

“Sibling Rivalry: Cain & Abel”

Genesis 4:1-16

Baxter T. Exum (#944)
Four Lakes Church of Christ
Madison, Wisconsin
October 21, 2007

Introduction:

This morning I would like for us to consider another request from one of the children of the congregation. It was turned in several weeks ago, and the request was for a lesson on the subject of “getting along with our brothers and sisters.” Probably most of us here this morning have siblings. The research tells us that 82% of people in Western countries have at least one sibling. Not only that, but we also find that siblings generally spend more time together during childhood than they do with their own parents. Most of us know from experience, then, that brothers and sisters do not always get along as they should. In my own family, some of my most vivid memories are of fighting with my sister. I remember one night on the way home from worship, we were sitting in the back seat and had not even made it out of the church parking lot when she looked right at me, bit her own arm to the point where it bled, started screaming, and then told my parents that I had bit her. That was not a pleasant evening. Probably many of us have similar memories, some of you here this morning are going through it right now, and so we are studying a valid request.

As I started doing the research for this morning’s lesson, the first thing I said to myself was, “Well, I know which set of brothers I will not be preaching on this morning—I will not be preaching on Cain and Abel.” We know how the relationship ended between the world’s first brothers—it was not a pretty ending. And yet as I continued looking at various brothers, I kept coming back to Cain and Abel. And again, the story does not end well, but these two men still teach us some extremely valuable lessons.

And so this morning, then, I would like for us to look together at **Genesis 4** ****PPT****—and as we study the importance of getting along with our siblings, I would like for us to consider what happens between Cain and Abel and hopefully apply some of what we learn to our own families. If you will, please look with me at **Genesis 4:1-16**...

¹ Now the man had relations with his wife Eve, and she conceived and gave birth to Cain, and she said, "I have gotten a manchild with the help of the LORD." ² Again, she gave birth to his brother Abel. And Abel was a keeper of flocks, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. ³ So it came about in the course of time that Cain brought an offering to the LORD of the fruit of the ground. ⁴ Abel, on his part also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and for his offering; ⁵ but for Cain and for his offering He had no

regard. So Cain became very angry and his countenance fell. ⁶ Then the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen?" ⁷ "If you do well, will not your countenance be lifted up? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it." ⁸ Cain told Abel his brother. And it came about when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him. ⁹ Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is Abel your brother?" And he said, "I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?" ¹⁰ He said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to Me from the ground. ¹¹ "Now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. ¹² "When you cultivate the ground, it will no longer yield its strength to you; you will be a vagrant and a wanderer on the earth." ¹³ Cain said to the LORD, "My punishment is too great to bear!" ¹⁴ "Behold, You have driven me this day from the face of the ground; and from Your face I will be hidden, and I will be a vagrant and a wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me." ¹⁵ So the LORD said to him, "Therefore whoever kills Cain, vengeance will be taken on him sevenfold." And the LORD appointed a sign for Cain, so that no one finding him would slay him. ¹⁶ Then Cain went out from the presence of the LORD, and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden.

As we look back at these 16 verses, I would like for us to consider several ideas that may help us to get along with our brothers and sisters.

I. First of all, we notice in the first two verses that SIBLINGS ARE A GIFT FROM GOD. **PPT******

Children are a gift to their parents, but they are also a gift to each other. Notice in **verse 1**, we find that Adam had relations with his wife, and she conceived, and she gave birth to a son. Some scholars have looked at the wording of **verse 2**, and they have put forth the theory that Cain and Abel were twins—a very interesting idea, because when we look at it carefully we find that there is not a second reference to Adam having relations with Eve before the birth of the second son. And so we have Adam and Eve getting together, and two sons are born—one right after the other. But either way we look at it, we find that both children were a gift from God.

We can hardly imagine what it would have been like for Adam and Eve. As parents, we remember the excitement when our children were born, but at this point Adam and Eve are totally alone. Neither one had experienced this before—there were no doctors or midwives—there were no mother's-in-law to give advice, there were no mothers to tell them that it would be alright. Adam and Eve were out there totally on their own, and they experience the very first birth in the history of the world. And we find that when Cain is born, Eve makes an interesting statement in **verse 1**. She says, ***"With the help of the Lord I have brought forth a man."***

First of all, then, we need to realize that children are a gift from God. And if we have brothers or sisters, then we should start by realizing that those members of our family (as irritating as they can be) are also a gift from God. This world would be a lonely place if no one had any brothers or sisters. As James said in **James 1:17**, **"Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow."** Our brothers and sisters are a gift from God, and we need to thank God for those relationships.

II. As we continue looking at Genesis 4, we see a second concept with the idea that SIBLINGS ARE DIFFERENT FROM ONE ANOTHER. **PPT******

In **verse 2**, the Bible says that, **"...Abel was a keeper of flocks, but Cain was a tiller of the ground."** So here we have two sons (possibly twins), they are raised in the same environment, they have the same parents, they ate their meals together, they played the same games together, they worship the same God, they live together as brothers, they both seem to be hard-working, and yet at the same time they are completely different from one another! Abel was basically a shepherd, and Cain was basically a farmer. Cain plowed, and planted, and pulled weeds, and brought in the harvest, but Abel spent his time taking care of animals out in the fields.

We learn, then, that children are not exact copies of their parents—and even twins can be extremely different from one another. It is amazing how brothers and sisters (even twins) can take the smallest differences and use those differences to get in huge fights with each other. After all, we are not going to cut on each other for our similarities. One identical twin will hopefully not be making fun of the other for how he looks! But we take the differences, and we use those against each other. I vividly remember the very first fight between our own two children. It happened on the way to church (maybe this runs in the family), but for absolutely no reason the older one reached up to the roof of the car and said, "Ha! Ha! I can touch the top, and you can't!" And at that point she started crying, and the fight was on! That was the very first one. The smallest differences can be used as a source of conflict, because siblings are different from one another.

With this in mind, we remember the passage we studied several weeks ago from **Romans 12:6**, where Paul said, **"Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly..."** In other words, we will only be held accountable for those things that God has given us the ability to do. Not only that, but we are not to always go around comparing ourselves to a brother or sister who may or may not have the abilities that we do. We are about to find out that Cain and Abel are as different on the inside as they were on the outside. But for now we can hopefully find a little comfort in the reminder that siblings are different from one another.

III. As we progress through the story, we notice a third concept as we find that SIBLINGS MUST RELATE TO GOD ON THEIR OWN. **PPT******

In other words, we are individually responsible to God—and no matter what our brothers or sisters may do, we always need to personally do the right thing. God will not judge us as a family, but He will judge us as individuals.

Normally as we grow up, we learn to worship God together, and a lot of us have the blessing of sharing our faith with our siblings, but even with the very first brothers, we find a difference, and we find that they are both held personally responsible to God. According to verse 3, **"...in the course of time...Cain brought an offering to the Lord."** And then in verse 4, Abel also brought an offering. But as soon as those offerings are made, we find that God made a distinction between the two. We are told in verses 4-5 that, **"...the Lord had regard for Abel and for his offering; but for Cain and for his offering He had no regard...."** The word, **"regard,"** means, "to pay attention to." And so we find that God paid attention to Abel's offering, but he ignored the offering from Cain.

Certainly we have a lot of unanswered questions here. For example, we are not really told exactly what caused one offering to be accepted and the other rejected. We do have several clues. When we look very carefully at what the Bible actually says, we notice that God had regard, **"...for Abel and for his offering."** God, therefore, was not only looking at the offering, but He was looking at Abel. And the same goes for Cain. The Bible says, **"...but for Cain and for his offering [God] had no regard."** And so God rejected not only the offering, but He rejected Cain himself. And so perhaps the problem was the attitude behind whatever it was that Cain did. Perhaps the offering itself was acceptable, and maybe Cain's heart was bad.

On the other hand, according to Hebrews 11:4, **"By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained the testimony that he was righteous, God testifying about his gifts, and through faith, though he is dead, he still speaks."** The writer of Hebrews seems to think that it was the gift itself that caused Abel to be accepted. The writer of Hebrews points out that Abel's sacrifice was offered, **"By faith...."** We know from the New Testament that faith comes by hearing the word of Christ, and so perhaps God had specifically called for a particular kind of sacrifice—perhaps Abel listened and Cain did not.

Some have suggested that Cain's sacrifice was rejected simply because it was not a blood sacrifice. I don't know. According to Hebrews 9:22, **"...the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness."** However, this morning's account takes place before the Law of Moses. Not only that, but later on in the Old Testament, sacrifices of grain are accepted for certain sins. So we cannot know for sure that the lack of blood kept Cain's sacrifice from being accepted.

Perhaps one clue is in the fact that Abel specifically, **"...brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock."** Perhaps it was this idea of bringing the best,

and maybe Cain only brought the leftovers. We do not know for sure. But we do know that God judged Cain and Abel separately. These two brothers had to answer to God directly for the sacrifices they had offered. One was accepted and the other was rejected.

But even as Cain is rejected, we notice that God goes the extra mile. In fact, God is not the least bit harsh. Cain responds in anger, and God says, "**Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will not your countenance be lifted up?**" In other words, even though Cain was rejected, God is offering a plan to make things right. God is offering a do-over. God is extending an invitation. God is giving a second chance. The amazing grace of God! Cain's rejection was not the end, but God encouraged him to "**do well.**"

Why was Cain so angry? We have a divine commentary on this question in **1 John 3:11-12**. The apostle John says, "**For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another; not as Cain, who was of the evil one and slew his brother. And for what reason did he slay him? Because his deeds were evil, and his brother's were righteous.**" And so we find that Cain was basically jealous.

We know from experience that brothers and sisters will occasionally still get jealous of one another. Maybe one sibling has the bigger bedroom, or maybe one gets a better Christmas present, or maybe one gets better grades. But even in his jealous condition, God was still willing to give Cain a second chance. God makes the offer, Cain kills his brother, but even after the murder, God continues to offer yet another chance. Notice in **verse 9** (even after the murder), God says, "**Where is Abel your brother?**" What a perfect opportunity for Cain to make things right with God. Cain could have said, "Oh, Lord! What have I done! I have done a terrible thing! I have done something that has never been done before! I have murdered my brother!" But instead, Cain (like his parents in the garden) arrogantly pretended to know nothing at all. Like his own earthly father, Cain tried to shift the blame, "**Am I my brother's keeper?**"

Oh, how it could have been different! If Cain had admitted what he had done, if Cain had confessed his sin, I am confident that God would have made it right. Cain refused, and he now serves as an example that God will judge each person individually. As the apostle Paul wrote in **2 Corinthians 5:10**, "**For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.**" We need to remember, then, that whatever our brothers or sisters might do, we personally will have to answer to God. If my sister bites her own arm—that's between her and God. But if I bite her arm, then it's between me and God, and I will be held accountable for it.

IV. Before we close, we should also emphasize that SIBLINGS HAVE A CHOICE CONCERNING HOW THEY WILL RELATE TO EACH OTHER.

****PPT****

What I'm saying here is that Cain had a moment in his life where he could have gone in one of two very different directions. Cain was blessed with having the freedom of choice. Sometimes it seems that we get into a situation (sometimes even with our own siblings), where we are all pressed up against the wall—maybe someone is pushing our buttons, maybe the other person really knows how to make us mad—and maybe it seems like we have no choice but to lash out in anger. But we always have a choice!

Maybe we are tempted to blame our situation on someone else. Maybe we try to blame our trouble on a little brother or little sister. Maybe we try to blame our decisions on our parents. Maybe we try to blame it on drugs, or alcohol, or TV violence, or gangs, or rap music, or the government, or something else. But as we look at **Genesis 4**, we find that the problem with Cain was Cain. In particular, his sin was uncontrolled anger. In Hebrew, the word for anger in **verse 5** is the same word people would use to describe the burning of a fire. And not only was he burning with anger, but the Bible says that he was **"very angry."** And so in a premeditated act, he did not kill his brother on the spot, but he waited until his brother was out in the field. Some ancient texts even indicate that Cain lured him (or invited him) into the field. And once they were out there alone, Cain killed his brother in a fit of rage.

But when we get right down to it, we understand Cain had a choice concerning how he would treat his own brother. And as we look at what the Bible says, we find that God could see it coming. God could see Cain's attitude, God could see that Cain was angry, and so God gave Cain a very clear warning. In **verse 7**, God said, **"And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it."** And so we find that Cain is confronted with his sin. Cain's anger is pictured as some kind of wild animal crouching at the door—looking for an opportunity to attack. Satan is right there cheering us on. Satan puts his arm around us, "You have every right to be angry! How dare they treat you like that! Strike back while you still can!" Satan wants us to give in. This past Wednesday evening, we read **Ephesians 4:26-27**, where Paul said, **"...do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not give the devil an opportunity."** There he is—Satan is waiting at the door. But God wants Cain to master the sin—to remove it completely from his life.

Perhaps some of you have heard the old story of a certain man who wanted to sell his house in Haiti for \$2,000. Another man wanted to buy it, but he could not afford the full price. After a lot of bargaining back and forth, the owner agreed to sell the house for half the original price with only one condition: He would retain ownership of one small nail sticking out just over the front door. After several years, the original owner wanted the house back, but the new owner was unwilling to sell. So, the first owner went out, found the carcass of a dead dog, and he hung it from the single nail he still owned. It did not take very long for the house to become unlivable, and the family was forced to sell the house to the owner of the nail. And the moral of the

story is this: If we leave the devil with even one small nail in our lives, he will come back, and he will make our lives absolutely miserable until we turn everything over to him.

In a similar way, Cain was flirting with sin. In fact, it went beyond flirting, because even after the murder, Cain tried to cover it up. Cain probably thought he was getting away with it. But in **verse 10**, we find that God confronts Cain and says, ***"The voice of your brother's blood is crying to Me from the ground."*** We think we can hide things from God, but we cannot. Maybe you saw the episode from COPS several weeks ago where the officer pulls a man over, and the man gets out of his car, and the driver has a great big marijuana cigarette tucked on top of his ear. So here he is talking to the officer, the officer sees it—it's obvious—but the man has no idea. And so the officer is asking the man, "Do you know why I pulled you over? Do you know why I might be a little concerned right now? Do you have any idea why you might be in trouble?" And the man has no idea. The officer is almost laughing, but the man doesn't have a clue. Cain was in a similar situation. Cain thought that he got away with it. He murdered his brother.

Did it solve the problem? Did murdering Abel make Cain's offering any more acceptable? It doesn't make sense, does it? Sin usually doesn't make sense. But the point of this morning's lesson is that we have a choice concerning how we will treat our brothers and sisters. Instead of getting mad and flying off in a rage, let us deal with them as God would have us do.

Conclusion & Invitation:

I am so thankful for the request that led to this morning's lesson. We have not looked at the most positive sibling relationship by any means, and yet we have learned several things to keep in mind if we want to get along with our brothers and sisters...

- We need to realize that our siblings are a gift from God.
- As brothers and sisters, we are different from one another.
- As siblings, we have to be right with God on our own—no matter what the other person may do.
- And then finally, just like Cain, we have a choice concerning how we will treat one another.

As we come to the end, and even if we were to keep on reading, I cannot find a reference to Cain ever having a change of heart. In fact, when he is banished from the fellowship of his family, the Bible seems to indicate that Cain responds (once again) as a whining coward. He complains that the punishment is too harsh. He complains that it is not fair. He portrays himself as a victim. But even with the whining, God extends an offer of grace and gives Cain a mark so that he will not be harmed by any relatives seeking revenge. And so he is even given more time to repent. He is given a second chance. God is merciful even to a murderer.

And yet over time, it only gets worse. We find that Cain establishes a city—apparently in direct disobedience to God’s direct command that he is to be a vagrant, a wanderer on the face of the earth. Not only that, but the influence spreads—one of Cain’s descendants is a man named Lamech. Lamech is the first man in the Bible to ignore God’s plan for marriage—he takes two wives. Lamech also lived a violent life and appears to have held up Cain as a hero—as an example to go beyond.

Certainly this is one of the saddest stories in the Bible. We can hardly imagine what it would have been like for Adam and Eve to go out and find their son dead—not only dead, but murdered by their first-born son who has now been removed from their family. As Adam and Eve kneel by the murdered body of their first born son, certainly their thoughts went back to the words of Satan in the Garden of Eden—**"You surely will not die,"** and now they truly know (once again) how false those words were.

This morning, we are in a situation very much like that of Cain. We know what we need to do, and so the question is: Will we do what is right, or will we react by trying to excuse our sinful behavior. Will we blame others, or will we turn our lives back to God?

Thankfully, thousands of years later, the promised Savior finally came, and his coming is referred to in **Hebrews 12:22-24** ****PPT****, ***"But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel."***

We come in contact with the blood of Christ at the point of baptism as we are buried in the death of Christ for the forgiveness of our sins. If you are ready to accept God’s offer right now, you can let us know as we sing the next song. Let’s stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: church@fourlakescoc.org

Four Lakes church of Christ website: <http://www.fourlakescoc.org>