Genesis 1 – 11 – Fact not Fiction

Chapter 4

This chapter begins the new normal, post the garden of Eden

After being expelled from paradise, the next significant event Moses references is the birth of two sons to Adam & Eve

“Cain” = “acquire; possession”

“Abel” = “breath”

Since 1880, 1,365 boys in the U.S have been given the name Cain compared with 36,268 who’ve been named Abel

It shouldn’t surprise us, knowing their story, how Abel is a much more popular name

I keep circling back to how we must interpret Genesis literally, as actual history

One of the ways we verify its literal historicity is to look for references in the New Testament to verify this

We have already seen how Christ Himself substantiated Adam and Eve were real people when talked about marriage

So what about Cain and Abel?

Cain is mentioned in Hebrews 11:4; 1 John 3:12 and Jude 1:11

Abel is mentioned in Matthew 23:35; Luke 11:51; and Hebrews 11:4; 12:24

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So it’s clear five different authors within the New Testament believed that these brothers actually existed

Furthermore, these two sons are the first two humans to be born into a world of imperfection and inescapable, eventual mortality

I plan to return back to this very significant point later

In the end of verse two we are told some specific information about their professions

Cain was a farmer and Abel was a shepherd

Next, we are told there was a time when the two brothers simultaneously brought offerings to God

We aren’t told of any preexisting, God-given requirements for bringing an offering or even why these offerings were being presented

We can speculate but must be careful of reading into the text

Both Cain and Abel brought what would we have expected, according to their professions

Was this the first time they brought offerings to God?

Again, we’re given no background information to conclude this

However, given what transpires next, this makes the most sense

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They both come with an equal expectation – that God will readily accept their sacrifice

There may be an important distinction however with the quality of their sacrifices

We don’t know for sure whether Cain brought the best of his produce but we do know Abel brought the best of his flock

Verse four indicates Abel got God’s immediate approval but Cain did not

The most commonly believed reason for this is that it what because Abel brought a blood sacrifice and Cain did not

In other words, since we know God would eventually institute the animal blood sacrificial system for His own chosen people, the Israelites and since we know Christ’s own blood was shed, as the final, ultimate sacrifice upon the cross of Calvary, God must have communicated to Cain and Abel, He expected them to bring an animal sacrifice

This may have been the reason for Cain’s sacrifice not being accepted but the text doesn’t specify this to be true

I think there is something much more fundamental going on here

It’s not just what we bring but how we bring our sacrifices to God that’s of primary importance

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Motive is often more important to God than substance

It’s the “Why” and not only the “What” which matters

I would have to conclude Cain brought his sacrifice out of pride but Abel brought his with an attitude of humility

James 4:6: “But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: ‘God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.”

Peter echoes this very same statement in chapter five, verse five of his epistle

Proverbs 6:17 says of the sins God hates most, a proud look is at the top of the list

I also believe there’s a possible connection here to their professions and the possibility of pride being more prevalent with one than the other

Cain’s profession required more intensive labour than did Abel’s

Cain is cultivating, planting, watering, weeding, harvesting

Abel is simply watching over sheep – protecting and leading them to good pasture but he can’t take credit for much else

So Cain may have brought his offering more out of a strong sense of human accomplishment than did Abel

Abel couldn’t easily take as much credit for his sacrifice

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So why is this account recorded in Scripture?

What is the purpose behind it?

Here’s what we can conclude with certainty

The way of Cain is the way of insolence

The way of Abel is the way of humbleness

At the beginning of this sermon I stated how they were the first two humans to be born into a world of imperfection and inescapable, eventual mortality

As such, and based upon how they brought their sacrifices to God, they’re representative of every single human being who was and is subsequently born into the world throughout history

Everyone approaches God in only one of two ways, either pride or humility

“God, You need to accept me based upon what I’m bringing to You” rather than “God, I’m bringing this to you with no demandingness, only casting myself upon Your divine mercy”

What we observe in Cain and Abel, we see highlighted frequently throughout Scripture

There’s only two spiritual kingdoms

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Pride is clearly characteristic of those belonging to the kingdom of darkness and light

Conversely, humility is visibly characteristic of those belonging to the kingdom of light

Saul was a Cain, David was an Abel

The Pharisees were representative of Cain and the disciples were representative of Abel, especially Peter

The one thief on the cross was a Cain, the other one was an Abel

The Judaizers Paul confronted in Galatians were representative of the way of Cain while the true believers were like Abel

We’re either a Cain or an Abel

Cain and Abel were seeking relationship and acceptance

The road back to relationship is always through repentance

In the hymn, “Rock of Ages” it says “Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to Thy cross I cling”

What are we relying upon to gain eternal life?

Let’s make sure we’re coming to God like Abel, humbly casting ourselves upon God for His forgiveness while acknowledging His grace

One hundred years from now, will it be true we were a Cain or an Abel?

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Our responses will inevitably reveal our motives

I have seen this happen in connection to Christian service

A person can faithfully serve within the church a very long time but that’s no guarantee they have done so for the right reasons

How does such a person respond when he or she don’t receive the accolades they were expecting when they finally resign from their role?

How does such a person react when they are feeling like they’re being forced out of a role by someone who is younger?

How people respond shows whether they have really being serving Christ or looking for human fulfillment and affirmation

Our Christian service will either be rooted in humility or pride

As we pick up the story of Cain and Abel in Genesis 4, we see how one’s true motives are revealed through their responses

Abel’s sacrifice was instantly accepted by God while Cain’s sacrifice was abruptly rejected

What was Cain’s immediate response to this?

Was it honest self-introspection, true remorse, genuine repentance, and a recommitment to bring his next sacrifice with a humble heart?

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No, unfortunately, it was none of these responses

Rather, the text says he got really mad and quickly sunk into a depressive state

Remember, response reveals motive

Cain’s response was proof positive he didn’t bring his sacrifice before God in the right way with the right intentions

It’s important to distinguish between righteous and unrighteous anger

Anger that’s righteous is primarily directed toward sin

What expressions of anger are therefore justifiable?

Anger against injustice, immorality, racism, abuse, ungodliness

On the other hand, unrighteous anger is indicative of pride

What letter is in the middle of the word “pride?”

It’s the letter “i”

When we get angry, it is usually sourced within selfishness, self-pity, self-importance or self-sufficiency

Anytime a person wrongly loses their temper, they’re focusing almost exclusively on themselves – their expectations, needs, wants, importance

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Even though Cain’s response was clearly unwarranted, it is fascinating to note how God reached out to Cain

In a similar way, as He did with Adam and Eve, God asks Cain rhetorical questions, i.e. moving him toward honest self-awareness and accountability

Can you imagine how significantly traumatic and unnerving it would be to have God Himself confront us over any sin?

God’s message was, what’s your excuse for your angry response and your sulkiness and sullenness?

If you had brought your sacrifice with the right motives, would it not have been accepted by Me?

But since it is self-evident you did not, here’s a word of warning

Your sinful pride will master you unless you master it

There’s no indication Cain was in awe of God confronting him or in any way seriously took God’s questions to heart

Rather, he let his anger remain unchecked, unconfessed and unresolved

Cain internalized his anger

This led to a seething resentment against his brother, which in turn would soon have horrifying, devastating consequences

Verse eight seems to infer premeditation

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He intentionally strategized how to isolate his brother and lead him into a place of vulnerability

Before going into the field, Abel probably already sensed his brother’s hostility but he almost certainly did not anticipate what would happen next

Cain, mercilessly and without any empathy whatsoever, attacks Abel and kills him

God immediately confronts Cain with yet another rhetorical question

God certainly knew where Abel was and what Cain had done to him

God wanted Cain to acknowledge reality, accept personal accountability, and move to true confession

How did Cain answer?

He lied, He sidestepped responsibility

John MacArthur writes, “Cain’s sarcasm was a play on words, based on the fact that Abel was the ‘keeper’ of sheep.”

We are our brother’s keeper

Actually, we have an inescapable responsibility for the welfare and safety of every human being

The parable of the Good Samaritan substantiates this

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Abel was truly an innocent victim and did not deserve to lose his life

Cain got to live many more years upon the earth

Abel’s life was cut way short

Even though this was true, there’s a truth here we must not miss

Ultimately, it’s always better to be an Abel than a Cain

What is eternal is always more important than what is temporary

1 John 2:15-17 verifies this fact to be true: “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world – the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life – is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.”

It’s far better to live for only a short time on earth and be in God’s eternal family than to live a long time on earth and remain in the kingdom of darkness

Abel is listed as a hero of the faith in Hebrews 11:4 and as such is most certainly in heaven

Cain is mentioned in Jude 1:11 as an example of an apostate and therefore was never a recipient of everlasting life

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Let’s conclude with some practical teaching points regarding anger

It’s very challenging to live out our lives without ever losing our temper

Here’s a list of people who lost their cool, according to Scripture: Cain, Jacob, Esau, Pharaoh, Potiphar, Moses, Balaam, Balak, Zebel, Saul, Abner, Eliab, David, Absalom, Ahab, Asa, Uzziah, Ezra, Ahasuerus, Haman, Nebuchadnezzar, Jonah, Herod

Unrighteous anger is not to be characteristic of a genuine Christian, c.f. Galatians 5:20; Ephesians 4:26, 31; Colossians 3:8; James 1:19,20

Controlling our sinful emotions isn’t something we can accomplish in our own strength

We need to submit to the Holy Spirit and be under His control

Philippians 4:4-7 instructs us how to have victory through God’s omnipotence, omnipresence, and omniscience

The opposite of anger is joy and one cannot angrily lose their temper and being truly joyful at the very same time

Joy is “Jesus, others, yourself”

Believing God is always present changes our behavior patterns

Praying replaces anxiety with God’s abiding peace