

FRIDAY: EAST OF EDEN

Read: Genesis 4:13-16 ¹³ Cain said to the LORD, "My punishment is greater than I can bear. ¹⁴ Behold, you have driven me today away from the ground, and from your face I shall be hidden. I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me." ¹⁵ Then the LORD said to him, "Not so! If anyone kills Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold." And the LORD put a mark on Cain, lest any who found him should attack him. ¹⁶ Then Cain went away from the presence of the LORD and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden.

REFLECT:

Irony and Grace. Scripture is full of both. Here we see irony in the fact that Cain's potential death (f:14b) is too much for him. Ironically, he had no problem killing his younger brother.

We see grace in the fact that God allowed Cain to live and provided him with protection. Apparently God is still waiting for Cain to repent. It appears Cain hasn't because his only concern in these verses is for himself...

East of Eden. It sounds innocent enough; yet it is the location to which Adam and Eve were driven (Gen 3:24). Cain was driven even further in the same direction (Gen 4:16). Life "east of Eden" is hard. Those who live "east of Eden" are selfish, egotistical, proud, arrogant, condescending, etc, etc, etc. Unfortunately, we all live "east of Eden" – we are all sinful. Fortunately, God is graceful...

RESPOND:

Have you ever been wronged and exclaimed "its no fair" only to realize you've wronged someone else in a similar manner? If so, what was your response?

Have you ever heard definitive explanations about what "the mark of Cain" was? Do you see anything problematic with that?

Are you more prone to find faults in other people or in yourself? What faults catch your eye most easily?

PRAY: Thank God for His grace. Pray for a growing awareness of how you view and treat those around you. Ask for God's blessing on NLCC's many teachers and preacher as they continue to prepare for Sunday morning.

SATURDAY: OF ULTIMATE CONCERN

READ: Ezekiel 36:1 – 22

REFLECT:

Verses 1-7 include God's words concerning the nations that have done harm to the people of Israel. God will not let them escape unpunished. While that may be comforting in hindsight – it doesn't make it any easier when presently facing hard times.

Verses 8-15 talk about future blessings for the people of Israel. Again, that may be comforting – this time with foresight informed by faith...but it is still unpleasant to face hard times in the present.

Verses 16-21 peel back the veil and now we understand why Israel was treated harshly (e.g., vs1—7). Israel wasn't living properly. They were disgracing the name of God – and that cannot be tolerated. Therefore, in verses 22-32 God informs them He will act for the sake of His holy name.

RESPOND:

How does the fact that God won't let evil go unpunished impact you?

As followers of Jesus, a major victory for us is when we allow God's faithfulness to us in the past to inform our emotions and thoughts in the present. How can this be a good witness for God?

If you could put a % on the amount of hardships you've faced in your own life that were more or less a result of your own actions...what would it be? Have you ever blamed God for any of those occurrences?

PRAY: Pray for our corporate worship gathering tomorrow at the building. Pray that people will sense that God desires them to come, pray that our guests feel welcomed and accepted, pray that the Holy Spirit will be active and moving, and pray that (above all) God is glorified.

Humans Are...

March 2 – 8

The varying beliefs on humanity and our origins are very diverse today.

Some say humans are nothing more than a "complex machine" – having evolved over billions of years. We are a mere interaction of physical and chemical properties. Ethics are man-made and situational. Death ends it all. [Naturalism from Darwinian Evolution].

- Yet there are parts of the human anatomy that are so complex that a naturalist cannot explain them. I.e., the human eye.

The above point of view logically leads to a devalued view of humanity. We have no purpose, those who are strongest determine what is ethical, and death is the "final absurdity." [Nihilism].

- However, no one can live with this point of view. It is too dark and depressing...leading to suicide; which is ironically an act of meaning – the thing which a Nihilist rejects.

Others believe our physical bodies are an illusion. Ethically speaking there really can't be right or wrong because "all is one" anyway. Death can be a gateway into oneness with the universe. [Eastern Pantheistic monism – e.g., Buddhism].

- However, no one can live this point of view consistently. I.e., simply offer to punch one of them in the face – pain is a good indicator of reality. (By the way, don't really do this...but it points to the absurdity of the view).

Many choose not to think about it. Apparently they adopt the slogan "ignorance is bliss" – or "what you don't know can't hurt you."

- However, if you're ignorant to the fact that stepping in front of an eighteen wheeler traveling at Interstate speeds will likely kill you, it doesn't matter. The laws of physics don't make amends for ignorance (or stupidity).

In light of these "modern" and educated" views some views the ancients held regarding humanity don't seem to far fetched.

- We are formed from the bloody remains of an executed demon-god. [*Enuma Elish* from Mesopotamia]
- The gods wanted a break from work so they made us to do all the back-breaking labor. [*Arahasis* from Mesopotamia]

The Bible doesn't agree with any of the explanations found above...nor does it propose the illusion that ignorance is bliss. God made humanity as the crowing point of His creation. It was "all good" until God created male and female in His image – then it was "very good".

All of humanity has inherent dignity and worth. The preacher on Sunday morning does. The happily married couple in the pew does. The struggling single mother does. The skid-row druggie does as well. We are all created in God's image. Yet we also all have the ability to make our own choices. Unfortunately, all too often we make bad ones.

MONDAY: BEGINNINGS

Read: Genesis 1:1 - 31; Gen 2:1 - 3

REFLECT:

It may seem odd to read an entire chapter (i.e., Gen 1) and then the first three verses of the next (i.e., Gen 2:1-3) and stop, but this is the natural break of the text. Notice how Gen. 1:1--2:3 forms a complete literary unit. In the beginning, God created – everything. At the end of His creative activity (which was very good) He rested.

Did you catch a pattern associated with God’s creation? Day 1 – light and darkness; Day 4 – sun, moon and stars. Day 2 – sky and water; Day 5 – birds and fish. Day 3 – land; Day 6 – animals and humans. It’s as if God is a Master Artist painting broad strokes and then filling in the finer details. The same can be said concerning the focus of Gen 2:4--25; the “creation accounts: don’t conflict; they complement each other – each telling the same story from a different vantage point.

Humankind was the crowning point of God’s creative activity (Gen 1:26f). He gave us dominion over the earth. We didn’t evolve. We’re not here by chance. We’re here because God placed us here and that gives us (i.e., everyone) inherent value. Yet the world would have us believe differently.

PRAY: Thank God for preserving the Bible through the centuries. Pick an item from the creation account you deeply enjoy and thank God for it. Pray that thoughts prompted by the sermon and corporate worship experience yesterday will continue to impact and change your life.

RESPOND:

Have you ever witnessed a heated debate between Christians over the interpretation of creation in Genesis? What seems to be the “big picture” of this text (e.g., Gen 1:1 - 2:3)?

Gen 1:27 is a “chiasm.” This means the middle part (*in the image of God He created him*) is the focal point, and the surrounding statements are parallel. Therefore, it is both male **and** female together that reflect the image of God. Do your interactions with the opposite gender reflect this truth?

Have you ever read through Genesis? Try reading through it using the following verses (which start with “these are the generations” – or something very similar) as a starting point; Gen 2:4; 5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10; 11:27; 25:12; 25:19; 36:1; 37: 2.

TUESDAY: ANOTHER “BEGINNING”

Read: Genesis 4:1-2a ¹Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, “I have gotten a man with the help of the Lord.” ² And again, she bore his brother Abel.

REFLECT:

If we all started from two people (i.e., Adam & Eve) – from where did their children get their spouses? It’s a common question, but one with which the text isn’t concerned. However, our modern minds desire an answer. All too often we bring the wrong questions to the Biblical text...

The ancients simply would have accepted that the children of Adam and Eve married siblings. However, notice what Gen 4:1 doesn’t say. It doesn’t say Cain was Adam and Eve’s first child. In fact, it seems implied that Eve already had children before The Fall (cf. Gen 3:16). E.g., how would Eve have known her pain in giving birth was increased if she had yet to have a child?

Furthermore, we have no idea how much time had passed in either the Garden before The Fall or outside of the Garden after their banishment. The focal point in these verses is that two new characters are introduced – Cain and Abel.

PRAY: Thank God that all we need to know concerning our salvation is clearly found in the Bible. Pray for your willingness to submit to the inherent authority of the Bible. Pray for the Bible studies taking place tonight.

RESPOND:

What are some questions you wish the book of Genesis (or the Bible for that matter) clearly answered? Are they really that important?

Eve is called the “mother of all living” (Gen 3:20), which is a further indicator of children having been born in the Garden. By the way, isn’t it interesting that a child didn’t cause The Fall?

Just as God created (Gen 1:26f) so now we are explicitly told that mankind is now creating (i.e., children). Does this heighten the responsibility of being a parent?

WEDNESDAY: CHOICE

Read: Genesis 4:2b-7 Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a worker of the ground. ³ In the course of time Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground, ⁴ and Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering, ⁵ but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his face fell. ⁶ The LORD said to Cain, “Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen?” ⁷ If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it.”

REFLECT:

This is a sibling rivalry at its worst, resulting in fratricide. Why did God accept Abel’s offering, but not Cain’s? Is God at fault for Cain’s actions? On the surface we see two individuals with different occupations which naturally lead to different sacrifices. Was Abel’s accepted simply because it was a “blood sacrifice?” Some say this is the case.

However, notice that Cain simply brought a sacrifice while Abel brought “fat portions” (i.e., the best) from the “firstborn” of his flock. These actions were the result of Abel’s inner convictions. Abel recognized God was the source of all he had.

Apparently Cain had a chance to rectify his mistake (v7a) – sadly he didn’t. The personification of sin in v7 is frightening. Sin is depicted as ready to pounce on us. Fortunately, we are not helpless in the matter. In fact, we are commanded to “master it.” The alternative is being enslaved to it.

PRAY: Thank God for His provision in your life. Pray for guidance and wisdom to live in a way that is pleasing to God. Confess to God your struggle with the “particular sin” mentioned in the “Respond” section.

RESPOND:

Giving God the best of what’s “firstborn” implies a trust that He will continue to provide. How can you show the same trust in God’s provision for your life?

Notice the grace God extends to Cain (v7a). What is a recent occurrence in which you had a second chance to make things right? Did you respond appropriately?

Is there a particular sin with which you struggle? How can you be proactive in mastering it?

THURSDAY: DUH-NIAL

READ: Genesis 4:8-12

REFLECT:

Why did Cain do it? Was he out of his mind? Perhaps. Was he jealous? Maybe. The text simply doesn’t say. However, in retrospect, we do know that Abel was the first in a long line of younger siblings who (for some reason) found favor in God’s sight (e.g., Jacob over Esau, Joseph over his brothers, David over his brothers). However, this selection was never for salvation; it was for service.

These events sound very similar to The Fall in chapter three. God asks a question (vs9a, 10a; cf. 3:9f), a bad answer is given (v9b; f. 3:10,12), and judgment is pronounced (vs11--12; cf.3:16--19).

Yet there are also difference between the accounts. In 3:10 and 3:12 at least Adam told the truth – some, if not all of it. Cain simply lies. The judgment for Cain is also more severe. Mankind had not only fallen, they had apparently reached a new low with this account.

PRAY: Thank God for the encouragement you find as a part of NLCC’s body. Pray for strength to face and correct mistakes you make. Pray for an increased sensitivity to the Holy Spirit’s promptings.

RESPOND:

Cain’s action is clearly premeditated; he removed himself and Abel from the observance of others. Are you more apt to sin when you are away from others as well?

Apparently, in vs9—10, God is offering another chance for Cain to do the right thing. Do you own up to your mistakes when the opportunity first arises?

Do you ever catch yourself trying to rationalize (tell rational-lies) or deny (duh-ny it) a sin when you’re either “found out” by someone else or convicted by the Holy Spirit? Why?