; this is not about favoritism; Cain, look within – deal with what needs to be dealt with.”

And then God gives this very pointed physical warning. He says this – “**Sin is crouching at the door.**”

For the believer, this image should raise the hair on the back of your neck...Sin is crouching at the door...like a serpent coiled and ready to strike any who get too close.

Christians, we can't relax. We've got to be aware of the struggle within, that struggle that would even disrupt moments of worship, moments of ministry, moments of service.

Sadly, you know the story – Cain was unwilling to look within. **(How long did Cain hate Abel?)**

He was angry at God, angry because Abel got what Cain thought he deserved. There were no guns. There wasn't really time to poison him; you know what happened. In an explosion of anger against God, which is played out against his brother, Cain brutally murders his sibling with his own hands.

One commentator writes, “**The first death in human history that came not by natural causes or by tragic accident, but by murder in cold blood committed by the first man born of a woman.**” It's tragic...

What happens immediately after the murder is almost just as shocking. God comes to Cain and says, “**Cain, where's your brother?**” This sounds exactly like how God confronts Adam after they had eaten the forbidden fruit “**Adam, where are you?**” And of course, God already knows, but He confronts Cain.

Cain gives the bitter response, “**I don't know, am I my brother's keeper?**” God gives Cain the punishment of being a nomad, a wanderer who can no longer work the ground. If I can be honest, I wish this historical account would've ended with this passage.

Sadly, we know the story of Cain plays out in our headlines and in our own lives.

You say, “But Ben, I'm not like that. I would never think of doing such a thing.” And yet, we get very irritated at the people that a sovereign God has placed in our lives.

We get angry at people who don't offer us the respect that we think we're due.

We get discouraged at people as they don't recognize the gifts that we think God has given us.

Our struggle is not first with people; our struggle first is with our Lord. And we really want him to endorse our kingdom when actually he's called us to be bondservants in his.

As much as we like to make the Bible, this book of heroes, the reality is it's not, it's a book of failures one after another but in Scripture there is one hero, his name is Jesus.

Hebrews 12:24 “**Christ's blood speaks a better word than the blood of Abel**”. You see, Abel wasn't the only shepherd who was mercilessly killed by his brother. See, where the first shepherd was killed by his brother, the Good Shepherd, Jesus, was killed by his kinsmen...the very ones he came to save.

Where Abel's blood cried out for justice...Jesus' blood cries out for you, “justified”.

Where Abel presented the sacrifice of the first born and the fat portions of his flock...Jesus presented on the alter HIMSELF, the perfect spotless lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world.

Victory over the serpent came through the work of the cross of Jesus Christ. It's through faith in Him that we find mercy and grace for every one of our patterns to live in the sin of Cain.

The blood of Jesus Christ speaks a better word than our life's circumstances.

The blood of Jesus Christ speaks a better word than our media's headlines.

The answer is not to try and go back to the good ol' days or a time that was better. Because Genesis 4 says that place doesn't exist this side of the fall. So we look ahead to a time when Jesus returns and finishes the work to restore this broken world to a place where there's no more pain, suffering or death.

And that's our hope, we are to live in faith like Abel...by faith that the serpent crushing work of Jesus Christ on the cross will one day be realized. This is our hope. Let's Pray: