

Cain and Abel – Sermon 8th November 2015

Reading: Genesis 4: 1 – 26 Cain and Abel

Adam made love to 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 favour on Abel and his offering,⁵ but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favour. 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.¹¹ Now you are under a curse and driven from the ground, which opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand.¹² When you work the ground, it will no longer yield its crops for you. You will be a restless wanderer on the earth."

¹³ Cain said to the LORD, "My punishment is more than I can bear.¹⁴ 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."

¹⁵ But the LORD said to him, "Not so; anyone who kills Cain will suffer vengeance seven times over." Then the LORD put a mark on Cain so that no one who found him would kill him.¹⁶ So Cain went out from the LORD's presence and lived in the land of Nod, east of Eden.

¹⁷ Cain made love to his wife, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Enoch. Cain was then building a city, and he named it after his son Enoch.¹⁸ To Enoch was born Irad, and Irad was the father of Mehujael, and Mehujael was the father of Methushael, and Methushael was the father of Lamech.

¹⁹ Lamech married two women, one named Adah and the other Zillah.²⁰ Adah gave birth to Jabal; he was the father of those who live in tents and raise livestock.²¹ His brother's name was Jubal; he was the father of all who play stringed instruments and pipes.²² Zillah also had a son, Tubal-Cain, who forged all kinds of tools out of bronze and iron. Tubal-Cain's sister was Naamah.

²³ Lamech said to his wives,

"Adah and Zillah, listen to me; wives of Lamech, hear my words.

I have killed a man for wounding me, a young man for injuring me.

²⁴ If Cain is avenged seven times, then Lamech seventy-seven times."

²⁵ Adam made love to his wife again, and she gave birth to a son and named him Seth, saying, "God has granted me another child in place of Abel, since Cain killed him."²⁶ Seth also had a son, and he named him Enosh.

At that time people began to call on the name of the LORD.

Introduction

This is a fairly well known story,

- Obviously follows on from the fall
- Where Adam and Eve eat the forbidden fruit and are cast out of the Garden of Eden.
- This first sin is immediately followed by a description of a major crime.
- A complete destruction of relationship.
- Brother killing brother.

But this is not just a story of jealousy and murder

- It is an account of what happens when we turn away from God
- The ultimate consequences of living for self rather than for God
- Clearly a few years must have passed between these events
- Time for Cain and Abel to grow up at least.
- But the bible puts the two events together to illustrate the connection between them

So what can we learn from this?

- I have five points
 1. The Arrogance of Cain
 2. The Anger of Cain
 3. The Adverse consequences to Cain
 4. The Ancestry of Cain
 5. The Alternative to Cain

I've concentrated on Cain

- Because this story seems to be all about Cain
- Abel is very passive in the story.
- We know he was born,
- His sacrifice was acceptable to God
- And he agreed to go to the fields where he was killed by Cain

I believe there is a point being made here

- That we are responsible for our own sins
- There is a tendency to try and blame others as an excuse for what we do wrong
- We saw it in the Garden in chapter 3
- When God asked Adam if he had eaten from the tree Adam replied
"The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it." (Gen 3:12)
- Likewise Eve's excuse was *"The serpent deceived me, and I ate."*

(Adam blamed Eve, Eve blamed the serpent and the Serpent didn't have a leg to stand on!)

We see it also in every court in the land

- I'm not to blame,
 - "It was the way he spoke to me"
 - "It was the way she was dressed"
 - "He didn't give me what I wanted"
 - Even , "It's the way God made me"

But God is clear

- The only person responsible for your action is yourself.
- That is an essential consequence of Adam and Eve's sin
- The tree they ate from was the tree of the knowledge of Good and Evil
- God tells Adam not to eat from it (Gen 2:16-17)

¹⁶ And the LORD God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; ¹⁷ but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die."

- So when Adam and Eve ate they gained knowledge of good and evil

Even the serpent acknowledges that is what the tree will give them.

- Although he denies they will die saying
"You will not certainly die, for God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil (Gen 3:4-5)
- As the saying goes "Be careful what you wish for it may come true
- Adam and Eve wanted to be like God, knowing good and evil
- And now we have no excuse, we know what is right and wrong
- We are to responsible for our actions
- As Paul tells the Romans (Romans 1:18-20)

¹⁸ The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness, ¹⁹ since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. ²⁰ For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.

This is where the story of Cain begins – with the arrogance of Cain

The Arrogance of Cain

We are told

"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 favour on Abel and his offering, ⁵ but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favour. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast."

Both Cain and Abel brought an offering to God

- Cain chose to bring some of his produce.
- And God rejected it
- Whereas Abel's gift was a lamb and was accepted.

Now we may have a bit of sympathy with Cain at this point

- It seems a bit unfair that God rejected Cain's offering
- After all he was a farmer
- He brought what he had sweated and worked for
- And offered some of it to God

So why did God reject his gift?

- Because it was not what he had asked for
- Cain had said to himself
- I will give to God what I want to give him
- God will accept me for who I am

And God says

- You and your gift are not acceptable to me
- You must come to me on my terms
- And I require humility and repentance.
- And the sacrifice of a lamb

I know I've said this before

- But there is a subtle heresy we often here in churches
- God's loves us as we are and He will accept us as we are.
- But that is not true
- God loves us as we are but he cannot accept us as we are
- That is why He sent Jesus, the lamb of God, to die for us
- If God could accept us as we are then Jesus would not have had to die.
- God cannot accept us as we are but he can and does accept us as Jesus is

That is the arrogance of Cain

- He knew good and evil
- He knew what God required
- But as the serpent predicted he thought he was like a God
- That he could decide for himself what was acceptable.

As Paul continues in Romans 1 (21-23)

"For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²² Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools ²³ and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles."

Cain's arrogance led him to think he was equal to God

- That he could decide how to approach God
- And when that arrogance was challenged
- He became angry
- So this is my second point

The Anger of Cain

When Cain's offering was rejected.

- He could have apologised,
- He could have done what God asked
- But he felt humiliated and his pride was hurt
- So he became angry.

James sums this up beautifully (James 4:1-3)

“What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don’t they come from your desires that battle within you?² You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God.³ When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.”

Anger in itself is not necessarily wrong

- The bible talks about the wrath of God
- Sin makes God angry.
- It can make us angry too
- When we hear about a child being abused or some other atrocity

However in this case Cain’s anger is a direct consequence of arrogance and pride

- God tries to reason with Cain
- We read in versed 6 & 7
“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.””
- But Cain was not willing to listen
- And his anger opened the door to sin
- And in a fit of jealous rage he murdered his brother.

What had Abel done to deserve that?

- Nothing, except to do what God told him to.
- Abel is mentioned among the great heroes of the faith in Hebrews 11
By faith Abel brought God a better offering than Cain did. By faith he was commended as righteous, when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith Abel still speaks, even though he is dead. (Hebrews 11: 4)

There is nothing that upsets people who know they are doing the wrong thing more than someone doing the right thing.

- Jesus told Nicodemus (John 3:19-21)
This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil.²⁰ Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. ²¹ But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God.
- That is why the Pharisees hated Jesus
- Why, so often, the world hates His disciples
- Jesus told his disciples (John 15:18-19)
“If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. ¹⁹ If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you.

This brings us to the adverse consequences of Cain’s sin

The Adverse Consequences to Cain

Cain murders his brother despite God's warnings to him

- And God challenges him
- But he denies all responsibility
- But he cannot escape the consequences of what he has done

We read in verses 9-15

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. ¹¹ Now you are under a curse and driven from the ground, which opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. ¹² When you work the ground, it will no longer yield its crops for you. You will be a restless wanderer on the earth."

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Cain used to enjoy farming

- Now his guilt and bitterness has spoiled that for him
- If he tries to dig the ground he will be reminded of his brother
- So he becomes a wanderer, a nomad,
- In the land of Nod.
- In Hebrew the word Nod means 'wandering'

Even then his sorrow is only for himself

- Not for the brother he killed.
- In His mercy God promises to protect him from human retribution
- And allows him and his descendants to flourish.

Very often this is the case.

- When we sin, in anger and arrogance
- Our own guilt prevents us from enjoying the very thing we wanted in the first place.
- And we wallow in self-pity and bitterness.
- Instead of letting go and repenting,
- Turning back to God in genuine sorrow for our actions
- And receiving release and healing in His forgiveness

But Cain held on to his bitterness

- And it affected his descendants
- My next point is the Ancestry of Cain

The Ancestry of Cain

This is not really the right word and its Cain descendants I'm thinking of not his ancestors.

- But descendants begins with a 'd' and I needed an 'a'
- Anyway the passage goes on to tell us of Cain's descendants
- Not only has Cain been protected, God has allowed his family to flourish.
- They are farmers, musicians and craftsmen living in cities they have built for themselves.

¹⁷ Cain made love to his wife, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Enoch. Cain was then building a city, and he named it after his son Enoch. ¹⁸ To Enoch was born Irad, and Irad was the father of Mehujael, and Mehujael was the father of Methushael, and Methushael was the father of Lamech.

¹⁹ Lamech married two women, one named Adah and the other Zillah. ²⁰ Adah gave birth to Jabal; he was the father of those who live in tents and raise livestock. ²¹ His brother's name was Jubal; he was the father of all who play stringed instruments and pipes. ²² Zillah also had a son, Tubal-Cain, who forged all kinds of tools out of bronze and iron. Tubal-Cain's sister was Naamah.

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"Adah and Zillah, listen to me; wives of Lamech, hear my words.

I have killed a man for wounding me, a young man for injuring me.

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Katie (my Wife) and I sometimes enjoy watching 'Who Do You Think You Are?'

- Where celebrities are helped to research their ancestors to get a sense of their heritage and history.
- Here we have Lamech boasting he is the great, great, great grandson of Cain
- Boasting that he too had killed a man in revenge for a perceived wrong.
- Boasting of how much greater his retribution was than for Cain.

In Hebrew culture numbers have significance

- 7 is the number of God and represents completeness
- 7 days to complete creation, 7 days in a week and so on
- When Cain was cursed, God promised to avenge anyone who harmed him completely
- 7 times over
- But here we have Lamech avenging himself
- And boasting of doing it many times better than God.

God tells us

"Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord." (Romans 12:19)

- Taking our own retribution is related to arrogance
- We are usurping God's place again.
- Making ourselves 'like God, knowing good from evil'

There is a better way

- And the passage finishes with a footnote on Seth
- An alternative way of life from Cain

The Alternative to Cain

Verses 25-26

Adam made love to his wife again, and she gave birth to a son and named him Seth, saying, "God has granted me another child in place of Abel, since Cain killed him." ²⁶ Seth also had a son, and he named him Enosh. At that time people began to call on the name of the LORD.

Seth and his son Enosh began to call on the name of the Lord.

- As a contrast to the self-reliance of Cain's line
- Seth and his descendants are noted for calling on God's name.
- We are not told of any of Seth's achievements
- Whether he or his descendants were successful or built cities
- All we know is that they *'began to call on the name of the Lord'*

Interestingly the word for call can also be translated to Proclaim

- I think that 'calling on God's name' is in itself a form of witness.
- Paul tells us in Romans 10 (vs. 12-14)
"For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him,"¹³ for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."
¹⁴ *How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?*

Noah is, of course, descended from Seth

- In Genesis 12, 13 and 21 we are told Abraham built an altar and
- 'Called on the name of the Lord
- In chapter 26 Isaac does the same
- In 1 Kings 18, on Mount Carmel, Elijah calls on the name of the lord
- And challenges the priests of Baal to call on their God.

Conclusion – The Name of the Lord

I want to finish by thinking about what we mean by the name of the Lord

- In Hebrew culture someone's name carried meaning
- Parents would often pray and sometimes even seek prophetic insight before naming their child
- Because their name gave a sense of their purpose and role in life
- God's name describes his character and holiness

In the Old Testament God is revealed by the names he gives himself

- To Seth, Enosh, Noah and Abraham he was
 - Elohim – Creator God
 - El Elyon – God most high
 - El Roi – God who sees all
 - El Shaddai – God all sufficient

To Moses he gave himself a new name - 'I am'

- Translated Jehovah or Yaweh – self existent one
- To the people of Israel he became
 - Jehovah-jireh – God who provides
 - Jehovah-rapha – God who heals
 - Jehovah-nissi – The Lord my Banner

- Jehovah-mekoddishkem – God who sanctifies
- Jehovah-Shalom – the Lord is Peace
- Jehovah-raah – The Lord is my Shepherd

In the New Testament Jesus teaches us to know him as Father

- And Jesus himself as Emmanuel – God with us
- Christ the Messiah and Saviour
- And the Holy Spirit as counsellor.

In Proverbs 18:10 we find the words we sometimes sing

'The name of the LORD is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are saved.'

- But this is a challenge.
- Do we call on the Name of the Lord?
- Are we reliant on Him?
- Do we trust in him or in our own strength?
- Do our lives proclaim our reliance on Him?

I'm not sure how true that is of me.

- Maybe I should be looking at some of the challenges in my life
- Not as problems and troubles
- But as an opportunity to call on the Name of the Lord.

Amen