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# SERMON NOTES

## Genesis #9: Chapter 4:1-26

Chapter four of Genesis begins a new and hard life for Adam and Eve. However, though this chapter is full of tragedy, and though the enormity of what their sin means begins to hit home, there is hope in the middle of these awful circumstances, and God's grace is evident even in tribulation.

This chapter is "bracketed" by hope: that is, it begins and ends with hope. The first hope is in the birth of a son to Adam and Eve. Eve exclaims that she has brought him forth with God's help. From this we can see two things: First, God has somehow made it possible for Adam and Eve to continue to have a relationship with Him, in spite of their sin; and second, Adam and Eve have taken God's promise of a savior very seriously. Eve's exclamation at Cain's birth implies that she may have thought that *he* was the one whom God promised would crush the serpent's head. They were both living in faith in God's promise – they both trusted Him and His graciousness to deal with the problems that they had created. Although they were the first sinners, they were also the first believers, and their faith was real.

Alas, Cain was not the one whom God had promised. In fact, Cain proved only how much humankind needs a savior. We have all heard the story of Cain and Abel, but it bears some close examination. First, after they grow up, they decide to bring God an offering. We don't know why they decided to do this, but possibly, it was in response to Adam and Eve's teaching them about God. Cain brings some of his produce to God, while Abel brings the very best portions of the very firstborn of his flock. God looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but not on Cain or *his* offering.

At first glance, this seems unfair, and we hardly blame Cain for being upset. However, there is a fundamental Biblical principle being introduced at this point in history, and that principle is that God sees and understands the human *heart*, and not merely the outward appearance. Cain did not bring God the best of the best, as Abel did. The importance of that point is that it is a reflection of the state of Cain's heart. Cain's outward actions were basically righteous – he *did* bring an offering, after all. The real issue though is not his outward action, but rather his inward condition. He did not bring God the best of the best, because in his heart, he did not honor God above all else. Outwardly, Cain conformed to an appearance of genuine religion. But inwardly, he did not accept the kind of relationship that God wanted to have with him. The offering was really neither here nor there to God – but God was concerned with Cain's heart. The fact that Cain did not bring God the best of the best was an indicator that his heart was not in the right place, even if his actions were. More than that, apart from any offering, God knew the state of Cain's spiritual being. God did not want to give approval to a way of life that outwardly looks religious, but inwardly has nothing to do with God, so he withheld acceptance from Cain. In his heart, he was holding back from God, and God knew it. God would not approve the offering because he did not want to endorse or whitewash Cain's lukewarm attitude toward his Creator. God says this:

Why are you so angry?" the LORD asked him. "Why do you look so dejected? <sup>7</sup> You will be accepted if you respond in the right way. But if you refuse to respond correctly, then watch out! Sin is waiting to attack and destroy you, and you must subdue it."

Cain was the first person to separate religious action from a true relationship with God. **He thought that if he just acted in a certain way, everything would be fine, without his actually having to have his life changed by a relationship with God.** Cain *wants* to be accepted by God – but he wants that acceptance to be given on *his* terms, not on *God's* terms. He wants to be able to induce God's blessing on his life by just doing religious things, without having to have his values challenged, his sin addressed, and his life transformed.

Now Cain compounds the issue. Instead of acknowledging his deceitfulness, and confessing his sin, he gets angry, and blames his brother for his own failing. Rather than dealing with a painful admission about the state of his own heart, Cain tries to convince himself that the problem is his *brother*. Perhaps he was even thinking that, with Abel out of the way, God would be *forced* to bless him, because there would be no other family in his generation. Cain's action is extremely revealing about the nature of sin, and of sinful desires: In response to a legitimate lack in his life, he attempts to "solve" the problem with an illegitimate action.

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**Instead of dealing with the fact that something is not right inside of him, Cain tries to fix the way he feels with an unrighteous deed.**

The apostle James, though he is not talking specifically about Cain, describes the process that Cain went through in James 1.13:

When tempted, no one should say, “God is tempting me.” For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.

Cain’s sin, when full-grown, resulted in the first death in the human race – that of his own brother. Cain rejected the truth that something was wrong inside of him. He rejected God’s help to deal with his problem. He even tried to reject God’s judgment after he sinned. God punished him by sending him into exile, and Cain responds with: “my punishment is more than I can bear.” He still refused to acknowledge his problem. There is no real evidence that he repented – he seemed sorry only because of the grief the murder brought *him* in the form of punishment. It is fascinating to realize that Cain is of the very first generation of humans who were born. Even here, so soon after creation, only one generation removed from perfection, we see the kind of terrible depravity that distresses us so much today. We are shocked by children killing other children, by family members killing each other, by the bold and unrepentant attitudes of those who commit such sins. And yet, from the very first generation after the world was created, this was the state of human nature.

Scripture confirms this truth in many ways. In theological circles, this truth is called “original sin.” The description of original sin goes like this: all human beings are born with a corrupted nature, and are inclined *toward* evil and *away* from God. The very first human being born to parents who had sinned was Cain, and we see that original sin was fully active in him. The rest of Genesis Chapter Four shows that original sin continues to be passed on through the generations. Seven generations from Adam, through the line of Cain, Lamech’s sin is just as bad, if not worse.

There are two rays of hope left, after Eve’s bitter realization that her son was not anything like the promised savior. First, even as God judges the sin of Cain, He also extends undeserved grace - promising Cain that no one will do to him what he did to his brother. Even in the face of terrible sin, God does not treat humans as we deserve. Secondly, God shows that He is actively working to fulfill his promise to Adam and Eve. He does this through the birth of Seth. Seth is only one of many children born to Adam and Eve, but his family line is to become important. Seth and his family follow in the imperfect, but *faith-endowed* footsteps of Adam. As sin gets worse and worse, there is still hope. The line of Adam and Eve continues – the promise of a savior is not forgotten, and can still be fulfilled through Seth’s descendants. In the midst of increasing sin, there is a lineage of faith.

There are a lot of applications for us from this passage. For instance, are you ever tempted to deny a true issue of the heart, and focus on something external (like Cain did)? Are you tempted to blame someone else for your own mistakes and problems? It would save a lot of time and trouble to learn from Cain. The best course is to own up to the wrong in our heart, and seek forgiveness and grace from God and others.

There’s another thing here, which I find very profound. I am often tempted to meet my legitimate needs with illegitimate (sinful) solutions. A legitimate need for love can result in sinful immorality, if we insist on having our needs met in our own time, on our own terms. A legitimate need for material things can result in skewed priorities, or even dishonesty if we insist on meeting the need ourselves on our own terms. A need to be valued and important can lead to a life lived for the approval of others instead of the approval of God.

How about this: are you ever focused on trying to show outward religious-ness without wanting to meet God where he wants you – in a personal relationship of faith, dependence and obedience? Do you want him in your life, but not as your number one priority?

And then there are positive ways to apply this. Adam and Eve, even in the middle of the heartache, trusted God, and trusted his promise to save them. They were the first sinners, but they were also the first believers. They believed that one day, God *would* defeat evil, without destroying love. What about you? Are you willing to believe God’s promises? Will you trust that God can and does bring hope and grace into the middle of tragedy, and even into the midst of the messes we cause ourselves.