

## **LIFE ON THE EASTSIDE**

Well today we see for the first time what life looks like outside of paradise, life with sin. The end of Chapter 3 tells us that God sends Adam and Eve east of Eden. Adam and Eve are thrown out of the garden into the hard-knock life of the eastside. I think Spencer Black might relate a bit since it's kind of like being sent out of South Hill into the Orting Valley. Life's get's tougher on the eastside.

This week we take a look at the first people born on the eastside. Of course, Adam and Eve were created as adult people. We don't know how old they were; were they created as 20 year olds, 25 year olds, 40 year olds? The Bible doesn't tell us. But Cain and Abel are the first humans to actually be born as babies into this world. And they are the first people to not only do sin, but to be born with a sinful nature inherited from their parents. And their story is really sensational. Fratricide. I mean this is something you'd expect to see as the headline on the covers of all the major tabloids as you're checking out at Wal-Mart. It's a scandalous event! Murder.

But this story isn't just about sibling rivalry, jealousy and murder. It's about life in a fallen world. What this disease called sin looks like and how only God brings the remedy.

Well, I know that some of us like to think systematically, so as we look at this passage today we're going to split it into three sections. Last week we had two "R" points, and this week, one week later, we're moving one letter ahead in the alphabet, and we'll have 3 "S's" to remember. We're going to talk about the sacrifice, the sin, and the Savior.

## **THE SACRIFICE**

Chapter 4 verse 1. "Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain." Now Adam and Eve have completely screwed up, they've been kicked out of the garden, but they are still fulfilling God's command toward them - "be fruitful and multiply".

And Eve gives birth to Cain and she says, "I have gotten a man with the help of the Lord." Now Eve is not being humble here. She isn't just self-effacingly acknowledging that she can do nothing without God, and that even the birthing process is a tribute to God's grace. She is actually bragging. She thinks she's going to save the world through Cain. You remember last week when God cursed the serpent and he gave this promise that Eve's seed would right all that had been wronged by Adam and Eve's sin. Would defeat the devil, would defeat death, would defeat sin. Well Eve bears Cain and she is thinking back to that; she's thinking back to the mess that she's made and thinking that now she's going to clean it up. She's going to right her wrong. She's done what she needed to do to make things right. Eve still doesn't get it - she doesn't get grace. She doesn't get that God is going to fix this problem, not her.

Now your Bible might have a footnote at the bottom of the page for verse 1 that tells you that the name Cain sounds like the Hebrew word for "gotten" When Cain and Abel are born names mean a lot more to people than names do to us today. I know as we were picking out names for Charis, the meaning was important, but much more important was the sound of the name. A name that had a good meaning like, "beloved of

Yahweh”, would have been a wonderful choice, but Dodavah Sansburn just didn’t have that nice ring to it. But to Adam and Eve - a name meant everything. It wasn’t just what you were called by, it became your very identity, who you were. And so Eve names her first son, this son she thinks is going to save the world, Cain - which meant “to acquire or to get”. His name carried this connotation of being productive, being fruitful and successful. He’s the first born, he’s the son of promise, he’s the one who is going to fix everything. And so this is the identity that Cain grows up with.

Then Eve gives birth to her second son, Abel. Everything that Cain is in Eve’s eyes Abel is not. Do you know what Abel means? Worthless and a nobody. So Adam and Eve have two sons - Productive, and Worthless. I mean - can you imagine the baggage that you’d have going around your entire childhood with a name like that? That would be worse than Dodavah - “Hey Worthless!” “What are you up to, Worthless?”

Verse 2 tells us the occupations they end up in. Cain, being the older favored son, inherits the family business. He becomes a farmer - exactly what God commissioned his parents to do in the garden. Worthless, on the other hand, gets relegated to the fields to tend sheep. This seems to be a common destination for the outcast of the family - tending sheep. Think Joseph. Maybe this is where the term “black sheep” comes from?

Now, in the course of time, Cain and Abel bring offerings to God that are appropriate to their occupations. Cain, the farmer, brings sacrifice to God of the fruit of the land, and Abel, the nomad, brings God the fruit of his flock. What we are seeing is actually the first church service in the Bible. This offering that they bring isn’t a sacrifice to cover over or pay for sin, which we see a lot of in the OT, it is a sacrifice of worship.

Verse 4 tells us that “the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering he had no regard.” Now the huge question that comes to my mind, and probably comes to yours as well, and it’s one that many Bible scholars have written countless pages about, is

“Why does God look at Abel and his sacrifice and say, ‘yes’ (accepted), but look at Cain and his sacrifice and say ‘no’ (rejected)?” What is the difference between Cain and Abel?

Turn in the New Testament with me to the book of Hebrews, Chapter 11:4. Now this is the great chapter on faith, and who is it that is the first person on the list of those with faith? A first ballot induction into the Hall of Faith is Abel.

*(Heb. 11:4) “By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous.”*

So what does Hebrews tell us is the key difference between Cain’s sacrifice and Abel’s sacrifice? Faith. Well what does that mean? By “faith” the author of Hebrews can’t mean that Abel believed in God and Cain didn’t. I mean, both of them were offering sacrifices to God, Cain talks to God, they must have both believed in God. So what type of faith is this talking about?

I want us to go to a parallel passage in the Gospels that might give us an idea of what kind of faith is being talked about here. Luke 18:8-14.

Exposition.

For Cain and Abel the problem is not what they bring in their hands but what they bring in their hearts.

Here's Cain... Just like the Pharisee he has faith in himself. It's like he says, "Lord, I thank you that I'm somebody. That I'm prosperous and successful. That I'm the firstborn, the favored one. I thank you I'm not like my brother Abel - the nobody!" And he approaches God with this attitude that God is going to benefit from having him around. Just like the Pharisee it's like he holds up what he's done - "I fast twice a week, I tithe, I'm giving you fruit of *my* harvest." He thinks that God needs him around. And he thinks that if he gives to God, if he meets God's needs, God of course will reciprocate and bring him blessing.

Go to most other cultures in the world, pagan cultures, animistic cultures, and this is how they approach the spirit world. If we do the right things, the right acts, if we meet the needs of the gods, they will respond in kind and bring their benevolence toward us. This is the approach that Cain takes. He believes God exists, but he doesn't understand how God operates.

Abel on the other hand gets it. He's heard the stories from his parents getting kicked out of the garden. He knew that his parents couldn't hold up anything before God, but in spite of that God showed them his amazing grace. He stood before God as a nobody. I can see Abel being just like the tax collector, he knew he was a nobody/worthless, standing before God and crying out - "Have mercy on me O God, a sinner!"

The kind of faith that the book of Hebrews is talking about, the kind of faith that Jesus is looking for is not just faith in the existence of God but faith in the character of God, in the way that God operates, trust not in ourselves but in the grace and mercy of God, faith in the Gospel. Cain's approach to God was mere religiousness, Abel's approach was rooted in Gospel faith.

Now what I am driving at here is the difference between true gospel faith and religiousness. Religiousness says that, if you perform the right acts, if you do the right stuff, if you appease God in the right way, he will bless you. The Gospel is different. In the Gospel we realize that God doesn't need us, or our worship or service. We make no demands before God. Religiousness obeys God to get stuff from God. Gospel faith obeys God to get God. In the gospel obedience and worship come out of response to God's love and acceptance and favor. In religion obedience and sacrifice are means to gain God's acceptance and favor.

Too often I live before God like Cain did. I think that if I obey, if I do the right things, God can't help but notice and bless me. Give me success, give me good obedient kids, provide not just my needs, but a lot of my wants. Too often I read the Bible and pray, not out of thankful response to God's favor, but thinking that doing these things will help me keep God's favor. Do you show up on Sundays thinking that if you go to church God will give you a good week? Or do you come because you love God, you want to thank him and enjoy him? Do you obey God to get stuff from God or to get God? Are we religious Cains or gospel-centered Abels?

Now look at the end of v. 5. "And the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. *So Cain was very angry, and his face fell.*"

Now here's the big problem with acting out of religiousness, and it happened to Cain and it's what happens to us. When we don't get those things we thought God would give us, those things we did our part for, we get angry and we get jealous. Example of my friend who did all the right things...

Cain offered his sacrifice, he did *the act*, he did his part, and God rejected it. Then Cain gets angry and gets jealous, and it leads to major sin.

## THE SIN

God knows that Cain is ticked. He knows that Cain is jealous that God favored his brother over him. Here's Cain, always the Man, the somebody, and God favors the Nobody over him. Cain is seriously rattled. And God comes to Cain gently. Do you remember that about God? Do you remember how God came to Adam and Eve gently, walking in the garden calling for them? God always loves to shatter our stereotypes doesn't he? How many of you have thought or heard other people talk about the God of the OT. That OT God, he's full of wrath and judgement, but the God of the NT, that's the God of grace. But here God does it again, in the second story of the OT, and in his gentle grace he approaches Cain.

And God asks him, this is verse 6, "*Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen?*"

God sees something boiling inside of Cain and gently, like only God can do, he warns him. Look at verse 7:

*"If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it."* (v.7)

God warns Cain to be careful. "Sin wants to get you," God says. "It wants destroy you like it destroyed your parents. Be careful."

But Cain doesn't listen to God, and we're told in verse 8 that Cain convinces his brother to come out into a field and there he kills him. It is pre-meditated, planned, thought out first degree murder.

Now of course, here's the spot in the story where all of us stray from being like Cain right? We may not bring our hearts to worship, we may worship and serve God like Cain did, out of a religious Spirit. We may struggle with jealousy and anger at times. But none of us would fall into murder. Murder - that's those psychopaths; those people raised in a culture of violence; those people that....that's not me.

But what if you were in Cain's situation. How many people are even on the entire planet? There are no external limitations, no law, no police, no judge, no district attorney, not enough people in the world to even put together a jury. Would you kill? What sin is crouching at your door that if you knew that no one would know, if you knew there'd be no repercussions, there'd be no consequences. What sin would you would give full reign to? I think for most of us there are some.

But the question I want to look at is, how does Cain go from anger and jealousy over God favoring his brother to actually murdering that brother? What is the process here from internal sin and temptation to external action?

The most obvious thing is Cain's hard-heartedness toward God. In God's grace he gives Cain a chance. He warns him. He tells him of the subtlety of sin. He tells him there is an ambush coming. In the New Testament Peter uses the same language as verse 7 to warn the church to be aware of their enemy.

*"Be soberminded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour."* (1 Peter 5:8)

If you were in the military leading your unit on a mission close to enemy territory and the commander called in and warned you that enemy had been seen nearby. That intelligence found information that there was an ambush being planned. That the enemy was ruthless and they would use any means necessary to completely annihilate your unit. That the enemy is not know for taking prisoners, but they kill everyone they find. What would you do? How would you act in response to that intel? You would take serious measures to be ready, to be on guard! But Cain doesn't take action. He doesn't prepare to fight the enemy.

His heart is so hard toward God that he doesn't listen, he doesn't act. He keeps going his own way, doing his own thing. How many of you have heard the Lord's voice over a certain sin in your life. Over a pattern of living. God, in his grace, has given you warnings. Maybe you've noticed this sin yourself. Maybe God has used others to lovingly correct you. Maybe right now you feel the conviction of sin. Don't harden your heart. Don't keep going your own way. Turn to God. Throw yourself into his loving arms of grace and mercy.

These words that describe sin are serious words. A roaring lion. A crouching lion ready to pounce. It wants to have you. It wants to destroy you. Sin is sneaky. It hides. But it is merciless. If you give sin room it will master you. We think we can control sin but if you do sin, sin will do you. Sin doesn't just want us a little embarrassed about something we did wrong, sin wants us dead.

That is the first reason for Cain's downward spiral from anger and jealousy to murder - is his hard heart toward God. The second reason is more subtle, and it has to do with Cain's identity. His whole life Cain had been the golden boy. He'd been the successful one. I'm sure Abel always heard around the home, "why can't you be more like your older brother?" He has a home and a yard, he doesn't live in a tent. He's Cain - successful, fruitful, prosperous. He's not like his brother Abel - the nobody. He's somebody.

But God does something he does so often through Scripture - he chooses to favor the one we least expect. He doesn't favor the tall dark and handsome one. He doesn't favor the somebody. He looks at the heart and grants his grace, his unmerited favor to one who didn't deserve it either - the nobody. But a nobody who realized he was a nobody.

But why would Cain be so angry, so angry that he could kill, at the success of his little brother - the nobody? Here's the problem that Cain is faced with. His identity is completely constructed by his relationship to Abel. He was great *because* he was better

than Abel. His whole life he's been told that, and he believes it. His identity is built by comparison to his brother. And so when God favors Abel his identity is totally shattered. And Cain realizes that he has a choice. His identity is wrecked, and to repair it he has to do one of two things. He can readjust his identity, or he can get rid of the problem, the situation that is getting in the way of his identity. He can get rid of Abel.

The root of Cain's sin is that he's built an identity completely outside of God. His identity was based not on how he related to God, but how he stacked up to his brother. Folks, if we build our identity on anything other than God then when things don't stack up, when something gets in the way of that identity either we'll be completely depressed or we'll be totally ticked off.

Think about this. What happens if you're the greatest golfer in the world. Everyone looks up to you, you're this great guy, you're in all the commercials, you've got a beautiful wife and two great kids. In the midst of all the bad athlete stories you're the good one. Then it all falls apart, things come out about you that completely destroy that image. Then you get injured and can't even compete. What happens? Your identity is broken. You're either totally depressed or you're totally ticked. Everything that you've placed your thinking in about who you are is gone.

We could go through so many scenarios that look the same. Anything other than God that we put our identity in is doomed to fail at some point. We won't always be the smart one, the pretty girl, the nice guy, the good mom, the one with the good kids, the one who can make money, the one who gives away their money, the servant, the theologian, the mechanic, the hard worker. Sometime someone or something will get in the way of our identity. And if that is what our identity is rooted in we'll get depressed, or we'll get bitter or we'll get angry. That's what happened for Cain. The nobody replaced him as a somebody and where did Cain end up? An angry, jealous and bitter murderer.

## THE SAVIOR

But Cain's story doesn't end here. Let's look at the passage again. (Read v. 9-10) God tells Cain that he knows what he did, that burying the body didn't hide it from God, Then he tells him that he is going to punish him for his sin. (read vv. 11-12) Then look at Cain's response. (v. 13-14)

A lot of commentators think that Cain is just complaining about the punishment that God is giving him. That he is basically saying, "God, do you think you could be a bit more lenient? Do you think you could let me off a bit easier this time? I mean, this is the world's first murder, there's not exactly judicial precedent for punishment on this one." But there are two reasons that I'm not convinced that's what is happening.

First, the word for "punishment" in Hebrew is actually the same word that is used for sin or guilt. So a marginal reading of v. 13, and some of you might have this at the bottom of the page in your Bible, is "my guilt (or my sin) is too great to bear." Cain is overwhelmed with guilt from his sin and realizes that it's too much for him. He is unable to bear his own sin. It seems to me that Cain is repenting. Not only does that sentence seem to feel that way, one of the results that Cain fears is that God's face will be hidden from him. Do you think this the tone of a hardened sinner or the language of repentance?

The second reason I think Cain is repenting is the way God responds to him. Cain basically says to God, "It's going to be brutal for me to farm now, you're not even going to look at me anymore, I'm not gonna have a home and I'm going to wander all over the place and anyone that finds me is going to kill me."

But what is God's response? Look at the mercy and grace that God shows toward Cain. (read v. 15-17) Look what God does for Cain - he gives him a mark of protection so that no one will kill him. Cain gets a wife and a son. And God doesn't make him a wanderer, he gives Cain a city. That doesn't seem like the response God would give to a hardened sinner.

Now I want to take a deep look at what I think is most precious that God does for Cain. Let's talk about this mark that God gives Cain. The Bible doesn't tell us what the mark was. It might have been the world's first tattoo for all we know. Teenagers, don't use this verse to defend getting a tattoo with your parents! I can hear it now, "But Dad, Cain got a tattoo!" But what is important about the mark? A mark gives identity - this mark, given by God, declared something about who Cain was. It marked him - this one's mine, God says. Do you see what God is doing here? He's giving Cain exactly what he needs - a new identity. An identity not in relation to Abel but in relation to God.

In this story, who do you identify more with? Are you more an Abel or more a Cain? Are you more a good guy or a bad guy? I think we're more the bad guys, but let's remember what we talked about last week. The Bible isn't just about good guys and bad guys, it's about bad guys and Jesus. Jesus is the only good guy. And Jesus is the true and perfect Abel.

Jesus came to earth and he lived a perfect life. He lived a life that was pleasing to his father. Like Abel he gave a pleasing offering of worship to God. An offering accepted by God. But because of our jealousy, and anger, and bitterness, and religiousness, Jesus was murdered. We, Jesus own brothers, put him on the cross with our sin.

When Cain murdered his brother no one knew about it. But God came to him and told him that Abel's very blood was crying out from the ground to him. The Book of Hebrews, after the author has already mentioned Abel in the Hall of Faith, mentions him again in Chapter 12. And he says this:

Hebrews 12:24 - You have come to... Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

What does it mean when the author of Hebrews tells us that the blood of Jesus speaks a better word than the blood of Abel?

Abel's blood called out for justice. It screamed for retribution and for condemnation. Jesus blood, rather than crying for justice fulfilled justice, paying the penalty for sin on the cross, and now cries for our justification. Rather than screaming aloud for our condemnation before God, Jesus blood sings of our salvation. The answer to our problems with religiousness, with identity, with anger, with jealousy, with our sin comes at the cross. It comes from the blood of Jesus.

At the cross we are confronted with the fact that we are a nobody. That our sin was so bad that it took the death of God's Son to pay for it. We're disarmed of anything we think we can claim before God. Of anything we think we deserve from God. But the cross doesn't leave us there. It marks us. It is where God says - this one is mine. It gives us a new identity, a new name. It really is where all of us become "Dodavah" - beloved of Yahweh. Look to Jesus, the true and perfect Abel. Offer worship and thanksgiving to Jesus. Find your identity in Jesus. What we need more than anything this morning is more of Jesus. Let's pray.