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Genesis 4:1-16

Two weeks ago, we talked about Joseph and his eleven brothers- the dysfunctional family that would become God's chosen people of the Old Testament, Israel. Today, we are going all the way back to the first family from which all of humanity came, and we'll see that it was also profoundly, violently dysfunctional. In the chapter before, Adam and Eve had a perfect world with no evil, so sadness, no death, and they ruined it by listening to Satan and eating from the tree that God told them not to, and they deserved to die. But God promised that, although their existence would be marked with pain, frustration, sadness, and ultimately death, someone would come, the offspring of the woman, and he would make all things new and crush Satan's head and restore perfection to humanity, so Eve gives birth to her son, and she assumes, "This is him! This is the one who is going to crush Satan and acquire, gain back everything we've lost!" So, she names him, "Cain," which means, "to acquire," or "to bring forth," the idea of having something you didn't have before, and literally, the Hebrew could be translated, "I have brought forth a Man with the LORD, or "I have brought forth a man- the LORD." We're not quite sure what Eve thought of Cain, but it's clear that she and Adam had very high hopes for him, possibly thinking that he would be the one who would save them from their sin and make all things new. Abel, not so much. In the book of Ecclesiastes, Solomon starts off by saying, "Meaningless, meaningless, everything is meaningless!" That word that's translated as "meaningless, or vapor, or something in vain," that's what Adam and Eve named their second son- that's what Abel means. Can you guess who the favorite is? Can you guess who they think is the most God-pleasing, who is more worthy, more faithful to God, more likely to withstand temptation? *They were wrong.* Today, we are going to see Cain's struggle against temptation, and we are going to learn how God strengthens us against temptation, and in order to understand temptation, we have to understand sin- so today, we see that **1. Sin dwells, 2. Sin crouches, 3. Sin decays, and 4. Sin loses.**

1. Sin dwells. Often, Christians, including myself, talk about sin as something we do- and that's true. But the Bible also makes it abundantly clear that when human beings sin, it's not good people making a mistake that they otherwise wouldn't make, it's evil people doing exactly what comes naturally to them. God says a few chapters later in Genesis 6 that the inclination of each human heart is only evil all the time. Jesus himself says that lust, greed, envy, violence, and all things that are bad are not mistake that we make or results of the bad things that people have done to us- it comes from within- it's from the heart! James says it well when he says that we sin when we are enticed, not primarily by outside forces, but by our own desires- why do people do bad things? According to the Bible, because they are bad, and like to do bad things! That's all of us, every single person doesn't just sin, but has sin, evil, badness, selfishness, dwelling in them. I know what you're thinking, "Pastor, that just seems a bit harsh, what about little children?" My response: have you ever met one? Many of you have heard me say this, but I'll ask anyway: how many of you have worked with small children? How many of those small children whined, hit others, threw tantrums, lied, stole, and were generally selfish monsters? To some degree, all of

them. How many of you taught them to do that? Probably none of you. You spent all your time trying to make them not like that! Why does selfishness and violence and greed come so naturally? Because sin isn't just what we do, it's what we are- and Genesis 4 is the first time in history where we see just how bad it is, and how easily human beings fall to temptation and sin. Why?

2. Sin crouches. On the outside, the first brothers looked quite similar. They both worked in agriculture. They were both faithful churchgoers, both offered sacrifice to God as an act of worship, and outwardly, Cain's probably looked a lot better. It was the fruits and vegetables of his harvest, it would have looked like those thanksgiving cornucopias, very pretty, neat, clean. Abel's was a carcass. A dead animal with blood gushing from its neck. Anyone looking would say, "Cain's sacrifice is better." God disagrees. God made it obvious that he loved Abel's sacrifice, not Cain's. Why? Because Abel offered his sacrifice in faith- his sacrifice was out of love- he loved God and trusted that he would take care of him and he wanted to give him the best of his flocks as a token of gratitude and joy. Cain didn't. Cain gave his sacrifice because if he did, God would be good to him and give him what he wanted. Cain didn't sacrifice to God for God's sake, but for himself. And God knew it, and he goes to Cain to try to get Cain to see this. "Why are you angry?" Cain's whole identity was wrapped up in being the better brother, and now God has given that status to his little brother. And he has two options- he can do what's right, trust and love God, or he can eliminate that which is making him angry. God knows this, and he pleads with him- sin crouching, it's hiding, it's stalking you, and it wants you. You must master it. You must deny your temptation to hate your brother. He's right. Sin crouches- it lies down. It presents itself as harmless, small, hidden, or even virtuous. Sin never says, "If you drink that drink, one will become 5, then 10, and this is going to turn into a habit that hurts your loved ones." Sin never says, "If you watch that video, you'll crave more and more and it will permanently scar your spouse when she finds out." Sin never says, "If you let this person into your bed, you'll feel worthless, dirty, and used." Sin never says, "If you harbor feelings of hatred, envy, jealousy, it will feel really good at first, but will cripple you from appreciating what you have and loving those around you." Sin always presents itself as harmless, just one drink, one glance, one night, one experience, you deserve this. They deserve this. They're the problem, not you. And then sin pounces and devours you. How?

3. Sin grows. Cain's sin started as a selfishness and lack of love and gratefulness to God, and when his brother was given approval and praise, he couldn't handle it. So he lures his brother to the field and his brother trusts him- why wouldn't he? And for the first time in history, a man takes another's away- his own brother. God should have just crushed him there, but he approaches him with grace and gives him an opportunity to confess- "Where's your brother, Cain?" "I don't know. Is it my job to know? Am I my brother's keeper?" Not only does he lie, he mouths off to God. His heart is stone cold, and the only time he reacts is when God calls him out and tells him the resulting curse- then Cain gets sorry- not sorry that he sinned, but sorry he's being punished. "That's not fair! That punishment is too great- you're being too harsh! Someone might find me and kill me!" Funny- they should. How did he get like this? How can Cain murder

his own brother in cold blood and not feel a bit of remorse? Because not only is sin dwelling within him, not only did it crouch, but now sin has sunk its claws into Cain and it's consuming him before our eyes. The cancer of sin started as a small benign-looking tumor, and now it's spread. It started as a seed, and it's grown into a plant absorbing Cain, controlling Cain, all while Cain has no idea, no remorse. Sin grows, and it ruins you, it absorbs you, it controls you. Sin turns into something that you are no longer in control of. Former addicts, and those who know addicts know this better than anyone. It starts with a drink, a hit, an indulgence, and soon you need more and more until you lose control. Sin makes all of us addicts. Greed turns into stealing. Envy turns into hatred and gossip. Lust turns into adultery. Sin is addictive! It feels good at first, but you need more and more and eventually, you don't do sin, sin does you. *But it can be mastered- how?*

4. Sin loses. Sin desires us, it desires to have us, to separate us from a holy God. But God refuses. I've heard people say that the God of the Old Testament is vengeful and ruthless, but I don't know how you can say that after reading this text. How would you react if one of your children killed your child, lied about it, then gave you shocking disrespect when you gave them a chance to repent? Look at the grace of God in response to the evil of sin. Adam and Eve disobey their perfect God and corrupt themselves and all creation, and God promises that someone is going to come and make all things new and restore the broken relationship between God and his people. When Adam and Eve have a child, and he grows up to be monster, God counsels and warns Cain before he sins, then he approaches him with love and gives him a chance to repent, and even when he doesn't, God promises that he won't give Cain what he really deserves- he isn't going to be killed. Sin didn't win. It didn't make Cain unlovable to God. How? How can a holy God not crush and destroy sinners? After all, justice has to be done- Abel's blood cried out for justice- the same is true all our sin. How can sin not win? Look at what Hebrews 12 says- *You have come to God, the Judge of all, to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.* The promised one came, and he was crushed as a sacrifice whose death would be a substitution for all of us, even Cain, And his blood didn't cry for justice, it cried, "it is finished. Justice has been done. Sinners are forgiven. Sinners are restored. Sinners rule over temptation." You have to know Jesus, and you have to know who you are because of him. If you are a Christian, you are saved, you are forgiven, you are a child of God, you are a perfect, redeemed, made holy creation of God- you aren't Cain, you're Abel- that's who you are! Yes, we each still have the sin dwelling in us, so how do we rule over sin?

In questions like these, sometimes looking at our ancestors in the faith is helpful. Ambrose, an influential Christian teacher in the late 300's, told this story. A Christian man, who in his past spent many nights prostitutes but since then had converted to Christian, yet was still tempted by lust, was walking down the street, and a woman that he had spent many nights with in his past shouted out to him. The man didn't want to fall into temptation, so he crossed the street and pretended he didn't hear her. Eventually, she ran up to him and said, "Don't you remember me?"

We spend many nights together. It is I.” He responded, “Yes, I know it is you, but it is no longer I.” That’s how Christians fight. “It’s no longer I.” Lust comes into the heart and says, “I can make you feel great.” We say, “That’s not who I am anymore.” Anger, hatred, bitterness, envy and jealousy come and say, “you’ve been wronged, they deserve payback.” We say, “That’s not who I am anymore.” We fall into a sin that we know we shouldn’t have, and guilt comes and says, look at what you’ve done, God could never accept a sinner like you. You’re not good enough” We say, “sure, but that’s not who I am anymore. I belong to Christ, he lives in me, I am his and he is mine.” That is how we fight and master temptation. Amen.