

Video: 800 Pound Gorilla Sometimes we can fall into the trap of thinking that our sin is not that serious. We fool ourselves that it is a small issue that we can ignore, overlook or control.

I think that's one of the reasons why we don't always understand why God is so against sin. In many people's eye, his response to sins like that of Adam & Eve seems so over the top. Surely it wasn't that much of a problem.

But we need to learn that we can't just ignore sin and hope that it goes away. If we don't confront it through confession and repentance, then it will not only destroy our lives, but it will have a devastating impact on those around us.

This is the tragic lesson from the life of Cain. We started looking at him last week, but let's read from the beginning again in Genesis 4:1-16: "Adam lay with his wife Eve, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Cain. She said, "With the help of the Lord I have brought forth a man." ² Later she gave birth to his brother Abel.

Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil. ³ In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the Lord. ⁴ But Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The Lord looked with favour on Abel and his offering, ⁵ but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favour. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast.

Then the Lord said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? ⁷ 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."

⁸ Now Cain said to his brother Abel, "Let's go out to the field." And while they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him.

⁹ Then the Lord said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?"

"I don't know," he replied. "Am I my brother's keeper?"

¹⁰ The Lord said, "What have you done? Listen! Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground. ¹¹ Now you are under a curse and driven from the ground, which opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. ¹² When you work the ground, it will no longer yield its crops for you. You will be a restless wanderer on the earth."

¹³ Cain said to the Lord, "My punishment is more than I can bear. ¹⁴ Today you are driving me from the land, and I will be hidden from your presence; I will be a restless wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me."

¹⁵ But the Lord said to him, "Not so; if anyone kills Cain, he will suffer vengeance seven times over." Then the Lord put a mark on Cain so that no-one who found him would kill him. ¹⁶ So Cain went out from the Lord's presence and lived in the land of Nod, east of Eden."

1. The Downward Spiral of the Unrighteous

Last week we saw that Abel's offering of a firstborn lamb was accepted by God whereas Cain's offering of the fruit of the soil was not. And we learned that the reason for this was faith. "By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did." Hebrews 11:4

Abel's offering was acceptable to God because he was expressing his dependence and trust in God. But Cain's offering was unacceptable because although he was involved in religious activity, his heart wasn't right. He wasn't trusting in God, he hadn't put his faith in him.

And from this we learned that it is possible to be religious but not righteous. We can go through the motions of Christianity, but if we don't have faith in Christ, then, like Cain, we will remain unrighteous.

But this morning I want us also to see that if we don't address this issue, then it can have a devastating impact on us and our relationships with others. This is the downward spiral of the unrighteous.

a) Giving in to Anger

First of all there was anger. "So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast." Genesis 4:5. Instead of genuine sorrow and deep repentance because he had wronged God, Cain was overcome with raging bitterness and self-centred pity.

I think many of us have been here. Someone confronts us, challenges us about our attitude, seeks to correct our behaviour, comes alongside us and tries to help us overcome an issue in our lives. But our first instinct is lash out in anger. "How dare you talk to me like that! Who are you to tell me what to do? I don't have a problem – it's you that has the problem!"

But when we respond with that kind of anger and let it take root in our lives – it always messes us up and it often leads to disaster. That's why James wrote: "Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires." James 1:19–20

Whenever we are confronted with our sin. Whenever someone seeks to correct us or come alongside us and help us to overcome some struggle in our lives, we mustn't jump to defend ourselves. Instead, we need to be willing to keep quiet and listen and learn. Maybe they are saying exactly what we need to hear. Maybe they are the ones who will save us from going down that spiral to disaster.

b) Accusing God

But Cain wouldn't listen and learn. That's why God said to him: ["Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? ⁷ If you do what is right, will you not be accepted?"](#) Genesis 4:6

Cain was so angry and down because instead of remorse for his own wrongdoing, Cain felt that he was the one who had been wronged. He thought that God had treated him unfairly. He believed that God had showed favouritism towards his brother Abel. He believed that God had been unjust.

It is the common complaint when someone is confronted with their sin, "That's not fair. God doesn't have the right to treat me like this. There are others worse than me. I'm not that bad."

But the Bible is clear, ["God does not show favouritism."](#) Romans 2:11 He is not prejudiced or biased. God is completely just in his dealings with humanity. He is completely fair in his judgement.

His different response to Cain and Abel was simply because of the difference in their hearts. If Cain repented of his sin and did what was right, like Abel had done through faith in God, then he would also be accepted!

c) Rejecting Correction

But Cain refused to accept this. And so God warned him: ["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."](#) Genesis 4:7

This issue in Cain's life was not small or insignificant. It wasn't something that Cain could safely ignore or minimise. It was like a wild animal, crouching at the entrance of his life, ready to pounce and devastate him.

That's why God urged Cain to take control over his attitudes and desires and rule them – because if he didn't, his desires would rule him and ultimately destroy him.

d) Destroying Others

And this unfortunately is what happened. Cain didn't repent. Instead he orchestrated an opportunity alone with his brother and then ["Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him."](#) Genesis 4:8

That is shocking. These were the first two human beings to be born on this earth – and one murdered the other. He gave in to his anger and jealousy. He refused to face up to his wrong attitudes and actions. He failed to submit to God's plan and purpose in his life. And he ripped his family apart.

e) Denying Responsibility

And even when he was confronted by God, there was a complete denial of his responsibility. God asked, ["Where is your brother Abel?"](#) Genesis 4:9. But Cain not only protested his innocence but angrily objected to the question. ["I don't know... Am I my brother's keeper?"](#) Genesis 4:9

Of course God did not hold him responsible to watch over his brother constantly. But God did hold Cain responsible for his actions against his brother. And God had seen it all, ["Listen! Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground."](#) Genesis 4:10

f) Refusing to Repent

But still Cain refused to repent. Even when God spelt out the consequences of his actions in terms of struggle, barrenness and separation from his family, Cain replied, ["My punishment is more than I can bear. Today you are driving me from the land, and I will be hidden from your presence; I will be a restless wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me."](#) Genesis 4:13

In his grace God stepped in to ensure that Cain would not be attacked and killed by others. God was going to protect Cain, but also protect his own purpose in filling the earth with people.

But do you see what Cain is worried about?

- He's not concerned about the fact that he took his brother's life.
- He's not upset because he has broken his parent's hearts.
- He is not crushed because he has sinned against God, his Creator.
- All he's concerned about is how this will affect him!

Sin had been crouching at his door, but because Cain refused to repent, it had devoured him.

- It had taken root in his heart.
- It had filled him with anger and bitterness.
- It had led him to do the most horrendous thing imaginable.
- It had separated him from his family and his community.
- It had filled his heart with fear of what other people would do.
- And it had trapped him in a prison of self-centredness.
- And ultimately it had further distanced him from God. "Cain went out from the Lord's presence and lived in the land of Nod, east of Eden." Genesis 4:16 Sin took him further and further from Eden, further from communion with God.

And this is the lesson from Cain's life that we need to face. Sin is not a minor issue. Sin is not an insignificant bad habit. Sin is not a trivial matter. Instead it is deadly serious.

We mustn't minimise or underestimate the impact of it. If we don't confront it and deal with it, then it will take us on a devastating downward spiral that will:

- Impact our emotions.
- Take control of our thinking.
- Lead us to horrible behaviour.
- Hurt those that are closest to us.
- Alienate us from our community.
- Destroy our productivity.
- Leave us trapped in resentment and selfishness.
- And most seriously of all, it will separate us eternally from God.

"Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction." Galatians 6:7-8

So if there are sins that we have allowed into our lives, we need to deal with them today! We need to confess them, repent of them and turn to God for his forgiveness and grace!

2. The Difficulty of the Righteous

But this incident with Cain and Abel doesn't only show the downward spiral of the unrighteous. It also shows the difficulty of the righteous.

a) Saved By Faith

Hebrews 11:4 says about Abel that "By faith he was commended as a righteous man, when God spoke well of his offerings." Abel was a man of genuine faith in God. As a result, not only was his offering of a lamb acceptable to God, he himself was declared to be righteous in God's sight.

That is because "The righteous will live by faith." Romans 1:17 Abel was the first person on this earth to be saved by faith!

b) Attacked By The World

But what was Abel's experience as a righteous man in this fallen and sinful world? Well, his name means a breath or vapour, and that kind of described what his life was like. It was cut short because he was attacked and killed by his unrighteous brother.

Abel was the first person in this world to be martyred for his faith in God. He was the first to suffer because he believed in God and followed him. But of course he was not the last! Since that time, God's people have suffered again and again simply because of their faith in God. They have been criticised, ridiculed, marginalised, excluded, imprisoned, attacked, beaten and killed.

And the Bible tells us to expect this in our lives too. Peter wrote in his first letter: "Do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you." 1 Peter 4:12

And Paul told the young believers in the churches that he planted: **"We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God."** Acts 14:22

And he wrote to Timothy that **"Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted."** 2 Timothy 3:12

This is part of what it means to follow Jesus today. If we are children of God through our faith in Jesus, then we will experience persecution of some sort. In this fallen and sinful world, suffering is part of what it means to be a Christian!

That is because this is what happened to Jesus: **"To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps."** 1 Peter 2:21

c) Resting in God's Justice

But Abel's experience doesn't only teach us to expect this suffering. It also shows that our suffering does not go unnoticed. Cain tried to hide his crime against his brother. But God saw it. He told Cain, **"Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground."** Genesis 4:10 And in his perfect time, he responded to it, judging and condemning the guilty.

And although we often will suffer unjustly in this world, we can rest in this wonderful truth that one day, God will judge the guilty. This was why Jesus refused to retaliate against those who so unjustly accused and attacked him: **"When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly."** 1 Peter 2:23

And we can do the same. Like Abel, we can rest in the fact that God sees our suffering, hears our cries, cares about our pain and in his perfect time he will step in to bring justice for his people!

3. The Death of the Righteous for the Unrighteous

But we're here this morning to celebrate that God has done something even more wonderful than promise coming judgement. Hebrews 12:23-24 says **"You have come... to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel."**

The suffering of Abel here at the hands of his brother points forward to the greater suffering of Jesus at the hands of his creation.

Abel was an unwilling victim of this crime. But in love, Jesus willingly laid down his life for us. **"No-one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord."** John 10:18

When Abel's innocent blood was shed, it cried out for justice against this sin. But when Jesus' blood was shed, he cried out for mercy for those who were crucifying him: **"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."** Luke 23:34

When Abel's blood was shed, it exposed the depth of Cain's wretchedness. But when Jesus' blood was shed, it covered our guilt because **"The blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin."** 1 John 1:7

So this passage doesn't only warn us about the about

- The danger of the downward spiral of the unrighteous
- Or the reality of the difficulty of the righteous.
- It points forward to Jesus, **"For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God."** 1 Peter 3:18

Conclusion

And so these are the lessons from this passage.

- Firstly it warns us about the seriousness of sin. If it is crouching at the door of our lives then we must listen to God, as he speaks to us through his Word and through his people, and repent before it devastates our lives.
- Secondly it reminds us of the reality of the suffering of God's people. We need to be ready for accusations and attacks, because that is always part of the life of those who follow Jesus in this fallen and sinful world.
- But thirdly, we can rejoice in our wonderful Saviour, that sin does not need to have the final say in our lives, because Jesus loved us and gave himself for us to bring us forgiveness and freedom and a wonderful future in his Father's presence.