

Cain and Abel (Genesis 4)

Valleys Family Church Sermon
Stuart Wheatman, Sunday 18th Nov 2012

Intro

- What were things like in your family if you had brothers and sisters? Was there any sibling rivalry going on? This morning we are going to look at two brothers who turned out completely different and we are going to learn some valuable lessons from their lives- the lives of Cain and Abel.

Read Gen 4

1. The importance of fulfilling our potential

- **v1 'acquired a man'**- Cain's name means 'acquired, gotten, bought'- Eve was amazed at the grace of the Lord that, despite the fall of mankind and death coming into the world God would bless them with a child.
- Cain was their firstborn and had great potential to bring blessing- he was a blessing to them and they expected him to be a blessing, but Cain did not live out his potential.
- Cain's descendants would follow in his footsteps- Lamech in v 19 had two wives- the first to start polygamy- he was violent like Cain and killed someone for hurting him (v23). All of Cain's descendants would later end with the flood, whereas Adam & Eve's next son after Abel, Seth's descendants, continued through Noah. How different things may have been if Cain had not given in to sin.
- When Cain sinned he lost the abilities he once had- he was born to be involved in agriculture and yet his sin meant the land would no longer yield its crop for him. Sin can affect ministry and gifting- we can end up disqualifying ourselves from things that God had planned for us- just as king Saul sinned and the anointing that he once had was no longer effective, and yet God anointed someone else with a heart after God- David. When Samson broke his Nazarite vow to God by having his hair cut the anointing left him.
- Sin promises so much but delivers so little- ruins our destiny.
- The Amalekites later in history would set an ambush on the Israelites when they came out from being slaves in Egypt. God remembered this and later when Saul became king God commanded that they be destroyed. King Saul didn't finish off the Amalekites as God had commanded him, but gave in to temptation and kept the best of the plunder (1Sam 15:9). As a result he was rejected as king. When he later died an Amalekite came and took his crown from his head (2Sam 1:13)- this is what the enemy wants to do to each of us- take away that which God has called us to be.
- What do you want to achieve in God before you die? Are you focussed on it? Are you living out your calling? Using your gifts to serve God and His people?
- Keep focussed on goals and deal with Satan's temptations which will steal the blessings God has for you.

2. The need for true worship

- **v4 'firstborn of his flock and of their fat' vs v3 'the fruit of the ground'**
- Abel gave the best offering he could to the Lord. We get the impression from reading these verses that Abel put a lot into his worship of God and yet Cain only brought 'the fruit of the ground'.
- The difference between the two offerings was that of sacrifice- Abel's offering was a true sacrifice- it cost him something. King David, like Abel, was a true worshipper of

God- when he was offered land free of charge to be the place where God's temple would later be build David insisted on paying for it, saying; *'...No, I insist on paying the full price. I will not take for the LORD what is yours, or sacrifice a burnt offering that costs me nothing.'* (1Chron 21:24).

- What cost do we put into our worship of God. When we come before the Lord is our worship like that of Cain or that of Abel?
- Abel=Hebel, derived from hevel (breath or vapour). Abel's sacrifice of worship literally would cost him his life. His life was like a breath or mist which appears and quickly vanishes- he was the first martyr. All around the world today believers are following Abel's example and their worship is costing them their lives.
- Although Abel only lived a short time he achieved his destiny and is now being blessed by God- his deeds are recorded in the New Testament as being righteous (1John 3:12). The righteous are not exempt from suffering- e.g. what Renee and Philip and family are experiencing right now. Sometimes the life of the righteous here on earth is not long and sometimes bad people can seem to live longer and sometimes prosper- one of the psalmists Asaph, struggled with this Ps 73:17 when he questioned it, but went to the sanctuary of God and then understood their end- although there may be apparent blessings in this life for the wicked it shall not last and the tables will truly be turned on the Day of Judgement. There is much blessing to come for the righteous. Cain lived a lot longer in this life than Abel, but who would you rather be on the coming Day of Judgement, Cain or Abel?
- We give Christ our all because He gave us His all and laid down His life in His devotion to us- this is a powerful motivator for us to worship Him sacrificially, being grateful for His generosity to us.
- True giving takes faith- our faith is that if we give sacrificially God will repay us abundantly- true worship involves faith. This is recognised in the New Testament when the writer to the Hebrews says 'By faith Abel offered a better sacrifice than Cain did' (Heb 11:4). A key area is our finances- it takes faith to give God sacrificially of our finances, trusting that He will make sure that we are provided for.
- Cain's offering has been said to be one of works as it is not a blood sacrifice- similar to Adam and Eve trying to cover their own nakedness with leaves and yet God provided coverings of skin for them. It is through receiving the blessings of Calvary that we are able to worship God aright. Have you come to an understanding of the cross? When was the last time you truly were in awe of what He has done for you?
- True worship springs out of a position of realising just how loved and blessed we are- it is a response of thankfulness- Cain was blessed but he hadn't comprehended it and as a result was not overflowing with thankfulness. Let's meditate on the goodness of God to us, His grace in His sacrifice on our behalf to work salvation for us- as we do this we, like Abel, will give of our best in thankfulness.

3. The importance of receiving a loving rebuke

- **v6 'Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen?'**
- What are you like when you are rebuked? Do you respond well to it?
- It is interesting the way that Cain receives the disappointment that his sacrifice has not been accepted by God- it should have been no surprise to him and led to an apology on his part to God and a change of actions in the future, but Cain doesn't seem to be able to deal with disappointment or loving rebuke- he lets his feelings get the better of him and nurses self-pity.
Not only does God not accept the sacrifice, but God challenges Cain on his attitude towards Him not accepting the sacrifice- he is exhibiting anger and depression- God challenges both of these responses to the situation and warns Cain that sin is

crouching at the door- God describes sin in terms of a demon waiting for him to open the door to allow it in- it wants to overpower Cain, but Cain must overpower it.

1Cor 10:13 No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.

- Our mind is like a doorway which we can choose to open to God or the enemy. The battle for the mind is a key area of spiritual warfare- how often have you been having a perfectly harmless conversation with someone and they have said something and it has stuck in your mind and Satan has tried to use it to stir up all sorts of feelings in you? Satan is a master at twisting things and bringing accusation and condemnation. We can't stop thoughts coming into our minds but we can choose not to reinforce them and ruminate on them. Rumination is negatively going over the past again and again, worry is doing the same about the future.

Wikipedia: Not only are habitual ruminators more likely to become depressed, but experimental studies have demonstrated that people who...ruminate experience greater depressed mood. There is also evidence that rumination is linked to general anxiety, post traumatic stress, binge drinking, eating disorders, and self-injurious behavior.

- What is the answer to rumination? Choosing to renew our minds by focussing on and believing what God says rather than the enemy:

Romans 12:2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

2 Corinthians 10:5 We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.

Philippians 4:8 Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things.

- We need to learn that a loving rebuke does not mean we are rejected- it is our behaviour which is being kept in check for our own benefit- love will rebuke where needed:

Prov 3:11-12 (quoted in Heb 12:5-6) My son, do not despise the LORD's discipline and do not resent his rebuke, because the LORD disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in.

Revelation 3:19 Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent.

- Are you secure in God's love? Do you know Him as your loving father? He gave His all for you, he couldn't love you any more than He does already- the cross speaks of the depths of His love- someone asked 'Lord how much do you love me', He replied 'This much' and stretched out His arms and died. When you are secure in someone's love you understand their loving motives in what they say to you- they want your best.

4. The need to love our brethren

- To say that Cain did not display the love he should have for his brother is an understatement. He sarcastically says to God 'Am I my brother's keeper?' (v9). The answer to this is an emphatic 'yes!'
- Keeper=shamar='guard, protect, attend, regard'
- **1John 3:12** 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.

1John 3:14-16 We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death. Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him. This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to

lay down our lives for our brothers.

- These seem like strong words, equating hating someone with murder, but John is quoting Jesus. The point that Jesus is making is that murder is hatred of someone fully carried out- it is a sliding scale, as seen by Cain murdering his brother- we are all capable of it under the right circumstances but for the grace of God. Usually our 'murder' of people we despise is in more subtle ways- gossiping about them behind their backs- we need to keep our tongues in check.
- Do you hate anyone at the moment? Then you are kindling similar feelings to Cain regarding Abel. Nip it in the bud today- hate the actions rather than the person. Pray for the person to repent and get right with God and you if need be. Resentment and bitterness will eat us away if we allow it to take root in our lives. Forgiveness is a process, but let's make steps towards forgiving certain people rather than staying bitter- if you cannot forgive yet pray that God would do a work in your heart and help you. Remind yourself of the debt you have been forgiven by God. We don't have to deny the pain to forgive- acknowledge the pain but still forgive.
- The antidote for hatred? Love. Love is a choice rather than a feeling. Cain may not have felt like loving Abel at this point but that should not have stopped him.
- Are you reconciled to all people as far as it depends on you today? Ask God what steps you need to make today.

5. Belonging comes from the cross

- The punishment for Cain was that the land would no longer receive him and he had to move away, becoming a wanderer. He had to leave the place of his home in shame. His descendants are known for great inventions, but it is almost like they are busying themselves restlessly because there is a hole in their lives.
- If God is not first in our lives, like Cain, we seek satisfaction in all sorts of areas, but ultimately they do not fulfil.

Augustine the Church Theologian said "You have made us for yourself and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in Thee."

Pascal the great Mathematician said "There is a god-shaped vacuum in the heart of every man, and only God can fill it."

- Legalism- not realising Christ has done it all on our behalf. Sometimes even Christians can be restless like Cain, forever striving and working- sometimes this is because we all can struggle for acceptance and belonging. It is as we realise that we are already accepted and belong in Christ that we are able to relax again and enter into God's true rest- there is a Sabbath day's rest for the people of God (Heb 4:9).
- Even in God's judgement on Cain we still see His mercy coming in- protecting him from harm by placing a sign on him. God loves us, even when we are rebellious His love remains constant.
- Sin alienates us from God and man, but the cross of Jesus reconciles us to God and others. We truly experience the fullness of being family, belonging and coming home.
- The blood of murdered Abel was crying out to God for justice to happen- he had been wrongly murdered by his brother, and yet the blood of Jesus cries out, not for justice but for mercy- 'Father forgive them'. His blood speaks forgiveness-

Heb 12:24 You have come to Jesus, the one who mediates the new covenant between God and people, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks of forgiveness instead of crying out for vengeance like the blood of Abel. (NLT)

- God is just and hates sin and must punish it, however He Himself took our punishment on the cross and so we have peace with God- He is no longer angry with us- this is called 'propitiation' -something which takes away wrath. By the blood

of Christ, His death, God's full anger against our sin was displayed. God wants us to come home.

- The parable of the prodigal son- wasted his father's estate, messed up big time just as Cain does and yet the father was there with open arms to receive him when he chose to turn back. Let's choose today to turn back to our loving Father.

Jude v11 'They have followed the way of Cain' – which way are you walking today?

Summary

In the lives of Cain and Abel we see:

1. The importance of fulfilling our potential
2. The need for true worship
3. The importance of receiving a loving rebuke
4. The need to love our brethren
5. Belonging comes from the cross

Song

Your blood speaks a better word