

12.08.24

Genesis

Chapter 4 - God's Grace Misconstrued

Good Admonition - Bad Interpretation (vs. 9-15)

Genesis 4:9-15: Then the LORD said to Cain, “Where is Abel your brother?” And he said, “I do not know. Am I my brother’s keeper?” He said, “What have you done? The voice of your brother’s blood is crying to Me from the ground. Now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand. 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.” Cain said to the LORD, “My punishment is too great to bear! 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.” 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.

As we said last week, how you and I respond to correction will define the course of our lives. Most of us don't like correction. It's not a natural phenomenon to embrace the correction that we might receive. Nevertheless, when God corrects, it is clearly for our good, is far better. The psalmist knew this all so well in Psalm 119. He conveys this particular point, "It was good that I was disciplined. Had I not, I would have gone astray" he states. One of the great differences between David and King Saul is King Saul would not receive the discipline of God. David had done some horrific things in his life, comparatively, probably in some regards, even worse than Saul. Nevertheless, when David was confronted, David would humble himself. He would thank God for that discipline, realizing that if he

had not received it, he would have gone astray. When we look at Cain, what we see is a person that just can't seem to handle discipline and the way that he responds is defensively, deceptively, and ultimately, within the passage, defiantly. He'll come, and as God begins to correct him, "Where is your brother Abel?" "How am I to know?" Now, we know that's a lie and his defenses have gone up. It's just kind of the natural phenomenon that we have. Even when we were little slow kids, "Did you do that?" "What?" "You know what I'm talking about." "No. I don't know what you're talking about." And we immediately begin to take the focus off of ourselves and maybe look a little confused, a little dazed. "Why would I do something that bad? Would I do something that terrible?" And we literally perceive the light or the exposure of that particular incident as being something cruel, judgmental or vindictive; something that would harm us. We see it as a negative thing, and clearly not as a positive thing. Why would God bother me with the details of these things? Why not just let it pass? Why not just let it go? So, we're going to see as we look at the passage, why we perceive things this way. At the very beginning, as

we look in the Book of Genesis, we've seen the beginning of our defenses and how we begin to handle the correction that is given to us.

What is to be noted before we go specifically into the passage, if you look with me in Psalm 103, one of the great Psalms that reveal to us clearly the love of God that is bestowed upon us, Who pardons all of our iniquities. That's kind of how it starts off, and you begin to see the graciousness of God; how good God is to us. Somehow, we seem to forget just how wonderful He is to us. Sort of like creation, He did all these things, and everything was good. Then, at the moment we're corrected, it just all goes out the window and God is mean and cruel and judgmental, right?

So, Psalm 103 starts off with,

(Psalm 103:1) “Bless the LORD, O my soul... bless His holy name.”

It goes on and says,

(Psalm 103:2) “... And forget none of His benefits.”

Because it's very easy to forget His benefits when you're corrected.

It then goes on,

(Psalm 103:3) “Who pardons all your iniquities,
Who heals all your diseases.”

I mean, He's the one that redeems. He's the one that rescues. God is not the one that's trying to oppress. God is the one that is rescuing you, and it's easy to forget that, especially when you and I sin.

It goes on and says this in verse 8, and really the context is,

(Psalm 103:8) “The LORD is compassionate and gracious,
Slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness.”

(Psalm 103:9) He will not always strive with us,
Nor will He keep His anger forever.”

And I like verse 10 because as we're going to be looking at Cain in particular, we're going to see that Cain didn't get what he deserved. God was gracious to him and God was directing him, and God was, in his correction, giving him a path that would help him. Of course, immediately we

perceive, “God is going to really get this guy because he killed his brother.” But if you look at the passage, it says this,

(Psalm 103:10) “He has not dealt with us according to our sins,

Nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.

(Psalm 103:11) For as high as the heavens are above the earth,

So great is His lovingkindness toward those who fear Him.

(Psalm 103:12) As far as the east is from the west,

So far has He removed our transgressions from us.

(Psalm 103:13) Just as a father has compassion on his children,

So the LORD has compassion on those who fear Him.

(Psalm 103:14) For He Himself knows our frame;

He is mindful that we are but dust.”

Of course, that was probably more acutely a point in Cain’s life than any of us because he knew where he came from, the dust.

So, if you come to this passage in Genesis 4, we realize that Cain is responding so counter to what God is really like, and when I go through this, I begin to realize just how I bristle at the fact that God has corrected me in some way. Sometimes, the correction comes through other individuals, and sometimes it comes through sickness, difficulty in our life. “What is God doing in the correction?” I guess is the question that we need to ask ourselves. Really, what you have within the passage is not as much a punishment, although Cain will reveal it as such, “My punishment is too great to bear!” as he’ll state. But it's not a punishment because the punishment is you getting what you deserve. So, it's not a punishment that happens within the passage, but it is an admonition that happens in the passage. Now, the reason why I put the word “admonition” in this is because God is correcting by putting something into the mind. The word in the Greek, if you were to go in the New Testament and pull out the word “admonition,” it is a word that literally describes to place in one's mind a particular thought, perhaps, or more specifically, when somebody is doing something wrong, it is to place in their mind something that they hadn't been

thinking about; whether it was that they clearly didn't want to think about it by virtue of just totally hiding from that or perhaps inadvertently, they didn't think about it. But admonition is you're going to put in mind, "You know that was wrong. You know you hurt somebody." And you begin to really describe the ramifications of those things that people don't even think about. When people do certain things that are selfish, and one of the things that we clearly see within the passage is that Cain is running off of his ego and out of selfish motives, there's no doubt about that. So, the thing that we see is we have no thought about how it affects anybody else. The only thing we can think about is how it affects us. I mean, just go on the freeway, let the freeways go down to maybe one lane, and you're going to watch some people just zooming right past you, and then at the very end, they'll cut in. Now, I can pretty well tell you they're not thinking, "I wonder if there's been a lot of people waiting in line all this time to get in?" No, they're not thinking about that. All they're thinking about is, "I'm going to get in before everybody else gets before me." Because that's the way they're thinking. I suppose if an officer were to pull this

person over and say something like, “You do know that there's an order to this, and when you do that, you're hurting all these other people?” What the officer might be doing by virtue of writing a ticket is going, “You might want to put this to mind. You might want to think about this.” By the seriousness of your faces, I'm thinking that a lot of you have done this before. So, the wonderful thing is I'm letting you know that God has forgiven you of this sin and you don't have to sit there with this great guilt upon yourself.

In this passage, we see that Cain is very resistant. He's denying everything that's going on and he's going into deception as well as he'll go into defiance towards God and that's kind of the way that we go. First of all, we're found out and we deny the whole thing, and then when it's pushed and the evidence is given, then we begin to just get angry about it towards God. So, as we pick up within the passage, the Lord will bring this up to Cain by a mere question. Now let me just say this, that one of the great ways to bring something to mind is to cause somebody to think about what they're doing, and one of

the great ways to do that is to ask questions. Simple questions like, "What have you done?" is exactly what God's going to ask you, and we've seen Him do this with Adam and Eve already, right? "Where are you, Adam?" and He goes to Eve, and He goes, "What have you done?" So, in both cases, you see, and he turns to Adam and goes, "Who told you that you were naked?" Well, these are interesting questions because He's dealing with the emotions that somebody is feeling. In other words, "Where are you?" Well, the point of the matter is that Adam and Eve were hiding, right? So, what God is wanting to bring up is, "Why are you hiding?" In other words, "I've given you this thing called a conscience, and it's tugging at you to such a degree that you're hiding. Now, you can deny that you're doing something wrong, but why are you hiding? Why are you feeling this way? Why is this feeling of what we call guilt so strong? Why is it you feel ashamed? Who told you that you were naked? What is this you've done?" So, He's causing them to think through all the emotions, whether it's their fear, or whether it's their shame, or whether it's a sense of perhaps they feel distant from one another and clearly distant from God.

“Why do you think you feel this way?” I think oftentimes, clearly as parents, that's what we encourage in our children. “Think about why you're feeling the way that you're feeling.” And you begin to admonish them on the basis of, “This thing that you're doing is not making you feel better.” One of the great lies about sin is that if you sin, you're going to be happier, and all the evidence points to the opposite. So, God begins to cause you to think through these things, and His admonition as such that it pulls those feelings out as well as a sense of cognitive reasoning. “What's actually happening here?” Once again, feelings that maybe you subverted, maybe thoughts that you didn't want to deal with, but admonishing brings them out.

(Genesis 4:9) “Then the LORD said to Cain, “Where is Abel your brother?” ...”

He immediately puts the context in with relationships and more specifically, this was a guy that was named your brother by virtue of he kind of followed you around and wanted to be like you. You were the one that was to be in charge and to keep him.

“... he said, “I do not know.” ...”

Now, that's in the perfect tense, which seems to convey that he's actually saying, “I have no idea where he is.”

Which once again we know is a lie. Then he asks a simple question to God, which now is putting him not only on the defense but really becoming more defiant. In other words, “Why are you asking me?”

“... “Am I my brother’s keeper?””

What's interesting about this phrase is that if you were to back up into Genesis 2:15, we understand that God had Adam be the keeper of the garden. It actually uses the word “keeper,” “*šāmar*”. What does “keeper” mean? It means somebody that cares for the garden, watches over, and tends for the garden. That's what he does. He focuses on the care of that particular garden.

As the text goes on and it begins to describe Cain, it doesn't refer to him as a keeper of the garden; it refers to him as a tiller of the garden which I think is interesting.

Now, we know that he's supposed to be following in his father's footsteps, but it seems as if the whole aspect of care has been taken out of his vocabulary and it's more,

“This is a job and not something I necessarily want to do.” We can picture that as well as the way that he comes with his offering before God, not only lackadaisical, but giving the least and his heart doesn't seem to be in it. He doesn't seem to be happy. You show me somebody happy at work, I'll show you somebody that's happy to give, but this, this individual is not happy about the things that he's doing, and he conveys that really in his offering before God.

As we come to this, his statement, “Am I my brother's keeper?” is telling us that he almost looks down on the word “keeper”. The reason why I say that is it says in Genesis 4:2, “Again, she gave birth to his brother Abel. And Abel was a keeper of flocks...”

Now, we know that Cain perceived this as a step down because he was like his father in the garden. So, “keeper of the flocks,

” who's the keeper of the flocks?” Who started that? It was obviously something that Abel did, but what we see is somebody that was (*“šāmar”*) caring for somebody,

that was a guard, one who tended to the care of the sheep.

It goes on and says,

“... but Cain was a tiller of the ground.”

Now, here again, you have to ask yourself, go back to go back to Genesis 2:15,

“Then the LORD God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep (“šāmar”) it.”

So, we know what he should have been doing, but “tiller” is going to be the focus of Cain, which is telling us that he perceives that whole care thing as just unnecessary. You don't have to care for anything. You just do your work, do your job, get it done. That's it. So, it's almost as if Cain is saying, “I'm offended by the fact that You would identify me as a keeper. I'm offended by the fact that in some way I would have to care for somebody.” It is interesting to think about the way that the world thinks, because much of what we do is more about business than it is about caring for people. If in fact you were to set aside business

to care for somebody, it would be looked at as a step down in most people's mind, and we would be perceiving it as an insult that we would have to take care of somebody. God forbid that we would actually have to think of people over money or over the things that we desire to do. He clearly sees this as an interruption by God. He clearly sees this as an assault on what he wants to do. So, his response is clearly defiant.

(Genesis 4:10) “He said, “What have you done? ...”

Now, God gets more direct. “You've done something. That's why I'm asking you questions.”

“... The voice of your brother's blood is crying to Me from the ground.”

The whole description and let me just emphasize the word “ground” there in the text, is actually where we get the word “Adam”. The word “ground” there is “*’ăḏāmâ*”. So, it is an interesting reminder of where we came from. The purpose of the ground originally, as we actually see in creation, is to bring forth life. Did you notice that? So, in the ground, the things began to spring up, and life came. Even the animals came up from the ground as man came

up from the ground. So, it was a place in which life came, not where death was sent.

(Genesis 4:11) “Now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand.”

Now, the way I think most of us read this is that the ground kind of opened up and received the blood, but I don't believe that's the picture at all. I believe the picture is that he buried his brother, and the ground had to receive him. It's actually what we would say is the first real cover up because he's covering up his murder. Scripture tells us that really when you start off being angry, it ultimately leads to murderous thoughts. That's why I think Scripture says you don't want to hang onto your anger. You don't want to let the sun go down in your anger, because if in fact you continue to hold onto it, as Hebrews 12 will say, a root of bitterness will come in, and that will actually transpire into a murderous thought.

The way that it's put in James 4:2,

“You lust and do not have; so you commit murder...”

So fundamentally, “Why are you angry?” One of the questions that God was asking him before, “Why has your countenance fallen?” is reminding him that your anger causes something. Some people go, “I wonder why I'm so angry.” And it's a very simple equation. If you're prideful, you will be angry. Very simple. So, the more pride you have, the angrier you will be. If in fact you are humble it will all go away, but the pride will cause a sense of arrogance, anger that will come in and on top of that, then what you have is disappointment, guilt, and depression. Once again, people oftentimes wonder, “Where does all this depression come from?” Well, psychologists will even tell you depression is fundamentally anger turned inward. So, it's holding on to that anger that brings depression and disappointment. It's basically fundamentally a result of an overinflated ego. If in fact you get rid of that pride and that arrogance, guess what else will go? Your anger, hatred and your depression, but it's all these things. You kind of get the feeling when you're looking at Cain and listening to him

that he feels he deserves better than everybody else. Obviously, his brother, if he gives a better offering, shouldn't be recognized because "I'm Cain. He's Abel. He shouldn't be recognized." He basically feels that he deserves better and quite frankly, he doesn't understand why everybody else doesn't recognize this. Have you ever met people like that? I mean, sometimes I'm there, "Do people know who I am?" and the bottom line is, absolutely not, and you find that out as you go through life, that maybe you're just not as important as you thought you were. What a shock, an epiphany, but you begin to realize these things, and if you don't, then what's going to come out of this is just this anger and hostility. What's interesting to me is the tie to the ground in which God is going to be tying this.

Once again, as we go through this, what you're going to see is why man doesn't like correction; you have to start off with because he's egotistical and self-absorbed. That's got to be the first rule of thumb that you begin to understand why man doesn't like correction.

The second thing that you see within the passage in verse 11 in particular is we would rather bury our faults than deal with them. I mean, “Can’t this problem just go away? I didn't do the right thing. Ok. So, I'm going to bury him.” This is one of the reasons why a lot of people just don't like church, because when you're reading Scripture, it doesn't allow you to bury it.

In fact, John 3:20, begins to convey the fact that the light of the word exposes things and those people that are doing evil, they don't want to be exposed to the things that they're doing. Why is that true? Because their perception is that God is going to punish them by giving them what they deserve, and what they perceive, they perceive on the basis of how they would project their thoughts onto God. So, what do you want to do? “I want to bury it. I want to hide it. It didn't happen” and God says, “You thought you buried your problems, I can hear it from the ground.” I think that's one of the reasons why the psalmist says, “Where can I go from Thy presence? If I go down to Sheol, Thou art there.”

I was thinking about Job in particular, and Job cries out in Job 16. In fact, turn there with me. It's a very interesting passage because you hear him request something that I think in some way might even be the request of Abel within the passage. If you come towards the end of this chapter, it reads this way,

(Job 16:18) “O earth, do not cover my blood,
And let there be no resting place for my cry.

(Job 16:19) “Even now, behold, my witness is in heaven,
And my advocate is on high.

(Job 16:20) “My friends are my scoffers;
My eye weeps to God.

(Job 16:21) “O that a man might plead with God
As a man with his neighbor!

(Job 16:22) “For when a few years are past,
I shall go the way of no return.”

Simple phrase, “O earth, do not cover my blood.” Clearly, Cain was wanting to cover up the whole scene and God says, “What, you don't think I heard him through the

earth? It's the earth that you came up from. It's the earth that cries out."

So, when you look at what God begins to direct him in verse 12, He's now going to once again, not punish him, but direct him in this and the point is very clear.

(Genesis 4:12) "When you cultivate the ground, it will no longer yield its strength to you..."

Another way of saying its power or its produce to you.

"... you will be a vagrant and a wanderer on the earth."

So, He's literally stating that there's a result to this and you say, "Well, yeah, God's being mean. That's the result." No, God's showing him something that he was not willing to look at. What is that? If you don't take care of something, you won't get any produce from it. Now once again, it's a very simple thought, but one that we easily miss because of the fact that all we can think about is how the correction affects us.

The way that it goes on and reads is,

"you will be a vagrant and a wanderer..."

Another way of putting it is, you're going to be a fugitive. A wanderer is a picture of somebody that shakes their head as they're walking by because they feel sorry for you or because they feel contempt towards you. It's talking about that you're going to live in a world; you're going to see what it feels like to be disregarded. That's an interesting picture, because man perceives once again that he's the center of attention, and this is why he can kill his brother. "Because if you adversely affect me or what I want, I don't give a thought towards you because I'm the center of attention." God goes, "We're going to let you start thinking about people." Look, you take a waiter, a waitress, and you put them out on the floor, and they go on the floor, and they start insulting people. So, as they go on the floor, maybe they call people stupid or ignorant or maybe they don't like their politics or something and they begin to criticize them. After a while, you begin to see people lowering the tips and maybe even saying, "I'd rather have this waiter over here." If in fact, that person is astute in any way, they'll stop and go, "Maybe I need to be nicer." Once they begin to feel the pressure, they begin to maybe see things from a different

perspective, that “The things that I have been doing have actually been causing my life to be less productive.” God will do this in your life, but it's God's grace that does it. Now, the way that he's going to interpret this is it's too much punishment, and that's the way man interprets God's correction. But you can clearly see that God is identifying these things, and as Cain will respond, he actually responds in a way that also tells us another thing that he's concerned about; not only is he coming in with this inflated sense of ego and not only is he wanting to bury his faults rather than deal with them, but within this passage he begins to share something that he's actually afraid of.

(Genesis 4:13) “Cain said to the LORD, “My punishment is too great to bear!”

(Genesis 4:14) “Behold, You have driven me this day from the face of the ground; and from Your face I will be hidden...”

“I'm not going to get Your favor,” which would be really expressed through the rain coming down in so many respects.

“... and I will be a vagrant and a wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me.”

To read that better in the Hebrew is, “whoever finds out about me will kill me.” What he's saying is that “If people knew who I really was, they would want me dead.” And I think that's one of the great fears that man has. I mean, obviously our pride starts off the whole thing, but even through the process, one of the greatest fears that we have about confessing our sins, Scripture says, “If you confess your sins, He is faithful and just to forgive you. He'll cleanse you from all unrighteousness.” So, why not confess your sins? “Do you know what people would think if they understood who I was? I can't do that.” Wow, that's literally one of the greatest fears that people have in their thoughts and in their mind. So, his focus is not as much about, “Well, this could actually heal me. This could actually bring good in my life.” The only thing you think about is, “This is the worst punishment that could ever happen to me.”

The Lord then says, “To really convey that this is not to bring you death; this is not a vengeful thing that I'm

doing.” And let me just say this too, that what we're dealing with is that God doesn't want a person to take in their own vengeance. As He'll clearly state in Romans 12, and as He'll clearly state through the law of God, He says, “Don't you do it, because you would be unfair. Vengeance has a way of going way beyond what you should do.”

(Genesis 4:15) “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.”

God sends a clear message, “This is not a vengeful thing that I'm doing. This is a corrective thing that I'm doing. Cain you need to listen.” Cain once again is not listening to those things. There's a fundamental principle within this that I just want to emphasize. There are a number of fundamental principles within this, but I want to emphasize one in particular, and that is the one statement that I'm making here is your sin will keep you from living a productive life.

If I can show you a passage that really to me parallels this, it would be in John 15. In John 15, one of the things that

Jesus says to His disciples is, “I came that you might bear fruit and that your fruit would remain.” Remember Him saying that within the passage?

(John 15:16) “You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you.”

Now, all of this is in the context of a simple command. It starts off with, “Abide in Me...” in verse 4. See that? Where He talks about the vine and the branches which is really horticultural within the same paraphrase picture. So, what you have is God giving this interesting picture through the plants and everything like that. The point of abiding in Him is thinking like Him; living like Him. As Philippians 2 would say, have the mind of Christ; have this mind in you, which is also in Christ Jesus. Think the same way. So, it's abiding in Him. What is the way that Christ thinks? Well, Christ doesn't think in terms of taking your life. He thinks in terms of saving your life; to the degree that He's thinking of you more than He's thinking of Himself. This is Philippians 2, right? Hold others in higher

esteem. Even Christ, as Romans 15 would say, did not please Himself.

So, it goes on,

(John 15:8) “My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit...”

In other words, be productive. The point of this is that God wants your life to mean something. Really, I think everybody wants to live a productive life. You can't do it if you hate people.

So, the passage reads this way,

(John 15:9) “Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love.”

Clearly, we understand what He means when he says, “Abide in Me,” “Think like me. Have the same love. Have this love in you. Have this mind in you.”

(John 15:10) “If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love.”

(John 15:11) “These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full.”

(John 15:12) “This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you.”

This is exactly what Cain did not do, and his thought is, “I'm going to be productive if I just pursue my own desires.” And God says, “That's not the way to be productive. If you want to be productive, you have to love man. You have to love one another the same way I loved you.”

And God is going to put Cain on this road to understand what it feels like to be rejected; to understand what it feels like to not be cared for; to not have anybody care for you; every time you walk around, for people to shun you. He's going to help him understand it. Will Cain receive the instruction? No, he won't receive the instruction. In fact, he'll just get angrier, and as we go on to see in that anger, war is going to come, and people are going to invent all kinds of things to kill people better and that's really going to come out of the “Cain” mindset. But what God is doing through these things in your life and in my life, is He is correcting us. I oftentimes just reflect on a very simple phrase, “Is this fostering love? Am I loving this person by

thinking this way?” Have you ever looked at the days gone by and go, “This was not a very productive week” and it's like God going, “Ok. What was missing?” And I have found that the more I start walking in the love of Christ, the more productive my week is. God has interesting and subtle ways to remind us of that, doesn't He? How do you respond to the correction of God? Do you see it as a terrible thing, a horrible thing, or do you see it as something that God is drawing you closer to Him?

Closing Prayer:

Father, we thank You for Your word. We thank You for the truth that comes to us. Lord, we look at Cain and we feel like we're looking in the mirror. It's very easy for us to defend ourselves, to be deceptive when charges are brought up against us, to even be defiant in the ways that we come back at You. But You're not telling us these things to be vindictive or hurtful or harmful. In fact, You tell us in Your word that there is a blood that speaks

better than Abel's; it's the blood of our Savior, Jesus Christ, and the blood doesn't say, "You must be avenged." It declares, "You are forgiven." And because of this, we can come to You without any fear. There is no condemnation anymore, and we are so thankful that when our sins are exposed before Your throne, they are just simply forgiven.

Your head's bowed and your eyes closed. There is now no reason for you to hide. Cain had what he perceived to be in his mind a good reason to hide; a good reason to deny everything. We don't have a good reason. We can ask forgiveness today and we'll be accepted with mercy and grace. We could come boldly before the throne of grace. The only thing that sin is doing is keeping you from being productive, and it's keeping you from being happy. No excuses.