



STORY

8/18/04

Cain and Abel - *Genesis 4:1-16, 25-26*

TEACHER PRAYER

Heavenly Father, as I study sin and its wickedness and the power it has in this world, I am struck with sadness and fear. When I think of how that sin lurks within me and how it wants to live and grow in me it is a sobering thought indeed. What joy! What comfort! to also hear of Your mercy and grace through Christ Jesus Who chases away the fear and sadness. Enable me to lead the children to see the very real danger of sin and to equip them with the Gospel so that they may “rule over sin” and live godly lives out of faith and love for You. Bless me in my preparation and presentation of Your holy and saving Word. Amen.

VOCABULARY

Jehovah (v.1ff) - Throughout this lesson, God uses His name “Jehovah” (Lord in NKJV) to identify Himself. It is the name of God that emphasizes that He is the “God of Promise,” the “Covenant God,” the God who delivers His people.

Respected (v.4) - Because of the way in which the word “respect” is used in our modern everyday speech, it may sound strange to hear that the Lord “respected” Abel’s offering. God’s action toward Abel’s offering was much more than “respect” in our usual usage. God “accepted/looked with favor upon” Abel’s offering—He received it as an act of faith from a child of God.

Countenance (v.5) - Cain’s countenance fell. In the Aaronic benediction we hear God’s blessing, “...*the Lord lift up His countenance...*” “Countenance” can also be translated as “face.” A fallen countenance is a face that shows disappointment, irritation, anger, pouting, etc. A fallen countenance won’t look at another person but be downward glancing with sorrow/anger in the eyes.

OUTER AIM

Cain murdered his brother Abel

INNER AIM

Sin begins in the heart but righteousness begins with Christ

BACKGROUND

In the last lesson we witnessed sin’s entrance into the world. Once sin entered the world it didn’t take long for it to grow and show its ugly effects. There are a number of intervening years between the fall into sin and the story of the first murder. (The exact number is unknown, therefore the ages of Cain and Abel are also unknown.)

There was, without doubt, *daily* evidence of sin in the family life of Adam and Eve. However, Cain’s murder of Abel is the first time that sin grew into the taking of a life. Through this lesson God shows the progress and growth of sin. He shows how sin rules in the world (cf: James 1:14-15). The story of Cain and Abel teaches that sin grows *inwardly* by showing how the sin began and then matured in Cain. The next lesson (the Flood) will teach that sin grows *outwardly* by showing the outward manifestation of sin in the people of Noah’s time. Genesis chapters 3-8 are God’s instruction in the reality of sin...but also of His grace.

The story of Cain and Abel reflects the change that sin produced. God had created man in His

image; but since sin entered the world, the offspring of man would forever be born in his (Adam's) image (cf: Genesis 5:1,3).

This story clearly illustrates what Jesus said to Nicodemus, "*That which is born of flesh is flesh...*" The story also illustrates the second part of what Jesus told Nicodemus, "*That which is born of the Spirit is spirit*" (John 3:6). The only thing that can truly solve the sin in mankind is the working of the Spirit through the good news of the Savior. While watching sin grow we also see God's tender and constant mercy toward sinful mankind.

TEXT COMMENTARY

vv.1-2

"I have gotten the Man, the Lord" vs. **"...together with the Lord I have produced a man."** Eve's statement after the birth of Cain can be translated in either of the above ways. Martin Luther understood it in the first way, namely, that Eve believed that this son was the promised Savior. In either case, Eve's faith is evident. Eve referred to God by His name, "Jehovah" (Lord in most English translations). Jehovah is the name of God that emphasizes that He is the "Covenant God" or the "God of Promise." Simply by calling God "Jehovah" Eve was confessing her faith in the salvation and deliverance which God had promised after the fall into sin. Adam and Eve were the first sinners but they were also the first believers.

"Cain" means "acquired." "*I have acquired a man. . .*"

It was after the fall into sin that Adam and Eve had their first children. Sexual intercourse is a blessing of marriage, and God had commanded Adam and Eve to "be fruitful and multiply." In view of this and since there was no child conceived in Eden, we can conclude that the time between creation and the fall into sin was quite short. Note how tactfully Scripture speaks of sexual relations. "*And Adam knew his wife...*" The biological process is evident and clearly presented in Scripture; however, it is done without the graphic and lustful detail that a secular writer would feel "obligated" to include.

Abel was Adam and Eve's second son. His name means, "breath, mist, vapor, etc." The difference in age between the brothers is unknown. (Luther thought they were twins, but that cannot be proven.) Cain was a farmer and Abel was a shepherd. These occupations clearly disprove the evolutionary theory that man learned to make tools and then developed occupations over eras of evolutionary progress.

vv. 3-5

Cain and Abel each brought offerings to God from the fruit of their occupation. At this time, no specific offerings or sacrifices were commanded by God. The Old Testament ceremonial laws which God would give much later on Mount Sinai would be pictures of Christ. Cain and Abel's offerings were not pictures of Christ. The offerings of Cain and Abel did not come as the result of a command by God, but were purely an expression of thanksgiving and offering of a gift to God, the giver of the blessings received.

It is clear that both Cain and Abel were instructed in the Word of God (not the written Word because that did not yet exist, but rather, directly from God) by their parents. Being believers, Adam and Eve took the parental responsibility of instructing their children (cf: Ephesians 6:4) in the Word of God.

The offerings which Cain and Abel made are comparable to our prayers of thanksgiving and our offerings which we give at church-thank-offerings to God!

There was a difference between what Cain offered and what Abel offered. However, the difference was not what made Cain's offering unacceptable and Abel's favorable. They were both bringing an offering out of the blessings which God had given them (*...let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper...*” 1 Corinthians 16:2).

The difference between the offerings was not what was on the altar, but rather what was in the heart. Hebrews 11:4 says, "By **faith**, Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain. . .” Abel's offering was made out of love and faith toward God. Abel showed his love by choosing the very best of his flock for the offering. Cain's offering was not given from faith and thus the difference in God's reaction. The same is true today. There is nothing of value in any "good thing" which we do. However, when good things are done out of love for and faith in Christ, then, because of what Christ has done, God sees our works as “good.” Without faith and Christ's redemptive work, God would not respect our offerings either. *"Without faith it is impossible to please God"* (Hebrews 11:6; see also 1 Peter 3:2).

There is an emphasis on the quality of Abel's offering. Abel brought the *firstborn* of his flock. He didn't keep something back for himself, but rather first offered a thank-offering to the Lord and *then* lived from the rest. Abel also brought an offering “*of their fat.*” Not only was his sacrifice from the firstborn it was from the BEST of the firstborn. God doesn't give any additional information on the quality of Cain's offering other than that it came from the field (his occupation). We cannot rightly conclude that the fruits, grains, etc. which Cain brought were of inferior quality– they could have been good as well. However, we can learn a proper approach to stewardship from Abel's example.

In some way, God made it known to Cain that He was not pleased with his offering. Cain understood that God did not accept his offering and for that reason was angry. Cain's *"countenance fell."* Cain was seized by anger and jealousy so that his disposition and everything about him was affected. Cain was seeking God's favor by the outward action of offering a sacrifice. When his outwardly “good” actions were rejected because of a lack of faith, he became angry. This is true of all who seek God's favor by what they do: “What do you mean, it's not enough, God?! Haven't I led a good life?! Didn't I do all sorts of nice things?!”

vv.6-7

God came to Cain to warn him about his sin and the danger which that sin held (cf: Jesus' warning to Peter on the night he denied Jesus, Matthew 26:31ff). God warned Cain to put away the sinful thoughts and anger lest he fall into still greater sin. Sin was at the door and God warned Cain not to let it in, but rather to rule over it, get away from temptation, repent and turn to God. Instead Cain multiplied his sin and killed his brother.

vv. 8-16

Cain killed Abel while they were talking in a field. After the murder, God approached Cain asking him about Abel. This is similar to God's questioning of Adam and Eve after they had sinned. In both cases God knew what sin had been committed. In both cases God already knew the answer to His questions,

but He asked the questions in order to bring the sinners to a confession of their sin and repentance. We can learn from this example when it is necessary for us to confront someone because of his sin.

When Adam and Eve were approached by God, they did not deny their sin although they did try to place the blame in places other than themselves. However, when God approached Cain, he denied knowing where his brother was and what he had done. Not only did Cain deny his sin, he became defensive about it and said, "Am I my brother's keeper?" God replied, "Listen! Your brother's blood cries to me from the ground." It was as if Abel's spilt blood cried out to God making known the deed.

Cain's contention that Abel's whereabouts and well-being was none of his concern is certainly sinful. Cain's statement is in complete contradiction to Philippians 2:3-4 and other similar Scripture passages. **LUTHER:** "There is a common proverb: 'What is it to the Romans that the Greeks die?'" For we think no dangers but our own concern us. But how does this idea agree with the commandment of God that He wants all of us to live together as brethren? Therefore, by saying that the care of his *brother* was no concern of his, Cain brings a heavy charge against himself." (*What Luther Says*, Ewald Plass, CPH, #4088).

Sin had spread and led to this first murder. The accounts in Genesis demonstrate how quickly sin spread because, just a few generations after Cain's murder, not only did Cain's great-great-great-grandson (Lamech) kill another man, but he **boasted** about it as well (Genesis 4:23-24).

Cain's curse: God cursed Cain because of what he had done. God had earlier cursed the serpent (Genesis 3:14) and the earth (Genesis 3:17) but this is the first time that God places a curse upon a PERSON. "This fact alone stresses, as perhaps nothing else could, God's earnestness over against sin. However, this curse is carefully defined as to what it includes, for it is not a curse that bars Cain from the possibility of salvation. It merely involves two things: a) being driven away from the cultivated and arable portion of the land and winning his sustenance under the greatest difficulties; and b) being compelled to shift and stray about in the earth." (*Exposition of Genesis*, H.C. Leupold, The Wartburg Press, p. 206)

The curse affected Cain greatly because he was "a tiller of the ground." No longer would the ground (already effected by sin) yield its full potential for Cain (a potential already limited by sin). Furthermore, Cain would be a vagabond with no rest on the ground. Luther described it as, "insecurity where you are and uncertainty where you are going."

God's intent: There was surely forgiveness for Cain through the coming Savior. God's desire for Cain was that the punishment for his sin would cause him to realize his wrongdoing, recognize the punishment as the consequence of his sin, repent, and look to the promise of God for forgiveness. In this way, God's mercy is evident even in judgment.

Cain's rejection of God's mercy: Instead of turning to God in repentance, Cain complained about his punishment. "My punishment is greater than I can bear. . . anyone who finds me will kill me." Cain turned to despair rather than true repentance and trust in the Lord. Instead of pleading, "God be merciful a sinner!" Cain complained, "It's not fair!" It is the attitude of a hardened sinner to deny all sin and its rightful consequence.

God's continuing mercy: God told Cain that if anyone killed him, seven-fold vengeance would be that person's punishment. God promised and gave to Cain a time of grace on earth in which to repent and return to the Lord. God gave Cain a sign to assure him of this promise. The King James, New King

James, and other translations of the Bible say that God "put a mark on Cain." The original Hebrew does not indicate that God put some kind of mark **on** Cain but rather that the sign was **for** Cain. There are various other times when God gave signs both to believers and unbelievers (cf. Judges 6:36ff, Isaiah 7:10ff, etc.). We don't know the nature of the sign which God gave to Cain.

Cain then left the region of Eden and lived in the land of Nod.

vv. 25-26

We don't know how many children God gave to Adam and Eve, but it was without doubt a great number. They would have certainly had many more children at the time of Abel's murder. The other children aren't mentioned simply because they are not important to the account which Scripture wishes to present. Since Cain feared someone would kill him, there had to be others who would be able to kill him (as well as sisters to marry, since Cain had children too cf. 4:17ff).

Adam and Eve's son Seth was born after Abel was murdered. "Seth" means "appointed." After Seth's birth, Eve said, "*God has appointed another seed for me instead of Abel whom Cain killed.*" Eve had other "seed" as well but Seth was significant because it was from the descendants of this son that the Savior would one day be born (cf. Luke 3:38). God's mercy continues to show itself in that He provided a "replacement" from whom His promise would be kept.

Seth also had a son whom he named "Enosh." "Enosh" means "frail one, mortal." In naming his son this way, Seth shows his understanding of the truth that this lesson teaches.

"Then men began to call on the name of the Lord." The name of the Lord is everything that God has revealed to us about Himself (cf: 2nd commandment; 1st petition). We call upon the name of the Lord when we proclaim what God has told us about Himself (cf: Exodus 34:5-6), when we praise Him for who He is and what He has done, and when we come with our needs and requests in prayer (cf: Psalm 50:15). In other words, "calling upon the name of the Lord" can be used to describe worship.

Adam, Eve, Abel, Seth, etc. had all worshipped the true God, but it was a personal private family type of worship. Now, the population had increased...Now, there were people in the world who were not believers...Now, the faithful people of God began to worship and proclaim the true God in a public worship setting.

ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURE:

1 Samuel 16:7; Zephaniah 3:9; Matthew 15:7-9, 19; Mark 7:20-23; Hebrews 11:4; 12:1-3; 12:24; James 1:14-15; 1 Peter 5:8; 1 John 3:11-15; Jude 11; Revelation 6:9-11 (Abel would be among the martyrs);

RESOURCES:

Bible History Commentary, Franzmann - pp. 55.
Bible History References, Rupprecht - volume 1 p. 19ff
The People's Bible - Genesis, Jeske pp.58ff

STUDENT PRAYER

Dear Jesus, thank You for coming to die for the sins of all people. Teach me to know whenever a new sin begins in my life, and then help me to get rid of it before it grows. Make my love for You stronger each day. Amen.

PRESENTATION

There was a time when the thought of brother murdering brother was a shocking idea. Among our children, prayerfully, it is still so. However, in an age when Cain's action against Abel is part of our daily living (in the news, etc.) it is important to create/maintain/re-create a sensitivity to sin in the hearts of our children (and ourselves). Children should be led to see the grave nature of sin and its consequences.

In our present society, there is also a tendency to downplay the "less serious" sins. There is no such thing. Sin is sin and is serious! What seems like a small sin can so quickly take root in our hearts, grow and mature-even if it doesn't lead to some great outward sin such as murder. When can you easily pull up an oak tree? When it is just a sapling. Once that tree has planted its roots deeply and grown thick and gnarly it can no longer be easily pulled up. So it is also with sin.

Law & Gospel: It is quite easy to find the law in this lesson; God's warning against Cain's sin, Cain's breaking of the law, and God's judgment on Cain's sin. HOWEVER, the lesson is likewise filled with Gospel; God's patient calling out to the fallen sinner, His promise and mercy shown to Cain, and the forgiveness for even the sin of murder that is given through Christ Jesus.

Frequently Asked Questions

- 1. How did Cain know his offering was not accepted?** We do not know by what means God made it known to Cain that He was not pleased with his offering. Early illustrators showed the displeasure by having the smoke of the offering go downward, but that is only a human idea. It is enough to know that God conveyed his displeasure to Cain and acted in mercy toward him.
- 2. What made Cain's offering so bad?** It was not the content of the offering, but the content of his heart.
- 3. Who would kill Cain? Whom did Cain marry?** We shouldn't necessarily think of Cain or Abel as young boys. We don't know their ages, but they were almost certainly young men and perhaps even older. Therefore, they would have had several of siblings (We might assume Eve gave birth to a child each year.) Cain's fear was of his siblings (or their descendants) seeking revenge. He married a sister (or niece, etc.). While today such a marriage would be sinful, in the very early days of time it was God's way of populating the earth. As the population grew, the acceptability of a marriage between close relatives changed because it was no longer necessary.
- 4. What kind of mark was put on Cain?** There was no mark on Cain (see notes above).
- 5. Why did God not kill Cain?** In Genesis 9:6, God commands that whoever sheds man's blood by man shall his blood be shed. God could have struck Cain dead because of his sin. However, for reasons not totally known to us (but assuredly just and right for they are God's) God chose to spare Cain's life and give him an additional time of grace. It is another example of God's abundant mercy. There are a number of other speculations as to why God would not kill Cain, but these ideas can be called nothing more than speculation because God has seen fit not to explain to us the details of this action toward Cain.

APPLICATIONS

Offering/thanksgiving/good works (cf: Hebrews 11:4,6): Our response to God flows from faith. We do what is pleasing to God out of love for Him and for one another. Our love for one another flows and grows out of our love for God. Without faith in Christ the best things we do (outwardly) mean nothing to God. Our good works are not a way to gain acceptance from God (as Cain thought) but are a way to show our thanks for God's gracious acceptance through Christ (as demonstrated by Abel). This applies to whatever service we give to God or to one another.

Stewardship: Proper Christian stewardship of the gifts which God gives is prompted by faith in Christ and love for God. Christian stewardship includes not only the monetary offerings we give to the work of God's Kingdom, but also involves so much more! Christian stewardship includes the way I use every gift God has given me. Am I giving him the best/firstfruits...or just whatever is left over after I serve myself? Am I giving it out of love for Him? Am I giving it joyfully? Abel provides an example for us in our stewardship.

“Saving faith is more than just knowing/believing that God exists. Cain didn't deny God's existence—he talked to Him! However, Cain was not trusting in the coming Savior, was not following God's Word out of love for Him. James tells us that even the devils believe that there is one true God (James 2:19). It is important for all Christians to understand what saving faith is. Many are misled into believing that “belief in God” is enough, but they never hear/learn/believe the saving Gospel.

The unbelieving world will hate believers. Abel was the first martyr for the Christian faith. Cain killed Abel essentially because Abel was a believer. The “world” was a lot smaller in Cain and Abel's day, but their relationship is an example of the unbelieving world hating/opposing the believers. We should expect nothing different: John 15:18-25, 2 Timothy 3:12.

We cannot hide from God nor fool Him: Adam and Eve thought they could hide from God after they sinned. Cain thought he could fool God by denying any knowledge of his sin. Neither plan worked. We can't fool God into thinking that we are His children by what we do outwardly— He knows our hearts. We can't hide any of our sins— He knows them all, even those we don't know.

Rule over sin: As children of God, our desire is to rule over the sin that infects us. This conquering of sin is accomplished only through Christ. He has conquered sin and death for us and the only way we can conquer sin and rule over it in our lives is to be armed with God's Word and with Christ fighting the battle for us. The Holy Spirit uses the Word of God to create faith in our hearts, to help us withstand temptation, and to flee temptations. This battle remains constant for a child of God during this lifetime because of our Old Adam. See: Romans 7:15-20; 8:13-14; Galatians 2:20; 5:16-26; Ephesians 6:10-17.

Response to correction: How do we respond when we are corrected in sin? When Cain was caught in sin he complained about the punishment instead of repenting of his sin and humbly accepting the consequence. When a child is disciplined by a parent or teacher, is the reaction one of sorrow and acceptance of the consequence or is it a self-centered despair, “That's not fair!” We seek to lead our children (and ourselves) to a God-pleasing response to correction.

Sin is never harmless: Cain's overt sin was against the fifth commandment that began with bitterness in his heart. Our youth are faced with a mighty battle with temptation and sin against the sixth commandment. All the media and other worldly influence in regard to sexuality and lust is no small matter. Lead the youth to see that it DOES MATTER what they watch, read, and hear. It DOES MATTER how physically involved they become with a boyfriend or girlfriend. Young people might respond, “I know those things are wrong and I would never do them. I know where to draw the line.” BEWARE! Sin is crouching at the door!! Knowledge of what sin is not the same as fleeing from it. Cain's sin did not begin out with murder...young and older take heed!

If we allow hatred, jealousy, and other sin (or temptations to sin) to grow in our hearts as did Cain, that growth will eventually show itself in what we do. Yes, hatred, a bad attitude, a feud with an “ex-friend,” etc. are all sins that, when given a fertile field and nurturing, will grow and thrive.

5th Commandment: Sins against the fifth commandment are not only murder and other outward harm to our neighbor. The fifth Commandment also governs our words and thoughts. Also, it is not just the prohibition against harming our neighbor but also the command to help and be a friend to him in every bodily need. Yes, we are our brother's keepers.

Family faithfulness does not equal personal faith. Being the offspring of faithful believers (as Cain was) does not assure salvation. Salvation is a matter of the heart for each individual sinner.

PASSAGES

These passages can be assigned as memory work or simply discussed in class as to how they fit the lesson.

5th commandment

Lower

1 Samuel 16:7 - *Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.*

1 John 3:15 - *Whoever hates his brother is a murderer and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.*

Middle any of the above and...

1 Peter 5:8 - *Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour.*

James 1:15 - *When desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.*

Upper any of the above and...

Matthew 15:19 - *Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies.*

Galatians 2:20 - *I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me.*

HYMN CHOICES

Glory be to Jesus - TLH #158

That Man a Godly Life Might Live - TLH #287 (st.6)

O Holy Spirit, Enter In - TLH #235(st.7)

Rise My Soul to Watch and Pray - TLH #446

My Soul, Be on Thy Guard - TLH #449