

## In the Beginning

Brother's Keeper (Genesis 4:1-16)

Preached by Pastor Jason Tarn to HCC on March 13, 2022

### Introduction

- ❖ **This book of Genesis gets dark pretty quick.** We were literally just in Paradise. Over the past few weeks, we've been walking through the first three chapters, and we gloried in the majesty and beauty of creation. We delighted in the peacefulness and harmony of life in the Garden. We celebrated the purity and wonder of the one-flesh union between husband and wife. Things were going great.
  - But then everything came to a crashing halt. **Genesis 3 happened.** A serpent slithered in whispering crafty lies. A couple tried to rise above their station. Mutiny ensued. A rebellion started. And a curse fell upon this once-pristine world.
    - **And now, at the start of Genesis 4, we encounter the world's first murder.** It's a case of fratricide – brother killing brother. Sin escalates quickly. Like I said, things get dark pretty quick.
- ❖ In last week's text, we saw Adam and Eve banished from the Garden. They were driven east of Eden. And today, at the end of our text, we see Cain expelled from the presence of the LORD "*east of Eden*" (4:16). **There's a theme – that to live east of Eden is to live outside of Paradise.** To live in a fallen world. To live a life separated from the presence of God.
  - Suffice it to say, that kind of life stinks. It's no good at all. **Life east of Eden is life with sin on the loose.** Lurking and crouching behind every corner. Ready to take us down when we're not looking. Hatred grips the human heart. And violence is always on the rise. Families are broken. Marriages suffer. Relationships are painful.
- ❖ But grace is there. **Even east of Eden, grace is there.** And where there is grace, hope will follow. So we're going to study a dark and gloomy text. But there's some light at the end – if you have the eyes of faith to see it.
  - **Now since we're in Genesis, understandably there are a lot of firsts.** The first human pair. The first marriage. The first pregnancy. And the first child. But what we'll focus on today can be summarized by three firsts. We'll consider (1) the first case of rivalry, (2) the first act of murder, and (3) the first grant of clemency.

### The First Case of Rivalry

- ❖ We begin with the first case of rivalry. Rivalries can be found everywhere. Between nations (as we see in Ukraine). Between class (rich vs poor). Between political parties (left vs right). Between colleagues and classmates. And between siblings. **You could make the argument that all of our rivalries today – and all of their ruinous effects – stem back to this ancient rivalry between two brothers.** Between Cain and Abel.
  - Their rivalry is related to the rivalry or enmity prophesied in chapter 3 between two lines of offspring. Speaking to the serpent, the LORD said in **Genesis 3:15**, "*I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring.*" **This enmity is now on display between these two brothers.** As we'll see, Cain represents the offspring of the serpent, while Abel represents the woman's offspring.

- ❖ Now what started this rivalry? Where did this enmity come from? You could argue that it came from their parents. Not just through the fallen nature they passed down, but specifically in the way **these two brothers were raised with two different expectations**. You get a hint of this in vv1-2. Listen to Genesis 4:1, “*Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, “I have gotten a man with the help of the LORD.”*”
  - **Cain, in Hebrew, sounds like the word “gotten”**. That’s why Eve says she has *gotten* a man with the help of the LORD. Notice she calls her offspring a “*man*” (*ish*). She didn’t use the Hebrew word for baby or son. She says man. **That’s a hint that she’s already thinking about who he might grow up to be**. Remember, she was told an offspring of hers would one day bruise the head of the serpent. He would inflict a mortal wound on the devil. Well, it sounds as if Eve is thinking she’s gotten that man. **She mistakenly assumed that Cain was that promised offspring**.
  
- ❖ This reading of the text is reinforced by the name she gives her second son. “*And again, she bore his brother Abel.*” **Abel’s name means vapor or breath**. And just as a vapor quickly comes and goes, the same Hebrew word can be translated as vanity. It’s the word used quite frequently in Ecclesiastes. “*Vanity of vanities!*” (Ecc 1:2). Abel of Abels! All is Abel.
  - In other words, he’s useless. **Cain is the heir; Abel is the spare**. He’s not needed since Cain is the presumed offspring of promise. So the expectations placed on these two boys couldn’t be more different. **And the point I’m making is that Cain was raised with the greater expectations**. He grew up assuming that he was the chosen one – the highly favored one. Which explains a lot.
  
- ❖ **It explains why these two brothers worshipped God with two very different attitudes**. We’re told in v2 that Cain took after his father Adam and his vocation. He became “*a worker of the ground.*” But Abel was “*a keeper of sheep.*” He was a shepherd.
  - **Now Scripture is not pitting these two vocations against each other**. There is no inherent conflict between the agricultural and pastoral. Both are fitting and God-honoring professions. **And both brothers brought an offering that corresponds to their profession**. Look at v3, “*3In the course of time Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground, 4and Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering, 5but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his face fell.*”
  
- ❖ So God accepts Abel’s offering but rejects Cain’s. **Now there’s no reason to assume that animal offerings were better than grain offerings**. Or that God would only be pleased if blood were shed. The type of offering is not the issue.
  - But notice a hint of difference between what they offer. **Notice the emphasis on Abel’s offering being from the “fat portions” of the animal**. Later in the Pentateuch, we learn that, in the sacrificial system, it was the fatty portions that were the most desirable and therefore to be dedicated to the LORD (Ex 29:3; Lev 3:3). The smell of the fat, as it was burned, is described as a pleasing aroma to God (Lev 3:5).

- ❖ **So this implies that Abel offered to the LORD a gift of the finest quality.** The best fruits of his labor. This is in contrast to the plain description of Cain’s gift as “*an offering of the fruit of the ground.*” He brought an offering. It’s better than nothing. But was it the best he could bring? You don’t get that impression.
  - **And notice how it says that Abel “*brought of the firstborn of his flock.*”** Indicating how valuable his offering was. But for Cain, there’s no mention of him bringing an offering from the firstfruits of his crop (Ex 23:19). **That could explain why God had regard for Abel and his offering but not for Cain and what he offered.**
    - Now admittedly, we can only speculate here since the text doesn’t explicitly say why God rejected Cain. But even if we don’t know what’s wrong with his offering, we know Cain’s heart was wrong by his reaction to God showing favor towards his brother. It says he was very angry and his face fell.
  
- ❖ And we know, without a doubt, that the issue was a heart problem because the New Testament tells us that. In **Hebrews 11:4**, we’re told that “*By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain.*” So it came down to faith.
  - Abel’s sacrifice was motivated by faith. **And the heart of faith finds joy in the worship of God – for God’s own sake.** Not in the hope of what might follow. Not because of what might result from worshipping him. That apparently was Cain’s attitude. He brought an offering to the LORD with expectation to receive something in return. He expected God’s favor. Remember, he was under the assumption that *he* was the highly favored one – not his brother.
    - **But that means Cain wasn’t worshipping by faith. He was worshipping by negotiation.** Lord, I’ll offer this if you agree to give me that. That was his attitude towards the worship of God, and that’s why his offering was rejected.
  
- ❖ But let’s be clear, that didn’t mean the LORD rejected him. **He had no regard for Cain’s offering, but he had great regard for Cain himself.** Which is why he speaks to Cain with great urgency and caution. Listen to vv6-7, “*The LORD said to Cain, “Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? <sup>7</sup>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 contrary to you, but you must rule over it.”*”
  - God says sin is lurking. **Like a predatory animal, it’s crouching, ready to pounce.** Its desire is against you, “*contrary to you*”. Sin seeks to dominate and control you.
  
- ❖ **Cain, your situation is worse than your parent’s.** They were tempted by something outside of them. At the beginning of Genesis 3, they didn’t have a fallen nature. But now in Genesis 4, Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel – they all have fallen natures. **So Cain is being tempted by sin that’s already inside of him – crouching at the door of his heart.**
  - That’s how dire his situation is. But his fall is not inevitable. **He’s presented with a choice, with responsibility to do the right thing.** If you do well, you will be accepted – literally, your fallen face will be “lifted up”. So don’t sleep on sin. Don’t ignore it. Flee from sin and pursue righteousness.

- ❖ Church, this is a word and warning for us. **If you are a Christian – if you have experienced Christian conversion, if you’ve been born again by the Spirit of God – then your fallen nature has been transformed into a new nature.** You are a new creation in Christ (2 Cor 5:17). Now since you're still in the flesh – you have yet to receive a new resurrected body – so that means a remnant of sin resides in you.
  - So like with Cain, sin and temptation are still inside you, and they can have a strong influence. But you have a choice. Christ has freed you from both the penalty and *power* of sin. **That means, by the Spirit of God in you, you have power to say No to sin and temptation** (Tit 2:12). You are not unwitting tools in the hands of sin. You are not defeated. By the grace of God, you can resist. You can choose to do well.

### The First Act of Murder

- ❖ But Cain chose poorly. Which leads us to our second observation – the first act of murder. This occurs in v8, *“Cain spoke to Abel his brother. And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him.”* **The word for “killed” is the Hebrew word for intentional homicide or murder.** It’s not the same word used in the sixth commandment, which would include manslaughter. That is, killing someone without premeditation or malice. You might call that unintentional homicide. But that’s clearly not the case here.
  - **We’re not told how Cain murdered Abel, but the narrator makes it clear that this was intentional.** It was premeditated. He lured his brother out to a field, out of sight from any witnesses. And he murdered him. Cain killed Abel.
- ❖ You can see how life east of Eden is exponentially worse than in the Garden. Cain’s reaction after being confronted with his sin is exponentially worse than how his parents reacted when God confronted them. **Adam and Eve responded with excuses and blame-shifting, but Cain responds with violence.** He channels his anger, his resentment, his bitterness towards his brother and expresses it through murderous violence.
  - Now we could venture to guess that jealousy was his motivation to kill. But we don’t have to guess. **The Bible tells us why Cain killed Abel.** In **1 John 3:12**, John exhorts believers to love one another and not to be like Cain. *“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.”*
- ❖ So Cain murdered his brother because Abel’s deeds were righteous and his were not. **His brother served as a stark reminder of how he ought to be living.** Abel – by simply practicing his righteousness in public – was a source of constant conviction for Cain. I’m sure he hated feeling that way, which caused him to hate the one who made him feel that way. **People living in darkness hate the light because of how it exposes them** (Jn 3:19).
  - I remember when I was living in darkness, far from God. It was my first couple of years in college. My roommate, at the time, was still walking with the Lord. Little did he know, he was a source of constant conviction for me. He was just doing his thing. Reading his Bible in the morning, praying. And it would annoy me to no end. **I hated seeing him do his devotions because it reminded me of how I ought to be living.**

- ❖ Now don't worry, he's still alive and well. **And he's still a good example of how Christians can serve as a light in dark places.** Not through ostentatious displays of religiosity. But through simple, modest, consistent acts of righteousness. Practicing your faith in faithfulness.
  - **Friends, if people attack you because you're a phony – if you're persecuted because you're a religious jerk – then you have only yourself to blame.** But if you suffer as a Christian – for the sake of righteousness – then, do not be ashamed. Rather, glorify God in that name (1 Pet 4:15-16).
  
- ❖ Now if we return to our story, you'll notice it skips over whatever Cain did to cover up his crime and immediately jumps to God's confrontation. Look at v9, "*Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is Abel your brother?" He said, "I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?"*"
  - In other words, why are you asking me? "I'm not his mother. I'm not responsible for keeping him – as in guarding or watching over him." But the irony is that he is. Cain, you and your brother were both made in the image of God. And the LORD God is your *keeper* (Ps 121:5). The Lord blesses you and *keeps* you (Num 6:24).
    - **So as divine image bearers, you and your brother were made to keep each other.** To watch out for each other. To protect each other. To be accountable for one another. Yes, you are responsible for your brother.
  
- ❖ Church, we need to hear this. **We live in a culture of radical individualism, where there's this unspoken understanding that we're not supposed to bother each other and get into each other's lives.** That's inappropriate. Let's just keep things nice and harmonious by only going so deep as to what's on the surface. Your business is none of my business. That's the general attitude. **We just don't see ourselves as our brother's (or sister's) keeper.**
  - But what else does it mean when Scripture tells us to bear one another's burdens? (Gal 6:2) Or to teach and admonish one another in all wisdom (Col 3:16). Or to encourage one another and build one another up (1 Thess 5:11). Or to exhort one another every day (Heb 3:13). Or to love one another (1 Jn 4:11).
    - **There simply is no way to live out the "one another's" of the New Testament apart from an understanding that we are our brother's keeper.** And that's why we join the church. Why we enter into a covenant relationship with fellow believers. Making a promise to be each other's keeper.
  
- ❖ Turn back to the text, in v10, and let's listen to God's response to Cain. "*<sup>10</sup>And the LORD said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground. <sup>11</sup>And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. <sup>12</sup>When you work the ground, it shall no longer yield to you its strength. You shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth."*"
  - **Notice how the LORD personified both the blood and the ground.** Abel's blood is described as crying out to the LORD. Crying out for justice, for vindication. Cain bears bloodguilt, and it's not easily washed away. And the ground is described as having a mouth that swallows up the innocent blood. Making the ground – no longer fertile and responsive to Cain – but sterile and stubborn, refusing to yield its fruit.

- ❖ Now, remember, farming was Cain’s profession. But now that door is closed. **And he becomes a wandering fugitive.** He loses his family, his sense of belonging. He is expelled both from the Lord’s presence and from his community. It’s a severe punishment.
  - And Cain has the audacity to complain about it. He says in vv13-14 , *“My punishment is greater than I can bear. <sup>14</sup>Behold, you have driven me today away from the ground, and from your face I shall be hidden. I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me.”*
  
- ❖ **Now you might be wondering who could be out there to kill him?** Unless he’s referring to his parents, didn’t he already kill the only other person on the planet? Well, we’re not given the information, but it’s reasonable to assume that, at this point, there were other people in the world. As in Adam and Eve had plenty more children than what’s recorded. Remember, it says Adam lives until he’s 930 years old.
  - So Cain is worried that one of his siblings or their descendants might one day try to avenge their brother or their uncle by slaying him. There’s the irony. **He who turned on his relative and killed him is now fearful of his own relatives and what they might do to him.** Cain is a tragic figure. But those are the consequences of murder.
  
- ❖ **Friends, murder is a heinous sin.** It’s arguably the worst thing you could do to a person. It’s so bad that most of us feel rather secure in the assumption that we would never (or could never) commit murder. But that’s where we need to listen to the wisdom of **James 4:1-2**, *“<sup>1</sup>What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? <sup>2</sup>You desire and do not have, so you murder.”*
  - **So what causes someone to commit murder?** It’s not a mental issue. It’s not years of trauma or negative conditioning. James says murder comes from disordered desires – passions at war within you. **That means you and I may never commit the act of murder (thank God!), but the sinful desires behind every act of murder could very well be in us.** They just get expressed in other destructive ways – through hateful thoughts, angry words, bitter attitudes, etc.
  
- ❖ Jesus said it best in the Sermon on the Mount. In **Matthew 5:21**, he preached, *“<sup>21</sup>You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’ <sup>22</sup>But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be liable to the hell of fire.”*
  - **So don’t brush off this sin too quickly or just think Cain serves as a good warning for those people but not yourself.** Keep a close watch on your own heart. And be quick to confess and repent whenever you detect in your heart those same sinful desires that give birth to murderous violence.

## The First Grant of Clemency

- ❖ Now you might be surprised that Cain is not immediately put to death. And how he receives mercy instead. This leads to our third observation – the first grant of clemency. Starting in v14, the LORD reassures Cain, who’s afraid someone will avenge Abel by killing him. “*Then the LORD said to him, “Not so! If anyone kills Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold.” And the LORD put a mark on Cain, lest any who found him should attack him.*”
  
- ❖ **So Cain hears a word of divine promise and receives an act of divine protection.** The LORD put a mark on him. So that anyone who attempts to exact vengeance on Cain will have no excuse to plead ignorance. Vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold. That should deter anyone from even thinking about killing Cain.
  - But even though clemency is granted, he still has consequences to face. In v16, it goes on to say, “*Then Cain went away from the presence of the LORD and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden.*” The word Nod is related to the word for wanderer. **So the wanderer ends up in the land of wandering.** That’s poetic justice.
  
- ❖ But it's still surprising that Cain didn't die and that he was shown mercy. But it was not for the reason you might think. It's not because Cain ends up a redeemed figure. **No, he was not granted clemency because God was trying to preserve the offspring of the woman.** God doesn't safeguard his life because the plan is for the Chosen One to come through Cain's line.
  - No, as the story of Scripture unfolds, we're told that the Chosen One comes through the line of Seth, another son born to Adam and Eve at the end of Genesis 4 (Lk 3:38). **The shocking realization is that Cain is granted clemency – his life is safeguarded – in order that the offspring of the *serpent* may be preserved!**
    - Nowhere in Scripture is Cain presented as a repentant, redeemed figure. He's consistently presented as a representative of forces opposed to God and his plans (Heb 11:4; 1 Jn 3:12; Jude 1:11). Remember, Cain represents the offspring of the serpent.
  
- ❖ **But even so, in the sovereign plan of God, the offspring of the serpent had to be preserved.** God apparently intended for his people (the offspring of the woman) to go through hardship, to meet opposition, and to face persecution by the serpent's offspring.
  - The LORD is all-powerful. **He could have extinguished the serpent's line right then and there by eliminating Cain. But he didn't.** He granted clemency. He kept him alive and allowed him to marry, have children, and extend his line (Gen 4:17-18).
    - It's hard to understand why. But that's because God's ways are higher than our ways and his thoughts higher than our thoughts (Isa 55:9). He has reasons and purposes that we cannot yet grasp.
  
- ❖ But here's a way to think about it: If all things are created *through* Christ and *for* Christ (Col 1:16) – if all of God's works in creation and redemption are accomplished to the *praise of his glory* (Eph 1:3-14) – **then even the preservation of Cain and his line has a purpose that ultimately leads to the glorification of Christ.**

- ❖ That means God was willing to endure thousands of years of suffering, evil, violence, and war – stemming from the unholy influence of the serpent and his offspring – **all in order that the fullest display of all the glories of God’s Son would be achieved at the cross.** Where he laid down his life even for a fallen world that commits such atrocities.
  
- ❖ **Friends, we would not know Christ in the fullness of his glory as Lord and Savior – if not for the preservation of Cain and his offspring.** Because just as Cain killed Abel, thousand of years down the line, Cain’s offspring would kill again. They would shed innocent blood again because they too hated a man for his righteous deeds. But this time that blood would belong to God’s own Son, and that blood would speak a better word.
  - **Hebrews 12:24** talks about the blood of Jesus and how it, *“speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.”* You see, Abel’s blood cries out, “Guilty!” It shouts for justice. **But Jesus’s blood cries out, “Forgiven!” It shouts for mercy.**
  
- ❖ Some of you have come here today bearing a heavy load. You feel the weight of your sin. **Maybe you said something hurtful, out of anger, to someone you care about.** You wish you could take those words back, but now they're out there. Like Abel's blood, your hurtful words cry out to condemn you. **Or perhaps you did something shameful, something you're not proud of.** You're hoping it stays covered. You're hoping no one finds out. But like Abel's blood, your hidden sins cry out to expose you.
  - Your only hope is to cry out to Jesus yourself. To ask him to cover you and your sins with his blood. **His blood that muffles the cry of your sins and speaks a better word of mercy and forgiveness.** Cry out to Jesus now. He won't disappoint.