

Part 1: A Legacy Better than Cain's

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Are you a pessimist? Or are you an optimist? Are you a glass-half empty kind of person? Or a glass half-full kind of person?

It is my personal belief that nothing reveals your worldview—are we progressively getting better, or are we progressively getting worse—than your view of the Christmas holidays. In my own home, I have a beautiful, lovely wife, who beginning the week of Thanksgiving begins to shape shift into a zealous and impassioned version of Cindy Lou Who. There is also another person in our house, who will remain nameless, who identifies more with a specific less loveable, but often misunderstood, Grinch.

Every year, before our children's eyes, worldviews collide. The crucible of curmudgeon is constantly accosted by the onslaught of glitter, greenery and the guilt of ruining our children's childhood.

Have you ever wondered why such a battle exists? Why are two people so seemingly alike so incredibly different? Why is it that even though we break our schedules and establish our traditions for the holidays that conflict, sorrow, death and darkness never seem to keep the same schedule?

Whether it's wrestling with a cantankerous husband about how quickly the lights should go up, or putting on a cheery face while pain, deep wounds and anxious worry eat at the soul underneath—we know what it's like to live in a conflicted world.

So will it get better? Or will it get worse? And how do we make sense of things in the meantime?

As we slow down to celebrate Advent, the long awaited birth of Jesus Christ, we encounter not only the theoretical answers to these questions, but the practical implications of them in our daily life.

In order to highlight for us the birth of Jesus we are going to spend four Sunday's together examining significant births in the Bible's Old Testament and we are going to see how each of them prepares us, and teaches us more about, the significance and wonder of the birth of Christ.

Our text, which was just read to us, may seem like an odd place to start the season of Advent. But it's actually in witnessing the pattern of the first, second, and third births in human history that we come to understand the necessity of the birth of Jesus. It's this story that not only highlights the significance of Jesus in the Bible, but the significance of Jesus in your own life.

What we are going to see today in Genesis 4 is this: **The hope of man is deliverance from hope in man.** We are going to see this in three points as we examine the story of Cain and Abel. First we are going to see the subtly to sin as we examine **Hope Distorted**, then we will see the dark spiral of sin as we see the legacy of Cain and **Hope Destroyed**. But lastly, when it seems everything has gone wrong, we see the promise of **Hope Delivered**.

To best understand what's going on in Genesis 4, we must first catch up to what has happened in the opening of Genesis.

After God created Adam and Eve in a perfect world, in a perfect relationship to himself, the Devil snuck in and deceived them. There was one tree which God prohibited his perfect creation to enjoy and it was a tree which if eaten of, would cause them to die.

What God gave as a gracious restriction, the Devil twisted into a sinister scheme by God to mute to glory and life of Adam and Eve. Maybe you've experienced the same sort of lie: "God doesn't want what's best for you," said Satan, "He doesn't want to share his glory with you. He's holding you back, limiting your freedom and stealing your joy." Adam and Eve believed the Devil, ate the fruit and found all that God said was true, and all the Devil said was false.

They sinned, and immediately they became spiritually dead. All the peace that existed between them was shattered. But in a remarkable turn of events God came to them in their sin and did something amazing: he didn't kill them. Though they would be spiritually separated from the presence of God on account of their sin, God allowed them to live. But why?

Because God also promised to make a way back to the garden, he promised that one day the serpent would be crushed forever, he promised to redeem all that Adam and Eve broke. Look at what God said to the serpent in **Genesis 3:15**. One day, an offspring of Eve would enter into this conflicted world but he would crush the head of the serpent. He would defeat the forces of darkness.

Through Eve, though she sinned first, God would grant the seed of salvation according to his mercy. This was so significant to what Adam and Eve understood at this point that it became part of Eve's identity **Genesis 3:20**.

Adam named his wife "Eve" which sounds like the Hebrew phrase, "Life-giver." Why did he do that? Because it was God's grace that Eve would conceive and through his mercy life would be restored.

This tragedy coupled with hope is the immediate context for our passage today, and it's only in seeing this that we examine our first point: **Hope Distorted**.

I'm sure as you heard Genesis 4 read for you, you picked up the primary theme of the passage: things go terribly wrong. But when do you think things started to go wrong? What was the first sign that things were not getting better, but in fact getting worse?

Though the serpent is nowhere to be found in this passage, where does the lie of the snake still echo in the hearts of humanity?

Well notice where this passage starts: **Genesis 4:1-2**.

Did you see it! It's so subtle, and the effects of sin often are. But by the end of our passage today what we just read will glow like Rudolf's nose.

One of the best questions you can ask yourself when you read the Bible is: What do I know? So what do we know going into Genesis 4? We know that Adam and Eve failed. We know that God in his mercy allowed them to live. We know that God in his grace promised he would defeat the Devil through the offspring of Eve. We also know that sexual intimacy existed before the fall, in Genesis 2 there was a one flesh union between husband and wife.

But we also know that of all the times they could have been intimate it wasn't until this very moment that the God who had mercy, that the God who promised grace, used his power to open the womb of Eve. And what does Eve say? "I have gotten a man...and God helped."

I have been in the delivery room for the birth of my four children. Never once after any of those births, do people stream in and congratulate me on my effort and my labor. Why? Because comparatively speaking I did nothing. Sarah did the work.

But after what we just witnessed in Genesis 3, that it was the mercy of God, the grace of God and the power of God who would bring forth a savior from Eve, Eve's comment is just as tone-deaf as I would be to boast in my own labor in pregnancy.

You see after the Devil planted the lie of our name being as great as God's the subtle virus of sin continued to stain the heart of Adam and Eve. Eve merely entered into a partnership with God. I have gotten, and God helped. But there was a total lack of a prioritization of God. Sure, he was involved, but Eve did the real work.

This comes to the surface all the more when we consider the name Cain sounds like the Hebrew word for "gotten" or "possessed," His name was a reminder of what Eve got for herself. Second, when Abel is born, he is almost an afterthought. Cain gets this doxological name from Eve, but Abel gets nothing. In fact he's not even introduced as Eve's son, instead merely Abel's brother. As if to add insult to injury, Abel's name is the same Hebrew word for "vanity and vapor," Abel was nothing.

Why? Eve did it. She did the thing, she got the man, now she is safe. She righted her own destiny.

Let this be a warning to all of us. Sin doesn't need the heart of an atheist to grow. It doesn't need you to condemn your faith in God it needs only a compromise. That's what Eve does here. She knows she should speak of God, seek God, and thank God. But it's mostly the Eve show, and God helped. The lie that, "You will be like God," continues to get legs in the heart of us all.

Eve's pride and joy, Cain, shows the dangerous trajectory of this compromise. Read with me **Genesis 4:3-7**.

It's important to note at this point that there is no system of sacrifices in place. Those will come later on in Israel's history. So what we have here is an example of the same desire that is actually at play in each of our hearts. What motivated this sacrifice was a simple awareness that God is worthy of the whole of our lives.

This awe we have to be inspired by something bigger than ourselves, to give ourselves to something great is displayed here. This is the effect of being made in the image of a living God—we aspire to give our lives to something great. And both Cain and Able set out to sacrifice to the same God.

Cain was by no means a non-believer. He didn't go and sacrifice to an idol. But here we see another difference don't we. Just like his mother, Cain entered into a partnership with God instead of prioritizing God. Cain offered some, yet Abel offered not only the firstborn of his flock, but also their fat portions.

Cain gave to God out of a motivation to include God in his life, but not because God was the motivation for his life. And nothing reveals a lack of sincerity in our hearts as much as seeing the sincerity of someone else. Cain didn't see Abel's sacrifice and say, "He gave just as I gave," instead Abel's genuine worship was immediately seen as a threat to Cain's disingenuous offering and he became angry.

His own response shows that though he looked the part, his heart was far from God. This is where God graciously began his counsel with him: "If you're upset, then do what is good! Offer a good sacrifice, submit your life to me and you will find your joy!" God reveals to him the competing desires of hope!

Sin desires you, it offers you a false hope that by withholding from God, by simply partnering with God, you can get everything you ever wanted as a co-equal with him. But God says you must master that, you must not believe that lie and instead do well—do what is righteous.

Look at how the New Testament writers speak of this: **1 John 3:12**.

Cain knew he didn't do what was righteous so he had two hopes: Be mastered by a prioritization of God and joyfully offer the best of your life to God, or be mastered by sin and hope to preserve what's best for yourself.

This is where things begin to get worse. Read with me **Genesis 4:3-16**.

So what happens? Instead of humbling himself and submitting his name under the worship of God, Cain thinks he can solve the problem by killing Abel. Why? Because if there are two people fighting for God's pleasure, if I kill one, then God must find his pleasure in me!

This is the hope distorted: If God's pleasure is what I need to be happy, then I just need to do what I can to earn God's pleasure by any means possible. But God's pleasure, God's grace is never a result of our works, only of our worship.

This terrible inversion leads to our second point today: **Hope Destroyed**.

Cain is confronted once more by God and he is cursed. Just as his father and mother were cursed by God, here their firstborn, the one who was hoped to be the snake crusher, is cursed again. Moved further away from the Garden of Eden than even his parents were.

God's specific curse was this: You are cut off from the presence and cut off from the land. You will wander the earth as a nomad and as a fugitive finding no home.

But remarkably, God gives Cain a promise when Cain says this is too much. Cain says, "If I don't have a home, if I'm a wanderer, someone will find me and kill me."

So God promises his protection on Cain and he places a mark on his as a visible reminder of this promise. Every time Cain was to see that mark, he was to be reminded that God would protect him.

But what does Cain do almost immediately? He settles in the land of Nod. He doesn't wander like God told him to. In fact in an ironic way he settles in the land of Nod which literally means, the land of "Wandering."

And what does he do there? He begins a family and builds a city. Look at **Genesis 4:17**.

He builds a city. Why? Because it's easier to trust in the safety of the city you can see than the security of a God you can't. More than that notice the repetition of the word "Name." "He called the name of the city after the name of his son, Enoch."

Despite God's grace to not destroy Adam and Eve, despite God's grace to grant Eve a child, despite God's grace to help Cain before he murdered Abel, despite God's grace to not kill Cain immediately, despite God's grace to protect Cain, Cain rebels against God all the more and builds a city in the legacy of his own name.

The lie of the serpent grows into human history. Cain's hope is in the legacy of Cain. Apart from God's gracious revelation in our lives this is the default of all of our hearts. It's what causes us as infants to desire what our siblings have. It's what makes us covet the house or career of our neighbor. It's what drives us to pornography and greed. We want to take what is ours because the bigger we are, the more secure and comfortable we are, the more real our hope is.

But this passage highlights for us the danger of such a hope. It paints a pessimistic picture of human history. Because it appears that despite God's promise to send redemption through the offspring of Eve, everything has gone wrong. If the hope of man is hope in man, hope is quickly lost.

Eve had two sons. One was righteous, one learned from his parent's mistake and prioritized above all things the name of God, and he was killed for it by his older brother.

That older brother, the one who "Eve had gotten," the one who was supposed to crush the head of the serpent was mastered by him. Just as his parents rejected God's counsel, so too did Cain. Just as Eve was warned of a desire contrary to her husband, Cain was ruled by a desire contrary to himself. Just as Adam was cursed from the ground up, so too was Cain cursed from the ground.

What are we supposed to feel in our gut? "It's happening again." The same mistakes, the same curse, the same sins multiplied. The latter part of this passage focuses on Cain's family tree, and specifically his distant grandson, Lamech. And notice how the trickle of sin turns into a river of darkness: **Genesis 4:19-24**.

Lamech makes Cain look like a choir boy. He breaks God's commands and design for marriage, taking two wives. And in a drastic show of arrogance he sings a song to his wives promoting his own name. But in his boasting we see the endless nature of his wickedness. Where Cain had killed his brother, here Lamech sings of his own power to kill multiple people, including young men. Even greater than Cain's revenge which was promised by God himself, is the revenge of Lamech who would take life by his own power and his own might.

Jude writes of Cain in the New Testament when he says this **Jude 11**, "Woe to them, for they walked in the way of Cain and abandoned themselves for the sake of gain..."

Bloodthirst is the legacy of hope in men. Dark is the wound of sin. Do you see here the gain of sin? Do you see the empty promise of living life for the fame of our own name? Do you see all that your effort might accomplish?

Do we need to wonder why darkness exists in our world? Our world often throws the word "sin" around as if to talk of it as a sacred pleasure. Cake so good it's "sinful." "Sin-City" the destination for the adult who wants it all.

But sin's slope is destructive, bloodthirsty and damning.

Whether you affirm a biblical doctrine of sin or not, don't you share the same experience? If you are a student of history, you know the devastation of World War 2. World War 1 was dubbed, the war to end all wars. After the war medicine, technology, communication and economies flourished on a global level. Jubal played his pipe while Jabal cooked us delicious foods and Tubal-cain used his tools to make secure walls and safe houses. We had done it. We had come together, we had solved the world's problems.

But then WWII happened. All the technological advances we turned to for deliverance were weaponized, politicized and turned against us ushering in the bloodiest war in human history.

Today social media overthrows governments for good, but enslaves teenagers to peer pressure and cyber-bullying bringing pornography in to the corners of our homes. Our cities are more connected than ever before, but our doors get smaller and our locks stronger.

The hope of humanity in the name of Cain is destined for the celebration of Lamech. Is this the best there is? Is this our greatest hope? Certainly there must be more? We know pain better than we know peace. We know anxiety better than we know affection and jealously more than we know jubilation.

But friends, there is another way because there is another name.

Consider our final point this morning: **Hope Delivered.**

Read with me **Genesis 4:25-26.**

God opened Eve's womb again, and it was the painful experience of her life which opened her eyes. Did you see it? Might God grant you today the vision of Eve.

Where her first born was named "Cain" meaning "I had gotten" her third born was named "Seth" meaning "God has appointed."

Where Eve only called Cain "her man," she returns to the promise of Genesis 3:15 when she calls Seth "another offspring." It is not the might of man which can save us, but instead the offspring according to the promise of God.

Even when it seemed all is lost, even when humanity blew it again for the second, third, and fortieth time, God kept his word.

And it was after the birth of Seth that something profound happened. No more was the hope in "A man" born by Eve, no more was security in the city of Enoch, no more were songs set to the brutality of Lamech, but instead people began to call on the name of the Lord.

Another legacy was made possible. A legacy of real change and hope, hope not in the promise of sin, but the promise of God.

A legacy that Luke captures for us in his gospel when he says this: **Luke 3:23, 38.**

It was through the line of Seth that God would keep his promise to a world embroiled in darkness. Though Abel and his righteousness was poured out by the bloodthirsty hands of his brother, it would be the grandson of Seth who gave up his life to make the many Cain's righteous.

Where do we find our hope? In the name of Jesus. Do you fear the world is getting worse? Sin rages forward but there is a way out, there is hope that God will keep his promise to save by giving you the faith to cry out for salvation according to the name of God. And because we have seen that name in the birth of Jesus Christ we know he is faithful. We know what it means to be accepted.

How do we apply this truth to our life this advent season?

When it seems the world is only darkness—God's promise remains. Like a seed growing in the darkness of winter, spring will come. God's word makes a way and Advent proves that the long awaited promise would one day break forth.

One day, this Son will restore what was broken in the garden. One day this name will be the only name.

When it seems the world is hostile to all that is God's, remember though there are many Cain's in the world we have a better brother in the flesh. One who gave himself for us to save us not only from the fear of death, but from the temptation of Cain. When we feel our name threatened, and sin creeping at our door, when it seems the only weapon against darkness is the violence of Lamech we remember that we have another tool.

We have Immanuel, who is God with us. A name which cannot be shaken and a legacy which will not be moved.