A Study of the Book of Genesis
Sermon #5

“The Way of Cain”
Genesis 4:1-16

In this morning’s message we noted that there are only two kinds of religion in the world – the religion of human achievement: which is the belief that one can approach God in a method of their own choosing. That may be the belief that we can earn God’s acceptance by doing some good thing, or by living by certain rules, or by observing certain rituals. The religion of human achievement is of course a lie of Satan.

The other kind of religion is the religion of divine accomplishment that says, "I can't do it. God did it for me in Christ." We noted that every religion of the world fits into one of those two categories.

What we have before us is the record of the first murder. But this is far more than just a record of the first murder – it is about the “way of Cain” (Jude 11). The “way of Cain” was a rejection of approaching God in the way that he had set out and was in fact a religion of human achievement. Cain apparently thought he did not have to do it God’s way, he could approach God in his own way.

Genesis chapter four is a record of the beginning of the corruption that began in the human heart as a result from sin. It is the sad tale of the slide of the human heart away from God. Cain’s tragic story is more than just a myth or a legend. It is history. It could have been prevented but it wasn’t. It stands as a sad record of the consequences of yielding to sin’s temptation and the destruction that result from it.

First, The Background of Sin (vv. 1-2)
“Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, and said, "I have acquired a man from the LORD." (2) Then she bore again, this time his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground.”
Adam and Eve have a baby, a little boy named Cain. Eve is excited. Although, because of disobedience to God, childbirth had become painful, God in His grace allows Adam and Eve to be fruitful and fill the earth. Cain means “I have gotten him or I have gotten a man from the Lord.” In today’s vernacular this son would probably have been named “Got.” Because of his name some bible scholars believe that Adam and Eve mistakenly thought Cain was the promised deliverer (Gen 3:15). And yet we know he was not to be the deliverer but the first murderer.

Because of the sin of his parents, Cain was the first person born in sin, as all have been since that time. Adam’s sin became a characteristic of the entire human race so that every person is born in sin. The Apostle Paul explains in Romans 5:12, “Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned.” This transfer of sin is called the doctrine of total depravity. Total depravity does not mean that every person is as bad as he can be, nor that sinful people are incapable of good deeds. Rather, it means that there is nothing in the human heart capable of earning God’s favor.

Then a second son, Abel, is born. He has an interesting name. In Hebrew Abel means breath or temporary which foreshadows that Abel’s life will be cut short.

We do not know anything about the boys growing up years other than Cain followed in his footsteps and became a farmer and his brother Abel became a shepherd. Both are honorable professions. The problem lies not in the each means of making a living but within each man himself.

It would seem as brothers that it is highly probable that they both received the same instruction from their parents, so why did these brothers turn out so very different? If we could answer that; we could answer why children in our own day with the same parents, the same home-life and the same instruction, can turn out so very differently.

Secondly, The Offering of Sin – An Unacceptable Sacrifice. (vv. 3-5)

“And in the process of time it came to pass that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the LORD. (4) Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. And the LORD respected Abel and his offering, (5) but He did not respect Cain and his offering. And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell.”

- The Crisis over Attitude
It is probable that there was a regular time and place at which men were allowed to meet God. Possibly the place was at entrance of the Garden of Eden where the Cherubim stood guard over access to the tree of life. As to the time of meeting with God the phrase - “in the process of time” (v. 4)–almost always denotes a set time. Perhaps at the end of every growing season they made their sacrifices.

Why did God accept Abel’s sacrifice and why did He reject Cain’s? One is tempted to feel sorry for Cain. He brings an offering to God only to be told it is not good enough. Talk about getting your bubble burst. Over the years, different Bible scholars have speculated as to why God rejected Cain’s offering. The Schofield Bible says God expected a blood sacrifice, which was a sin offering, signifying atonement of sin. Others speculate that God must have told Cain that a grain offering was not acceptable, but that Cain ignored what the Lord said.

The answer to why Abel’s sacrifice and Cain was not may lie in verse three and four where we read that Cain brought only “an offering of the fruit of the ground” (v.3)–whereas Abel brought the best of the flock – “the firstborn of his flock and of their fat” (v.4). Abel was careful in his offering and Cain was indifferent in his. The writer of Hebrews makes it plain why the offering of Abel was accepted whereas the offering of Cain was rejected; what pleased God about Abel’s offering was not so much that it was a blood sacrifice, but that it was an offering given in faith (Hebrews 11:4).

How then did Cain and Abel “know” whether their sacrifice was accepted or not? Obviously there had to be some kind of physical sign, some outward evidence that made this clear. Perhaps it was as when the offering that Elijah made on Mt Carmel when the offering was consumed by a fire from Heaven (I Kings 18:38).

At any rate I think the big difference between Cain and Abel is not the kind of offering they brought, but the attitude behind their offering. Cain's problem was a bad attitude. Cain proved his attitude in his response to the rejection of his sacrifice. Cain erupted into blazing resentment – resentment which he soon directed at his brother!

Confrontation about Anger

“So the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? (7) If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it." (8) Now Cain talked with Abel his brother; and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him.”
When God rejects his offering, Cain becomes very upset and the Lord confronts him over his anger. “So the Lord said to Cain, "Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen?" (v. 6) Of course God knew the answer to those questions, but he wanted Cain to have to think about why he was behaving as he was. God is telling Cain there is no logical reason whatsoever from him to be acting the way that he is acting. The question clearly implies that Cain’s anger is unfounded.

Cain was so angry that it was reflected in his countenance - his face was downcast. In verse seven, God tells Cain that he has a choice. Sin is always a choice. God warns Cain about the destructive nature of sin by telling him that sin sits crouching at the door. I think that is an alarming image. God is saying, "Deal with your sin. Don’t let it go on, or you will either master it or you will soon find yourself its victim." Sin always begins with wrong thoughts. If you let those wrong thoughts go on, they lead to wrong feelings.

The matter is clearly not one of a lack of understand but was open rebellion on the part of Cain. Cain like so many in our day, wanted to do things his way. While getting things your way may work when ordering a hamburger at a national chain not so in dealing with God. As one man said, “You can go to Heaven God’s way or go to Hell anyway you please!”

God tells Cain, “Act right and you will feel right.” If you will obey God and judge sinful feelings, your feelings will come around, and you will find your-self feeling good. But if you follow your feelings and disobey God, you will be plunged into guilt and depression. Cain has a choice, he can do what is right, or he can continue to disobey God.

Some of you may have come into this room today feeling angry. It might have been something which happened this morning. Or maybe something happened years ago. Perhaps a neighbor, or someone in the church, cheated you out of some money or took advantage of you in some way, and you still have a bitter attitude. Whatever type the anger is, you need to get control of it, and get rid of it. Ephesians 4:27 says if we don't control our anger, we give the devil a foothold in our lives. That is what Cain did. That is what God warned him about in verse seven, "...if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it." Uncontrolled anger and jealousy resulted in Abel's death and destroyed Cain's life too.

It is certainly not Abel's fault that Cain's sacrifice is not pleasing to God. But when God accepts Abel's offering and rejects Cain's, Cain directs his anger, jealousy, and hatred toward his brother. Cain makes his decision in verse eight, “Now Cain talked with Abel his brother; and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him.”
It has always been difficult for me to understand how Cain could have turned so suddenly on his brother and without provocation killed his brother in cold blood. Think with me for a moment. Jesus refers to Abel as the first prophet (Luke 11:49-51). Cain is a man who wants to do things his own way, and Abel a man concerned with doing things God’s way. As they turn to walk in the field on day, perhaps Abel tried to reason with his brother, tried to get Cain to repent and do things God’s way. But as Abel urged his brother to repent, Satan stirs up Cain heart in jealous anger. “For crying out loud, how long I am going to have to listen to this self-righteous garbage from my little brother.”

Bitter thoughts may have coursed through his mind. “Why should I have do things God’s way? After all that required me to get a animal to sacrifice from his Abel? Why does God favor Abel?” And so bitterness and anger welled up in Cain until he could stand it no longer and “...Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him.”

Third, The Confrontation and Consequences of Sin.
(vv. 9-16)

- God Confronts Cain (vv.9-10)
“Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is Abel your brother?" He said, "I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?" (10) And He said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood cries out to Me from the ground."

Once again remember that God is not asking these questions for the purpose of gaining information, but rather He was giving Cain a chance to confess. Cain’s flippant and indifferent reference to the brother who he has just killed shows us just how far and how fast the human heart can be hardened by sin. Cain responds, "I do not know. Am I my brother’s keeper?" (v.9) His lying to God was just a futile as his father’s hiding from God after his sin. Does he really believe that God does not know what has happened, or where the body of his brother lays?

- God Curses Cain (vv. 11-14)
“So now you are cursed from the earth, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. (12) When you till the ground, it shall no longer yield its strength to you. A fugitive and a vaga-bond you shall be on the earth." (13) And Cain said to the LORD, "My punishment is greater than I can bear! (14) Surely You have driven me out this day from the face of the ground; I shall be hidden from Your face; I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond on the earth, and it will happen that anyone who finds me will kill me."
When his father had sinned the ground was cursed but now because of his sin Cain himself was cursed. The only reason I know why God didn’t kill Cain on the spot, was His great mercy. Cain got far less than he deserved. And yet he complained that his punishment was too harsh (4:13)! Isn’t that just like sinful man! In verse thirteen Cain said to the Lord, "My punishment is greater than I can bear."

Some believe at this point Cain repented, while others see it as simply an expression of despair. But at any rate, Cain falls to pieces but there is no evidence that there is remorse over what he has done to his brother or compassion for what he had done to his parents and certainly not recognition of what he has done to God. It is plain and simple - self-pity. How many times down through the years have we all heard the compliant, “But that is not fair!” Whatever the case, God chooses to show mercy to Cain.

- **God Marks Cain** (vv. 15-16)

  “And the L ORD said to him, "Therefore, whoever kills Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold." And the L ORD set a mark on Cain, lest anyone finding him should kill him. (16)Then Cain went out from the presence of the L ORD and dwelt in the land of Nod on the east of Eden.”

  Regarding the “mark” (v. 15) given Cain there has been plenty of speculation over the centuries as to what that mark was. It was either a physical mark (perhaps on his forehead) or it was some type of sense of awe or dread that emanates from Cain they would repel those he came into contact with. We are not really sure how important know that bit of information really is? If it were crucial information, God would have told us!

  Some see this as a promise from God that no one would be allowed to kill him. I am not sure that the Lord promises that. What God promises is, “Anyone who takes Cain’s life will pay a terrible price for it!”

  Cain moves away and marries. Where did Cain's wife come from? It seems clear that Cain's wife was one of the many daughters of Adam and Eve mentioned in Genesis 5:4. Although later prohibited (Leviticus 20:17), necessity demanded that Adam’s sons marry his daughters. At this point in human history the gene pool was pure enough to allow this to happen without harmful results.

  No matter how cut off Cain is from the rest of humanity, God in his mercy allows him the love of a family. We do not finally and decisively what happened to Cain. Did he ever repent? Probably not because the New Testament speaks almost unvaryingly of Cain in a negative sense using phrase like “the way of Cain” (Jude 11) and the one “who was of the wicked one
and murdered his brother” (1 John 3:12). But we do not know conclusively, he may have repented. Cain was not beyond the grace of God.

But it seems that Cain’s descendants grow up never experiencing God’s blessing because, as verse sixteen said, when Cain left for Nod, he "went out from the Lord’s presence."

Conclusion

As we began this message we did so by alluding to Jude 11 which speaks of “the way of Cain.” What actually does that mean and why is it to be avoided at all cost? Basically Cain rejected approaching God in the way in which God has established. Cain wanted to do it his own way, and like so many in our own day, Cain wanted to approach God on his own terms. Today many reject the idea of the shedding of blood as being necessary for approaching God as old-fashioned if not barbaric. But there is no approach to God except through the shed blood of Jesus. On this the Bible is very clear!

“And according to the law almost all things are purified with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission.” (Hebrews 9:22)

“but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.” (1 Peter 1:19)

“Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.” (John 14:6)

“Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12)
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Secondly, The ______________ of Sin – an unacceptable sacrifice. (vv. 3-5)

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