

11.24.24

Genesis

Chapter 4 - God's Grace Misconstrued

Right Pursuit - Wrong Perception (vs. 1-5)

Genesis 4:1-5: 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.” Again, she gave birth to his brother Abel. And Abel was a keeper of flocks, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. So it came about in the course of time that Cain brought an offering to the LORD of the fruit of the ground. 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; but for Cain and for his offering He had no regard. So Cain became very angry and his countenance fell.

Throughout the years, I've been reminded of my responsibility as a pastor, and I would say the greatest responsibility that I have is to represent God appropriately. Hebrews 11:6 says that without faith it's impossible to please God. You must first believe that He is. Well, that's theology. Theology is describing God for who He is; not for who we think He is, not for who some say He is, but who He is. That's what Scripture reveals to us, the truth about who God is. To misconstrue that, to misrepresent God in any way, to misinterpret the meaning of God, meaning of the things that He does, the intent of God, His character in anyway, would be criminal, blasphemous; it would be taking His name in vain. Oftentimes our thoughts are so disjointed that we begin to project our own perception of who God is on Him. Then, we tell everybody else this is who God is. In my endeavor to preach the truth, I find myself oftentimes unraveling all of the lies about God because there are literally centuries, millennia of lies that have been wrapped around who people say that God is. It's an interesting question that Jesus asked His own disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" And everybody has a thought, but the reality is that we have misrepresented Him.

I come to this particular passage, and it just jumped off the page to me. We don't understand God at all. At the very beginning of all of this, clearly, we have seen the grace of God in creation. When you look at creation, you can't help but say, "Why did He do that?" He didn't have to create all these things. When you consider the universe, certainly things that go beyond our visual, why did He even have to create that? Why did He do that? We look at the fact that He made everything good, and we scratch our heads, and we go, "Why did He do that?" I mean, we take a microscope and maybe perhaps a telescope, and we say that we're investigating these things, but we missed the whole point of the whole creation; we missed the whole point of what He's doing. Why give men a choice? We wrestle through these things. We create things such as philosophy to begin to describe what we think God is up to, or what we think everything's about. We consider ourselves extremely wise and smart.

We find in this particular passage at the end of Genesis 3, that man has to experience toil and pain. He has to experience difficulty and hardship, and our thought is, "Why?" Sometimes we come up with the conclusion, "God's

just being mean. He's just not nice.” If you read Scripture correctly, one thing is very clear, it's not God that's mean, it's man. Man is the treacherous one. Man is the one that deceives in what he does. He is not wholly in the relationship. I mean, God freely gives us all things; man withholds. In everything you see about man, we realize that the heart of man is desperately sick. We ask all of these, see the things that God does, and we have this question, “Why?” and I would say it's not brain surgery and it's not rocket science. In fact, the answer is very clear in 1 John 4:8, “God is love.” So, everything that He does is done out of love, because that's who God is. God is love. If in fact you begin to come from that perspective, you begin to see things a lot clearer. This particular passage is dealing with having a child; a wonderful gift. Of course, Scripture tells us in Psalm 127 that children are a gift from the Lord. Not only in this passage do we see the reaction of Eve with the child and the perception that she has that seems to be a little off, but we also see then the offerings that are given before the Lord and the perception of offerings and they are off. I guess naturally, when man begins to perceive offerings, his natural inclination is to think, “Well, this is another ritual. It's

another regiment that we do. It's possibly another requirement that God has placed upon us" and really nothing could be further from the truth. It is a misrepresentation of God; a misrepresentation of why He's established certain things. I've seen this particular passage misrepresented so many ways, from the offering to the naming of the children, but we begin to see is man's inability to perceive things correctly.

When I go to a passage such as Psalm 50:21, you have this perception that man has that God is like him. When you go into the book of Hosea, it's very clear that God corrects that. He says, "I'm not like you." Because man is vindictive; man is motivated by his vindictiveness, but not God. God's motivated by His love for us. So, as Isaiah 55 would so aptly put it, God's ways are higher than ours. We don't even think close like Him. As high as the heavens are above the earth. That's pretty high. When we sit down and we begin to go into our studies of Scripture, and we begin to say, "Well, that doesn't seem right. Why would God do something like that?" We become critical. We become a judge of God, and people don't fully comprehend what they're actually doing, but let me just say this, you never want to go there. Because

not only is God good, but you have absolutely no idea what He's doing. You could not possibly ever fathom the goodness that He is creating by anything that He does. You just couldn't fathom that because you don't think that way. You think the opposite.

So, we come to this passage and it's certainly my desire to convey the thoughts of God by the word of God and through the Spirit of God, that you might see Him. As we come to this Genesis 4, it starts off with a changing of things. Man has come to the realization that he has sinned. He has come to the realization that he has chosen the bad, once again, the choice given, which a choice given is necessary in order to have a relationship. If God didn't give us a choice, we'd say, "God is mean. He didn't give us a choice." If God gives us a choice, we'd say, "God is mean. Gave us a choice." But in His love, He gives man a choice, and unfortunately man always chooses wrong. It is in this choosing wrong that he reaps the benefit of the wrong; that is pain and suffering and ultimately death, but God in the context is going to direct him into the pain and the suffering and the toil. With the woman He's going to bring forth hope through birth. With the man, He's going to bring forth fruit in the toil, and God is

going to bring out good in the midst of the wrong choice that we made. It is the goodness of God. If you know God, you will understand that. If you don't know God, you are going to perceive Him inappropriately.

When we come to Chapter 4, and what's interesting is as God begins to direct man into what is right, he names his wife Eve, which he at this moment, begins to realize, "This woman that God has given me is truly a gift. She is the source of life." So, he names her Eve, which means the "source of life." I think one of the things that Greg was saying is that you begin to appreciate things when you go through the difficulty, when you go through the suffering. It's one of the great benefits of that. There's also something else that happens, and not only is he drawing closer to his wife, but in this particular passage it says that he has relations with his wife, which is telling us a little bit more than just having a relation in the sense of having a sexual relationship but goes into the realm of knowing her. The word that is used in the Hebrew is "yāda'". "Yāda'" is "to know," and in this setting it is to know intimately, and more specifically it is to know in a sense of caring or building a relationship. What we didn't see in the garden, that is a

sense of relationship, he just literally throws his wife under the bus, we do see as he begins to toil and go through work, and that is a sense of appreciation for what God has given him and there's an embracing. Let me just emphasize this too, this is one of the reasons why you don't want children from test tubes, because the whole purpose of having children is that they come out of a relationship, they come out of love, they come out of care; it is in that nurturing that children are born, but you begin to just think of them as a number, that's all they become. So, it is the graciousness of God to actually bring forth birth out of relationship, not out of pragmatism or necessity, or anything else.

It starts off this way, in Genesis 4:1,

“Now the man had relations with his wife Eve, and she conceived...”

This is the Lord's blessing, and the conception is one of the things that was promised, that she should be the source of life, and that through her would come not only a source of life, but according to Genesis 3:15, would come the Messiah. Through the woman would come the Messiah. That sense of hope, in which ultimately death would be taken care of, and toil and sorrow and pain would all be dismissed. As you go to

Revelation, it tells us the day is going to come, He's going to wipe away every tear. All these things are going to go away. It was the hope that the Messiah would bring that, and it was the hope that as a child was conceived, this could be the one.

So, the way it reads is this,

(Genesis 4:1) “Now the man had relations with his wife Eve, and she conceived and gave birth to Cain (“Qayin”)...”

“Qayin” is an interesting way of describing someone that you've acquired or created for yourself. So fundamentally, what Eve is going to say is, “I have created for myself the gotten one.” Now, there's kind of a play of words within the text because if you look at the name “Cain,”

“... and she said, “I have gotten,”

it is a form of “qayin”. It is “qānâ” in the passage, which means “the gotten one.” What it means is, “I have gotten for myself, I have created for myself the one who was promised,” is really what she's looking at within the passage.

“... and she said, “I have gotten a manchild with the help of the LORD.”””

It was very nice of her to add and tack on “the help of the LORD” within the passage. In many respects, that phrase that is tacked on, “with the help of the LORD,” is what begins to energize a sense of offerings that are given because really, we don't see any kind of offerings given up to this juncture. But now we see that things begin to change and as we'll see with Cain, offerings are brought with Abel. There is a sense of, we could say, gratitude, and let me just say this, this is the first time we see an inkling of gratitude. Go back to the beginning. Did you see Adam go, “Wow, thanks for this garden, this is great. That water, that gold really sparkles”? I mean, there's a lot of things that he could have said that could have at least shown some sort of gratitude, and yet nothing, silent. It was the same thing with Eve, but when they began to have to work for something and they have to go into a kind of labor, then they turn and go, “God helped me do this.” That's true. God did help you do this.

Verse 2 reads this way as it begins to establish really a foundation because the details are not given within the text, but what is given is what Scripture is wanting us to see

specifically about God and how man reacts and responds to things that God does. So, in the passage, it says,
(Genesis 4:2) "Again..."

Which you might want to underline the word, "Again". Sometimes, we take certain words for granted, "That just means again." Yeah, it does mean "again," but the emphasis of the word is something that seems to convey something unnecessary. So, you have this sense of, "I've gotten the gotten one. Why do I need this one?" And it is also what we would call complementary in the passage, in which the woman will perceive this birth as being a son that is complementary to Cain, "*qayin*." So, this one that is born will not be elevated as gotten one, too, 2.0 or however you want to consider; but will not be considered that way, but he will be considered as the brother to Cain. So, the introduction is very clear,

"Again, she gave birth to his brother..."

"*Āh*" would be the word that is used within the passage, and it just simply means "behold, there is somebody resembling Cain." I'm not bitter about this, and I've oftentimes made reference to it, but when I would go to

school, and I would follow my brother who was two years older than me, and I'd go into a class, and I happened to get the same teacher that he had; she looked at me, and I remember the look. I mean, it's just etched in my brain. Once again, I haven't held on to this, but she would look at me and she goes, "I hope you're as smart as your brother." And I'm going, "I'm toast." I knew I was in trouble. You know, to have to live up to that. Can you imagine? Really, this is kind of in the context of this, and one of the translators actually put in the sense of augmentation, that is to say that Abel comes in as an augmentation to Cain; somebody that kind of maybe makes him look better, but he is an add on to Cain.

So, "Again, she gave birth to his brother Abel("hebel")..."

Now, "hebel" is repeated over and over again in the book of Ecclesiastes. It is the word "vanity". "Vanity of vanities! All is vanity." It is the word "*Hebel hebel! All is hebel.*" The word simply means "breath," and it conveys something fleeting. So, your life is but a breath, right? So, the foundation of it is, "It's not a necessary ingredient; not something that's going to last. How would you like to name him?" So, it's not one of those endearing names. Again, a brother, *Hebel*. So, all those

brought together, if I could put it this way, we see a wrong perception on Eve's part, and we don't hear after this, a "thank You," which to me is very interesting. It was very clear that she gave some credit to God with Cain, but it's just *Hebel*, right?

(Genesis 4:2) "Again, she gave birth to his brother Abel. And Abel was a keeper of flocks, but Cain was a tiller of the ground."

This too you might want to note. We understand that in in Genesis 3:23,

"Therefore, the LORD God sent him (Adam) out from the garden of Eden, to cultivate the ground..."

If you look in Genesis 3:17,

"... Cursed is the ground because of you;
In toil you will eat of it
All the days of your life."

The clarity of this is that Adam was going to be the tiller of the soil. Who was going to help him? "*Qayin*," Cain, because he's the gotten one. So, who's working with the dad? Cain. What's Abel doing? Now, it's also important to note within

the passage, and once again some of the things that we misunderstand, that when Abel is tending the flock that he's not tending food. Because according to Genesis 9:3, it was until after the flood that you ate meat. So, what is he tending? Well, according to from what we understand, in Genesis 3:21, he's tending to the clothing industry, as God was the one that brought the clothing. We understand that sheep and God made them this way which to me is very interesting, but the sheep don't really thrive without the care of a man or human being. They really can't function. Their protection, their care doesn't exist. In fact, you let them grow their fleece so much, they'll fall over and die because they can't get up. So, man has to really care for these animals. What's also interesting is that it begins to create a sense of caring, a sense of watching, a sense of guarding, and one of the reasons why throughout Scripture, as God begins to call men to lead, He calls shepherds. Even if He calls fishermen, He'll call them shepherds. Remember when He calls Peter, and He goes, "Ok. So, here's your job, tend My flock. Feed My sheep." "Ok, I'm a fisherman. I just throw out the net." "Not anymore. You're going to be a shepherd." Therefore, the word "pastor" means "shepherd".

You look at Moses, he's a shepherd; Abraham, he's a shepherd; you go through David, he's a shepherd. Christ will be born in the village of shepherds in Bethlehem. All of this will point to one who will care, one who will be tender, and what's interesting is that oftentimes the word "to tend" can also mean and be translated, "to be a friend."

When you go into John 10, we hear about the Good Shepherd. Of course, one of our favorite passages in Psalm 23, "The Lord is my Shepherd," but you come into John 10, and you realize that Christ is revealing that there are some that are hired to do this, but the Good Shepherd, He'll give His life for the sheep. I think that's one of the things that actually draws out David from the bunch, that he was willing to die for his sheep. I can't even imagine that, going after a lion to get your sheep back. I would say, "I don't know, we have a thousand, let him go. You know, lions have to eat too." Not David, and you begin to see the heart of God in shepherding which is very interesting. When I when I think about the gardening and the toiling and everything like that, it can teach you a lot of things and we talked about that, but there's a lack of relationship. There's a lack of care. There's a lack of friendship. There's a lack of intimacy. If I could put it

this way, of having a friend of sorts with the soil or with the things growing. What seems to be able to happen if you take care and you'll take friendship, or you take a relationship out of the work, what you basically have is just hard labor. With just hard labor, it's probably easy to get resentful. I mean, you go to work, and you say to yourself, "Well, I just have to work." Yeah, but if you go to work and you go, "But I'm doing this for somebody," then it begins to matter. So, you have interesting dichotomy between the two, and the passage reads and wants to establish one was the keeper of the flocks, one was the tiller of the soil.

(Genesis 4:3) "So it came about in the course of time that Cain brought an offering to the LORD of the fruit of the ground."

Now, I've got to establish this because I've heard this misrepresentation many times, the offering that is given is not an offering for sin offering for sin has not happened yet. It doesn't really happen until Leviticus 1, as the Law comes into play. In fact, it's very important to note that there is no injunction in any way to give an offering. I mean, where does God say that He wanted an offering? So, what we have in the passage is really a free will.

It's one of the things that is brought up during the time of Jeremiah, and I want you to look with me in Jeremiah 7, if you would. Sometimes you have these, which I've often mentioned, obscure passages in these places, and you go, "What in the world is that there for?" And then you begin to read a certain passage, and you go, "That's why it was there."

(Jeremiah 7:21) "Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, "Add your burnt offerings to your sacrifices and eat flesh."

(Jeremiah 7:22) "For I did not speak to your fathers, or command them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings and sacrifices."

Do you understand what He's saying here? He's saying, "When I first rescued your father's, we didn't even talk offerings." And I think there's a clear reason why, if you go back to that whole incident in which God calls His people out of Egypt, and He rescues them. So, we have a picture of salvation in which God is leading His people and takes them through the water, which is another picture of salvation, and as Paul will actually refer to it as baptism. So, it is a walking, coming out, and stepping out by faith and God rescuing.

What's interesting is, no law was given to them before they were rescued. People oftentimes think, “Well, you have to obey the law in order to be rescued.” There wasn't any law. So, the rescuing came first. Then came the Law, and that's to be noted, but the passage is telling us that “When I first talked to your fathers, I didn't talk to him at all about offerings.” And really, if you think about it, the whole offering thing didn't come into play until man begin to offer to other gods, while Moses was receiving the word of God. Then God says, “Ok, if you want to offer, this is what's going to happen.” So, it's an interesting picture or one to be noted. Let me also say this, when you when you come to Genesis 4:3,

“So it came about in the course of time that Cain brought an offering...”

I just want to finish this concept up with “offering,” that when he uses the word “offering” within the text, “*minḥâ*,” it is a word that is not referring to necessarily blood offerings, because I know that some people say, “Well, I know the reason why Cain’s offering wasn't accepted. It wasn't accepted because it was at the fruit of the ground.” It wasn't a blood offering. It wasn't a sin offering. One, there's

no sin offering at this time, and two, the name “offering” here, “*minḥâ*” makes reference to a tribute. It's the same word that's actually used in 2 Samuel 8:2, for the Moabites, and I think in verse 6 as well, the Assyrians come, and they give tribute to David, because he's the king. The passage is making reference to something that is not only a tribute, but perhaps a portion, a gift to the king, but within the text it's very clear that they're not sacrificing something, they're actually giving shields of gold to David. So, what is the passage referring to? It's talking about a tribute; a gift that you're giving out of your abundance. The question here is what caused him to do this? I would have to say that it would have to go back to Genesis 4:1, in the sense that Eve goes, “with the help of the LORD.” So, perhaps in some way she turned to the kids and said, “You know why you're here? Somebody had something to do with it.” So, they began bringing tributes to God in recognition of this. It's no more complicated than that.

Now, the passage will say in verse 3 as it begins to describe the way that Cain does it; this will begin to describe why God does not receive his offering,

(Genesis 4:3) “So it came about in the course of time...”

That phrase together, “it came about in the course of time,” actually, “the course of time” means “to the very extremity of time.” Another way of putting it would be “at the very, very last moment he brings his offering.”

Again, I don't know why I remember these things. I'm trying to let them go, but I remember a birthday, and somebody came to the birthday, and they go, “Oh, it's your birthday.” And then they got out some chewing gum or something and handed it to me, and I'm going, “Ok. So, you remembered?” It is that kind of mentality that Cain is showing within the passage, and though it may not be really clear in the English, it's extremely clear in the Hebrew that he was not only lackadaisical, but he was also lethargic in what he was doing, and ultimately apathetic in the sense that he really didn't care about this. In fact, he saw it probably as a ritual, a regiment, a requirement. Maybe his mom pressured him to do it or whatever, but here he is doing it, and in the course of time, he finally gives in and gives it. It's also emphasizing this in the sense of “the course of time,” that he's giving the worst. Scripture will oftentimes refer to the beginning of the crop as being the first fruits. It is the first fruits that really describe a sense of alacrity, or a generosity or a desire to

give. Alacrity seems to have the context of just really rushing to give, and you see somebody that can just hardly wait to give you something, and that's somebody that actually wants to give you something. You see somebody that goes, "Eh, I'll get around to it." That's not somebody that really wants to part with the things that they have, and they'll find something that they perhaps have with them, but there's no thought to it. There's no concern in it.

If you look with me in Malachi. Malachi would literally be the parallel to this of Cain in Malachi 1. In Malachi 1, the whole problem was that the people of Israel were bringing offerings to God without any kind of thought, without any kind of concern or care. There was no sense of love; there was no sense of affection; there was no sense of adoration; there was no sense of honor; there was no sense of respect.

(Malachi 1:6) "A son honors his father, and a servant his master. Then if I am a father, where is My honor? And if I am a master, where is My respect?" says the LORD of hosts to you, O priests who despise My name..."

Now, the people there go, "How do we do that?"

(Malachi 1:7) “You are presenting defiled food upon My altar. But you say, ‘How have we defiled You?...”

(Malachi 1:8) “But when you present the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? And when you present the lame and sick, is it not evil? ...”

In other words, “These are things I was going to throw away anyway. I'll bring them to God.” You see, “I was just getting ready to throw them out. Glad You came by.”

“...Why not offer it to your governor? Would he be pleased with you? Or would he receive you kindly?” says the LORD of hosts.

(Malachi 1:9) “But now will you not entreat God’s favor, that He may be gracious to us? ...”

He goes on and says in verse 10, “I'm not pleased with this” and verse 11 is very clear, “I'm to be exalted.” Does that exalt God when you bring in your least? Now here again, I want to go back to the initial point, there was no command here. There was no requirement given. Why renege? Why not just not give? You see that throughout Scripture, in Isaiah 1 and other passages, He goes, “Who requires this

trampling? You don't want to be here. I don't want you here.”

(Malachi 1:13) ““You also say, ‘My, how tiresome it is!’ And you disdainfully sniff at it,” says the LORD of hosts, “and you bring what was taken by robbery and what is lame or sick; so you bring the offering! Should I receive that from your hand?” says the LORD.”

Clearly, throughout the book, you realize that God is revealing this, and in Malachi 3:8,

“Will a man rob God? Yet you are robbing Me! But you say, ‘How have we robbed You?’ In tithes and offerings.”

(Malachi 3:10) “Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in My house, and test Me now in this,” says the LORD of hosts, “if I will not open for you the windows of heaven...”

The perception of who God is, the perception of what He's doing, the perception of why I do what I do really define how I see God. Here again, if I perceive giving is something that you have to do as a requirement or something like that, then I misread God altogether because it has nothing to do with that.

(Genesis 4:4) "Abel, on his part..."

I want you to see the contrast that's very clear within the passage.

"...brought of the firstlings..."

Now, did you see the word "first fruits" with Cain? No, you didn't see it.

He "brought of the firstlings of his flock..."

"*B^akôrâ*" is making reference to he was desirous of giving the best to God; he was desirous of giving quickly to God; he longed to give. It was not something that somebody pressured him into doing; it was something that he longed to do. Therefore, the firstlings that were brought, and it goes on and says,

"... of his flock and of their fat portions..."

We'll often use the particular phrase, "living off the fat of the land," and what it's talking about is the best of the land, the best of everything, and the most excellent. God is deserving of that. You sense the heart of Abel, that he loves God, he wants to do this, and it is that sense of desire and alacrity that we see in the passage.

So, the way it reads at the end of this verse,

“... And the LORD had regard...”

That's a very simple word that is used, but it gives the perception of gazing or staring or looking at, and the picture is one of, “he did this for me,” and God's favor. Now, that which would not be God's favor would be to not look. So, you bring in the vegetables that are already rotting, and you bring in the leaves that are all wilted, and you place them on the altar, and God goes, “I can't even look at that.” Now here again, our initial perception perhaps of reading this would be “God is mean,” but you misread it. God's having a hard time looking at something that man doesn't want to give in the first place and gives with a heart grudgingly.

“... the LORD had regard for Abel and for his offering;

(Genesis 4:5) but for Cain and for his offering He had no regard. So Cain became very angry...”

Can I read that in a different way? Cain became burning with furiousness. Wait a minute. Doesn't God know he's the gotten one? He's the favorite. Abel's the number two guy. Abel complements him. Now, Abel's taken the number one seat? That can't be. It says his countenance falls, which is an

interesting picture of not only his face falling, but a sense of his demeanor. And it is a falling in the sense of with his anger as well, because the Scripture is actually telling us what brought about the fall. The point of the passage to me is that man misperceives why God is doing what He's doing. I mean, what is this offering all about? Well, obviously it was a free will offering. It was something that was supposed to be from the heart. We have Christmas. You give gifts. Why do you do it? Well, some people actually give gifts because they have to, they think it's expected of them, but there are some people that actually do it because they want to. If in fact you're going to give it grudgingly, just keep it. There's nothing that says you have to do it. Scripture's revealing the very beginnings of these things. Oftentimes, think of all the wonderful gifts that God gives us. God gives you the freedom, you can do whatever you want to with them, but He does encourage you to do the right thing. For instance, why is it that some people are really, really strong? Why does God give them great strength? I can tell you why, Romans 15, you who are strong ought to bear the weakness of those without strength and not just please yourself. Why do people have power in positions? Why do they have

authority? Well, I can tell you why. Jesus says, "Now, the Gentiles misread me on this." He says, "The whole reason you have power and authority is to serve." That's what Jesus tells His disciples. Why do we have marriage? So, we can take advantage of people, get what we want? No, Jesus says from the beginning, it was not so. The whole reason for marriage is to show love and concern and care and sacrifice for one another to such a degree that you would actually represent the nature of Christ in doing so, in Ephesians 5. Why do we have laws? I know why we have laws, God's just wanting to keep us under His thumb and He's wanting to oppress us and He's wanting to make us miserable. The law was a tutor to lead us to Christ. It was never to give you a list of things to jump through in order to be perfect. It was in order to show you that you couldn't be perfect so that you would turn to the Savior. I would say, almost everything in Scripture that we read that God has given us, we've misinterpreted and misused. We've misconstrued the meaning of it; we've misconstrued the intent; we've misconstrued the character of who God is in doing it.

I want to end with a passage found in 2 Corinthians 8, a familiar passage dealing with giving. Paul gives a great example of those that are giving in this passage. 2 Corinthians 8 is about the Macedonians and verse 3, how they gave to their ability and beyond their ability, which seems to be a really generous act.

(2 Corinthians 8:3) “For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability, they gave of their own accord,

(2 Corinthians 8:4) begging us with much urging for the favor of participation in the support of the saints.”

Do you sense in any of this that it was a regiment or a requirement, something that they had to do? You can feel the spirit of Abel that goes, “I love doing this.” And that's what God's looking for.

It says this, a very interesting point of reference,

(2 Corinthians 8:9) “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich.”

The grace of God. Boy, do we misunderstand the grace of God.

I was looking at some of the passages dealing with how God thinks, and of course obviously His ways are higher than ours, and in Jeremiah 7, 19, and 32, he brings up Israel taking their children and slaughtering them or burning them on the altar of Molech, and God says, "You want to know something, that thought never entered My mind." I think that's just an interesting phrase, that of all the things that we know God knows, He would make that statement, "That thought never entered My mind." I mean, even when He calls about Abraham to take his son, it never entered His mind to have him sacrifice his son, never. But He would sacrifice His Son because of our distortion. The very thing that we would misuse and abuse, He would bring salvation through it. That's the heart of God, isn't it?

(2 Corinthians 9:6) "Now this I say, he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.

(2 Corinthians 9:7) Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

(2 Corinthians 9:8) And God is able to make all grace abound to you..."

Can I stop there for just a second? Why do we give? See, you misunderstood God. Does He need you to feed Him? “If I was hungry,” God says, “I would not ask you.” Does He need your money? What is He going to do with money? Why does He ask you to give? To be like Him. It is the road to be like Him. For God so loved, He gave. It’s who He is. Even though He owned everything in heaven, He gave up everything for you. You want to be like God? I thought that was the cry of Adam and Eve, “I want to be like God.” “You want to be like Me? Start giving.” We look at giving, “Well, this is just a requirement that God is oppressing me with.” He's not oppressing you, He's saying, “Do it to be like me.” In fact, the way it reads is, God is able to make all grace abound to you if you will give like Him.

Now, the way this ends is, and clearly it says in verse 10, He's going to supply you with these things and going to enrich you in everything, but I want you to see in verse 14,

(2 Corinthians 9:14) “while they also, by prayer on your behalf, yearn for you because of the surpassing grace of God in you.”

He's saying that as you begin to give generously, the way God gives, then the testimony of God's nature begins to

shine to everybody around, and the benefit that you receive, the surpassing grace of God is in you, not just upon you, in you. Boy, do we misunderstand God. Boy, did Cain misunderstand God. Boy, did Eve misunderstand God. You know, our perception is, "It's got to be this time. Got to be this kid. It's got to be this way." And God goes, "I'm not going to compromise. I'm going to do it perfect." As Galatians will say, at the fullness of time, God sent forth His Son. God knows what He's doing and He's doing everything because He loves you. If you're misreading Scripture and perceiving God in any way as being harmful, mean, vengeful, you've misread it and it's to your hurt as well as to God's defaming.

Closing Prayer:

Father, we come before You today and we ask Your forgiveness of the many times that we've misrepresented You, misthought, misperceived, misconstrued the things that you were doing in our lives for us; to perceive giving to be a negative thing. You would remind us of it's far more blessed

to give than to receive. Why can't we get these things in our head? Why is it we see things so twisted? Why is it we elevate the wrong people and suppress the right ones? We don't think anything like You.

With your heads bowed and your eyes closed, I'm just asking you to change your way of thinking. This is what the word "repentance" means, and this is what God is calling you to do, to have the mind of Christ, to understand just how much God loves you. If you will comprehend this, it's going to free you up from a lot of pain and sorrow because thinking of God in a negative way is just bringing you into a realm of hopelessness and sorrow and depression.