

Cain and Abel

Genesis 4:1-26

Covenant Waterfall, 7 November 2021

Read

Pray

Introduction

We all survived the elections last week, thankfully! Yet no one can deny that our country is in a downward spiral. Face lots of uncertainties now with coalition governments being formed in the major centres in the country. And this is coupled with violence, crime, tanking economy, sky-high fuel prices and a corrupt and morally bankrupt government.

Even the church in our land which should be a beacon of hope in times like these is in trouble. Plagued by false teaching, prosperity gospel, worldliness and compromising the truth of Scripture with the changing winds of culture.

Or what about our own lives – perhaps you think you’ve messed up so badly, beyond redemption. Past sins disqualify you from God’s favour and God accomplishing his purposes in your life?

It can all seem a bit hopeless at times. Can God really accomplish his purposes in our land, in our church, and even in our own lives, given the mess? The situation can seem impossible at a human level.

We’re looking this morning at Genesis 4 – Adam and Eve’s descendants. What we see here is the devastating outworking of sin in the human race. As a result of the Fall, humanity is now divided between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman – those who follow Satan, and those who follow God. There is now a strong expectation that God’s promise that he made in Genesis 3:15, that a descendant of Eve will crush the serpent and deal with sin, will come. Will it be one of Adam and Eve’s sons?

We also see mankind descend deeper into sin, into a pit of despair and darkness. What hope is there for mankind? How will God accomplish his purposes to destroy sin and the curse, save a people for himself, and build his church? What we will see here is that because God is sovereign, his purposes never fail. In Christ, he will build his church and the gates of hell will not prevail.

- Cain and Abel
- Cain's descendants
- Seth

A. Cain and Abel, vv. 1-16

“Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, “I have produced a man with the help of the Lord.”² And again, she bore his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a worker of the ground.”

So we see here that Adam and Eve have two sons, Cain and Abel. Cain's name in Hebrew means something like “produced” – as it's connected to how Eve describes his birth – she produced a man with God's help. Is this then God's promised seed of Eve who will crush the serpent? Or will it be the younger son, Abel? Incidentally, Abel's name in Hebrew means “breath” or “vapour”. We'll see why this is significant later...

Abel became a keeper of sheep, a herdsman, while Cain worked the ground.

Verses 3-5 continue...

“In the course of time Cain brought to the Lord an offering of the fruit of the ground,⁴ 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,⁵ but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his face fell.”

Cain and Abel both bring an offering before the Lord, as an act of worship. Abel's is accepted, but Cain's is rejected. Why is this? On the surface, both seem to be sincere in the worship. Yet God rejects the one, but accepts the other? Is God being unfair?

No, not at all. Abel worships God how God has desired to be worshipped, while Cain did not. According to God's law, he required the very best sacrifices to be offered to him – specifically a firstborn animal, unblemished, including their fat portions, which were seen as the choicest part of the animal. See this in places like Leviticus 22:20-22. So because Abel offered the firstborn of his flock, with the fat portions, verse 4 tells us that God “had regard for Abel and his offering”. God looked at both Abel's heart and his sacrifice, and was pleased by both. This is why Hebrews 11:4, reflecting on this, says, **“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.”** Abel worshipped God by faith. He was a believer who was righteous before God and so lived by faith (Hab 2:4).

Contrast this with Cain, who offered the fruit of the ground. Not even the “first fruits”, just something that he saw fit to offer God – not what God had required. Verse 5 says that God had no regard for Cain and his offering. Already we can see something of Cain's heart – he approached God on his own terms, not on God's terms, as Abel had done. He knew better. And his reaction to God's disapproval lays bare the true state of his heart – instead of being repentant and humble before the Lord, acknowledging his wrong-doing, he is bitter, proud, arrogant and “exceedingly angry” (Hebrew in v.5).

This should serve as a stark warning for us, to take the way we worship God very seriously. God is holy. Worshipping our holy God is not a frivolous act, where we approach God in any way that seems best to us. Worship can never be on our own terms, it is always on God's terms. We are to worship him only as he desires.

This is why the WCF 21.1 says, “The acceptable way of worshipping the true God is instituted by himself, and so limited by his own revealed will, that he may not be worshipped according to the imaginations and devices of men, or the suggestions of Satan... or any other way not prescribed in the Holy Scripture.”

Only worship God how he has explicitly revealed to us in Scripture: sing God's Word, pray God's Word, preach God's Word, confess our sins, hear the gospel, receive the sacraments. Not a time to be creative, using our good ideas and sensibilities. That's what Cain did, and God utterly rejected it. Abel and his worship was regarding by the Lord because he worshipped him how he desired to be worshipped.

God then confronts Cain in his anger, in verse 6. Cain is no victim here. God says to him in verse 7, **“If you do well, will you not be accepted?”** If Cain worships God correctly, obeys him, loves him with his whole heart – he’ll be accepted. But if he remains hard-hearted, God warns him that “sin is crouching at the door” like a lion waiting to pounce. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it.

Warning to us too – not be complacent and passive in our walk with God. We must be constantly alert, actively putting sin to death in our lives. Flee sin and temptation, be ruthless about it. Puritan John Owen, “Be killing sin, or it will be killing you.” Part of our sanctification, growth in Christ – rule over sin, cut it out, not let it dominate our lives any more. By God’s grace, by the Spirit’s power, he promises to help us in this struggle.

Tragically, Cain doesn’t listen to God. He lures Abel out into the fields and murders him in cold blood. We understand here why Abel was named Abel – his life was just a “breath” – gone in an instant. This is the first murder recorded in human history, and shows mankind’s rapid descent into sin.

God confronts Cain again in verse 9, **“Where is Abel your brother?” He said, “I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?”** ¹⁰ **And the Lord said, “What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground.”**

Deeply disturbing – Cain has committed a heinous act, killing his own brother in a fit of rage and jealousy because his offering was rejected and his brother’s accepted. Even when God confronts him, he is unfazed – boldfaced lie to God, doesn’t know where his brother is, and backchats him “am I my brother’s keeper?” Just shows how hardened and depraved he is. Not an ounce of guilt in what he’s done – justifying his sin.

God then curses Cain – working the ground will be even more difficult that it already is. He will be a fugitive and wanderer on the earth, and is driven away from God’s presence, settling in the land of Nod, east of Eden.

So it looks like all is lost. Both of Eve’s sons, one of them potentially God’s promised man who will crush the head of the serpent – has not materialised. Abel, though he was righteous before God, has been killed in cold blood by his brother. And Cain, we now see is definitely not the son of promise, rather we see that he is actually the seed of the serpent.

Does this now mean that God's plan has been thwarted by sin? Has evil now got the upper hand?

B. Cain's descendants, vv. 17-24

Scripture, from this point on tracks the parallel lineage of the seed of the serpent – Cain and his family, with the seed of God's promise – see later. From v. 17, see Cain's family and his line. Cain has a son called Enoch. We then see that Cain builds the world's first city, and names it after his son. Then we are introduced in verse 18 to Cain's great-great grandson, Lamech. Lamech is the first polygamist in Scripture – he has two wives, Adah and Zillah. Between them they have three sons – Jabal, who was the father of tents and livestock - farming (v.20). Jubal, father of those who play lyre and pipe – music, arts and culture (v.21). And Tubal-Cain – forger of all bronze and iron instruments – developer of technology (v.22).

See the unfolding of sin even more in Cain's descendants. Most notably Lamech – deviates from God's plan of marriage – one man, one woman, instead marries two women. Then we see him boasting to his wives in vv.23-24 for killing a man who hit him. Arrogance of his sin – happy he's murdered someone. Tragic consequences of Adam's sin flower through his descendants.

Yet incredible thing is that though sin increases among mankind, God is still gracious. He gives gifts of his common grace to Cain's descendants – development of agriculture, the arts, music and technology. Humans still flourish on earth despite sin. Still the case today. Blessings of development, education, science, arts and farming – believer and unbeliever alike are all evidence of God's graciousness to mankind that we don't deserve.

C. Seth, vv.25-26

“And Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and called his name Seth, for she said, “God has appointed for me another offspring instead of Abel, for Cain killed him.” ²⁶ To Seth also a son was born, and he called his name Enosh. At that time people began to call upon the name of the Lord.”

The narrative here jumps back to Adam and Eve, who eventually have a third son, to replace Abel – Seth. Meaning of his name? “Appointed” or “set”. Now there are two interesting things here in the Hebrew. The root of Seth’s name “set” is the same word that’s used in Genesis 3:15 – “I will set enmity between you and the woman.” Also, the same Hebrew word that is used in Genesis 3:15 for “offspring” or “seed” (zera) of the woman is used for Seth here in verse 25. It’s not used for Cain nor Abel.

Significance? Clear and deliberate markers in the text that link Genesis 3:15 to Seth. How come? It is through Seth and his descendants that God will send the seed of the woman to crush the serpent. Seth’s line is the line of God’s elect, of God’s people. That’s why it tells us in the last verse that it was among Seth and his descendants that people started to call on the name of the Lord – people began to worship the true God.

See here – despite the tragedy of Abel’s death and Cain’s descent into sin, God nevertheless fulfils his purposes, and in the fullness of time brings forth a seed of the woman, Seth, through whom his promise to defeat sin and redeem his people, will be fulfilled. It’s through the line of Seth that will come God’s chosen Messiah Jesus, who crushed the head of the serpent on the cross, breaking the power of sin, redeeming a people for himself and building his church that the gates of hell shall not prevail.

Conclusion

Can God still work his purposes in our land, our church and even in our own lives, despite all the mess and sin that abounds? If we’re honest with ourselves, we’re guilty of behaving like Cain in many ways – wanting to deal with God on our own terms, worship him how we see fit, justifying our sins, being arrogant, proud and defiant in our ways, allowing sin to devour us, instead of resisting it, living life how we see fit, with little or no reference to God.

Tragedy – all these sins lead to death. Cain was cast out of God’s presence forever because of his sins. So it will be for anyone else who continues in sin unrepentantly – eternity in hell.

What hope then do we have? See in Genesis 4 a glimpse of the coming Messiah who would save us from our sins. How? Abel. Abel, a man righteous before God, was killed by his brother Cain, who was the seed of the serpent. Abel’s blood was spilt upon the ground.

Points us to Jesus, the Righteous One, the promised seed of the woman – also killed by the seed of the serpent – who bruised his heel, whose blood was shed on the cross. Yet he didn't stay in the grave, for on the third day he rose again and crushed the serpent's head – defeating the power of sin, breaking the curse. This is why Hebrews 12:24 says, **“to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.”**

What is the **“better word”** that Jesus' blood speaks, compared to Abel's blood? 1 John 1:7 declares the glorious answer: **“the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.”**

Brothers and sisters, repent and trust in Jesus Christ, the promised seed of the woman, God's Messiah, truly God and truly man, whose blood was shed instead of yours in order to cleanse you from every sin. He is faithful to accomplish his perfect will in your life, despite the mess. Receive forgiveness of your sins in his name, know that he counts you as righteous before God, adopts you as his own beloved sons, into his church, sealing you by his Spirit for eternal life with him in the new creation.

Amen