

Genesis 4:1-10

There was work. There was relationship. But it was all perfect when the world began. Perfect joy and perfect satisfaction from both.

When sin entered the world through Adam and Eve's fall, that changed everything. The Fallout is still felt to this day. Work is hard. Relationships require work to remain healthy. There is still joy. We still feel satisfaction. But it is so clearly less than perfect. Selfishness hurts the ones we love. We get hurt too, by our own selfishness and that of others. The toil and toll of work sap us. Failures litter our work and our relationships in this fallen world. And as much as we might try, we can't get things back to the way they were in the beginning. We feel the effects throughout every day – throughout all aspects of life. But sometimes the depth of the fallout jars us! Like news of cold-blooded murder.

Yet all is not lost. Before we're through today we'll talk about how Jesus is connected to this page of the Bible... and we'll hear the news of what that means for us. **Read Genesis 4:1-10.**

Adam lay with 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.

Monday morning I grabbed my briefcase. I climbed in our van. I was prepared for getting at my work while I waited for an oil change & inspection. But I wasn't prepared for what happened on the way. As I listened to the radio it was the first I had heard about the murder of 49 people. My eyes welled up with tears as I drove. Later in the week as I drove back from an outing I heard on the news: it was the 1 year anniversary of the murder of 9 individuals gathered at their AME church in Charleston SC. "Is it a year already?" My heart felt sick from sadness at the thought of it.

Has your week been at all like mine? We may at such moments be more keenly alert than other times to the depth of sin's devastation in our world.

And yet, there are people in the world today that don't want to acknowledge sin, or at least the depth of it. They think, "People are basically good." But the evidence to the contrary is all over. It's seen in the senseless, horrific violence that spills blood all over our world. But that's not all. It's seen in cases of abuse that flood our world. It's seen in the hatred and envy that fuel internet traffic to page-after-page spewing gossip, lies. Of course, you don't need technology. Wounds can be struck by punches on the keyboard or by lashes of the tongue. They might be un-bloody assaults, but they are not painless. The internal trauma can be immense. So let's not ignore the problem.

Sin is real. And the effects of sin are obvious. In fact, the trail of evidence showing sin's devastation leads back to the beginning days right after the Fall into sin. Look more closely with me at Genesis ch.4.

We hear about the birth of two sons. If we just settle in to the opening verses, we can get caught up in the momentary joy. Babies' first cry of life, babies' first steps, babies' first words. And a little further down the road... babies' first jobs: Cain a farmer; Abel a shepherd.

Ok, you older boys or younger men might be saying, "Oh, don't call them 'babies' anymore, when they've got jobs. They're grown up then." But you'll always be your momma's babies. Has she told you that? Yeah. In fact, though you probably won't hear anything like that from a dad, it doesn't mean he doesn't feel a little bit of the same. Two moms were sitting on the bleachers as the basketball season began, they were figuring out who is who, and one of them turned to me and asked: "Which one is your baby?" I didn't object, or try to correct her – what she said was true.

So here were two of Adam and Eve's baby boys. We hear about the first breath of each, and we hear about the first job of each, and a few short sentences later we hear about... the first murder. The one killed the other.

I can't imagine the pain for Adam and Eve when they found out. They lost their son.

It still happens today. And I can't imagine the pain. People say it's the worst thing that can be felt... parents losing a child.

So when it comes to cases when that loss is caused by murder, someone might suggest: "If we just make the right laws, and if we figure out how to educate people well enough, to make sure everyone knows the laws and the reason behind the laws, we can make sure this never happens again. Given the chance, people will do the right thing." Right? Is that right?

Cain was warned by the Highest Authority. The Lord instructed Cain to do what was right. Cain still murdered his brother Abel. The issue runs deeper than laws. The issue runs deeper than good instruction. The issue is a matter of the human heart.

How far back does the problem in Cain's heart go? We dig back further than the act of murder. We dig further back than Cain's anger that premeditates that tragic act. And what do we find? Dig into the Bible verses and see.

What might strike you at first is how alike Cain and Abel's descriptions sound. Sure one is a rancher, and the other a farmer, but... they're both working. We don't hear about one of them as the hard-working, religious kind of guy - the other a blight upon society because of a waste of his talent or wild-reckless living. And, they're both described as bringing an offering to the Lord.

But then we're told: the Lord accepted Abel's offering, but Cain's offering wasn't acceptable to him.

Now why is that? We've got to dig in a little to understand. But it's worth the time.

This is an important issue. It addresses a widely held error in our world today. You'll hear people today express: "As long as you believe in God (or seek God) and try to do what's right, God will be happy with you – he'll be pleased with what you're offering."

This account shows: that's not true. It's never been that way in this fallen world. The rest of the Bible explains why that popularly held view isn't true. And the book of Hebrews specifically refers back to the example of Cain and Abel. It states the difference between Abel's offering and Cain's like this: (11:4) Abel offered his in faith. And through faith God counted Abel as right with Him.

So think this through: Does that mean Cain didn't believe God existed? No. We hear God talking directly with Cain in this account. He certainly believed God existed. And Cain even brings an offering to the Lord. But he didn't have faith in the Lord for rescue from sin.

So if that's the case, why did Cain bring an offering?

Well, unless it is merely because you're trying to impress people, there are only two reasons really to bring an offering to the Lord.

- The one is: You offer something because you think you have to, or because you want to earn God's favor. Such a person thinks it up to them to make things right with God.
- The other is: your offerings are a thank you to the Lord. You're not offering him something to earn His favor. You trust His Word, that He gifts you forgiveness and eternal life through faith in our Savior Jesus' work. And your offerings are a thanks to him and an expression of your trust in Him.

Cain lacked faith. He certainly needed the Lord's rescue. But Cain didn't want things the Lord's way. He didn't want to hear what the Lord had to say. Cain was angry when he heard God. And his anger didn't stop there. It spilled over to his brother.

Now we see surface what was already present, but not yet out in the open earlier. The depth of the problem in Cain's heart shows itself when Cain isn't happy with God's determination of what makes an offering acceptable. Cain rejects the Lord's will. He is unsatisfied with God. He is envious of his brother Abel. He is unapologetic about how he feels. And he becomes unhindered in his sin. Sin had taken over his heart.

We learn important lessons about sin from this section of God's Word. The Lord pictures sin as a crouching predator with muscles tensed, ready to pounce. It's nothing to mess with, nothing to play around with. But the lesson is not only to see sin's power. Oh, we do learn: don't give anger or envy a room in your heart, because sin is never content to remain as mere occupant; it always wants to take over ownership. "It desires to have you." Yes we want to see those lessons. But the biggest lesson to go with them is to see and treasure the Lord's solution for sin.

The Lord reached out to Cain. The Lord didn't need to ask him questions to understand where Cain's heart was at. He knew what was going on in Cain's heart. But the Lord asked questions in an attempt to get Cain to understand his own heart.

The Lord was pursuing Cain. He wanted Cain to come to repentance for his sin, and to turn in faith to Him for rescue. Cain sadly didn't.

Adam and Eve lost a child. I said earlier: you'll hear it called the worst thing that parents can experience. And I agree. But I might mean something different than what you might think. Adam and Eve lost Abel for all the years until they were reunited with him in heaven. So in a way, though I don't want in any way diminish the grief they experienced in long years apart from their son, they never really lost him – not forever. But their son Cain... he is the son lost in the end (Jude vs.11; 1 John 3:12).

But this chapter of the Bible doesn't end there. It returns to Adam and Eve. They didn't despair. They clung to the Lord in faith. And that's shown when they express thanks to the Lord at the birth of another son: Seth. And we're told Seth had a son. And then before more links in the genealogy are continued in

Gen. ch.5, the description is “slipped in” – very intentionally – how this family was calling on the name of the Lord.

We’re part of that same family – the family of believers. We call on the Lord in confession of our sin. We call on the Lord in faith, trusting in His forgiveness and rescue in Jesus. And here’s the assurance we are given as we call on the Lord for such grace: *“You have come to God, the judge of all men... to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel”* Hebrews 12:23-24. There’s the Jesus’ connection I mentioned earlier.

Do you understand? What’s the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel? In Gen. 4:10 God tells Cain: Abel’s blood cries out. It was a preachment of law to Cain. Abel’s blood cried out for justice.

What about all my sins? What about God’s justice for them? All sin must be punished. This is true. But... “the blood of Jesus speaks a word.” What word is it? A better word! It too cries out. But it calls out the good news: the blood of Jesus Christ, God the Son, cleanses us from all sin. Jesus died taking God’s punishment for all our sin. Be assured God is just. He does not demand payment twice for sin. Come to him calling on His name: “I want to be judged not based on my record, Lord, because then I’d be lost; instead judge me based on your perfect record, Jesus, and your suffering and death in my place.”

Know this. Trust this. Use this assurance of God’s great love to strengthen you against sin’s attacks. Spend the rest of your life treasuring the forgiveness that is yours in Jesus through faith, and offer your thanks in reply. Amen.