

“Our Mission: Love” Genesis 4:1-15 Trinity 11 2024

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, the opposite of life is death. The opposite of love is hate. This Old Testament lesson shows us why we need Easter: why we need life from Jesus, because sin brought death. Sometimes that death comes sooner than expected, especially at the hands of a vicious murderer such as Cain.

It all starts out with such a seemingly small thing. It starts out in church, in a sense, through a religious act gone bad. Cain offers some of his grain, while Abel offers an animal to the Lord as a sacrifice. There were no laws from Moses commanding these sacrifices, but Adam may have taught them how and why to do these sacrifices. They were giving to the Lord a portion of what He had given to them.

Abel's sacrifice, the Bible does distinguish, came from the fat portion of the firstborn. Fat was considered the prime part of the animal back in the Old Testament. But that's not to say there was anything wrong with the content of Cain's offering. He worked with crops, so he gave some of his crops. However, somehow, in some way, God let Cain know that his offering was not acceptable while Abel's was.

So, what did it come down to? Hebrews 11:4 says, “By faith Abel offered a better sacrifice to God than Cain did.” One offering was made in faith while the other was not. It's that simple. Well then, why did he make the offering at all? Maybe because his father told him to, or his brothers were doing it as well.

Moses writes, The Lord looked with favor on Abel and his offering, 5 but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. It's kind of interesting how this is written. Notice how the offering is connected to the person. God is never primarily concerned with what you offer as He is with why you offer it.

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He can tell when you're only going through the motions. He can tell when you go to church just because your parents made you go. He can tell when your religion is more a sense of duty than it is a sense of faith and thankfulness to the God who has died for you and given you forgiveness and hope in Jesus.

In the big picture of things doesn't this offering seem like a small deal? I mean, at least Cain was trying to do the right thing. And God knew what would happen if He confronted Cain. Why didn't He just let it go? Forget about it? Well, first, Cain probably would have kept offering him offerings just for show. He also would have thought God didn't know the difference. The ultimate problem was that Cain wouldn't have had an opportunity to repent because he wouldn't have known that his sacrifices were sins against God.

What was the problem with Cain? Cain expected God to accept his offering. He probably felt that God owed it to him for making the sacrifice in the first place. “I made the sacrifice. Now be happy with it!” Imagine a wife who is unhappy with her husband because he doesn't ever do anything for her or show her any affection. He buys her a flower and stuffs it in her face. “Here! Are you happy now?”

Of course, that's a blatant illustration. I'm sure Cain wasn't so blunt about his motivation. I would imagine Cain may have been more of a golden child. The Hebrew might say more about Cain. When Eve gave birth to him, she literally said in a literal translation, “I have acquired a man - the Lord.” Luther speculated that she may have thought she had given birth to Jesus - the Messiah. When parents treat their sinful children as if they were perfect, as if they can do no wrong, they end up thinking that way. When they finally hit the real world and have their professor flunk them in a class, they are shocked and angry at the professor for bursting their bubble. I've heard of

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parents calling the professors of college students and bosses at their workplace to yell at them when their children fail or are fired. Was Cain one of those types of children who thought he could do no wrong, who thought the world revolved around HIM? It's hard to realize you're actually a sinner when you think you're the Messiah.

It's called a sense of entitlement. We can have the same attitude towards God in our lives and in our worship as well. Sometimes it happens with someone I've tried to contact time and again to come back to worship. When they finally come, they expect to be praised because they made the sacrifice of coming on a Sunday morning: as if God should be happy with them and praise them for the wonderful thing they've done. Instead of coming to receive blessing from the Lord, they seem to think they are blessing God with their presence.

We can do the same thing with God, right? We get mad at God when something doesn't work right: when we get sick, or something breaks down. We go to God and say, “What did you do that for?” Insinuating that we didn't deserve it. We wouldn't admit it, but we think God owes it to us to give us what we want because we of what we do for Him. When we obviously sin, we say we're sorry and then we treat God as if He owes us forgiveness because we said we're sorry. There's no humility there. There's no deep sense of repentance over how we've treated God or His Word. There's no real appreciation for life and forgiveness that Jesus brings. That seems to be what Cain had.

The sad thing was that he wasn't too far gone when God warned him about it. “Sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must

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master it.” God personified sin, turned it into a prowler who wanted to pounce on him and devour him. This is the nature of sinful desires within you. It reminds me of our dog at the dinner table when I was growing up. He always knew that there was food. He wanted the food. He begged for it. He’s hungry for it. He breathes on your leg. So, you have to be harsh with him. “No! Go away!” I set up barriers between me and him. Otherwise, he’ll keep begging for more if you give her even a little, and you create a monster. This is how Cain could have been with his sinful nature at this point. This is how you can be with your sinful nature when you baptized and in the Word of God. The Holy Spirit can work in you and through you to fight against sin. Your God is alive and powerful and well. You’ve been connected to the living Jesus. You can live and fight against sinful temptations of anger and despair and lust and whatever else is going on inside you. Master it. Be nasty to it. Tell the devil to take a hike!

Cain did not fight against it. His pride was hurt. His ego. “It’s not MY fault that the Lord didn’t accept my sacrifice. God is too picky. He’s playing favorites. He just likes Abel more than me.” Maybe Cain thought, “He doesn’t know Abel like I know him. I’m so much better than Abel! He has no idea how hard it is to bring in these crops. All Abel does is sacrifice an animal. Big deal!”

It wasn’t only Gods’ fault, but it was Abel’s as well. Cain didn’t see that it wasn’t a matter of one over the other. God wanted both! In reality, God wants ALL men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. God offers and gives the same salvation in the same way to all people. We are saved by grace, through faith in Jesus Christ. We all are commanded to repent of our sins, no matter who we are, and cling to His free and full forgiveness. No

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matter what your sin is, God wants you to repent and cling to Jesus: no matter how embarrassing or difficult it is for you, so that you can find forgiveness and cling to it in Jesus. But Cain interpreted that as hate instead of love.

Don't we witness a similar type of hatred within the liberal sectors of Christianity? Those who demand God to accept everyone without repentance. They feel rejected and hated because they've been told that something they've done is sinful and flat out wrong. Some of the angriest people against historic and Biblical Christianity are those who have wanted to lead a sinful lifestyle and were told to repent. Pro-abortion activists can be very mean and nasty. Proponents of woke ideology hate the idea of a God telling them right from wrong. Modern-day Cains want nothing more than to shut down the God of the Bible who demands that we bow the knee before God and ask for mercy and forgiveness and the cross of Christ. They want to invent their own God who confronts nobody and has no standards: the God who universally lets everyone to heaven and has no sin and no hell. They maybe won't say it, but you can see how they literally hate who we are and what we stand for. True Christianity doesn't say we are better than them. We know we are sinners too. But the only way to salvation is through repentance and forgiveness in Jesus. Without repentance, you won't see a need for forgiveness.

Abel didn't have anything to do with this quarrel in some senses. He was minding his own business, but Cain didn't care. Cain tricked Abel. He lured him out to the field and murdered him in cold blood. He couldn't kill God, so He killed one that God loved. This was a wicked and personal thing that Cain did to his own brother that he was supposed to love. Yet what was his response? Am I my brother's keeper? Yes, you are.

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If you think about it, God was more merciful than any of us could have ever been. He let Cain live! He let Cain suffer, by not letting him work the ground successfully. Every time he tried to work and plant the ground, he had opportunity to reflect on the blood of Abel that he poured into the ground when he killed him and buried him. God also let Cain build a city later. He blessed Cain with very talented children and grandchildren. They became musicians and builders and innovative warriors, able to make weapons out of metal. Cain's descendants became even more violent than he was, but God let them live. He even protected Cain from his own brothers by giving him a sign, perhaps a miracle of some sort that he could perform to scare away anyone set on vengeance. Why was God so merciful to Cain? Because he wanted Cain to repent. He wanted Cain to find forgiveness and hope in Him.

But that's not all God did for Cain. God also became a different type of Abel, another kind of martyr, when Jesus took on flesh and blood to die on the cross for the sins of the world, including Abel. Why did God do that? Because God is merciful. The sad thing is that Cain probably never believed it. (1 John 3:12) Today, so many others in this world don't either.

But what about Abel? Hebrews 11:4 says, “By faith Abel offered a better sacrifice to God than Cain did. By faith he was commended in Scripture as righteous; God testified favorably about his gifts. And by faith he still speaks, even though he is dead.” We don't have to say “poor Abel.” He ended up in heaven by faith. Abel is still speaking, because he is still alive, waiting for the resurrection of his body, which will rise from the dead. Even in the midst of death, God brings life. Murder can't stop God's love and God's life from doing what it does.

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So how do we live? Sin is crouching at your door. It wants to have you: it wants to own you and control you. The devil wants you to be filled with anger and fear and vengeance. He wants you to hate those who have wronged you. He wants you to dig in your heels against God and believe that He owes you for all you do for Him. But you have a different master, who died to kill that desire. You have Jesus, who has shown you what love is through his death on the cross and resurrection to life. Live how you were created to live, how you were adopted to live, how Jesus died for you to live, and how Jesus rose for you to live. Live a life of love: love for God, and love for men, no matter how nasty or angry they may be. Live a life of love. Amen.