



A Tale of Two Families

Grace Reigns: God's Gospel for All Peoples Series #10

Genesis 4:17-5:32

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Introduction from Pastor David Sunday:

It is my joy and privilege to introduce our guest speaker to you this morning. Sam Allberry serves as one of the pastors at St. Mary's Church in Maidenhead, England. That is about an hour west of London and is an evangelical congregation in the Church of England. Sam studied theology at the University of Oxford in Wycliffe Hall. He is the author of a number of books, two of which I have read and appreciated very much. One is Lifted: Experiencing the Resurrection Life, which would be a great read leading up to Easter or the weeks following Easter. It is all about the implications of the resurrection for the Christian life.

Another book I just read and highly recommend is called Is God Anti-gay? Sam has a burden to speak clearly and compassionately with an uncompromising and biblical witness, but with great love and mercy, to those who struggle with the issue of homosexuality. This book is a much-needed resource for the church. Sam has been to the United States before, but he has never been to the Midwest until this week. This is his first time in the Chicagoland area.

Good morning! Thank you very much for what I now know is a Midwestern welcome. It is better than all the other welcomes I have had so far in the States. It is good to be with you this morning. I cannot help but notice that all the songs we have sung thus far have been by Brits, so I appreciate that form of welcome as well.

We are looking at Genesis 4-5 today. Let's begin with Genesis 4:17 and we will go through the end of Genesis 5. If you scan your eyes over those verses, you will realize it looks a little bit like a telephone book. It is just a long list of names.

Let me take you back a few years. In September of 1999, a set of words appeared in movie theater screens across the world. Never have a few short sentences in a movie theater caused so much excitement and then led to so much disappointment. These are the words that appeared, so see if you can recognize what I am speaking about: “Every generation has a legend. Every journey has a first step. Every saga has a beginning.” This was the beginning of the trailer for Star Wars: Episode One, which is why I say such words in a cinema screen have never caused so much excitement only to lead to crushing, crushing disappointment. George Lucas, you destroyed a little piece of my childhood right there.

We were excited because of what these words seemed to promise. We were going to find out how it all began—where all the characters and dynamics of the film came from. Instead, we ended up with a movie that was about trade negotiations, midi-chlorians and Jar Jar Binks. It was a crushing disappointment indeed.

Now, we love the idea of going back to the start, don't we? We love the idea of tracing out the origins. That is true of a movie series and it is also true in real life. We recognize that, at some level, finding out where we have come from helps to make sense of where we are. Understanding our past helps us make sense of our present. That is why these opening chapters of Genesis are so important for us to study. They may feel like unfamiliar territory, but, as far as the human race is concerned, these chapters of Genesis are our family history. This is where we are from; this is what makes sense of who we are and of whom we have become. This is our story.

We are looking at two genealogies. The first is the family line of Cain in 4:17-26. The second is the whole of chapter five, which is the family line of Seth. I am sure most of us are tempted to skip over these passages in the Bible when we are reading on our own. Am I the only one who does that? We just read a list of names, begettings and numbers, and it all feels a bit bewildering. We think, “Well, it doesn't look like there will be much there I need to notice,” and then, “Oh, Noah's next in chapter six, so I'll just skip ahead to that bit.”

I have a distant family relative in Western Australia who has, for some reason, made it his life's mission to explore our family history. He comes over to the UK once every couple of years and does some digging and rummaging around, getting us a few more years back in our timeline. He then presents to the rest of the family his findings in thorough, exhaustive detail. We nod politely, thinking, “Okay, that's nice.” But it is not quite our thing, even when it is our own family. Therefore, when it is someone else's family, it is even harder to get interested. (By the way, if you are looking for pretentious baby names, these chapters could be very helpful for you if you are Bohemian and into that kind of thing. “Have you met my son, Mahalel?”)

I am sure most of us would look at these words and think, “We have just sung this morning of needing the Spirit to make us more like Christ.” I’m sure many of us come with things on our hearts—things we would love the Lord to do in our lives—and then we come to these words and think, “Yeah, but how’s God going to do anything in our lives through this kind of passage?”

I want to suggest that these words were given to us for our edification (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Actually, I do not want to suggest that; I just want to say it. We know this from the New Testament. All these words have been given to us by the Spirit and preserved by Him, so that He can work in our lives through them. These two family lines have been kept for us to look at and learn from. In the case of each of these families, we see something of ourselves in them. They make sense of who we are and where we have come from.

On one occasion back in the early 90s, President George H.W. Bush called on American families to be a lot more like the Waltons and a lot less like the Simpsons. As you can imagine, the makers of The Simpsons had a field day with that particular bit of publicity. As we compare these two families, it is not that we are meant to be one and not the other. Both actually tell the story of who we are.

There are certain things both families have in common. Both families descended from Adam. There are the descendants of Cain and the descendants of Seth. Seth and Cain were both sons of Adam. Both of these family lines have the same shape. If you were to make them into a diagram, you would end up with a long vertical line tracing several generations of sons, and at the very bottom would be the base of a tripod. You would end up with it splitting into three. In each genealogy, we end with three sons being named and mentioned.

In 4:20-22, there are the three sons of Lamech—Jabal, Jubal and Tubal-cain. You might want to meet them before you find their names funny because they are pretty serious guys. In 5:32, the three sons of Noah are mentioned—Shem, Ham and Japheth. Both of the family trees share the same ancestry, come from the same stock and have the same shape. In each case, the seventh generation is singled out for particular comment. In chapter four, it is Lamech, and in verses 19 and following, the writer dwells on him for a moment. In chapter five, the seventh generation is a man named Enoch; in verse 24, we briefly dwell on him.

These two particular individuals show us how different these families are. Lamech takes life; Enoch escapes death. Both of those individuals give us the flavor and something of the lesson we are to learn from each family. As we go through, we will learn something of what God would have us know about ourselves. As we look at the family of Cain, we see progress in culture,

but we also see progress in sin. As we look at the line of Seth, we see the reign of death, but we also see the hope of life.

Progress in Culture & Progress in Death

Let's begin with 4:17, where we find the family of Cain. There is progress in culture, but there is also progress in death. Let's read the first few verses of this family tree. Genesis 4:17 says, "*Cain knew his wife, and she conceived and bore Enoch. When he built a city, he called the name of the city after the name of his son, Enoch.*"

When we last met Cain earlier in chapter four, he was coming to terms with God's judgment. He killed his brother, Abel, and God had judged him. God had also shown him mercy. Do you remember that God had also given him a mark of protection? Clearly, that mark of protection worked and Cain was able to live and have a family. Therefore, we see another aspect of God's mercy. Cain was enabled to multiply and increase in number. He was able to fulfill that aspect of God's calling on humanity.

We also notice in verse 17 that Cain built a city. God had condemned him in verse 12 to being a fugitive and wanderer. It may have been a sign of rebellion against God when Cain decided to construct a city and put his security in his own hands. Nevertheless, as we trace down his family tree, we see that his family was a very productive one.

Verse 18-22 says:

To Enoch was born Irad, and Irad fathered Mehujael, and Mehujael fathered Methushael, and Methushael fathered Lamech. And Lamech took two wives. The name of the one was Adah, and the name of the other Zillah. Adah bore Jabal; he was the father of those who dwell in tents and have livestock. His brother's name was Jubal; he was the father of all those who play the lyre and pipe. Zillah also bore Tubal-cain; he was the forger of all instruments of bronze and iron. The sister of Tubal-cain was Naamah.

It is interesting that, as we see Cain's family line, we see a certain amount of cultural flourishing. Seven generations of Cain's family were recorded. The last time we came across the number seven, it related to God's creativity. Here we see it has to do with human creativity. In Lamech's sons, we see the beginning of animal husbandry in verse 20. We see the beginning of musical culture in verse 21. (Those of you who played instruments today, keep in mind that this is where that side of life came from.) In verse 22, we have the beginnings of metallurgy—"Tubal-cain...was the forger of all instruments of bronze and iron." All of this came from one family. There was progress in culture. Humanity was given the task of both filling and working the land.

We now see that happened with increasing creativity. Taken on its own, Cain's line shows us that humanity advanced technologically, artistically and culturally. This is a story of progress.

The sad truth is that is not the only thing we see going on in Cain's family. Yes, they were advanced in a number of areas, but they were still the same kind of people we have always had. The problems we have had with Adam and Eve remained in Cain's family. While we see progress and culture, we also sadly see progress in sin. The sin that marked Adam and Eve was also present in Cain, and now we see that same sin in Cain's line. It was not just transmitted through the generations, but, sadly, we see that the sin was intensified. Each generation seems to be more in the grip of sin.

Therefore, we meet Lamech, who appears in the end of verse 18. Two things are immediately apparent about Lamech. The writer paused on him and wants us to take a good look at him. The first thing we notice is his bigamy. Verse 19 says, "*And Lamech took two wives.*" In Genesis 2, we saw that God created Eve for Adam. The writer then applied that as the basis and model of all human marriage—God's design for one man and one woman to become one flesh. Yet, Lamech's appetite was bigger. Sadly, his appetite was not just excessive in this particular area of life.

Secondly, we see he was characterized by violence as well. Have a look with me at verses 23-24. Lamech was evidently a bit of a poet and he wrote a poem for his wife. That may sound like a lovely, romantic thing to do. Husbands, take note. No doubt, his middle son was able to play it on the lyre and pipe. However, listen to the words of this poem for the family singsong:

*Adah and Zillah, hear my voice;
you wives of Lamech, listen to what I say:
I have killed a man for wounding me,
a young man for striking me.
If Cain's revenge is sevenfold,
then Lamech's is seventy-sevenfold.*

I am told the Hebrew is sophisticated, so this is good poetry. There is parallelism, word play and rhyme. However, for all the beauty of the craft, the content is horrific. This poem celebrates excessive violence.

Some time ago, there was a news story that came out of London. There was a pedestrian footbridge at one point in London that went across the Thames River. On the news, there was a story about a young man who had been walking across that footbridge early one evening (it was not particularly late or dark). The nearby security camera picked up a small group of people walking toward him from the other direction. They encountered him about the middle of the bridge, halfway across. On the footage, it is evident that this gang beat this lad to death and then

threw his body into the water. They did not know him and, apparently, he had not done anything to provoke this attack. What made it even worse was the next camera picked up this gang after they came off the bridge and walked down the street. It showed them laughing together, slapping each other on the back.

This story affected many of us in the greater London area. What was particularly horrific was not just that something violent had been done, but these guys got a kick out of unprovoked violence. That is the kind of man we have in Lamech. He said, "I will kill a boy just for the slightest kind of grievance."

You can imagine some poor kid in Lamech's neighborhood riding his bike, accidentally knocking into Lamech on his way through. Lamech would say, "I will even kill a lad just for doing that." He was proud that he outdid Cain. "If Cain's revenge is sevenfold, mine is seventy-sevenfold." God had promised punishment on anyone who killed Cain, but Lamech took that punishment and turned it into a permission to exact unlimited vengeance on anyone for anything. Therefore, the sin of Cain multiplied in Lamech. Yes, there was progress in culture, but, sadly, there was also progress in sin.

Friends, I think the lesson from that is very clear to us. Human development is no guard against wickedness. However much we may advance in certain areas, we will always have the same capacity for sin. We will never make ourselves better people. We see that whenever a new, big technology comes along. We see how much that can improve human life and the good that can come from it. However, we can also quickly see the evil that can be done with it.

Those of us of a certain age will remember when the internet was first invented. We also remember how quickly that revolutionized communication, tasks and everything else. We do so many things now that we cannot imagine how we would even think about doing those things before the time of the internet. Yet, we cannot help but be conscious that with that advance has come many new areas and avenues for human wickedness.

Think of the burgeoning online porn industry and the human trafficking that feeds it. Think of the rings of child abusers who use the internet to plan together or of the terrorists who use that kind of communication to plan acts of wickedness. Any advance is never an improvement on human character.

You could also think of the advances in medical technology, the way we can now save unborn lives in a way we never could before. Yet, down the corridor in the same hospital, medical technology is being used to end unborn lives in a way that would have never been possible for previous generations.

Friends, we must never believe the myth that we are on a journey of progress as human beings. We develop new forms of culture and technology and new capabilities, but we do not become better people. If there is one lesson we learn from the family of Cain, it is that there is progress in both culture and in sin.

The Apostle Paul describes humanity in general in Romans 1, saying, “They invent ways of doing evil.” How true that is! We have come up with ways of doing evil in our generation that no one would have thought of before. However, to say we do not put our hope in human progress is not to say there is no hope.

Have a look at the end of chapter four. Before we get to Seth’s line in chapter five, we are given a movie trailer for it at the end of chapter four. Verses 25-26 say:

And Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and called his name Seth, for she said, “God has appointed for me another offspring instead of Abel, for Cain killed him.” To Seth also a son was born, and he called his name Enosh. At that time people began to call upon the name of the LORD.

Like all good movie trailers, you are given the information you need. It is short and punchy. Cain was not the last son born to Adam and Eve. Seth comes and with him comes a note of hope. So Eve can say in verse 25, “*God has appointed for me another offspring,*” or, literally, another seed. That is such a loaded term because God had promised back in chapter three that a seed of the woman would be the means God uses to crush Satan. We have seen the need for that with sons one and two. So maybe son three is going to be the one to undo what the devil has wrought on humanity.

Our hope is not unfounded because in verse 26 we begin to see people calling on the name of the Lord. It is as if the writer is saying, “Yes, the legacy of Cain may have been culture and murder, but the legacy of Seth is going to be worship.” Therefore, we move on from the line of Cain to the line of Seth, from chapter four to chapter five.

Death Reigns

Let’s look at the second of these two families. The writer begins 5:1 with a bit of a recap. He begins by saying, “*This is the book of the generations of Adam...*” and then we get a kind of “Previously, on Genesis...” moment. Verse one continues, “*When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God. Male and female he created them, and he blessed them and named them Man when they were created.*”

We get a recap of what happened in Genesis 1, and then we continue in verse three, which says, “When Adam had lived 130 years, he fathered a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth.” In other words, God’s likeness was reproduced in Adam, then Adam’s likeness was reproduced in Seth. We are fallen but still bear the image of God. We still bear the likeness of our Creator.

Have a look with me through the next couple of verses. As I read a chunk of this genealogy, look at the pattern of how it has been crafted. Verse four says:

The days of Adam after he fathered Seth were 800 years; and he had other sons and daughters. Thus all the days that Adam lived were 930 years, and he died.

When Seth had lived 105 years, he fathered Enosh. Seth lived after he fathered Enosh 807 years and had other sons and daughters. Thus all the days of Seth were 912 years, and he died.

When Enosh had lived 90 years, he fathered Kenan. Enosh lived after he fathered Kenan 815 years and had other sons and daughters. Thus all the days of Enosh were 905 years, and he died.

When Kenan had lived 70 years, he fathered Mahalalel. Kenan lived after he fathered Mahalalel 840 years and had other sons and daughters. Thus all the days of Kenan were 910 years, and he died.

Do you notice that the pattern you get there in every paragraph is formatted the same for each entry? You get the person’s age, the age when their first son was born, their subsequent lifespan and news of other kids they may have had; then you get their total age before we are told that they died. That pattern is repeated the whole way through.

The other thing I am sure you noticed as I read those verses is the length of time people lived. I cannot help but notice that Adam lived 930 years; Seth lived 912 years. That is a lot of candles on a birthday cake! But I take it we are meant to understand those numbers literally. We know how careful this writer is in giving these details. It may well be that God enabled these unusually long lifespans to allow for rapid multiplication. He told Adam and Eve to fill the earth. So allowing people to have childbearing years that went on for centuries would be a pretty good way of doing that.

Notice also that, however long people lived, none of them ever made it to 1,000. Some of them got pretty close. In verse 27, we see that Methusaleh got as far as 969 years. Whilst the greeting card shop would have had birthday cards saying “Happy 250th Birthday!”, “Happy 300th Birthday!”, or “Happy 700th Birthday!”, no one would have needed to buy a “Congratulations on

your first millennium!” birthday card. I think that is significant because we are told elsewhere in Scripture that a thousand years is but a day to the Lord (Psalm 90:4; 1 Peter 3:8). However long these lifespans may look to us, they barely register in the light of eternity for God. No one lives to be even a day in God’s sight, so do not be impressed by those big numbers. Human life remains fleeting.

I think the point the writer wants us to notice is that death catches up with them all. The point is not how long they lived but how inevitably they died. So we have this refrain with each entry: “...and he died.” One writer says it is like a bell ringing. “Every single time, however long they live, however many children they produce, eventually, they die. The bell rings again and again and again.” So the Apostle Paul can sum up this whole period by saying, “*Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam...*” (Romans 5:14).

That is a reminder to us just how unavoidable death is. However long you live, there will always be those words, “...and he died.” We cannot legislate against it. We cannot bribe it. We cannot outspend it. We cannot outrun it. You may be very wealthy, popular, able, strong, intelligent, attractive or powerful, but it makes no difference. Think of how much kale you have eaten in the last few days. At some point, someone will write of you, “...and he died.” We live in a world where people die and there is nothing we can do about that. It comes to us and it comes to those close to us. Try as we might to ignore it, there is no way we can avoid it.

Last week I read a novel by C.S. Lewis called That Hideous Strength. There is a point in the novel where one of the main characters, a man called Mark, suddenly realizes he is on a course of action that is likely to lead to his death. He has made a decision to resist a certain thing that is going on around him and he is fairly sure he is about to be hanged for what he has done. We read this in the novel:

Mark had never till now been at close quarters with death. Now, glancing down at his hand (because his hands were cold and he had been automatically rubbing them), it came to him as a totally new idea that this very hand, with its five nails and the yellow tobacco-stain on the inside of the second finger, would one day be the hand of a corpse, and later the hand of a skeleton. He did not exactly feel horror, though on the physical level he was aware of a choking sensation; what made his brain reel was the preposterousness of the idea. This was something incredible, yet at the same time quite certain.

I was very struck reading that. It occurred to me to look at my own hand and think, “One day this will be the hand of a corpse and, after that, the hand of a skeleton.” Death reigns.

Death is not just unavoidable. We already know from Genesis that death is meaningful. God had warned Adam that the penalty for sin would be death—“...*you will surely die*” (Genesis 2:17). Satan had mocked, “...*you will not surely die*” (3:4), but now we realize Who was right. We have had the first death in chapter four and we are about to have many, many more in chapter six with the account of the flood. Every single death reminds us that the human race is not right with God.

The Hope of Life

However, this family tree shows us more than the reign of death. It also shows us the hope of life. We have seen the pattern you have at each of these entries. The format is the same. There is one moment where the pattern is interrupted, so let me just read a few more verses. See if you can spot where the change suddenly comes.

Genesis 5:18-24 says:

When Jared had lived 162 years he fathered Enoch. Jared lived after he fathered Enoch 800 years and had other sons and daughters. Thus all the days of Jared were 962 years, and he died.

When Enoch had lived 65 years, he fathered Methuselah. Enoch walked with God after he fathered Methuselah 300 years and had other sons and daughters. Thus all the days of Enoch were 365 years. Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him.

Friends, when you read the genealogy, that sentence suddenly feels like a needle scraping across a record. (Some of you need to know what needles and records are and I will explain them to you after the service.) It suddenly feels abrupt. You are poised to read, “...and then he died,” but you don’t. You read, “*Enoch walked with God...*” Twice we are told that Enoch walked with God.

In the Old Testament, walking before God was a way of speaking about obedience, but walking with God speaks of intimacy. It is wonderful, isn’t it? God can be walked with. We can know His presence through life. We can know Him personally. It is in the midst of this chapter, of all places, with death everywhere, that we are reminded we can walk with God.

Let me read you a verse from Hebrews 11:5, looking back on the life of Enoch. We read these words: “*By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death, and he was not found, because God had taken him.*” It is wonderful, isn’t it? In the midst of a passage where people die, we suddenly see an exception to that. The bell is silent when it comes to Enoch. It is possible to be born outside of Eden, to inherit and repeat the sin of Adam, to be born as someone

under the judgment of God and yet, to come to know God, to trust Him, to walk with Him and for death to be robbed of its sting. The reign of death, yes, but also the hope of life.

Friends, as we finish this particular family tree, there is one other moment when that pattern is broken. Let me carry on reading verses 25-32, which say:

When Methuselah had lived 187 years, he fathered Lamech. Methuselah lived after he fathered Lamech 782 years and had other sons and daughters. Thus all the days of Methuselah were 969 years, and he died.

When Lamech had lived 182 years, he fathered a son and called his name Noah, saying, "Out of the ground that the LORD has cursed, this one shall bring us relief from our work and from the painful toil of our hands." Lamech lived after he fathered Noah 595 years and had other sons and daughters. Thus all the days of Lamech were 777 years, and he died.

After Noah was 500 years old, Noah fathered Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

Once again, the pattern is broken with Noah. As Noah arrived, his father could not help but pause and show us his own aspiration for his son. "*Out of the ground that the LORD has cursed, this one shall bring us relief*" literally says, "This one shall bring us rest." Rest from what? Rest from "*our work and from the painful toil of our hands.*" In other words, rest from the consequences of sin.

What hope is pinned on Noah? Answer: the story is left hanging there. This family is going somewhere. With Cain's family, we are given seven generations and then that is it; we never hear from them again. But with Seth's family, we have ten generations, from Adam to Noah; then another ten generations, from Noah to Abraham, when you get to Genesis 11.

This family went from Adam the Fallen to Noah the Rescued to Abraham the Promised. It shows us that history is going somewhere. It is not just an endless cycle of begetting and dying. The destination is hinted at by the life of Enoch because Enoch lived, walked with God and then God took him.

Jerry Bridges says that Enoch is his favorite Bible character. He writes, "I am a man of simple gifts. I may never be an Abraham or a Noah or a David or a Paul or a Moses. But I can be an Enoch." Friends, all of us can be. If we walk with the Lord, we will not find that the last line of our story is "...and he died." The last line of our story is that the Lord took us to be with Him. Jesus said, "*Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life*" (John 5:24).

Let's pray, friends.

Our Father, we see that, left to our own devices as a race, we can bring about progress and culture, but we also see progress in sin and the inevitability of death. Our Father, that is the story of the human race. We thank You it is not the only story the Bible tells us. We thank You for the story of those who walk with You; those who call on Your name; those who know You and trust You and love You; and those who go to be with You and see life, even after death. Father, we thank You for the words of our Lord Jesus Christ. As we come to Him, we have already crossed from death to life. The death we will one day die is but the beginning of an eternal life with You on a new creation. Father, even as far back as Genesis 5, we thank You for the way this passage can hint at the life that Christ has come to bring us. We thank You for the opportunity we have to enjoy that life now and pray that the hope of all that we have in Him would shape us and mold us to be those who are a blessing to our race. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

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