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Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

“THE MARK OF CAIN” ~ Genesis 4:1-16

■ {1:1} “**In the beginning,**” YHWH placed Adam and Eve in Eden and provided for all their spiritual, relational, emotional and material needs. The man and woman enjoyed the highest degree of safety and confidence.

But the serpent wormed its way into paradise. It claimed that disobedience to God was the key to divine knowledge (and, by extension, god-like security). Eve swallowed the lie hook, line, and sinker. {Ge 3:6} “**She took some**” of the forbidden fruit “**and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.**”

The impact was horrific: sin set the humans at odds with the Earth, with each other, and with God. Their confidence was corroded by doubt, anxiety and fear. Subject now to dangers both real and imagined, their safety was no longer guaranteed.

Inward shame, mutual suspicion, gender conflict, increased pain in childbirth, frustrating work, the possibility of starvation, the inevitability of physical death, diminished intimacy with the Creator – one would think humankind hit rock bottom in Genesis chapter 3.

□ Then, in Genesis 4, we find ourselves falling further. (This series of disasters reminds me of the prophet Amos’ word-picture {Amos 5:19} of a man who flees a hungry lion, only to meet an angry bear. He runs into his house, slams the door, and collapses against the wall – “**only to have a [venomous] snake bite him.**” It would be funny, if it weren’t so tragic!)

Actually, chapter 4 starts on an upbeat note: Adam and Eve are intimate, and to their delight a baby boy is born. Cain is the fruit of their love, life arising from death, new dreams from the ashes of the old, a living, breathing 2nd chance. The joy and hope he brings are worth the pain of childbirth.

○ Cain grows up to be a farmer, and “**In the course of time [he brings] some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the LORD**” (verse 3). That might sound pretty good at first hearing, yet all is not well: the LORD “[does] **not look with favor**” “**on Cain and his offering**” (verse 5).

○ In contrast, Cain’s younger brother Abel brings an animal sacrifice and “**the LORD [looks] with favor on [him] and his offering**” (verse 4).

Why does God accept Abel’s gift and reject Cain’s?

⊗ In my opinion, the most convincing answer is two-fold: 1) Cain’s motives are ungodly (Hebrews 11:4 explains that “**By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was commended**”). The other is that Cain’s offering is mediocre in quality (in verses 3-4 Cain brings “**some of the fruits of the soil**” casually, almost carelessly, while Abel offers the choicest parts of the best animals). Whatever the reason, God “[does] **not look with favor**” “**on Cain and his offering.**”

Cain’s response is disturbing: “**So Cain**” (verse 5) “**was very angry, and his face was downcast.**” In context, his downcast face does not speak of sadness or discouragement; it indicates a refusal to

look up at God. Adam and Eve hid their bodies from God in fear; now Cain hides his face from God in anger.

○ In verses 6-7 the LORD confronts Cain for his good: **“Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it.”**

Cain puts himself on precarious footing, and he does not recognize his own insecurity. As the serpent lay in wait in Eden, so **“sin is crouching”** like a vicious beast **“at [his] door.”** It lusts to dominate him, but he must control it. Cain declines to do so.

As Adam remained silent at the crucial moment, failing to speak a word of rebuke to the enemy or a word of correction to Eve, so Cain remains silent. He fails to speak in response to the LORD God.

As Eve gave in to the serpent, so Cain submits to the crouching demon. But whereas she at least made an effort to resist self-destruction, her son charges full speed ahead into disaster.

○ V 8: **“Now Cain [says] to his brother Abel, ‘Let’s go out into the field.’ And while they [are] in the field, Cain [attacks] his brother and [kills] him.”**

This is an especially heinous offense.

☠ 1st, it is the first act of human violence and murder. Cain has the distinction of introducing a whole new category of sin to the world.

☠ 2nd, it is conspicuously brutal. Hebrew has several words for **“kill”**. This one is used for notably cruel murders. We are to imagine Cain’s face and clothing splattered with blood, and maybe brains.

☠ 3rd, it is premeditated. O.T. Law {Dt 22:25-27} postulates that committing a crime out **“in the field,”** where no one else can help, is evidence of forethought. The double use of **“field”** here strongly implies that Cain has it all planned out.

☠ 4th, it is fratricide, the murder of a sister or (in this case) brother. Fratricide is exceptionally repugnant even in a world jaded by serial killings, massacres, warfare and genocide.

○ V 8: **“Cain [says] to his brother Abel, ‘Let’s go out into the field.’ And while they [are] in the field, Cain [attacks] his brother Abel and [kills] him.”**

Why? Does he hope to gain physical safety?

Abel is no killer. But might not a man who has murder in his heart see a murderer where there is none?

Does he hope to gain confidence? With Abel gone forever the LORD will have to favor Cain, won’t he? With Abel out of the picture, Cain will be his parents’ golden child, won’t he? With Abel dead, Cain will finally feel self-assured, won’t he?

Put like that it sounds exceptionally foolish, doesn’t it? Yet it is a common way of thinking. I have in mind the bully who terrorizes his peers, the mean girl who verbally eviscerates her rivals, the abuser who batters his wife, the couple that aborts their baby, the gang banger who guns down his adversary, the government that assassinates foreign officials, the terrorist who murders civilians, the nation that believes war is the necessary means to prestige, prosperity, and protection.

Cain expects to gain safety and confidence; what he gets is danger and anxiety. He {Hos 8:7} “[sows] **the wind and [reaps] the whirlwind.**”

○ “**The LORD [says] to Cain,**” (verse 9) “**Where is your brother Abel? ‘I don’t know,’ he [replies]**” (that’s a bare-faced lie). “**Am I my brother’s keeper?**” (No; but we are required to extend practical care to all our neighbors, and more so to our family).

○ Verses 10-12: In response, God proclaims that Cain is now “**under a curse and driven from the ground.**” He who has {Gunkel} “**tilled the land,**” who has “**offered**” to God “**the fruit of the land, and**” has “**given the land his brother’s blood to drink**” is vomited out from the land.

That might not sound so bad to us. But consider what it means for Cain:

☞ 1) His environmental insecurity and 2) food insecurity intensify. Until today, because of his parents’ sin, the ground has produced {3:18} “**thorns and thistles**” alongside his crops; now, because of *his* sin, “**it will no longer yield [any] crops**” for Cain. The ground itself is set against him. He will have to forage, steal or beg for food.

☞ 3) His identity insecurity gets worse. The Creator ordained Adam to tend the garden, and Cain has had a similar calling. Like any man, his sense of self is defined in large part by his work. That is gone.

☞ 4) His social insecurity escalates. Cain has been the older brother; now he isn’t a brother at all. He has been the firstborn son; now he is dead to his parents. He has been a member of the family; now he is a man without a family.

☞ 5) His survival insecurity inflates dramatically. In verse 14 Cain cries out, “**Whoever finds me will kill me!**” (he is probably referring to other unnamed brothers and sisters and their growing families.) And,

☞ 6) His spiritual insecurity increases exponentially. Our merciful God says nothing about shunning Cain – yet Cain announces (verse 14), “**I will be hidden from your presence.**” And verse 16 tragically states: “**So Cain went out from the LORD’s presence.**” Notice the direction of movement: Cain leaves God.

Cain expects to gain safety and confidence by killing Abel; what he gets is danger and anxiety.

What does Cain’s experience reveal to us?

★ 1st, Security cannot be achieved by sinful means. Adam and Eve tried it in the Garden, and it did not work. Cain tries it out in the field, and it does not work. Sin of every kind begets insecurity.

★ 2nd, Our insecurity, like our sin, always has social impact.

The curse in verses 10-12 precisely fits Cain’s sin and applies directly only to him. Yet his family suffers grievously for it.

Not only so, violence is now a realistic possibility in human relationship. Keep in mind that, with some exceptions, we won’t do anything that we do not visualize as a possibility. Cain has made assault and murder -- even fratricide -- conceivable. Talk about an earthquake of the soul! We are still dealing with the aftershocks.

★ 3rd, we tend to aggravate our own insecurity.

Cain is compelled to leave land and family; yet he does not have to leave God. The LORD is not tied down to one location. Cain could go *with* God; instead he says: “**I will be hidden from your presence,**” and “[goes] **out from the LORD’s presence.**”

As we learned from Job: though God guarantees no one absolute security in earthly matters, he has the power to provide it, and he is the only foundation of true security. Cain insists on breaking fellowship with the LORD, and his security slips away.

How often have we turned away from God? How often have we put ourselves in greater danger and magnified our own doubt, anxiety and fear?

✪ *Is there any hope?* Indeed, there is!

Cain’s field is the epicenter of violent insecurity. The hill of Calvary is the focal point of peaceful security.

Out in the field Cain commits a new sin, taking insecurity to a new level. At Calvary Jesus is subjected to violent insecurity, yet he did not sin.

Out in the field Cain puts us all at risk by his violent disobedience to God. At Calvary, Jesus begins to rescue us by submitting to violence in obedience to God.

One final word of hope and grace.

Cain does not confess his sin. He does not show the slightest twinge of regret for his crime. He has good reason to fear that “**whoever finds [him] will kill [him].**”

○ What does the LORD God say in verse 15? “**If anyone kills Cain, he will suffer vengeance seven**

times over.” And what does he do? He puts “**a mark on Cain so that no one who [finds] him [will] kill him.**”

Cain deserves to die, but God does not execute him. Then he goes the next step and forbids Cain’s enemies from taking his life.

This is good news for every one of us who has a little bit of Cain inside.