

Sin is Crouching at the Door: Genesis 4:1-10
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In Genesis 3:15 God said to the serpent, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.” Ultimately that is fulfilled in the battle between Christ and Satan, but it is also evident in the age-old struggle between the redeemed and the reprobate. Throughout history, ever since the Fall, there have been offspring of the woman, and offspring of the serpent. To say it another way, there have been those who trust God and those who do not. In chapter 3 we saw the immediate effects of the Fall, in that Adam and Eve felt shame, they hid from God, they blamed others, and God punished them severely.

Now in chapter 4 we continue to see the devastation that sin brought into the world. Cain and Abel are the first clear picture of the struggle between the serpent’s offspring and the woman’s offspring.

Verse 1 says that “Adam knew Eve his wife,” which refers to the sexual intimacy within the marriage relationship, “and she conceived and bore Cain.” This was the very first pregnancy, and the first birth of a child. And there was pain in the childbirth, which was the punishment God pronounced on the woman back in chapter 3. But in spite of the pain there was also great joy and anticipation and excitement about the birth of this son. Eve exclaims, “I have gotten a man with the help of the Lord.” We need to remember the anguish and disappointment of chapter 3, but also the glimmer of hope that God gave in 3:15, the promise of a deliverer who would crush the head of the serpent. It’s possible here in 4:1 that Eve considers Cain to be the fulfillment of that hope. Here he is! Here is the man who will deliver us from that evil enemy. Here is the One who will restore Paradise.

Unfortunately, Cain was the opposite. He was not the One who would master sin and Satan. Rather, he would be mastered by them. He was the seed of the serpent. He was the son who would continue the downward spiral of sinful humanity.

In verse 2 Abel is born. We’re not sure if the brothers were twins, or if Abel was born years later. But he was named Abel, which means “breath” or “vanity.” It’s the same word that’s used in Psalm 144:4, “Man is like a breath; his days are like a passing shadow.” And so even though Adam and Eve didn’t foresee Abel’s fate, the name they gave him pointed to the brevity of his life. His life would be cut short.

In contrast to Cain, Abel is the faithful son. He is the one who trusts in God and seeks to obey. He is the elect younger brother, which is a common theme throughout Genesis. Isaac was chosen rather than Ishmael, Jacob rather than Esau, Ephraim rather than Manasseh, and Abel rather than Cain. God’s purpose is evident here. Even though the effects of sin are overwhelming and depressing, God always has and always will preserve a remnant. His elect will stand. And even though Abel is murdered, at the end of the chapter we read of Seth, who was given to replace Abel. Eve gave birth to Seth, and she said, “God has appointed for me another offspring instead of Abel, for Cain killed him.”

The struggle in this chapter between Cain and Abel is a picture of a much larger battle. It’s the forces of the evil one waging war against God’s chosen ones. That’s what

this story so vividly portrays. Let's look at the contrast in these verses between Cain and Abel. The contrast between the serpent's offspring and the woman's offspring. The contrast between the reprobate and the redeemed. And the contrast between the tragic effects of unbelief and the God-honoring worship produced by faith.

Verse 2 continues by identifying the occupation of each brother. "Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a worker of the ground." Abel was a shepherd and Cain was a farmer. Then verses 3-4 tell us about the offerings that each brother presented to the Lord. They each brought an offering that corresponded to their occupation. "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." Then it says, "And the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering he had no regard." And the question is, "Why?" What was it about Abel's offering that made it acceptable, and what was it about Cain's offering that made it unacceptable?

Some have suggested that the Lord had regard for Abel's offering because it was a blood sacrifice. It was an animal sacrifice. Cain's was not. But even though the blood sacrifice provided a rich foreshadowing of Christ and demonstrated the seriousness of sin, the Old Testament is clear that grain offerings were also important and acceptable. Cain was not rejected because he brought an offering from the fruit of the ground. That was not the determining factor that made God accept Abel and reject Cain. Cain's offering of fruit from the ground could have been perfectly acceptable. The issue is much deeper.

I'll point to two things that show the contrast between Cain and Abel, the first being an effect and the second the root difference. The point is that it's a heart issue. Abel's heart was in it. Cain's was not. The effect that we see is that Abel offered the very best of what he had, whereas Cain did not offer the firstfruits. In verse 3, "Cain brought to the Lord an offering of the fruit of the ground." Cain made an offering to the Lord from what he had. And it may not sound like there's anything deficient about that at all. But then we contrast that with Abel's offering, which was "the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions."

We don't know how much God had revealed to them at this point about appropriate and inappropriate offerings, but later in the Old Testament it is very clear that the first and best was to be offered to the Lord. Deuteronomy 26 instructs the Israelites to take the first of all the fruit of the ground and offer it to the Lord. The first fruits are for the Lord. Also all the firstborn are to be consecrated to the Lord (Exodus 13). And Leviticus 3 gives instructions for the fat pieces that should be offered to the Lord from the animal sacrifices.

When we contrast Abel's offering with Cain's, it becomes evident that Abel offered the first and the best. He offered the firstborn and the fat portions. Cain, on the other hand, doesn't appear to have offered the first or the best. It just says he brought "an offering of the fruit of the ground."

I think there's a very convicting application for us in this comparison between Cain and Abel, because we should each look into our own hearts and ask, "Am I offering to the Lord the very best of who I am and the very best of what I have?" Here are some questions for all of us to ask ourselves. Am I giving the Lord the firstfruits of my time, or do frivolous activities fill up each day before I have a chance to spend time in the Word and in prayer and in fellowship with other believers and in ministry to others? Am

I giving the Lord the firstfruits of my energy and my gifts and talents and abilities, or do I wear myself out pursuing wealth and toys and comfort? Am I giving the Lord the firstfruits of my money? Is it a priority to give to the work of the church and the cause of missions, or do I just kind of see what's left at the end of the month? Have I consecrated my family to the Lord? Am I more concerned for their spiritual growth or their worldly success? Would I be willing for my children to move overseas and become missionaries even if that meant I wouldn't see them? These kinds of questions should help us think about what we're offering to God.

It's a matter of the heart. It's a question of where our hope is. If our hope is in the Lord, then we will gladly offer him the very best of who we are and what we have. We will offer those things to Him because we know that the greatest joys in life are found in serving Him and pursuing Him. And this gets to the deeper contrast between Cain and Abel, which is the issue of faith.

In the famous chapter of faith in Hebrews 11, Abel is given as the first example of one who lived by faith. It says in 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." The root difference between the two brothers was faith. Abel had it. Cain did not. Abel presented his offering from a heart of faith. He trusted in the Lord. He loved the Lord. And therefore he saw it as a joy and privilege to offer to the Lord the first and best of what he had. Cain, on the other hand, was going through the motions and he presented his offering from an unrepentant, unloving, unbelieving heart.

It was Abel's faith that made his offering acceptable before God. God looks at the heart, and it was Abel's heart of faith that pleased God. It wasn't that Abel, himself, was good or righteous before God. He had a sinful nature just like his brother, and just like all of us. But Abel believed in the Lord. He trusted the Lord. He was looking away from himself and coming to the Lord by faith.

This is such a good lesson about what really matters! Faith is what matters. It doesn't matter if you're a farmer or a shepherd. It doesn't matter if you offer to the Lord the fruit of the ground or sheep from your flock. To apply this to ourselves today, the issue is not what percentage of your income you give to the Lord. The issue is not how long your quiet times are, or how many ministries you're involved in, or how many Christian books you've read. The Christian life does not consist in externals. A person may give a huge amount of their money to the church and pour their lives out in ministry to others, but that doesn't necessarily mean they're a Christian. As sinful human beings, we can be pretty good at conforming to external religious requirements without experiencing any real spiritual life.

Christianity is a matter of the heart. It's a matter of faith. And when God changes your heart and gives you the gift of faith in Him, then there will be changes. There will be a desire to give to the Lord and pour out your time and energy in serving Him. And that is the offering that the Lord commends. That is the worship that pleases Him.

In verse 5 Cain is downcast because the Lord had no regard for his offering. "Cain was very angry," it says, "and his face fell." Cain's response in the following verses reveals more and more about his hard heart. In the way Cain responds to this situation, we gain a better understanding of why God rejected Cain's offering. The lack

of faith and lack of love and lack of humility in Cain's heart is seen in his actions and words that we'll come to in a moment.

But first the Lord speaks to Cain in verses 6-7 in a very gentle and encouraging way. The Lord is urging Cain toward repentance and faith. God knows that Cain's sinful heart is the source of his anger. He was not worshiping the Lord from a heart of faith, and therefore God did not accept his offering. And that produced anger and jealousy, and also the temptation to lash out in violence. So the Lord confronts Cain and says, Don't be angry. Let go of your anger, and if you do, you'll be accepted. But then He gives him a warning in verse 7: "if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it."

What an interesting illustration of how sin pounces on us in order to rule over us. Sin is crouching at the door. Sin is always crouching at the door. And its desire is to overcome us. Sin wants to overpower us and rule over us. Just think about the sin of anger, which is the sin that devoured Cain in this passage, along with jealousy. Anger arises in our hearts because of discontentment, because we don't have what we want, because we think we deserve better. When things aren't going our way, irritation and frustration and anger begin to churn within us. And that sin is crouching at the door waiting to devour us. Waiting for just the right situation that will push us over the edge and cause us to lose our temper and give full vent to our rage.

This is the battle that we must wage in our own hearts every day. Sin is crouching at the door, but we must rule over it. Again, it's important to recognize that this is a heart issue. When we feel anger rising up in our hearts, we can't blame that on our circumstances. We can't blame that on anybody or anything. When I'm angry, there's a problem in MY heart. The problem is with me.

There is such a thing as righteous anger, which Jesus demonstrated when He drove the money-changers out of the temple and poured out their money and overturned their tables. And certainly we experience righteous anger from time to time when we're outraged at certain evils and injustices in the world. But I'm not Jesus, and neither are you. And so we should not be too quick to conclude that the anger in our hearts is righteous anger. Maybe sometimes it is. But not most of the time. Most of the time it's my pride and selfishness and impatience that causes me to feel angry. And I can't blame that on anyone else.

Notice that God doesn't give Cain a chance to respond. When the Lord asked, "Why are you angry?" Cain could have said, if he was given the chance, "I'm angry, Lord, because You didn't accept my offering." To which God could have replied, "I didn't accept your offering because your heart's not right. There's no faith in your heart, just this rebellion and anger." The problem is not out there. It's right here in our own hearts. Cain couldn't blame God or Abel or anyone else for the anger in his heart. Sin was crouching at the door, and as we read in the next verse, Cain did not rule over that sin. Rather, the sin ruled over him, just as it desired to do. Sin mastered him, and in his anger he rose up and murdered his brother.

It was premeditated murder, which shows the deep roots of his anger and jealousy. Cain's depravity brought him so low that he carefully planned out how he could kill his own brother. He led him out to a field, where he thought nobody would see. But, of course, God saw. God could see Cain's heart, and God certainly saw Cain's actions.

In verse 9 the Lord speaks to Cain again. “Where is Abel your brother?” Cain’s response is somewhat like the response of Adam and Eve in chapter 3. They each passed the blame along to someone else. Cain is even more brazen. First he lies by saying that he doesn’t know where his brother is. Then he basically says, “I don’t care.” “Am I my brother’s keeper?” This is the epitome of a cold, hard heart. An angry heart, and a jealous heart.

1 John 3 instructs us to love one another, and then it says, “We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. Any why did he murder his brother? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother’s righteous.” John Chrysostom, in the 4th century, said this of Cain’s anger and jealousy: “There were two reasons for his annoyance: not just that he alone had been rejected but also that his brother’s gift had been accepted.” Isn’t jealousy wicked! Jealousy steals so much joy because it turns rejoicing into self-pity. When we see ways in which God is blessing others around us, that should be reason for rejoicing. But if we let the sin that is crouching at the door master us, those reasons for rejoicing will quickly turn into a pity party, because God isn’t blessing me in those same ways.

Just like anger, it is a heart issue that we must rule over. We must fight against the sin of jealousy and strive for greater joy in God’s good plan. Every good gift is from Him, and He gives those gifts as He sees fit. And the gifts He has given you right now (spiritual gifts, material gifts, relationships) are the best ones for you. The fight of faith is to trust that His plan is best. You don’t need what someone else has. God has given you what is best for you right now. And there is great peace and contentment in trusting Him.

In closing, let’s be encouraged to follow Abel’s example rather than Cain’s. Like Cain, sin is crouching at the door, and anger and jealousy and so many other sins have a desire to overcome us. The only way we can overcome those sins is by trusting in the One who defeated sin once and for all. The ultimate seed of the woman who crushed the head of Satan and triumphed over evil. Jesus Christ, the One who never sinned, and then died on a cross for sin, and rose on the third day. It’s only when we come to Him that we can be forgiven. And we must come to Him like Abel came. With a heart of faith and love and humility. Offering everything to God. Placing in His hands everything we have and everything we are.