

Cain and Abel

Gen. 4:1-8

Introduction:

1. Often we have read this account in relation to Heb. 11:3f distinguishing Abel's offering made by faith and Cain's not by faith.
2. Perhaps you have heard sermons that focus on Gen. 4:9 and Cain's question, "Am I my brother's keeper?"
3. The passage is quite powerful addressing both issues between a man and his God, AND a man and his relationship to others.
4. In this passage we have the beginnings of a theological construct teaching us about the nature of God and its effect on our relationships to one another.
5. My aunt Ruth was well known for knitting sweaters. If I understand it, knitting involves mainly one thread knotted together repeatedly. Loosening that one thread could theoretically de-construct the whole sweater. That's kind of what we want to try to do with the thread tied up here in this account of Cain and Abel.

Discussion:

- I. In 1 Jn. 3:11-12 Cain is presented as an example of one who is unloving.
 - A. In this passage identifying loving one another as the mark of the children of God, Cain is identified with the evil one and thus a child of the devil (1 Jn. 3:10).
 - B. John identifies the reason for Cain's slaying Abel: his deeds were evil and his brother's righteous.
 1. Abel's righteous deeds inciting Cain to murder.
 2. What an injustice! Abel did the right thing. Cain did not and then took his anger out on Abel (Gen. 4:6).
- II. God is the champion of the vulnerable (Gen. 4:9-11).
 - A. Our relationship to God inter-relates with our relationship to one another.
 - B. God's character is the basis for our understanding of our relationships to one another. He is concerned that we mirror His character in our relationships to one another.
 - C. The fact that God holds Cain responsible for his actions against Abel is indication of this.
 1. We should be those who uphold righteous behavior and be the champions of the vulnerable.
 2. The Egyptians acted like Cain in oppressing Israel, but God came to their aid.
 - a. God delivered Israel (Ex. 3:7-8).
 - b. Just like Moses delivered his Hebrew brother (Ex. 2:11ff) and like he delivered the daughters of the priest of Midian at the well (Ex. 2:16ff).
 - D. There are many examples of God being the champion of the vulnerable. He called on Israel as His people to protect the rights of the innocent, but His call met with

stubborn hearts.

1. Deut. 10:12-19.
2. Isa. 1:16-17.
3. Zech. 7:8-14.

Thus Israel became like Cain and was taken into captivity. God afflicts the comfortable, but comforts the afflicted.

III. God's plea throughout history has always been the same.

- A. It is the message of Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:21-48; note esp. 21-25 and 43-48). Hatred, disrespect, murder, and the like, are opposed by God and by His children.
- B. It is the message of the Parable of the Prodigal (Lk. 15:11ff).
 1. Like Cain, the Pharisees rejected tax-collectors and sinners who came to Jesus.
 2. The older son, like Cain, rejected the vulnerable son who came for forgiveness. Abel offered his sacrifice for his sins. He confessed his vulnerability and received forgiveness. And Cain's response was to murder him.
 3. The sinners came to Jesus for forgiveness and the Pharisees rejected them. This was a murderous action. It left them in their sin to experience the consequence of death.
- C. When John questioned whether Jesus was the "Expected One" or whether he should look for another, Jesus said, "Go and report to John—the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them" (Matt. 11:3-5; cf. Isa. 35:5; 61:1ff).

IV. God's plan is to restore respect, honor, right and life.

- A. His church is a microcosm of this (Gal. 3:26-27).
- B. Heaven is the ultimate fulfillment of it in a return to the Garden of Eden.
- C. What this means to us, as the children of God (1 Jn. 3:11ff).
 1. We should not be like Cain. Instead we should destroy the works of the devil (1 Jn. 3:8).
 2. His works are murderous and evil. These are not the works of those born of God.
 3. We ought to relieve the oppressed, raise up the down-trodden, care for the vulnerable, root out inequality and hatred, and give life to the dying.

Conclusion:

1. The principle is broad and sweeping.
 - a. It hinges on the character of God.
 - b. It is summarized in various ways in Scripture.
 - 1) The great commandment is to love God with all one's heart, soul and mind and then to love one's neighbor as Christ loved and gave Himself up for us.
 - 2) Go and learn what this means, "I desire compassion and not a sacrifice" (Hos. 6:6; Matt. 9:13; 12:7).

2. It defines our disposition as the children of God.
3. It is applicable to all our relationships. Is it compassion we manifest in our marriages or anger, hatred and murder? Is it compassion we communicate to our children or anger, hatred and murder? Is it compassion in experience among church-goers or envy, jealousy, anger, hatred, murder?
4. And how are we to influence the world with an invitation into the family of God if we are like Cain rather than Christ?