

# His Blood Cries Out

Genesis 4:1-16

This past week, a young man in Uvalde, Texas, after killing his grandmother, enters into a grade-school and murders 19 kids and 2 adults. The grief and pain and sorrow of this one man's actions are unthinkable. Only, this is not the first time this has happened, is it? The names "Columbine" and "Sandy Hook" are engraved on our hearts as well. Politicians will point their fingers at guns or mental illness or lack of education. I do not presume to know the motivations that drove these people to commit such evil acts. I am not sure that I even want to know. But the capacity of human beings, made in the image of God, to commit terrible evil is not new. In fact, it has been happening from the very beginning. The very first son of Adam and Eve murders his own brother. The story of Cain and Abel will not explain everything about the specifics of mass killers. But surely God's Word has much to teach us. And we would do well to pay attention, not so much to understand sociopaths, but to understand ourselves.

Read Genesis 4:1-16.

The story of Cain and Abel begins in a very quiet and unassuming way.

Now

Adam knew Eve his wife,  
and she conceived and bore Cain,  
saying, "I have gotten a man  
with the help of the LORD."

With the birth of a baby there is new hope. It is a time of rejoicing at the coming of new life into the world. Eve is truly happy that she has born Cain. Cain is a gift from God. Eve has born him with the help of God. There are no omens that Cain will turn out to be an evil man.

<sup>2</sup> And again, she bore his brother Abel.

Now

Abel was a keeper of sheep,  
and

Cain a worker of the ground.

Eve then bears another child – Abel.

We are told only one detail about their lives: their occupation.

Abel = a shepherd

Cain = a farmer/gardener

Both occupations are honorable. God even describes Himself both as a Shepherd and a Gardener. There is no hint that one occupation is more valuable than the other in God's eyes. But while both occupations are valid as a means of serving God in this life, there is more to offering God acceptable worship than giving him something of what we possess. In this passage, we are given the first glimpses as to what God requires if we are to enter into his presence and receive his blessing. We are also given fallen man's reaction to not being accepted by God.

<sup>3</sup> In the course of time

Cain brought to the LORD an offering

of the fruit of the ground,

<sup>4</sup> 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,

<sup>5</sup> but

for Cain

and

his offering

he had no regard.

The first thing to notice is that God determines what is acceptable worship. Both Cain and Abel give offerings to God. But both offerings are not received by God.

Try to put yourself in the place of Cain. What would it feel like for you to have God reject you and your offering?

Maybe an analogy to human rejection will help. A young man takes interest in a young lady. After much internal grief, he works up the courage to ask her on a date. He decides to buy some flowers to give to her before asking her out. But when he approaches her, she wants nothing to do with him or his flowers. What feelings are going through him?

The reasons for not accepting Cain or his offering may be different than the lady's rejection of the man, but the feelings of not being accepted are probably very similar. There is confusion and the question of "Why?". Emotions can range anywhere from dejection to anger: We ask of ourselves, "What is wrong with me?" And simultaneously, we become angry at the one who rejected us.

Add to this scenario that God accepts Abel and his offering. In the analogy, not only does the young lady reject your request of a date, but then she turns around and accepts a request from another guy. And he happens to be your younger brother. Now, your anger is not only towards the lady, but it is also towards your brother. "Who does he think he is anyway?" "Does he think he is better than me?" "I don't care. She can have him if that is what she wants. I want nothing to do with either of them."

No one likes rejection. It hurts our pride. I know that God is not a woman choosing between two men. But it is too easy to read this story and feel no affinity with Cain. We can coldly look at him like the bad guy in a movie of whom we have no correlation to ourselves. But we are to see ourselves in Cain.

We are never explicitly told why God accepts Abel's offering and rejects Cain's. This has led to all sorts of speculations. And, if all we had to go on was Genesis 4, I think we would be left in the dark. It is a good thing that we have the entirety of Scripture to help us. And, in this case, there are other passages that speak directly to the issue of why Cain and his offering were rejected. We will get to those in a moment.

For now, let's simply follow the flow of the account in Genesis 4. How does Cain respond to God's rejection of him and his offering?

So  
Cain was very angry,  
and  
his face fell.

Cain is filled with anger. And his face fell. That means that he is downcast. He is dejected. There can be many reasons why we might feel this way, but in the context of Cain it seems to be the feeling that he is not good enough.

It is the opposite of the feeling we have when someone gives us praise. When we receive meaningful praise, we often feel warm inside. When we are criticized or rejected, we are downcast. And as response to feeling downcast, we often get angry.

While Cain's reaction may be understandable, it is a reaction that is driven by pride and selfishness. God's intent with Cain is not simply to make him feel good about himself. There is something seriously wrong with Cain and his offering, and unless it is fixed Cain will experience untold suffering apart from the gracious presence of God. What makes me think that Cain is responding with pride and selfishness? Part of it comes from meditation on Genesis 3. When Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit, they were determining for themselves what was right and wrong. They were acting autonomously. Rather than humbly submitting to what God's standard of good and evil, they wanted to decide for themselves.

We see this attitude in most 2 year old's. Very few kids at this age find it easy to submit to the wisdom of their parents as to what is right and wrong. It is not uncommon for kids to throw a temper tantrum all because they are convinced that they are fully capable of deciding for themselves what is right. Usually, what is right is nothing more than what they want. As adults, we experience many of the same feelings. Only we are better at disguising them.

God communicated to Cain that what he had offered was not favorable to him. It was not good. The anger of Cain stems from being told that he had to change his attitude and his behavior to conform to God's standard. Admitting that one is wrong requires humility. Throughout this story, Cain never admits that he is wrong. Instead, Cain exhibits a very proud attitude.

"Who is God to tell me that my offering is not good? I know what is good. God is expecting too much from me. I tried, didn't I?"

What might a humble reaction look like? Cain might have simply asked God, "Why have you not accepted my offering?"

"What do You require that I might be acceptable in your sight?"  
Many years later, king David expresses this sort of humility.

**Psalm 19:14** <sup>14</sup> Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.

We know that God is not like a young woman choosing or not choosing to go on a date with a young man. The truth is that if a person approaches God with a right attitude and in the way that God prescribes, God will most certainly accept him or her.

**Acts 10:34-35** <sup>34</sup> So Peter opened his mouth and said: "Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, <sup>35</sup> but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.

Cain's anger reflects an attitude of pride. He is not humble and broken before the Lord. He does not recognize his own unworthiness before a Holy God. All he can see is that Abel has been accepted by God and he has not. Cain is selfish in that he is willing to tear down others to feel better about himself. He makes himself the victim and justifies his own evil thoughts toward God and Abel.

God does what any good parent would do... He gives in to Cain's manipulative attempt to get his own way, just so long as Cain is happy. Right? Wrong! God confronts the lies that are swirling around in Cain's head. And he confronts the evil attitude that is rising up within Cain.

He calls Cain to repentance and faith.

<sup>6</sup> The LORD said to Cain,

"Why are you angry,

and

why has your face fallen?

<sup>7</sup> 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."

God exposes the lie that Cain is believing. Cain believes that it is God's fault that his offering was rejected. He believes that he has done nothing wrong.

God clearly explains that if Cain were to change his attitude, his offering would be accepted. Nothing external was preventing Cain from changing his attitude. It is that he did not want to do so. He was selfishly demanding that God conform to his standard and behavior. God is making very clear to Cain that there is a path to his full acceptance. At this point Cain is simply told, "If you do well, will you not be accepted?"

What it means to "do well" is not explained. I believe it is not explained because Cain does not care to know. Had Cain humbly asked, "What is it that I must do?" I believe God would have told him. But he has no interest in even asking the question.

And so, God gives to Cain a serious warning. He tells him that "sin" is crouching at the door. Sin's desire is to rule over him.

I find this very enlightening. In chapter 3, the enemy is Satan. Satan is the one crouching at the door. But in chapter 4, God does not even mention Satan. Surely Satan is still active. But God directs Cain to the evil within his own heart. There is no, "The Devil made me do it" in this account.

Sin is personified. God describes it as a force within the heart of Cain seeking to rule over him. Of course, the sin is simply his sinful nature desiring evil. And even though sin is already living in Cain, it has the capacity to increase in strength and even to rule over Cain. The NT speaks in this very language saying to all men apart from Christ that they are slaves to sin.

God calls Cain to struggle against this evil desire within him. Of course, God already knows that Cain intends to kill his brother out of jealousy and spite. God graciously calls Cain to repent before he commits this heinous act.

God calls each of us to fight against the sin that lives within us. Some of the sweetest memories that I have from when our kids were little was watching them internally wrestle with themselves when they were told "no". I could visibly see them fighting to overcome the sin that was rising up within them. I call these memories sweet because they reflect the working of God's Spirit.

There is no such wrestling within the heart of Cain. He stubbornly believes himself to be in the right. And in his pride, he plunges headlong into terrible sin.

No one naturally submits to God. The struggle of some is easier to see. But everyone struggles with internal desires that are contrary to God that seek to rule over them. Repentance is not the removal of these desires. It is fighting to not let them rule over you.

God offers hope to Cain. If you do will, you will be accepted. Doing well is not being perfect. It is not even the perfect ruling over sin. When God says “you must rule over it”, He uses the imperfect tense. This is helpful because it indicates that the ruling is ongoing. We have an ongoing obligation to strive to rule over our sin. We are never justified in simply going along with sin. The Christian is to choose to fight.

But God’s statement does not have to be taken solely as a command in which God leaves Cain entirely to himself to find the gumption to defeat his sin. It is grammatically acceptable to understand God’s statement as including a promise, “You shall rule over it.” There is an implied offer of grace given to Cain. Should Cain decide to fight against his sin, God would not leave him alone in that fight. Cain “may” rule over his sin.

Granted, the promise aspect of God’s statement is subtle here. But it is made explicit in other places in Scripture. Because of Jesus Christ, we have the promise that God works in us to will and to work according to his purpose.

**Philippians 2:12-13** <sup>12</sup> Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, <sup>13</sup> for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

God gives Cain hope, but Cain does not want it. It would require the humility of admitting that he was wrong. And his pride will not bow.

And so, he is cold and indifferent to the call.

Instead of responding in faith, Cain jealously seeks to kill the one that God has accepted.

<sup>8</sup> Cain spoke to Abel his brother.

And  
when they were in the field,  
Cain rose up against his brother Abel  
and  
killed him.

What we have here is pre-meditated murder motivated by jealousy and hatred. Would you have believed that in one generation, we would move from eating a forbidden fruit to the murder of a brother? It is hard to imagine.

On one level Adam and Eve are to blame for this sin, and the sins of the whole world. On another level, Cain must bear the responsibility of his own terrible sin. Cain is following the cravings of his sinful heart. Yes, he was born with evil desires, like every child since the Fall. But Cain is still responsible for acting on these desires. Cain is responsible because his choices reflect the desires of his heart.

Parents:

- Teach your kids that they are responsible to fight against sin.
- But also teach your kids to not be shocked when they desire evil.
- Cain is not some freak anomaly. The attitude of Cain lives in all of us. And we must learn to fight against it.
- Talk about your own sinful desires. Explain to them your need of Jesus Christ, so that they might see hope in their own foulness.
- Lead them to Jesus:
  - o For forgiveness and cleansing by his shed blood.
  - o For sanctification by His Holy Spirit.
  - o For glorification – the day when the struggle will be no more.

Back to the story:

Cain has committed a terrible atrocity. And once sin has been committed, you cannot take it back. How will God respond to Cain now that he has committed murder?

In much the same way as when God confronted Adam and Eve, He takes the initiative. God moves toward Cain.

<sup>9</sup> Then the LORD said to Cain,  
"Where is Abel your brother?"

God has no obligation to speak to Cain. He would have been fully justified in pouring out wrath upon him. Instead, God mercifully gives Cain the opportunity, even now, to confess his sin and to repent of it, seeking forgiveness. But rather than act in humility and true repentance, Cain continues to act out of selfishness and pride.

He said,

"I do not know;  
am I my brother's keeper?"



Cain categorically denies his sin. He knows that he has murdered his brother. But in his pride, he has justified his actions. His response to God is nothing more than an attempt to avoid the consequences of his actions.

Cain absolutely knows the whereabouts of his brother. Cain may not be Abel's custodian, but he does have some responsibility towards his brother. Cain is hardened in his sin. This sin was there in him before he committed the murder, but only now is its ugliness truly seen for what it is.

Apart from the working of grace deep in the soul, hardness and unrepentance will never be overcome. Apart from grace we do not feel the full weight of our sin.

In verse 10, God speaks to a very hardened Cain.

10       And

the LORD said,

    "What have you done?

        The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground.

11       And

        now you are cursed from the ground,

                which has opened its mouth

                        to receive your brother's blood

                                from your hand.

12       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."

God's initial question, "What have you done?" is intended to motivate Cain to reflect upon the evil of his actions. Repentance only occurs after a serious consideration of the evil of our actions. Cain believes he has been wronged, by God and by Cain. The evil of his own actions is hidden from him by his own pride.

God tells Cain: "The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground"

What is that blood crying? Abel's blood is crying out to God for justice! But why does Abel's blood cry out for justice? Abel's death demands retribution. He has been murdered unjustly, and this injustice must be put right. But God does not put it right.

God's curse upon Cain is a punishment. But it is not the execution of God's perfect justice. God does not immediately kill Cain. God does not command Adam to kill Cain. Even though God's justice requires this.

**Genesis 9:6** <sup>6</sup> "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image.

Cain will be a wanderer. The ground will be even less fruitful for him. But he is not executed. God has been firm with Cain, but He has not exacted perfect justice. If anything, He has been merciful. Cain does not think so.

13 Cain said to the LORD,  
"My punishment is greater than I can bear.  
14 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."

Just as Cain cannot see his own wickedness, neither can he see God's mercy. He focuses entirely upon his own pain. His only desire is to reduce the sentence. He refuses to consider the real issue: that of the evil of his own heart.

Cain's fear of death also is the product of his own sinfulness. Before Cain murdered his brother, no one had killed before. But because he has murdered, he now fears that the same will be done to him.

Cain is not interested in humbling himself to admit his wrongs. He does not acknowledge his sin. He does not cry out to God for mercy. He only complains that the punishment is too much for him. These are the marks of an unconverted heart. At this point, God could have responded, "Death is nothing more than you deserve. It will serve you right to die at the hands of another evil person."

But this is not how God responds. God's response is shocking.

15 Then 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.

Defining precisely the nature of the mark has proved a fruitless endeavor. What we do know is that God responds to Cain by providing a means of protection for him. The mark was either a sign to others, or a sign to Cain, of God's powerful hand of protection. And rather than vengeance being poured out upon Cain, God promises to pour out vengeance on anyone who would attack Cain. God acts in kindness towards Cain. Rather than giving Cain an immediate execution, God will keep Cain alive. And Cain will live to have sons and daughters. An ungodly line of people will flow from Cain. Why would God do this? Do we not expect more evil from Cain? Do we not expect more evil from his descendants? Of course, we do. And yet, God makes sure that they live on.

I think there is at least two reasons. The ungodly line will serve as a fulfillment of the seed of the serpent, who will engage in perpetual conflict with the seed of the woman. In addition, God will have mercy on some in this ungodly line to save them.

**Romans 2:3-6** <sup>3</sup> Do you suppose, O man- you who judge those who do such things and yet do them yourself- that you will escape the judgment of God? <sup>4</sup> Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? <sup>5</sup> But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed. <sup>6</sup> He will render to each one according to his works:

So, the blood of Abel continues to cry from the ground for justice. This justice will be executed when Jesus returns to judge the living and the dead. But, the blood of Abel does not only speak judgment. The blood of Abel also speaks promise to those who look for mercy. Even such a terrible evil as the murder of your brother can be atoned. In the shedding of blood, there is forgiveness.

Now it is time to explore why it is that Abel and his offering were accepted by God. God did not accept Abel because he was good, or even because he was better than Cain. If this were true, then we would not need Jesus. Just be good enough and you will be accepted. And if this were true, then there would be no hope for Cain, or for us. Abel did not look to his own goodness. Abel trusted in the righteousness of another for his acceptance before God. This is not clear in Genesis 4. But it is very clear from the book of Hebrews.

<sup>ESV</sup> **Hebrews 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.

This verse makes explicit that Abel and his offering were accepted because he had faith. But faith must have an object in which it trusts. Faith does not trust in itself. We do not have faith in our faith. Faith is always directed in something or someone. In the book of Hebrews, faith is “in Jesus Christ.” So, when we are told that Abel had “faith”, he must have had faith in Jesus Christ.

But how could Abel have faith in Jesus Christ? What did Abel know that pointed him to Jesus Christ? There are only two pointers that I see that were available to him. The first is a promise, and the other is a sign. The promise is in Genesis 3:15 – from the woman one would come who would conquer the serpent. Abel, must be trusting in this promise.

The sign is seen in the garments of the animals that God slew to cover their nakedness. God shed the blood of animals to cover the sin of Adam and Eve. Surely, Cain and Abel were also given garments from the skins of dead animals to cover their own nakedness. It is later unfolded clearly in Scripture that without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness.

Would not the Israelites ask themselves, “Why is it necessary to cleanse everything with blood? Can we not simply offer ourselves to God?”  
Would not the Israelites of Moses’ day see in this story the foundation of their own Levitical Laws?

The Levitical laws allowed for grain offerings, but only when they were given by those already cleansed by the blood. Once the shedding of blood is given as the foundation, the idea of Abel offering the best has some significance. It is important to strive to offer the best that one has. Abel does show his dedication by offering the best of the best of his flock.

God does not want us to worship Him in a half-hearted way. But I do not believe that Abel is trusting in his own dedication any more than we should trust in our own devotion to make us right with God. Abel was counted as righteous and received by God because of his faith in God's provision of redemption.

Abel has been accepted because he had faith in the Messiah to come. Every person who has ever been accepted by God has been accepted on the basis of grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. Abel is trusting in the blood of another, and as a result, his own life is taken from him.

The blood of Abel cries out that this terrible crime must be avenged. In fact, God promises to everyone who has been unjustly treated that He will execute just vengeance upon the guilty.

**Romans 12:19** <sup>19</sup> Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord."

Abel's death can only be avenged by the death of the perpetrator. God will execute vengeance upon Cain for his act. Unless... Unless, Cain, like Abel, places His faith in the atoning blood of sacrifice. By faith in the promise of God and the shedding of blood there is hope of redemption. God leaves Cain alive to contemplate his condition. The blood in which Abel trusted would also be sufficient for Cain.

Even at this time, Cain could cry out to God for mercy. He could follow in the path of his brother. He could humbly live by faith. Listen to the words of the author of Hebrews:

**Hebrews 12:22-25** <sup>22</sup> But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, <sup>23</sup> and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, <sup>24</sup> and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

How is Jesus' blood better than the blood of Abel? Abel's blood was the blood of an ordinary man. Jesus' blood was the blood of the Messiah. Jesus' blood is the blood that is able to cover every other sin. His blood is sufficient to cleanse even the most wicked of sins. God's vengeance was poured out upon Jesus. Jesus' life was not taken from him as was Abel's. Jesus freely laid down his life for those who deserved to die.

We have no indication that Cain ever came to repentance and faith. But we do know that God saves murderers. And if God saves murderers, he does so because the blood of Jesus is greater than the blood of Abel. What sin plagues your soul? Is it greater than the blood of Jesus? No, it is not. No sin is greater than the blood of Jesus. Flee to Christ – His blood is sufficient to cleanse you from your sin.

But if Jesus' blood is better, then those who refuse to trust in his blood, who reject God's means of redemption by faith alone, will even more certainly bear the wrath of God. The very next verse in Hebrews says as much:

<sup>25</sup> See that you do not refuse him who is speaking. For if they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape if we reject him who warns from heaven.

The writer of Hebrews unpacks both the wrath and mercy of the blood of Abel. Cling to Jesus and keep clinging to Him, and you will experience God's acceptance. Ignore Jesus, keep on deliberately sinning, and you will experience God's just wrath.

Cain ignored God's promised redemption. And He will endure an eternal wrath because of it.

What will we do? Will we place all our hopes in the blood of the Lamb? Or will we refuse him? Will we look for redemption somewhere else? Or will we simply deny the idea of a true redemption from sin?

The blood of Jesus is speaking to you. His blood is crying out to you. His blood is promising to you full atonement if you repent of your sin and believe in Jesus. But his blood is also warning you that if you refuse Jesus, you will surely experience the wrath of God. Are you trusting in Jesus alone for your redemption? Or are you refusing him?

The blood of Jesus cries out to you, "There is no redemption apart from my blood! Reject me and you will die! The wrath of God is coming upon all the evil of this world! I am your only hope!"

But rather than cry out to God for this mercy, Cain simply leaves the presence of the LORD.

<sup>16</sup> Then Cain went away from the presence of the LORD  
and  
settled in the land of Nod,  
east of Eden.

Conclusion:

1. We are from this moment forward to struggle against the sin of our own heart. We are not to follow in the way of Cain!

**1 John 3:11-12** <sup>11</sup> For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. <sup>12</sup> We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous.

It is not the presence of evil within you that will be your undoing. It is your refusal to fight against that evil by the grace of God.

2. Acceptance before God only comes when we offer ourselves to Him in faith, trusting in the righteous blood of another – Our Lord Jesus Christ.

The fact that we regularly celebrate the death of Jesus Christ is our proclamation that our corruption goes so deep that we cannot fix ourselves. We are not acceptable to God apart from the sacrifice of blood.

**John 14:6** <sup>6</sup> Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

The world wants there to be many ways to God. We are told that we can come to God on our terms. We are told that God would be harsh to not accept our offering. These are all lies. The truth is that God only accepts those who come to him through faith in Jesus Christ. It is His blood alone that cries out to the Father, "Forgive!"

It is in Jesus alone that our souls can truly "Arise!". Are you trusting in Jesus? Then as we sing our closing hymn, sing with thanksgiving that the blood of Jesus does continue to cry out on your behalf!