



Blood on the Ground

Grace Reigns: God's Gospel for All Peoples Series #9

Genesis 3:8-24

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Even in the resurrection, we will never forget the wounds of the Lamb Who was slain to redeem us. We will worship Him forever. Let's turn in our Bibles to Genesis 4. It is a text in Scripture that will point us, as every passage ultimately does, to the Lord Jesus Christ and the work that He has done. I am borrowing my title from a great book by Alistair Paine that I have been reading these last couple of months. It is entitled The First Chapters of Everything and is full of insights on Genesis 1-4. He called his chapter on this passage "Blood on the Ground."

Let's pray as we look to God's Word together.

Father, we long to be wise and see with new eyes the truth that was written by Your hand. Morning and evening, we come to the light in Your law and in Your Word. We pray that You would give us eyes to see, ears to hear and hearts that believe that Your Word is near and is here in our Lord Jesus Christ. We pray that, through the presence of Your Spirit, You would enliven my preaching, illuminate our understanding and transform us wholly for You. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Two Sons

Our narrative begins with two sons in Genesis 4:1-2: *"Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, 'I have gotten a man with the help of the LORD.' And again, she bore his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a worker of the ground."*

We see in these first couple of verses that, though Adam and Eve had sinned terribly in the Garden of Eden, God's grace and mercy continue. There is a grace that is greater than all our sin. There is mercy in God's judgment. William Langland said, "All the wickedness in the world

that man might work or think is no more to the mercy of God than a live coal in the sea.” Remember that as the story continues.

Picture Eve holding a little baby in her hands, the first son born to humanity. With astonishment, she looked into the face of this child and thought, “Oh, he looks just like his father, Adam. With the Lord’s help, I have gotten a man. His name is Cain (which means ‘brought forth’ or ‘acquired’).” She acknowledged that this child was not her own doing. He was a gift from God.

I wonder if she looked at the baby and thought, “Could this son be the cure to the conflict we created back in the Garden of Eden? Would this be the one who will crush the serpent’s head (the one who was spoken of in Genesis 3:15)?”

Soon after, Cain had a little brother whose name was Abel, which introduced an ominous note into the story. Abel means “vapor” or “breath.” It is used metaphorically for that which is insubstantial and fleeting. Abel never spoke in this narrative. However, thousands of years later, Abel’s name would be on the lips of Jesus. Jesus spoke of the righteous prophets who were slain, from Abel to Zachariah (Matthew 23:34-36). The apostle who wrote the letter to the Hebrews honored Abel as the first hero in the Hall of Faith. In Hebrews 11:4, he said of Abel, “*And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks.*”

Abel did not speak in Genesis 4, but, according to the Bible, Abel is still speaking today. Cain and Abel grew up together. They were the first two direct offspring of the mother and father of the human race. As brothers often do, they bore a striking resemblance to one another. They laughed, played, wrestled, hunted and fished. They took vacations as a family in the unspoiled paradise that surrounded them. They talked late into the night about their hopes and dreams for the future. They listened to their mother and father teach them about the Lord God and how they had sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23), but God had not left them without a promise and without provision for hope and a future (Jeremiah 29:11).

Though their lives were different from ours in many ways that we cannot imagine, in the ways that matter most, Cain and Abel are just like us. Every single one of us has something in common with Cain and many of us, by God’s grace, have something precious in common with Abel. These two boys grew up to become honorable workmen. Each performed a necessary function for the development of civilization. Abel became a shepherd; Cain became a farmer. Together they were taught to worship and serve the Lord God.

Two Offerings

That brings us to verse three where we find two offerings. The text says, “*In the course of time Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground, and Abel also brought of*

the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering he had no regard.”

It says in verse three, *“In the course of time...”* Quite a bit of time had probably elapsed from their birth to this point in the story when they worshiped the Lord and offered sacrifices to the Lord as adult men. This may have been the end of a season of harvest or an appointed time to make sacrifices. Each came to present his offering to the Lord.

God made known His approval or His lack of approval to each of them. We are not told how they knew God’s response to their worship. Was there a fire that came down from heaven and consumed one of the sacrifices but not the other? Was there a voice from heaven that said, “I approve of this, but I don’t approve of that”? We don’t know, but both Abel and Cain knew. They each knew whose sacrifice God had approved.

The most important factor here is not what they offered to the Lord. In the Old Testament, God accepted sacrifices and offerings from the fruit of the ground and the land, as well as offerings of meat. So it is not a matter of blood sacrifice versus a sacrifice from the produce of the land. That is not the point.

It may be that Abel’s offering was more sacrificial than Cain’s was. There seems to be a more elaborate description of what Abel offered, as if he offered his very best to the Lord—the first born of his flock and some of their fat portions. It could be that Cain just gave the leftovers or a mere token.

However, what matters is not so much what they offered but how they offered it. It was the attitude of their hearts. Did you notice that, even the way it is worded, we can see God first looked at the person and then at his offering. We see this in the middle of verse four: *“And the Lord had regard for Abel and for his offering, but for Cain and his offering he had no regard.”*

Man looks at the outward appearance; God looks at the heart (1 Samuel 16:7). Man brings sacrifices and offerings; God is looking for a heart that is sacrificial and devoted to Him. What we do know from Hebrews 11 is that Abel’s offering was a reflection of a heart that trusted and treasured God, whereas Cain’s offering was not.

Look at what the writer to the Hebrews said in Hebrews 11:4-5: *“By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts. And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks.”* So it was his faith in God. He trusted and treasured God. A heart that did that made the difference between Cain and Abel.

The focus in Genesis is simply on the fact that one man’s offering was pleasing to the Lord; the other’s was not. That is something to which we need to pay attention. Do you

understand that God is not like a Goodwill depository? “Donations accepted here. We’ll take whatever you bring. Just drop it off.”

We can think so highly of ourselves, as if all we need to do is show up for worship and God is bound to be pleased with whatever we give Him. It is like when you were young and went to someone’s house to eat. In the car on the way, your parents say, “Just be happy with whatever they put on your plate. Take it and don’t complain.”

The prideful human heart asserts, “God should be pleased that I pay Him any attention at all. If I give Him something in worship, He should accept it. Preferably, He should give me a tax-deductible receipt at the end of the year for my offering. God should be happy with whatever I bring Him.”

Here’s the point: the ultimate test of any act of worship is whether or not God accepts it. Does it please the Lord or does it not please Him? If God is not pleased with our worship, the fault does not lie with God, as if He is too picky or too hard to please. If God is not pleased with our worship, the fault lies in us. God sets the terms for how people are to approach Him and serve Him and God has exclusive standards. We don’t know how Cain and Abel knew those terms, but we know that God knew and was able to judge which man’s worship was acceptable and which man’s was not.

What are the terms of worship today? They are exclusive. Jesus said in John 14:6, “*I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*” The only way to come to God the Father in worship is by trusting and treasuring God the Son. If we deny Jesus Christ and marginalize Him and His work on the cross, if we do not trust Him and treasure what we have celebrated here at the Lord’s Table, that kind of worship is not acceptable to God. Self-righteous worship is not acceptable to God. Mindless or obligatory worship, just going through the motions, or any kind of worship that is an attempt to earn credit with God rather than a heart expression of trust and treasuring God, is not pleasing to the Lord. God sets the terms. He has the right to establish what pleases Him and what does not.

How do you feel about that? That made Cain angry. Look at what the text says in verse five: “*So Cain was very angry, and his face fell.*” It made him angry that Abel was regarded by God and he was not. It made him angry that his way of doing religion was not enough.

You may be able to think about people in your life who have a closer relationship with the Lord right now than you do. How do you view those people? Do you look up to them or do you become jealous and critical of them? Do you scorn them? We can all be like Cain.

Alistair Paine writes, “In our pride, there is nothing which irks us more than the suggestions that we cannot ourselves set the terms of our approach to God.” That irks us. We

want to decide what is pleasing to God—what we are going to do in worship to approach Him and how we are going to live. What we see here in Cain is anger that says, “Why isn’t my way acceptable to You?” It is an argument at root about Who is God. Who is God? Are we free to set the terms or is He?

Two Paths

So we have two sons: Cain and Abel. There are two offerings: one that is acceptable to God and one that is not. That brings us to two paths in verses six and seven. Verse six says, *“The Lord said to Cain, ‘Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen?’”* God takes notice of all our moods and restlessness. Caring people often notice, too, because they can read it all over our faces.

God saw the anger in Cain and He saw his downcast face. God offered him an opportunity to repent. In verse seven, He said, *“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 for you, but you must rule over it.”*

There is great mercy here. When God disapproves and corrects our hearts, attitudes and conduct, saying, “That is not right,” and calling us down a different path of repentance, that is not God’s meanness; that is God’s mercy. God does not call us down a path of repentance in order to condemn us, but in order to transform us—to take out the stony heart of unbelief and give us a tender heart that is pleasing to Him (Ezekiel 36:26-27). It is a gift of God when He convicts us of our sin. I hope you are learning by the grace of God to receive conviction of sin as a gracious gift. Welcome it and seek it because God is leading us on a path of goodness when He brings us down the pathway of repentance.

What is the alternative to the pathway of repentance? Notice verse seven is the first time in the Bible that the word “sin” is mentioned. Of course, it is not the first time the act of sin occurs; that was back in chapter three. But here it came from outside Adam and Eve; it was like a vandalous intruder. Here sin is very near. It is crouching at the doorway of a man’s heart. It is like a lion or tiger waiting to devour, or like a serpent poised to strike and sink its fangs into the bloodstream. Sin is predatory. Sin is a parasite. Now it is going to invade humanity. There is now something within the nature of man himself that is friendly and inviting toward sin. We must master it or it will rule over us.

I heard Tim Keller say many times, “First, you do sin. Then sin does you.” It takes over your life. Listen to how C. S. Lewis describes the conviction of sin that the Holy Spirit began to work in him when he was converted by God’s grace. As he began to examine his character in the light of God’s truth, here is what he discovered:

For the first time, I examined myself with a seriously practical purpose and there I found what appalled me: a zoo of lusts; a bedlam of ambitions; a nursery of fears; a harem of fondled hatreds. My name was legion.

As the Holy Spirit sheds His searching light into our hearts, we find we are just like Cain and C. S. Lewis. Our hearts contain a zoo of lusts, a bedlam of ambitions, a nursery of fears and a harem of fondled hatreds. We know this is accurate because we tremble at some of the vile thoughts that pass through our minds. We think, "Oh! If sin were to carry me down its drifting pathway, how evil I could become!"

We agree with the Apostle Paul, who said, *"For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh... For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members"* (Romans 7:18a; 22-23). When I want to do right, evil lies nearby, crouching at the door. We must master sin or it will rule over us. There are only two paths: the path of faith and repentance that leads to life, or a path of tyranny and bondage to sin that leads to death and destruction. Sadly, Cain decisively and stubbornly resisted God's voice and traveled down the pathway of tyranny and bondage to sin.

Two Kinds of Blood

Genesis 4:8-16 says:

Cain spoke to Abel his brother. And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him. Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is Abel your brother?" He said, "I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?" And the LORD said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground. And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. 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." Cain said to the LORD, "My punishment is greater than I can bear. 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." 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. Then Cain went away from the presence of the LORD and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden.

Here we are just 87 verses into the Bible and we already have the first murder. How did it come to this? D. A. Carson wrote a poem that says:

The Paradise of Eden—what warm light,
Primordial glory, sweetly baffled the world,
Reflecting the Creator's joy unfurled
Across what once had been bleak nothing's night.
Called into being by its Maker's might,
The universe, described as "good" (blessed word!)
By pure Omniscience took strength and hurled
Itself through trackless space in sheer delight.
On one small globe, creation's jewel, a pair
In God's own image crafted, chose the worst
Offense, rebelled—a sordid, cheap affair;
And Holiness made Paradise accursed.
Appointed as vice-regents at God's side,
Decisively they disobeyed—and died.

Death became literal in their family as they faced the nightmare parents cannot even imagine of their first two sons. The older killed the younger. Death came into their own household, having come from the hands of their own flesh and blood, brother against brother. One commentator says, "The tragedy of it is threefold: that the context of the first murder was worship, the victim a brother and the perpetrator a man who would not even let God Himself talk him out of his crime."

It was premeditated. In verse eight, as Cain spoke to Abel, he got him out of the field where no one else could see and rose up against his brother. He did not even have a gun to put on a clinical distance between himself and the one he killed. It is likely he used his own hands to wring the life out of his little brother, Abel.

In verse nine, when God came to him and asked, "Where is Abel, your brother?" he denied responsibility and lied to the Lord. "I don't know. Am I my brother's keeper?" In verse ten, God made it clear that, although Abel was speechless in this narrative, Abel spoke from the ground. And God heard the voice of Abel's blood crying to Him from the ground. Do you see that in verse ten? *"And the LORD said, 'What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground.'"*

Blood and life belong to God the Creator alone. When you commit murder and destroy life, you are taking something that belongs to God. Gerhard von Rad said, "Spilled blood cannot be shoveled underground. It cries aloud to heaven. It complains directly to the Lord of life." That is reassuring, because we live in a world where people literally get away with murder. But God hears the blood crying. It is the blood of millions of unborn children. It is the blood of

slaughtered Holocaust victims. It is the blood of unsolved homicides. It is the blood of persecuted martyrs. It is the voice of witnesses who cry out in Revelation 6:10 with a loud voice, *“O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?”*

God hears that blood crying from the ground. God sees. God knows. How reassuring!

There is also a sharp edge to those words. Sin leaves its stain. Sin leaves its mark in the ground, an indelible mark. It may not be blood on the ground. Maybe it is fingerprints on the weapon. Or it may be the history on your web browser. It may be a trail of credit card receipts, deposit slips, texts and emails that have fallen into the hands of someone for whom they were not intended to be seen. However it happens, you can be assured of this: eventually, inevitably your sin will find you out. God sees. God hears. God knows.

The Bible tells us, *“Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap”* (Galatians 6:7). In Genesis 4:11-12 God said to Cain, *“And now you are cursed from the ground...”* This was a horrible thing to hear, as it was the first time a human being had been cursed by God. In chapter three, God did not curse Adam and Eve. He cursed the ground and brought consequences for the woman’s sin, but he had great mercy on the man and woman themselves. Now, here is a man created in God’s image who comes under God’s curse. The very ground that he works is no longer going to yield to him its strength. He is going to be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth.

When we see our sin for what it is—for what it really is—it is more than we can bear. When we see our sin for what it really is, we will cry out, *“The remembrance of them is grievous to us; the burden of them is intolerable”* (from The Book of Common Prayer). That is what Cain did. Verse 13 says, *“Cain said to the LORD, ‘My punishment is greater than I can bear. 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.’”*

Even though Cain was only concerned for himself and driven by terror and self-pity, God was merciful to this, the first murderer. He put a mark on Cain. We are not sure what that was, but it was a sign to everyone that this criminal was under God’s protection. *“Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord”* (Romans 12:19). It is not for man to take vengeance into his own hands.

In verse 16, Cain tragically took another step closer to the chasm of hell itself. He fled from the presence of the Lord and settled in the land of Nod—which means “wandering”—east of Eden. Dark is the stain that we cannot hide *. The remembrance of our sin is grievous to us. The burden is intolerable. Dark is the stain. What can avail to wash it away? *

(* Lyrics quoted from Grace Greater than Our Sin by Julia H. Johnston, 1911)

Listen to God's Word through the Prophet Isaiah in Isaiah 1:18-20:

*"Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD:
though your sins are like scarlet,
they shall be as white as snow;
though they are red like crimson,
they shall become like wool.
If you are willing and obedient,
you shall eat the good of the land;
but if you refuse and rebel,
you shall be eaten by the sword;
for the mouth of the LORD has spoken."*

The Lord takes sin so seriously. He sees it. He hears it. He sees the blood crying from the ground. How, then, can the Lord speak words of pardon like that? It is because there is another kind of blood. We read of it in Hebrews 12:24, which says, *"[You have come] to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel."*

What does Abel's blood speak from the ground? It says, "Justice must be done! Vengeance must occur! For I have been slain innocently. I, the *imago dei*, did not deserve to be killed like this." It is a blood that cries for justice.

But there is a blood that speaks a better word. And when this blood speaks, "Justice smiles and asks no more." When this blood falls to the ground, God says, "It is finished! The price is paid." When the blood of Jesus covers us, our sins are forgiven. They are cleansed. They are covered. They are cast behind God's back. They are removed from us as far as the east is from the west (Psalm 103:12). They are passed over, trampled underfoot and cast into the depths of the sea. Through the blood of Jesus, God is able to blot out our transgressions like a cloud in the sky or a morning mist. Through the blood of Jesus, God is able to hide His face from our sins and blot out all our iniquities.

Because of the blood of Jesus, the blood of the New Covenant, God says to those who trust in Him: *"For I will be merciful toward [your] iniquities, and I will remember [your] sins no more"* (Hebrews 8:12). That blood speaks a better word than the blood of Abel! Blood is available to cleanse you and me.

What can wash away my sin?
Nothing but the blood of Jesus
What can make me whole again?
Nothing but the blood of Jesus

Oh, precious is the flow
That makes me white as snow
No other fount I know
Nothing but the blood of Jesus

(Nothing but the Blood by Robert Lowry & William Doane, 1876)

Two sons: Cain and Abel.

Two offerings: one that is acceptable to God and one that is not.

Two paths: a path of repentance that leads to life and a path of hardening that leads to death.

Two kinds of blood: a blood that cries out for our condemnation, that rises and accuses; a blood that flows from Calvary, crying, "Forgive him. O, forgive. Forgive."

Two Humanities

We are now left with two humanities in the remaining pages of Scripture. There are two lines that you can trace throughout Scripture. Next week, we are going to have a guest preacher with us from the Church of England. His name is Sam Alberry and he is going to speak to us about these two humanities in Genesis 4-5.

Francis Schaeffer said, "Since Cain, everyone in the world stands either in the place of Cain or the place of Abel. From this time on, in the flow of history there are two humanities. The one humanity says there is no God, or it makes gods in its own imagination, or it tries to come to God in its own way. The other humanity comes to the true God in God's way. There is no neutral ground."

By nature, all of us are like Cain. But by grace through faith in Jesus, we can be brought into the line of Abel—a righteous man who lived by faith. How do you know which line you are in? Listen to what the Apostle John said. There are two evidences I want to share before I close.

First John 3:11-15 says, *"For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. 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. Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you. We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death. Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him."*

So Cain hated Abel, but Abel did not hate Cain. We should love one another. Loving one another is one piece of evidence that proves we are like Abel. Another evidence that proves you are in the line of Abel is when you face hostility from the world, just as Abel and Jesus did.

Which line do you see yourself in? By faith in Jesus, be brought out of the darkness of Cain's lineage and into the light and life of Abel's. Even if the world slays you, God will remember you. God will hold you close to His heart, welcoming you into His home forever.

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