

Cain and Abel

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[0 : 00] We turn now to Genesis chapter 4. We read at verse 3, And in process of time it came to pass that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the Lord.

And Abel he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering. But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect.

And Cain was very wroth and his countenance fell. And the Lord said unto Cain, Why art thou wroth? Why is thy countenance fallen? If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted.

And if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. The Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering, but unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect.

Genesis. It's the book of the beginnings. Genesis is the explanation of the world that we are living in.

[1 : 21] Genesis. Genesis, it tells us how the world began. It tells us how the human race began. It tells us what has gone wrong with the human race.

That's what Genesis is all about. And so here we have these two boys who were born to our first parents, Adam and Eve.

And we might say that we see the disastrous results now of the disobedience of Adam to the command of God.

I wonder did Adam realise what disaster he was going to bring upon the world and upon his own family because of what he had done.

The world itself refused to be as productive as it ought to have been. Its fertility was reduced.

[2 : 24] But what must have been the greatest grief to Adam and Eve was the way that one of their boys turned out. Here was this son that was born to them, Cain.

He should have been, as the Bible puts it, the son of consolation. What joy! Their firstborn son! What hopes they had for him!

What a future, they thought, lay before that boy of theirs! And yet, instead of that boy bringing to them the consolation that they thought he would bring, it turned out to be this, that he brought nothing to them but grief and vexation.

And you see, the sacred writer is not concerned about the whole family of Adam and Eve. There were many other children born to Adam and Eve.

But the sacred writer is concerned to bring out these two, the lives of these two boys, Cain and Abel. Because, in Cain and Abel, we see these two lines developing from Adam and Eve.

[3 : 40] And these two lines are still developing to this very day that you and I are living in. You see, here is Abel, God's elect, God's redeemed, the holy people of God.

He represents, you see, the line of the regenerate. Here is Cain, he is reprobate. And he represents the line of the reprobate.

He's godless, he's wicked. The tendency of his whole life is to do evil. And that is why the sacred writer brings out these two boys to remind us that these are the lines that have come down through history from our first parents, Adam and Eve.

And so Abel stands in the line of the redeemed, the line of the good, the line of the holy. Cain stands in the line of unbelief, the line of evil, the line of wickedness, the line of reprobation.

And these two branches, as we have said, are the branches that have stemmed out from Adam. There is the healthy stock which is going to survive, endure.

[5 : 11] There is the diseased stock that's going to perish. But let's consider these two sons of Adam and see how radically they differed. How did they differ?

Well, they differed, you see, in their religious perception. That's the first thing that we notice about these two boys. They were so different as far as their religious perception was concerned.

different as far as their religious approach was concerned. Different as far as their attitude to God was concerned.

And not only were they different in their religious perception, but they were also different in their moral character. You see, religion and morality go together.

And as the one becomes a very religious man and a very God-fearing man, so his character develops along these lines.

[6 : 11] As the other gets away from God and becomes more and more irreverent and more and more irreligious, it's not to be wondered that that you see this moral plummeting in his whole character.

And as there was a difference in their moral character, there was also a difference too in their ultimate destinies. Well then, they differed in their religious perception.

The Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering, but unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect. Now of course we ask ourselves the question, what was it that made God favorable to Abel and not to Cain?

After all, the both boys came to God with their offerings. And indeed you might even say with regard to Cain that he worked hard to bring his offering to God.

He toiled, he sweated to bring of the first fruits of the ground to God. But as Abel was concerned, we don't read that he toiled or sweated, he just took an animal, sacrificed, and offered it to God.

[7 : 27] Well you see, in what they did, it shows how they differed these boys in their idea of the righteous character of God.

Here was Abel the younger. What was his idea of God? God? He thought of God in noble terms.

He saw God as the high and the lofty one. His conception of God was so above standard.

He saw God in all his majesty and in all his holiness. goodness. And you see, it was this knowledge of God that he had that made him approach God so differently from his brother Abel.

You see, to Cain, God was no higher than himself. As far as Cain was concerned, his view of God was earthbound.

[8 : 38] And the result was that he thought that he could sin and sin with impunity and go on sinning and God would pay no attention to it.

And that is why he rejected his brother and all that his brother stood for and rejected the way his brother offered an offering to God.

And when God at last confronted him because of the terrible deed that he had committed on his brother and because God had said to him, What hast thou done?

Oh, said Cain, am I responsible for him? Am I my brother's keeper? He can look after himself the way I'm looking after myself.

He paid no attention, you see, to the awful, atrocious character of the deed that he had perpetrated against his brother. And so you see, these two boys differed not only in their idea of God, but they differed too in their ideas as to propitiation.

[9 : 56] And that's a word that's not perhaps used very often today in the churches, propitiation. What do we mean when we talk about propitiating God? God, you see, is angry with sin.

God is angry with the sinner. He must then be made to be at peace with the sinner. That's what we mean by propitiating him. But here is the problem.

How can we propitiate the anger of God? How can we appease God? God has shown us that there is only one way that he can be appeased, and that is by way of sacrifice and blood.

In other words, you see, God is making it clear to us that sin is not an easy offhand thing that you and I can wink at and turn aside from when we want to.

Sin is not something that we can cover up as we would cover up dust in our homes by putting a sheet on it or something like that. No, no, you can't do that with sin.

[11 : 13] Sin has to be blotted out completely and it takes blood and pain and tears to take sin away.

And it was made known, you see, to Adam and Eve what their sin had cost and what it was going to cost. When they sinned, what did they try to do?

They tried to hide from God among the trees, as if the trees could hide them from God. And then what makes did they do? Well, they took the fig leaves and sewed them together in some sort of way, hoping that these fig leaves would cover them from God.

God wouldn't see them. Not all the fig trees in the world and not all their leaves could hide them from God.

God sees. Sees all things, knows all things. you can't sin, you see, against God with impunity and get away with it. You may seem to get away with it, but the day of reckoning comes.

[12 : 28] Oh, it comes. And so what had to happen was this. Skins of animals had to claw these parents of ours.

and that meant that these skins from the animals could only be got at the sacrifice of the animals. And as these animals were put to death and skinned and as their blood was shed, here was Adam watching this.

He had never seen a sight like this before and God was saying to him, do you see what your sin has done? Do you see how offensive it is to me?

It might be your blood that I would take, but instead of taking your blood and your life, I will allow this animal to take your place until the perfect sacrifice of my son comes into being.

And so you see, Abel knew this. Abel had seen it all. I'm sure his father had reminded him and his father had said to him, Abel my boy, I sinned terribly and the only way I could be reconciled to God was through the death of an innocent animal.

[13 : 57] And you are sinning like me because you've inherited from me a sinful nature with all its sinful tendencies. And you know, Abel, the only way that you can propitiate God is by going to God as I had to go to God with an animal and shed its blood.

And I'm sure that Adam must have said the same to his oldest boy Cain, but no, Cain, I'm not going to shed the blood of an animal.

I'm not going to do that sort of thing. I know a better way. I'll take the fruit of the ground and I'll give it to God. I'll go about and I'll establish my own righteousness and I'll do my own thing and I'll please God my own way and I won't listen to my father.

You know, the sin of Cain is the sin that Paul accused the Jews of in his day. You remember how when he was arguing against the Jews he said, oh, you Jews, you're very zealous in your religious practices.

You've got a zeal, said Paul to these Jews, but you know your zeal is not according to knowledge. And he cries out, I bear them record that they have a zeal, he says, of the Jews, but not according to knowledge for they, being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God.

[15 : 54] And that is precisely, you see, the sin of Cain, he refused to submit himself to the righteousness of God. He imagined that he was righteous himself, and that God must be pleased with him.

And you know, God tried to reason with this man. When he saw, you see, when he saw Cain, how his countenance had fallen, how he was angry with his younger brother because of the way his younger brother's sacrifice was accepted, he said to Cain, you know, Cain, if you do well, you will be accepted too, like your brother.

And if you don't do well, if your life doesn't conform to my standards, and it doesn't, sin lies at the door. Some commentators have translated that by saying that the word sin really means sin offering.

It's lying at the door for you, Cain. There it is, there's the animal, it's lying at the door. All you have to do is to take it, substitute it for yourself. Don't try to justify yourself before me, because if you try to justify yourself before me, it will not do.

No, no. You must substitute the animal in your place. There must be a substitution, and it's lying at the door for you.

[17 : 31] Now, isn't this so like our own day? You know, the Bible is so up to date, isn't it? So that when we go back to the first book of the Bible, it's speaking to our generation loudly and clearly.

And here we still have the people who are in the line of evil. Men and women who have come to recognize that God's righteousness cannot be appeased by themselves.

But God is angry with sin, and has declared against it. And what have these people done? Precisely what Abel did long, long ago, only thank God.

They don't go now and take an animal to sacrifice it to God Almighty, no, they go to the Lamb of God, Christ himself. Behold the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world, said John the Baptist, with regard to Jesus.

And so those who are like Abel today are those who have gone to the cross of Calvary, and there they have looked at the Son of God who loved his people and gave himself for them, and that's their sacrifice, and that is the payment that has been made to God for their sins.

[18 : 58] And my dear friend, if you are a Christian man here today, a Christian woman, aren't you so thankful for the Saviour? Aren't you so thankful that God made this tremendous arrangement with his Son?

By saying to his Son, I'll give you these people if you contract to redeem them at the cost of your life's blood. And aren't you so thankful that in the fullness of time, our Lord Jesus journeyed from eternity, left his abode there, came down here and humbled himself, made himself a little lower than the angels.

Fancy, the Son of God, the Lord of the angels, making himself a little lower than the angels. Why? Why did he make himself a little lower than the angels?

for one purpose. He made himself a little lower than the angels for the purpose of suffering and for the purpose of death, that he, by the grace of God, should taste death for men.

And God looks at you today, and he looks at me today, and he says, your life is twisted by sin.

[20 : 26] But there is the sin offering lying at your door. There is Christ the Savior to lay hold of. Yes, thank God for the line of Abel.

things. But isn't it only too obvious that there is the line of Cain? Oh, there they are, proud people. They don't need God.

They don't need any blood sacrifice. Their lives are perfect in their own estimation of things. What have they got to fear?

They don't fear death, so they say. They don't fear an ultimate meeting with God, so they say. They fear nothing.

And like Cain, their ancestor, they're working out their own righteousness and imagining in themselves that they can save themselves. you know, isn't it David who discovered this after his own terrible act of sin?

[21 : 46] God never allowed that man to forget his atrocious crying. It's like a beacon of warning in the Bible the life of David.

especially with regard to his own peculiar sins. It's like a beacon of warning. It's as if God had said, see this man David, I'm not covering his sin.

Do you know this? This is one of the great troubles with people who write biographies of men and women. You sit down and you read the life of a man or a woman that has been written today.

Oh, you would almost think that this man or woman is above everybody else. Great life. None of the faults are told.

Everything that they've done good, oh, that's all made a fuss of. Even the same with regard to Christian biography. You be careful when you're reading the Christian biographies of men.

[22 : 53] Even if it's a man like Robert Murray McChain, if it's a man like David Brainerd, if it's a woman like Mary Slessor, you be careful when you're reading about these people. You'd almost think that they had been sinless today.

They would be the last to claim sinlessness. They were sinful. David, when God writes his life story, does he hide anything?

No. he writes it over the canvas of history. The man who sinned with Bathsheba, the man who was responsible for the death of Uriah the Hittite.

And God dealt with this man until at last the psalmist cried out in despair, well not in despair but in hope rather, the sacrifices.

you can almost hear the despair and yet there is the hope. The sacrifices of God, he says, what are they? A broken spirit and a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou would not despise.

[24 : 08] That is precisely what Abel was like. He was a broken man and he came to God with a broken heart and a broken spirit.

and Abel said to God, I've been a sinner. I've sinned against you and the only thing that I can do now is to come to you the way that you have prescribed and that is through the blood of atonement and I bring to you my sacrifice, the atoning blood of this animal.

But you see, Cain, what's he like? Well, isn't he like that proud Pharisee of long ago that Jesus speaks of?

I thank thee that I am not as other men are. I fast twice in the week. I give tithes of all that I possess. And you see, this is where we see the fundamental difference in these two brothers.

their religious perception is radically different. The one brother is overwhelmed by the offensiveness of his sin against a holy and a righteous God.

[25 : 26] The other man seeks his own self justification and offers to God what he thinks is necessary.

Isn't this, as I've said, what we see in life around us today and the people who are like Cain?

Ah, proud, self-centered, self-assured, nothing to be afraid of, nothing to regret, nothing to be sorry for, nothing to be broken hearted over.

And so, in their boldness, they go on, sinning in their offensive way against God Almighty.

You know, my dear friends, I suppose that we are seeing things maybe in a way that perhaps sometimes our fathers might not have seen them and that is this, in this respect, that we are seeing sin being so blatant today, aren't we?

[26 : 35] the blatant character of sin in our times, the offensiveness of sin, the diabolical nature of sin, the heinousness of sin, and yet men are not broken by it.

No, they're proud. They're not ashamed of their lives. these portrayals that you see perhaps on television, well I hope you don't see them, but we've got to, we read about these things, perhaps unsuspecting you're sitting down waiting for the news to come on on television when suddenly there's flashed on your eyes a program that's going to be shown, and the nature of it is so debased.

You feel a disgust, a revulsion, of sin, these shameless women who parade themselves before millions of people in their state of degradation, I call them shameless women, and these shameless men, that is the offensiveness of sin, that is the revolting character of sin, sin, and they're so proud, and there is no humility, and speak to them about their need of being saved, speak to them about their need of being reconciled to God through the atoning work of Christ, they will tell you to get on your way.

grace. I haven't time to go on. We might look at this again, but this morning what we've been trying to look at is this. These two brothers, they are the leading characters in Adam's family.

You see in these brothers the development of grace, the development of sin, the development of true righteousness, the development of self-centeredness, the development of godliness, the development of sinfulness.

[29 : 03] It's there before us. These two brothers differed. The one loved God, knew his sinfulness, and sought appeasement through God's terms.

The other had no time for God, only concerned with himself, and sought to justify himself by his own method of salvation.

My dear friend, I hope none of us will go away from this church thinking, ah, we've arrived, we'll justify ourselves. No, don't do that.

Don't do it. you put your trust in Christ, the only true salvation, the only true offering for sin.

And let me put my trust in him, and all will be well. Let us pray. Eternal one, we draw near to thee in the name of our Lord Jesus, thanking thee for that wonderful sacrifice that was made by the Son of God for the sins of men.

[30 : 22] And, O Lord our God, we pray that we may not be as foolish as Cain was, trying to work out a righteousness that we imagine will please thee, but may we gladly betake ourselves to the refuge that is offered to us by thyself in thine own Son, Jesus Christ.

This we ask in his name and for his sake. Amen.