

## The sermon

### Intro

How do I know if my life, my works, my service is accepted by God? What does God accept? What does God reject? Better, who does God accept? Who does God reject? What's the critical factor?

And there's this thing called sin. In our culture, people might dispute the inerrancy of the Bible. People might dispute the deity of Christ. People might dispute the resurrection.

There's some things people generally don't dispute. Few people dispute the fact that Jesus was an actual, historical person. A good number of Jews don't dispute the fact that Jesus performed miracles. And while people might dispute their own sinfulness, they don't dispute the fact that sin exists. They probably don't dispute the fact that people sin against them.

We're a culture that's afraid of things like corrupt government officials, voter fraud, mass shootings, cyber-terrorism (attacks on infrastructure like power grids), Russia's use of nuclear weapons, corporate greed that drives inflation, identity theft/scams/hackers/computer viruses, drunk drivers, drug dealers, etc. We live like we ought to be on the lookout because other people might do bad things that can harm us. We live like sin is out there.

What should we make of sin? What does it do to us? How do we deal with it?

Genesis four gives us some answers.

### **DON'T READ PASSAGE!**

## Body

### Passage Focus

We'll work through the chapter step by step, making observations along the way.

Chapter four begins to answer the question, what becomes of humanity after the fall?

### **READ 4:1-5**

#### **Point 1: A tale of two offerings (4:1-5)**

*"Adam knew his wife"* = sexual relations. The verb "to know" conveys more than just intellectual knowledge. Know involves relational knowledge.

Eve's first son is Cain. Eve's second son is Abel. Abel worked with sheep. Cain worked with the ground.

In the middle of 4:2, we jump from Abel born to Abel keeping sheep.

In time the two bring offerings to the LORD. Cain offers fruit. Abel brings sheep. The first recorded instance of humans taking animal life. The first recorded instance of an offering to the LORD.

*"offering"* = paying homage to someone, whether a freely given gift or a required tribute. We're not told why they were giving offerings to God. A tradition instituted by their father Adam? An unrecorded command given to Adam? The issue is the nature of their offering.

#### **What's the difference?**

Abel's is accepted. Cain's is rejected. What's the difference?

*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. And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks. – Hebrews 11:4*

Abel's offering was offered in faith. It's implied Cain's was not.

*And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.*

Yes, Abel believed in God's existence. Adam and Eve surely shared many things with him. And Abel believed something about the nature of God: *"he rewards those who seek him."* **Things work out well for us when we honor and obey God.**

Abel gave his offering from trust in God, not because of obligation. Not a thoughtless habit. Not merely to please his parents. Not because he had selfish motives. Abel offered something because he trusted in God. Whatever the reasons Cain offered fruit, it wasn't from faith.

Another hint is the quality of offerings. Abel gives from *"the firstborn of his flock"* = giving first to God before keeping for himself and *"their fat portions"* = the best parts of the animal. God is valued. So Abel gives the first and the best to God. **Faith, firstborn, fat.** That's why Abel's was accepted.

### **Cain's heart response**

God's rejection results in anger and despair. Simultaneously outraged and crushed by the sting of rejection. Who does God think he is? I did what I was supposed to do. Why is God against me? This is unjust! The one who created all things and can do whatever he pleases is against me. What hope is there for me? Nothing I do will ever be good enough for God.

### **Application**

We who live in the New Covenant age aren't commanded to bring fruit or sheep. We're commanded to give our whole life to God.

*I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. <sup>2</sup> Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. –*

### **Romans 12:1-2**

Like Abel, we live by faith, trusting that God *"rewards those who seek him."* That things go best for us when we obey God's commands. So, trusting that things go well when we obey, we offer our lives to God as a living sacrifice by submitting to his will. Being a living sacrifice entails rejecting the ways of the world, rejecting what opposes God's revealed will. Trusting that God's ways are good when the world says they're not.

Music and giving come to mind. Why are you singing along and putting money in the offering plate? Because that's what everyone else is doing? Because it's what you were taught to do? Because you want people to think you're a good Christian? Because it makes your parents, friend, spouse happy? Are you doing these things because you love God? Because you believe God is good to you? Because you want to, because God means something to you? Do you sing because God is your strength and confidence and hope?

### **Singing and giving becomes delight, not duty, when accompanied by faith!**

Cain offered something. But he didn't offer it for the right reasons.

**Practical question:** what am I offering to God and why?

**READ 4:6-7**

**Point 2: Two ways to address sin: rule or be ruled (4:6-7)**

*“Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen?”*

Cain, what’s going on inside your heart that’s led you to this point? God prompts Cain to do a little self-examination.

*“If you do well, will you not be accepted?”*

Cain, there’s a way out of your predicament. Rejection isn’t final. But you need to start doing life differently. To do well means living by faith.

*And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door.*

Cain is warned. *“crouching”* generally means “to lie down.” The picture is sin is resting but nearby, resting but ready to pounce. Like a lion. Danger abounds!

*Its desire is contrary to you, but you must rule over it.”*

Sin desires to rule over Cain. So Cain must fight back. He can’t be passive. **It’s one or the other: rule sin or be ruled by sin.**

Note sin strikes at the heart level. Cain’s heart is all over the place: burning anger and downcast. Sin is ready to use that anger and despair to take control of Cain. Cain, fight back. Master your anger. Master your despair. How do we fight anger and despair? By faith. If Cain puts up zero resistance, sin will rule. If Cain lives by faith, Cain will rule. Doing nothing means sin rules!

**Application**

Likewise, sin is ready to pounce on us. Ready to use our emotions to rule our heart. We fight sin by faith.

Assuming we agree with God, we don’t get hot over God’s assessments (I’m not angry that God convicts me of failure to be gentle). We don’t despair over God’s assessments (I’m not despairing because God points out my need to serve others). By faith we say, God you’re right. You’re always right. Obedience is always good for me. Help me to think, feel, want in a way that pleases you.

It’s at the point when we’re wrathful or despairing or envious or fearful that sin takes control. We fight sin with faith.

**Practical question:** am I fighting sin with faith?

**READ 4:8-16**

**Point 3: Sin rules; mercy extended (4:8-16)**

Cain doesn’t heed God’s counsel. Sin takes control of his heart. Cain murders Abel (4:8). The first murder.

*“Where is Abel your brother?”* God knows. God’s seeking to provoke a confession.

*“I do not know.”* Cain compounds murder with lying. Murder and lying. Sounds like Satan.

*“am I my brother’s keeper?”* The arrogance. The lack of love. Why would I care about my brother?

Abel’s blood cries out from the ground (4:10). The injustice, the atrocity committed against Abel demands a response. Something must be done! The ground shares God’s sense of justice.

**Cain pictures how sinful man acts when there's no fear of God and there's no stated laws and there's no stated consequences!** This is man left to himself without God's intervention!

### **Cain cursed**

Previously the serpent and the ground were cursed. Now a person is cursed. "*cursed from the ground*" means "*When you work the ground, it shall no longer yield to you its strength*" (4:11-12). There's a second curse: "*You shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth*" (4:12).

The ground won't work for Cain. He's going to have to find a new occupation. It would be like a chef that can't cook. Every time you press the power button on the stove or the microwave or the grill it won't start. A race car driver who can never drive a car again.

Cain's second curse seems to indicate he can't live in one place. Constantly be on the go. He'll never have a place he calls home. We're not told how God enforces this one.

### **Cain protests**

Cain protests he can't bear the weight of these two curses. He'll be separated from God's face/presence (4:14). People will want to kill a fugitive/wanderer.

### **God responds**

God responds mercifully to Cain.

1. God promises sevenfold vengeance on anyone who kills Cain.

If someone does kill Cain, they will be killed by God.

2. A mark is placed on Cain to prevent people from physically attacking him.

We're not given specifics. Some sort of visible identification that says do not attack this person or things will not go well for you. Interesting, the first murderer is apparently permanently protected from being murdered.

Cain settles in Nod, away from the land where God dwells (4:16). God is omnipresent, yet he can be said to dwell in some places and not in other places. "*east of Eden*" means further away from the garden.

### **Application**

The apostle John fills us in on Cain's motivations.

*For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.* <sup>12</sup> *We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous.* <sup>13</sup> *Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you.* – **1 John 3:11-13**

Cain "*was of the evil one*" = the devil. So he acted like the devil.

If Cain loved Abel, he would have protected him, not killed him. Why murder? Because Cain was evil. Because Abel was righteous. Cain wanted to do evil. Cain didn't like righteousness. There was something about Abel's behavior that angered Cain.

John applies the episode to Christians.

1. Love one another. Be your brother's keeper. We imitate Cain when we fail to love one another.

Same word for Adam guarding the garden (2:15) and the cherubim guarding the tree of life (3:24).

2. In the world, people will be hostile towards you because you obey God's commands.

Yes, some will turn to God because of our righteous deeds (Matt 5:13-16). But there's something refreshing about gathering with the local body of believers. A place where we look out for one another rather than murdering/hating one another.

**"sin is crouching at the door"** to prevent us from loving over one another. With the Lord's help, we need to rule over sin to love one another as we ought. Cain lived by his sinful passions. Abel lived by faith. When we live by sinful passions, we ruin the church.

**Practical question:** how am I keeping/guarding my brothers and sisters in Christ?

## READ 4:17-26

### Point 4: A tale of two seeds (4:17-26)

#### Cain's lineage

We're given a brief account of Cain's history and descendants.

Cain proceeded to know his wife and have a son (4:17). Cain built a city which seems to imply disobedience. He was supposed to be a fugitive and wanderer. The first recorded human city.

Where did Cain get a wife? Had to be one of Adam's daughters (5:4). The only way mankind could multiply from one man and one woman was their children reproducing with each other. Later, incest was outlawed for Israel (Lev 18:9).

We're only told about one of Cain's sons. One his sons and so on. Until we get to Lamech. Frequently genealogies aren't complete. They're structured to highlight what they want to emphasize.

With Lamech we get the first recorded instance of polygamy. God never outlawed polygamy in the Law of Moses, but elders in the New Testament *"must be...the husband of one wife"* (1 Tim 3:2). Those who model godliness for the congregation can't be polygamists indicating polygamy isn't something to imitate. God's design from the beginning was monogamy. Married to only one person. Adam and Eve became one flesh. To introduce another wife into the picture would be to undo the one flesh relationship. Introducing polygamy distorted God's design.

Cain's line advanced human civilization: **"the father of those who dwell in tents and livestock"** = the founder of nomadic animal husbandry (livestock workers who dwelled in tents); **"the father of those who play the lyre and the pipe"** = the founder of musical instruments; **"the forging of all instruments of bronze and iron"** = the founder of metalwork.

Lamech pridefully boasts of murder.

What's striking about Cain's line is no reference to God. Polygamy, the advance of civilization, and boasting of murder. That's the fruit of Cain's descendants.

#### Adam's other lineage

Adam knows Eve and they have a third son, Seth, who's appointed by God to replace Abel (4:25). With the arrival of Seth's son Enosh, **"people began to call upon the name of the LORD"** (4:26).

Calling on God for help, which implied faith. People recognized God. People recognized their need for God. People called on God for help. They lived by faith.

Remember **Genesis 3:15:**

*I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel."*

Satan has offspring. Eve has offspring. Cain "was of the evil one" = Satan's offspring.

Seth was Eve's offspring. From the line of Seth eventually came Jesus Christ (compare 1 Chron 1:1-27; Matt 1:1-17; Luke 3:23, 38).

### **Application**

Cain's line was a mix of industrial progress and moral degeneration. The earth was subdued, but God wasn't feared. So wickedness multiplied.

Cain's line illustrates God's common grace. Cain's line has ability to do great things in industry, yet sin within ruins marriage and murder is celebrated. **Mankind is both wonderfully gifted and horrifically corrupt within!**

### **Conclusion**

Cain didn't get what he deserved: death. Cain got what he didn't deserve: protection.

Likewise, the one who came to rescue us from sin, Jesus Christ, got what he didn't deserve: the cross. So that we won't get what we deserve: eternal punishment in hell.

On the cross God treated Jesus as if he lived our sinful life. If we trust in Jesus/call upon the LORD, God treats us as if we lived Jesus' perfect, sinless life. Jesus furnished proof of his claims by rising from the dead.

Jesus invites us to escape the power and penalty of sin. Cain temporarily escaped the consequences of sin. But one day Cain, Satan's offspring, will get justice.

*But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death." – Revelation 21:8*

If you haven't turned to God for forgiveness, call upon the name of the LORD. Confess your sin. Acknowledge your guilt. Concede your only hope of rescue is through Jesus Christ. Ask for God's forgiveness on the basis of Jesus' death. And trust that God receives all who come to him through his Son Jesus.

God forgives. God makes people new. Turn to him. Live by faith.

**Practical question:** am I calling on the LORD?