

Over the last few weeks, we have been covering stories in the book of Genesis. Today we will continue as we turn from chapter 3 to chapter 4 and look at two brothers named Cain and Abel. While many believe this account is the first killing or death in the story of God... it's not. In Genesis 3:21, God sacrificed an animal to cover the shame of Adam and Eve after they sinned in the garden. Genesis 3:21 and 3:15 were a foreshadow of the greater work that Jesus would do on the cross to cover our shame. This is referred to as the protogospel, or the gospel before the gospel.

In the story of God found in Genesis 4, two brothers bring their offerings to God. Cain works the ground and produces crops, and Abel works the animals and produces meat. When they gave their offering to the Lord, Abel's offering was shown regard while Cain's was not. Why is that? There are a couple of possibilities. As we look at Abel's offering in Genesis 4:4, he brought his firstborn. It was his first part which demonstrates that God was shown priority. As for Cain, he just brought "an offering." While Cain's was a gift, it was not a gift that showed God priority. This reflects the principle that we see throughout Scripture in giving. God loves a cheerful giver and someone that shows faith in their generosity. The reason that we give our first part and best part is that God gave us his in Jesus Christ. The other possibility is that Cain's offering was a sacrifice of vegetation and Abel's was a sacrifice of blood. Because sin entered the world, there is life in the blood of the atoning animal (Leviticus 17:14) and there is no forgiveness without the shedding of blood (Hebrews 9:19-22). Whatever the case, whether it was the order of the gift or the type of gift, God's pleasure with Abel's gift brought Cain anger against his brother.

In verses 6-7, God shows Cain compassion in asking why he is downcast (angry). Even though Cain struggled to remain connected to his emotions, God was not. God was more connected with Cain than Cain was with himself. God encourages him and lets him know that if he does the right thing in life, that he will also experience favor. And finally, the greatest act of compassion that God showed Cain was warning him that sin was close at hand, and that his anger would be used for evil. Sin was crouching at the door. As quickly as God shares this, Cain goes with his brother in the field. Rather than burying the hatchet in the dispute, Cain buries the hatchet in his brother. In Genesis 4, we have the first shedding of human blood. The fruit of Eve's womb was killed, because of the fruit of Adam's sin. The irony. Again, in an act of compassion, God asks Cain, "where is Abel, your brother?" This was Cain's opportunity to come clean with God about his sin. Just like God asked Adam, "where are you," God is asking Cain, "where is your brother?" In the story of God, Cain walks in the footsteps of Adam when he responds by lying and shifting blame or responsibility, "I do not know, am I my brother's keeper?" While Cain's lie was shocking, what was even more shocking was his arrogant retort. Cain was so deeply deceived with his sin that he no longer knew the truth. The problem with his answer is, "YES!" we are our brother's keeper.

As a church, we are going to spend time praying for our brothers and sisters in faith and in the world. We are not disconnected from them or unrelated. Like Cain and Abel, we are all descendants of Adam, and for believers, we are from the second Adam (the perfect man), Jesus Christ. As we pray, may we pray with passion and reflect that, because people matter to God, they matter to us. We are our brother's keeper!

- Pray for the spiritual health of people in our congregation. Pray that people would take responsibility to care for the souls and eternities of other people. Pray that people would take responsibility and would obey the command of Christ to be disciples that make disciples.
- Pray for the emotional health of people in our congregation. Pray that they would find comfort and encouragement from believers and that they would not feel alone in their suffering. For those that suffer from mental illness, pray that they would be given greater clarity by the Holy Spirit to respond to the challenges they face. May they experience healing by a renewed mind in Jesus Christ. Pray that believers would surround them and remind them of who they are and how they are loved by God.

- Pray for the physical health of people in our congregation. Pray that their physical needs would be met and those who are suffering would experience healing, in Jesus' name. Pray that our people would take responsibility to identify with people in their suffering and to share their burdens by helping care for their needs.
- Pray for the financial health of people in our congregation. Pray that God would meet their needs and that people would understand the sufficiency of God's grace. Pray that they would seek God and would be willing to ask for daily bread and see that their financial need can grow their faith. May they embrace the words of Paul, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me," in that whether they are full or hungry, they experience the power and peace found in Jesus' provision. (Philippians 4:11-13)

For the Gospel,
Pastor Bryan