

A Hideous Beginning

Genesis 4:1-16

Death is the result of disobeying God's commands. He warned them of that in **2:17**. It's also given to us in **Romans 6:23**. And that's exactly what happened to them. Spiritual death came that created a separation from fellowship between them and God because of sin. In time they also died physically. I think from that moment they sinned the dying process began. They started to age. Eventually their bodies succumbed to the natural way of things. But something else happened. Instead of a spiritual nature, they had a sin nature. This nature was passed on to their children and their children's children on down through the ages. Because we are all in Adam we all receive that sin nature. Consequently we do things according to that nature. We sin. That's what we see in our passage today. Death occurs, but not by natural means. It is unnatural death.

Murder isn't anything new. It's almost as old as the beginning of creation. Murder is devaluing the life of a person who was made in the image of God. But today if you don't believe in God and if you believe in an evolutionary system where you came from the primordial ooze, life has no value and the person whose life has just been taken isn't any different than the animal that just got hit on the side of the road. Under those circumstances life is cheap.

But the fact of the matter is that most societies value life. I can say that because they have laws against murder, that is, they value life so long as it is out of the womb. That's why it is troubling to see States like Virginia and New York pass laws allowing a newborn in a botched abortion to lay there and die without medical assistance. So kudos to States like Ohio and others for passing a heartbeat bill so that once a heartbeat has been detected abortion is not legal. This past Tuesday I went to Lansing and heard from Janet Porter who initiated and saw the heartbeat bill pass in Ohio. She's hoping that a similar bill will pass in Michigan. The sad reality

though is that our governor has already made it clear that she will not sign any anti-abortion legislation and our State's Attorney General will not enforce any law that overturns Roe v. Wade.

Since 1973 our nation is approaching 60 million murders through abortions. Life is no longer about conviction but about convenience. It's no longer just about the unborn, but about the elderly, and about the terminally ill, even about those who hold different political or religious ideologies. Why else did Hitler attempt to exterminate the Jews or the ethnic cleansing by Idi Amin known as the butcher of Uganda or 1 million people killed under the Khmer Rouge regime in Cambodia.

Flint was listed 6th in the nation last year for murder at 46.1 murders per 100,000 people. Detroit was 7th with 45.2 murders per 100,000 people. East St. Louis tops the list at 100.9 for every 100,000 people.

We could go on and on with statistics that would give us nightmares about the brutality of one person against another or one nation against another or a government against its own people and it all began back here in **Genesis 4**. Let's turn to our passage.

Genesis 4:1-16

Genesis is a book of beginnings, of firsts, the first creation, the first man and woman, the first command, the first marriage, the first family, the first sin, the first death, the first sacrifice, the first worship, and unfortunately – the first murder. The Bible is an open book and doesn't sugar coat anything.

It is not by accident that we have recorded for us in this chapter the raw nature of such contention. From this point on in Scripture we begin to see the fulfillment of God's Word in the Garden of Eden when He described with accuracy the contention that would arise between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent for that is what we have here. We will see it rear its ugly head from this point on

until we reach the final chapters of Revelation.

Perhaps the best verse that describes the life of Cain is summarized in the Wisdom of Solomon where in **Proverbs 16:25** we read **“There is a way that seems right to a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.”**

That is an apt depiction of what we find in these few verses about Cain. As we look at this passage, there is one thing to keep very clear in our mind, there is either God’s way or man’s way – period. Cain shows us what happens when man chooses his own way. He did not live by faith, but by the flesh. **Jude 11** aptly describes it as **“the way of Cain.”** With that, let’s lead into what transpired by first looking at the siblings productivity.

I. THE SIBLINGS PRODUCTIVITY – vs. 1-5

Verse 1 begins by telling us that Adam and Eve took to heart the command God had given them before the fall and started to have a family, to populate the earth. They also remembered the words in the Garden at the fall, when God told Eve that she would have children, all be it in pain. In time she became pregnant and had a son. They called him Cain. He is the first natural born child. His name means acquired and that’s what we read in **verse 1** when Eve says **“with the help of the Lord I have brought forth a man.”** Even though Adam called her Eve because she was the mother of all the living, what she says is an acknowledgement that God is ultimately the giver of life.

John Phillips writes that “Her exclamation demonstrates her faith in the promise of a coming redeemer.”

Initially she thought that Cain was the promised seed mentioned by God in **3:15**. She was both right and wrong. She was right to believe in the promise, but wrong that it would be through Cain. She would soon see why.

We’re not told how long, but sometime later Eve

bore a second son and they named him Abel. His name means vanity or vapor reminding man of the brevity of life. **James 4:14** says we **“are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.”**

They were about to find that out. We learn from verse two about their work.

A. Their Work Is Different– v. 2b

We have to read a bit between the lines here and make some inferences not found in the text. What we assume is that after their expulsion, Adam set about learning how to till the ground to produce their food. He must have also learned how to tend flocks, since they would need animals for both additional clothing and for sacrifices. As the boys grew he taught them both trades and about God. They had the same parents and sat under the same teaching. But as they grew into adulthood we see some differences that emerge. They’re not bad differences to begin with, but in time we will see that there will emerge differences of the heart.

We read that Cain was a husbandman and Abel was a herdsman. Cain worked the field while Abel tended the flocks. They were both noble occupations. Let me just say here that it was not in the type of work they did that caused God to look with favor on one brother over against the other. What they both did was necessary for their survival. *It wasn’t the acts of their hand in work that distinguished one brother over the other but the attitude of the heart in their worship.* It wasn’t in what they brought but how they brought it.

So over the course of time in raising these boys, Adam taught them the importance of their work as well as the importance of their worship. That’s what we see next. But even in that there was a difference.

B. Their Worship Is Different – vs. 3-5

Notice first their differing actions for worship.

1. Their different actions for worship – vs. 3, 4a

Now it's unclear from the text if this is the first offering they had been brought to the Lord or if they had each made offerings before. All we know for sure is what the text tells us that **"in the course of time"** they came with an offering.

Abel brought his offering from the flock.

a. Abel's offering was from the flock – v. 4a

It's important to note that his gift was the fat portion and from the firstborn of the flock. The fat portion speaks of the careful preparation Abel made in the selecting and bringing his sacrifice. That it was the firstborn simply means that it was the best he had. It's an acknowledgement that the productivity of the flock was from God, that it all belonged to Him. Bringing the firstborn is a testimony of faith believing that God will add to the flock. Abel brought his offering from the flock. Cain on the other hand brought his offering from the field.

b. Cain's offering was from the field – v. 3

We are told in **verse 3** that he went out to the field and gathered some fruit of the soil. It doesn't say it was the firstfruits just that it was from the field. It gives the perception of being casual in approaching God, which translates into a lack of reverence. It is apparent that he seems indifferent to what he brought while Abel brought the best. Cain came on his own terms. Abel came as directed by God.

Now as I mentioned a moment ago, it wasn't in what they brought but in how they brought it that made the difference. Keep in mind that as the Law was given both types of sacrifice were welcome. Grain offerings were a gift to God on account of His blessings. But keep this in mind – God has the right to set the rules in how He is to be approached in worship when it comes to atoning for sin. We don't get to pick what we think is appropriate. In the garden God demonstrated what would be required for worship and sacrifice in order to come into His presence. It was through the blood of the sacrifice.

We learned from our study in **chapter 3** that God had to sacrifice an innocent animal to cover the nakedness of Adam and Eve, a picture of what is required to be covered from sin. So while grain offerings were acceptable the primary sacrifice was a blood sacrifice by which an innocent animal died for the sinner. That is the picture God uses to describe the perfect sacrifice of Jesus as our atonement for sin.

What can wash away my sin,
nothing but the blood of Jesus.

I Peter 1:18-19

I Peter 3:18

God did not accept Cain because of the kind of sacrifice he brought, but because of how he brought it. It was all about attitude.

Notice their different attitudes for worship.

2. Their different attitudes in worship – vs. 4-5

Abel's sacrifice was pleasing.

a. Abel's sacrifice was pleasing – v. 4

He brought his offering in faith. It demonstrated belief in the coming redeemer his parents taught him about when he was growing up. **Hebrews 11:4** tells us why his offering was accepted. It was by faith. **"By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was commended as a righteous man, when God spoke well of His offering."**

Abel had a right heart condition in coming to God. The sacrifice, although important, wasn't why God accepted Abel, it was because of the faith of his heart. The confession of David offers insight on the kind of attitude with which we should come to God. **Psalm 51:16-17** **"You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; You do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, You will not despise."**

God wants a humble heart, a repentant heart. Abel's sacrifice was looked on with favor, a word that means He approved of it, He was pleased with it. So the question we must ask ourselves is this: **when we come into God's presence is our heart right? Do we come in faith?**

In **Psalm 66:18** we read **"If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened."**

That's the same as saying that God won't receive me, that He won't accept me. **So with what kind of heart are you coming into God's presence?**

Abel's sacrifice was pleasing.

Cain's sacrifice, though, was problematic.

b. Cain's sacrifice was problematic – v. 5

Our text says that Cain became angry. He wasn't angry with Abel. He was angry at God. He only took his anger out on Abel. What he shows us is that his reaction was predictable.

Warren Wiersbe says "Cain wasn't rejected because of his offering; but his offering was rejected because of Cain: his heart wasn't right with God."

Even if he had brought an animal sacrifice, he would have been rejected because his heart was not right with God.

Micah 6:6-8
(Isaiah 1:11-20)

He would have been accepted if he had brought his offering in faith with the prayer of David who asked God to create in him a clean heart and renew a right spirit within him (**Psalm 51:10**).

According to **Hebrews 11:6**, it is faith that pleases God, not sacrifices.

Cain's is the first false religion, trying to come to God by one's own efforts, the effort of self-righteousness, the effort of bringing what your own works have produced. To Cain, salvation had to be earned. He may have been pious in bringing an offering, but he was not penitent. Worship was on

his own terms, done in a casual even haphazard manner. It made sense to him so he couldn't understand why God wouldn't accept it. It will be no different for many who stand before God bringing their works of self-righteousness thinking that having gone through the motions of being religious by doing all kinds of good works and religious activity that God should accept them. Instead they will hear Him say to depart because He doesn't know them. So don't for a moment think that's what it takes. There is only one way to come to God and that is through His Son Jesus Christ and that's what Abel shows us in coming by faith. Abel's sacrifice was pleasing while Cain's was problematic. It is in this moment of Cain's life that we see sin's pull.

II. SIN'S PULL – vs. 6-7

Notice sin's temperament.

A. Sin's Temperament – vs. 6, 7b

Anger is a strong emotion. In the Hebrew, the word that means burning with anger. We would describe it as being hot under the collar. It is defined as rage, or wrath, or fury. It involves a strong hostile response to a perceived threat, provocation, or hurt. It is the natural response to other emotions like bitterness, resentment and unforgiveness.

Here, though is God's grace. God gave Cain the opportunity to repent, to get right, to come clean. He tried to lead him down the right path. He confronted him not in condemnation but out of concern for his attitude of anger. God continued with an explanation of what Cain could expect if he didn't take care of it, sin was crouching at the door of his heart ready to pounce.

Picture a ferocious animal waiting to strike its prey, to seize it and devour it. It is crouching low ready to attack. That's the same picture Peter gives us of Satan who is lurking about waiting to devour someone (**I Peter 5:8**). At this point it is just a strong temptation. It hadn't taken over yet, but it

was waiting for him to open the door. In **verse 6 and 7** God gave him a way out of sin's temptation, a way that will work for us, too.

B. Sin's Termination – vs. 6, 7

When it comes to any temptation rearing its ugly head, Paul offers some sound advice.

Ephesians 4:27 “Do not give the devil a foothold.” Don't let him get his feet set or give him an opportunity. That comes on the heels of telling us that in our anger don't sin (**v. 26**). In **verse 31** we are told to get rid of all bitterness, rage, and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice (**v. 31**).

God told Cain to do what was right by mastering it rather than by letting it master him. Control it or it will control him. Don't hold a grudge that Satan can use. An unforgiving spirit always spoils worship and destroys fellowship with God and others. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said that if there is a rift with someone else even if we are at the altar with our sacrifice, it's more important to go and be reconciled before giving your offering. Only after an attempt at reconciliation should you come back to make your offering.

If Cain repented and obeyed God his countenance would be lifted up. It's another way of saying that he would be accepted. Here's where Scripture encourages us, so that instead of instead of being a victim become a victor.

I John 1:9

Romans 8:5-6 “For they that are after the flesh, do mind the things of the flesh and they that are after the Spirit, the thing of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.”

II Corinthians 2:14 “Now thanks be to God who always makes us triumph in Christ.”

II Corinthians 10:5 “taking captive every thought to the obedience of Christ.”

Ephesians 6:10-11 “Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

James 4:7-8 “Submit yourselves therefore to God, resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double minded.”

Temptation was crouching at the door of Cain's heart and God was compassionately trying to bring him to do what was right. **That's the thing about God isn't it?** He takes us where we are but doesn't want us to stay there. God is always ready and willing to bring us back to himself no matter what. God was giving Cain a way out if he would only obey and follow.

We are reminded by Paul in **I Corinthians 10:13** that God always makes a way out of temptation and He was offering that way to Cain. Sin has a strong pull. Unfortunately as we continue reading we see Cain's shameful premeditation.

III. SHAMEFUL PREMEDITATION – v. 8

Premeditation is something you think or plan beforehand. I can plan a wonderful surprise for Robyn. We plan for a vacation. There are good things we can plan. In this case premeditation is done with ill intent. One author suggested that this happened right after their respective sacrifices. When Cain's offering was rejected because of what was in his heart, he flew into a rage. One scholar suggest that Abel may have tried to calm his brother by offering to give him an animal from his flock, but Cain rejected it, suggesting a spontaneous act of fury. I believe it was premeditation. It was a shameful method.

A. A Shameful Method – v. 8a

Notice the verse, **“Now Cain said to his brother Abel, ‘Let’s go out to the field.’”**

Some scholars suggest that after Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden that they didn’t wander too far from the gate. They suggest that it was at the gate where God would meet with them to provide instruction. We can only speculate on this point, but it stands to reason that if they wanted to maintain some closeness to God, stay near the place you last saw Him.

The invitation by Cain suggests two things. The first as I have mentioned is that this was premeditated. He began to dwell more on his rejection by God and schemed on how to get rid of his brother. After all to him it seemed that it was the difference in their sacrifice that became the reason for his rejection so get rid of the competition.

There was a story out of Houston a few years ago where a woman wanted to ensure her 13 year old daughter made the cheerleading squad so she hired a hitman for \$2,500 to take out the mother of her daughter’s competition for the coveted spot. Her reasoning was that the girl would be so distraught by her mother’s death that she would pull out of the competition allowing her daughter to get the spot by default. She was caught and arrested.

People will do all kinds of things, even murder, out of revenge. Cain invited his brother on a trip to the field, apparently away from the Garden’s gate. Maybe it was under the false pretense of showing him some of the produce of his garden. I think the second reason is because the field would be away from the entrance to the garden and away from God’s presence. It was on this trip that his shameful method turned into a shameless murder.

B. A Shameless Murder – v. 8b

“And while they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him.”

The word **“attack”** implies premeditation. There’s

the crouching animal ready to pounce. He attacked his brother and killed him.

When there is a murder, investigators are left to put together the pieces. Who did it and why are a couple of important dots to connect. A movie or novel tries to keep the audience in suspense and not reveal the murderer until the end. That’s when all the loose ends are tied up and we learn who did it and why.

In our text we know the who. What we don’t know is the how. Did he use a stone? Was it the knife Abel used for his own sacrifice? Did he strangle him, or use one of his farming implements? We don’t know. We only know the result. Our picture Bibles and other artist renderings depict him using a stone with a blow to the head. One author, though, suggests that Cain used a knife because that’s probably the only way he had seen something else die. Regardless of the how, it was a shameless act.

Often times one sin begets another and that’s the case here. Cain lied. Notice the severe punishment.

IV. SEVERE PUNISHMENT – vs. 9-16

In **verse 9** God confronts Cain.

A. God Confronts Cain – v. 9

We learned in **chapter 3** that we can’t hide from God. Maybe Cain missed that lesson from his parents. God knows all about our sins. Nothing is hidden from Him with whom we have to do.

Psalm 139:7 “Where can I go from Your Spirit? Where can I flee from Your presence?”

Jeremiah 23:24 “‘Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him,’ saith the Lord. ‘Do not I fill heaven and earth,’ saith the Lord.”

He sees not only all that we do, He also knows the motivations of the heart. Nothing is secret to an ever present and all knowing God. So don’t think for a moment that you can get away with anything. He will bring the hidden things to light.

God asked Cain where his brother was. Cain lied. He said he didn't know and essentially said Abel wasn't his responsibility, which means he didn't care. What God said next tells Cain he couldn't get away with murder. He had murdered Abel in spite of his worship, in spite of God's warning, and then tried to lie his way out of it. Man still hasn't learned that it's futile to attempt to hide the truth from God. Notice that God curses Cain.

B. God Curses Cain – vs. 10-12

In the short story by Edgar Allen Poe, *The Tell-Tale Heart* is about the murder of an elderly man, the body of which is hidden under the floor boards of his bedroom. Police investigate but find nothing suspicious. The murderer invites them to join him for tea in the very room where the body is hidden. He begins to hear what he assumes is the heartbeat of the old man. Convinced that the police can also hear the loud heartbeat breaks down and confesses to the crime.

God said the blood of Abel cried from the soil. His blood had defiled the ground and as a result the soil would no longer produce for Cain. He was cursed to wander the field instead of work the field. He was an outcast from God's presence. Cain had chosen to reject God and he would now bear the consequences.

The blood of Abel cried out loudly to God and He acted not only to curse the ground and Cain, but also to condemn him.

C. God Condemns Cain – vs. 13-16

For the rest of his days he would be condemned to wander the earth, forced to eke out a living. What Cain says to God exposes the sad condition of his heart. **“My punishment is more than I can bear. Today You are driving me from the land, and I will be hidden from Your presence. I will be a restless wanderer on the earth and whoever finds me will kill me.”**

He was in fear for his life and in fear of being cast from God's presence. It shows that he did not have a repentant heart. He turned his back on God and left Eden. Cain wasn't concerned about pardon; he was only concerned about his punishment. For a time the murderer was spared from any avenger. God gave him some kind of mark to identify that he was under the curse of God, but wherever he went was always in fear for his life.

This goes to show us that when we follow God we don't have to fear His judgment or separation, but if we reject God He will bear down with punishment. **I John 3:12** gives us insight into what I believe to be Cain's final state. **“Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother's were righteous.”**

There is the end of the matter. As I said at the beginning, there are only two paths to take. You can follow God's path as Abel did and be called righteous or you can follow man's path as Cain did and be called evil. Cain was given the opportunity to make things right and he chose instead to harbor a hard heart that led him to commit murder. God gave him a way out. It's the same way He gives to every one where sin is crouching at the heart.

Today if you are walking the way of Cain God invites you to do what is right by trusting Christ as your Savior.

If you are already a believer in Christ, and sin is crouching at the door, submit to God, draw near to Him, be strong in the Lord and put on the whole armor of God so that you can resist the devil and stand against his schemes.