

Genesis 4:1-16 – The Post-Fall Pattern and Human Reaction

Cain and Abel: 1 Adam made love to his wife Eve, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Cain. She said, “With the help of the Lord I have brought forth a man.” 2 Later she gave birth to his brother Abel.

Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil. 3 In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the Lord. 4 And Abel also brought an offering—fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The Lord looked with favor on Abel and his offering, 5 but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast.

6 Then the Lord said to Cain, “Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? 7 If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it.”

8 Now Cain said to his brother Abel, “Let’s go out to the field.” While they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him.

9 Then the Lord said to Cain, “Where is your brother Abel?”

“I don’t know,” he replied. “Am I my brother’s keeper?”

10 The Lord said, “What have you done? Listen! Your brother’s blood cries out to me from the ground. 11 Now you are under a curse and driven from the ground, which opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand. 12 When you work the ground, it will no longer yield its crops for you. You will be a restless wanderer on the earth.”

13 Cain said to the Lord, “My punishment is more than I can bear. 14 Today you are driving me from the land, and I will be hidden from your presence; I will be a restless wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me.”

15 But the Lord said to him, “Not so; anyone who kills Cain will suffer vengeance seven times over.” Then the Lord put a mark on Cain so that no one who found him would kill him. 16 So Cain went out from the Lord’s presence and lived in the land of Nod, east of Eden.

Subject: What will happen when I fall short of God’s requirements? How will I react? How can I rule over sin?

Compliment: When I fall short, I can expect punishment; how I respond is critical.

Homiletical Idea:

Hurting others is the true mark of a fallen human.

Introduction

This is the second time I have had the privilege of preaching here at Cornerstone, or anywhere for that matter. The first time, I preached on two verses out of John, John 13:34-35. It was a sermon on love, a sermon on something I am passionate about. It wasn't easy, but it wasn't daunting. This time, as providence would have it, I was to preach on Genesis Chapter 4. Which, I shortened to the first 16 verses. This time it was daunting. Until, I realized that these two passages are somewhat related. My big idea back in November was, "loving others as God loves you is the true mark of a Christian". Let's shorten that to "loving others is the true mark of a Christian". Well, one big idea that jumped out of this passage is this: "hurting others is the true mark of a fallen human". Loving others is the true mark of a Christian. Hurting others is the true mark of a fallen human.

Genesis Chapter 4 takes place right after we read about the fall in Chapter 3. And, I think we can see an interesting pattern start to develop. Sometimes it takes a little while to notice a pattern, and God knows we are not always so smart, so he repeats this pattern 5 times in 9 Chapters. Here is the pattern: (1) Sin, (2) Judgment speech by God, (3) God gives a token of grace, and (4) God's judgment. Let's look briefly at what happened in Chapter 3 that leads into our passage.

In Chapter 3, Adam and Eve sin by eating the forbidden fruit and the serpent sins by deceiving Eve, God then pronounces his judgment in a series of curses, God then makes clothes for Adam and Eve out of animal skins (a sacrifice) helping them where they have expressed vulnerability, and God expels them from the Garden of Eden.

In Chapter 4, Cain sins by killing Abel, God then pronounces curses on Cain, God makes a mark on Cain so that he will not be killed helping him where he has expressed vulnerability, and God sends him out from His presence to wander.

In Chapters 5-11 we see this pattern repeated 3 more times with the sons of God and the daughters of men, the flood, and the tower or Babel. We will get back to this pattern later in the sermon.

Let's dive into the text for today.

1 Adam made love to his wife Eve, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Cain. She said, “With the help of the Lord I have brought forth a man.” 2 Later she gave birth to his brother Abel.

Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil. 3 In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the Lord. 4 And Abel also brought an offering—fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The Lord looked with favor on Abel and his offering, 5 but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast.

Adam and Eve have two sons, Cain and Abel, and the story moves quickly from their birth to them grown-up and interacting with God. They both bring sacrifices. Cain brings “some fruits of the soil” and Abel brings “fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock”. People surmised for years that Abel’s sacrifice was acceptable because it was a blood sacrifice, but that is not widely held today. The Old Testament has grain sacrifices, and certainly what I know of the God of the Bible makes me believe it was not about the blood. The next common thought is that Abel brought the “fat portions” and the “firstborn” while Cain just brought “some”. Maybe this is why Cain’s sacrifice was not acceptable, but then again, maybe not. Again, in the Old Testament, the first fruits were often for the priests and fruits that were not first fruits were given the Lord. We just don’t know for sure what was wrong with Cain’s sacrifice, but I have a suspicion that it may have been a heart or attitude issue as much or more than issue with the actual sacrifice. It immediately makes me think of King David in 2 Samuel 24:24 when he said “I will not sacrifice to the Lord my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing.” Those offerings would have been identical whether David paid for them or not, but which way was more pleasing to God?

The main point of our text I do not believe is found in the births, or the sacrifices, or even why Cain’s sacrifice wasn’t acceptable. The main point is in how Cain responds. Let’s keep reading verses 6-7:

6 Then the Lord said to Cain, “Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? 7 If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it.”

Verses 6 and 7 are interesting. We still don't know what was wrong with Cain's sacrifice, but it seems clear that he knows what it is and God is giving him the opportunity to "do what is right". But, if he doesn't do what is right, sin is crouching at his door; it desires to have him, but he must rule over it."

Genesis 3:16b "Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you."
Genesis 4:7b "[sin] desires to have you, but you must rule over it."

The Hebrew word used for desire in these verses appears only three times in the Bible; these two places and Song 7:10. In 3:16 and in 4:7 it should be understood as a desire to dominate. God is warning Cain, sin desires to dominate you, but you must dominate it instead. I think that is a warning applicable to us today.

It seems like David might have written this right after reading this account:

Psalms 4:4-5

Be angry, and do not sin; ponder in your own hearts on your beds, and be silent.
Offer right sacrifices, and put your trust in the Lord.

Look at Paul. Romans 7 talks about the battle between the sin nature and the desire to follow God. Paul ends almost every epistle with a plea for the Christians to cling to what is good or flee from what is evil or both. We must flee from evil and pursue righteousness. These are both actions for us.

Nancy Kerrigan, the United States' best female figure skater and one of the gold medal favorites for the 1994 Olympics, was attacked after practice on January 6, 1994 by an unidentified man who struck her on the right knee with a blunt object and escaped. The attack jeopardized Kerrigan's chances of qualifying for the Winter Games in Lillehammer, Norway. Kerrigan had just completed a practice at Cobo Hall in preparation for competition at the United States championships the next day. The doctor who examined Kerrigan, Dr. Steven Plomaritis, said the attack appeared calculated. "He was clearly trying to debilitate her," Plomaritis said. It turns out that Kerrigan's chief US competitor, Tonya Harding, and her team, were behind the attack. They figured the best way to get a spot on the Olympic team was not through hard work, but by eliminating the competition. This story did have a mostly happy ending as Nancy Kerrigan went on to win the silver medal at the Olympics.

Why is it that envy and jealousy abound when we perceive someone is better than us in some way. I hear stories of rumors being started about people because they are too smart or too good-looking; someone has to take them down a notch. Why instead of bettering ourselves, do we look to drag others down? Instead of getting better ourselves, we want to eliminate the competition. This is exactly what Cain did. Instead of trying to do what was right, Cain decided to eliminate his sacrificing competition. Maybe he thought God would have to accept his sacrifice if Abel wasn't around to show him up... let's read on.

8 Now Cain said to his brother Abel, "Let's go out to the field." While they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him.

9 Then the Lord said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?"

"I don't know," he replied. "Am I my brother's keeper?"

I have heard it said many times that the first sin recorded in the Bible after the fall is murder or fratricide. I think it maybe envy, bitterness, and rage all came first. And, after the murder came lying to cover up. This, unfortunately, is human (sin) nature. And, we all have it rooted within us.

10 The Lord said, "What have you done? Listen! Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground. 11 Now you are under a curse and driven from the ground, which opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. 12 When you work the ground, it will no longer yield its crops for you. You will be a restless wanderer on the earth."

13 Cain said to the Lord, "My punishment is more than I can bear. 14 Today you are driving me from the land, and I will be hidden from your presence; I will be a restless wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me."

15 But the Lord said to him, "Not so; anyone who kills Cain will suffer vengeance seven times over." Then the Lord put a mark on Cain so that no one who found him would kill him. 16 So Cain went out from the Lord's presence and lived in the land of Nod, east of Eden.

There are many similarities again between Genesis 3 and Genesis 4. God asks both Eve and Cain what they have done. God curses the ground. God expels them from where they are currently living.

How can we love others and not hurt them? There is only one way to be able to do what is right and love. Like Cain, when we do not do what is right, sin is crouching at our door. We need to pursue righteousness and put to sin to death. When I preached on love I said that the only way to love like God loves is to abide in Christ. I used John 15; the vine and the branches. And, that is still true in this sermon. Listen to how Paul puts it.

Colossians 3:1-14

1 Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. 3 For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

5 Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. 6 Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. 7 You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. 8 But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. 9 Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices 10 and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. 11 Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.

12 Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. 13 Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. 14 And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

Abide in Christ, put sin to death, pursue righteousness, and love one another.

These are actions and we must take an active role in our own lives. If we do nothing, sin is crouching, ready to pounce. We must abide, battle, pursue, and love.

Hurting others is the true mark of a fallen human.

Loving others is the true mark of a Christian.

That brings us back to the title of the sermon and the pattern we discussed at the beginning. That pattern continues today, but with a big difference...

Here is the pattern again: People sin, God pronounces judgment, God gives a token of grace, and God executes the judgment.

Conclusion:

But now, the pattern is broken: Sin – We all sin and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23); God gives a judgment speech – The wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23); God gives (a token of) grace – God sent Jesus as an atoning sacrifice (Romans 3:25); God executes the judgment – God’s judgment and wrath was poured out on Jesus and those who put their faith in Christ are saved (Romans 5:9)

Now the pattern is forever changed for those who put their hope and faith in Christ Jesus. The pattern stops at 3; #4 is finished, checked off, done. Jesus has taken it for us; because, like Cain said, the punishment is too much for us to bear. We don’t want to be expelled from God’s presence. On the contrary, we want to spend eternity in His glorious presence!

What is your reaction to Jesus breaking the pattern?

Prayer, and don’t forget the offering.

Benediction: 1 Peter 5:8-11

8 Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. 9 Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings.

10 And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. 11 To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.