August 24/25, 2013

The Way of Cain

Treasure, Time, Talent Series

Genesis 4

Pastor Bryan Clark

So, you've probably figured it out. This weekend we're talking about money. If you're visiting with us, every year at this time of year we take a week to talk about stewarding our time, stewarding our talents, and stewarding our treasures. We're doing it just a little bit differently this year; we're going to talk about treasure today, and time and talent later in October.

Last week we reminded ourselves of this concept of a *Decade on Purpose*: really being thoughtful about spending this decade living for the things that really matter. And I know you've heard me say this before, but it's a very sobering thought. If you do not get this money thing right, if you do not really have a biblical understanding of stewarding your treasure for God, you stand virtually no chance of living this decade for the things that matter. Jesus was very clear about this. Where your treasure is, that's where your heart will be. There's no way that your treasure can be somewhere else, but your heart will be for the things that matter. That makes this a very significant topic.

Now I've done this enough over the years that I know that people have various reactions when we talk about the topic of money—actually, uniquely so. Some of you—I'd say a very high percentage of you—actually express appreciation. You really do want to steward what you have for God's purposes. You're thankful for the teaching. You're thankful for the reminders. Others of you, not so much. As a matter of fact, some of you are thinking, *I wish I would have done something else this morning.* Some people actually have a physical reaction. Some people get very upset—uniquely upset—about this topic, which raises the question: Why is that? What's happening that causes such a reaction?

Now I don't take that reaction personally, and it helps me to remember that the very first sermon ever given on the topic of giving was given over ten thousand years ago and given by God Himself. And on that day He only had two people in the audience. One appreciated the talk. One got very upset. Why is that? That's what we'd like to talk about this morning. If you have a Bible, turn with us to Genesis, Chapter 4, the story of Cain and Abel. Just to set up this chapter a little bit, let me remind you that Genesis chapters 1 and 2 are really about what God always wanted for people made in His image. It would be my opinion that Genesis 1 and 2 are critical for formulating a right view of God—what God's always wanted for you as someone made in His image is that you would live in relationship with Him. You would find your life, your love, your significance in a meaningful relationship with Him in a place called Paradise. It was beautiful.

Genesis chapter 3 is the story of *the fall*, and the essence of the temptation to Adam and Eve was to consider the possibility of being their own god. What if you were your own god? What if you ran your own life? What if you decided what's good and bad, and what if you were in charge of your own significance? Don't you think life would be better? It's a great temptation for people made in the image of God, and Adam and Eve considered that option and decided to go with it. And they rebelled and sinned against God, and the human race was plunged into sin, and the struggles and the pain and the confusion of our world today is the result of that. But this is not what God wanted. As a matter of fact, God is so passionate about His vision of what He wanted for us that He was willing to give up His own Son in order to make a way back, that His own Son would shed His blood on a

cross to make a way of salvation that sinful men and women could make it back to paradise with Him forever.

Genesis chapter 3 is what I sometimes refer to as *The Great Divide*. The divide is basically two roads, two paths, two options. The Bible talks about it often in both the Old and New Testament. One path, which Jesus referred to as *the narrow path*, is the path of those who surrender to God as God. Therefore, *I will find my life in God. I will find my significance in God. I will seek to walk in obedience to God because that's where I believe life is found.* The other path is what Jesus referred to as *the wide path*, and that's the path of those who are convinced that life is better with *me* in charge. *I'll be my own God. I'll call my own shots. I'll run my own show. I'll decide for myself what's right and wrong. I'll make myself significant.* And really, those two paths then define the rest of the Bible.

I think the purpose of Genesis 4 and 5 is basically to illustrate this point. Genesis chapter 4 is illustrating the two paths and primarily the path of Cain. So we pick it up in chapter 4, verse 1:

> **Now the man had relations with his wife Eve, and she conceived and gave birth to Cain, and she said, "I have gotten a manchild with *the help of* the Lord." Again, she gave birth to his brother Abel.** (*NASB, Genesis 4:1-2a)

So we're introduced to the birth of the first two sons of Adam and Eve: Cain and Abel. There are some scholars that think they were twins. Maybe they were; maybe they weren't. It's hard to tell, but they were certainly brothers. The name *Cain* basically means *gotten one.* Some scholars entertain the idea that the reason Adam and Eve named Cain, *Cain* is because she was saying, "This is the promised seed," from chapter 3. "This is the gotten one." Now that makes some sense. There's no way that Eve would understand that it would be thousands of years before the *Promised Seed* would come. But it also might have a negative connotation.

I think the more interesting discussion is around Eve's statement, "**I have gotten a manchild with *the help of* the Lord**." Now scholars debate that statement because it can either be a positive statement or a negative statement. I use the New American Standard, and you'll notice that the words *the help of* are in italics. That tells you it isn't actually in the Hebrew; it's implied. It can either be positive or negative. The New American Standard takes the positive, that she is saying, "I have done this *with the help of* the Lord." But a lot of scholars think it could have been a negative statement, which basically would read, "I have done this *just like* the Lord." In other words, "*I* have done this—*I* have produced life, like God."

Now there's no way to sort out which it is just based on the language itself. It can go either way, so we're left to try to sort it out through the context. I lean toward the idea that it was a negative statement, that she was saying, "I have done this, just like God." Now there are a couple of reasons for that. First of all, it seems to be the theme of the chapter. In other words, it seems to fit the storyline. Second of all, if you look at Eve's statement at the end of the chapter when Seth is born—and Seth is basically her next son that takes the place of Abel because Abel was killed—she makes a completely different statement that clearly is positive and identifies Seth as *from God.* Now if you know anything about Hebrew narratives, you know that the change of language is never stylistic. It's always theological, so that would make sense.

Perhaps the most compelling reason to me is the use of the name of God in this text. You've probably heard me say before: to understand the early chapters of Genesis, it's very important to pay attention to the names of God. Genesis chapter 1 is God, the Creator God—capital G, small o-d. It's the Hebrew *Elohim.* God is the Creator God; He's the big God—the God of all gods. You come out of chapter 1 feeling like God is so big, He feels unknowable. But you get into chapter 2, and it's LORD God—LORD in all caps—which always tells you this is the Hebrew Yahweh, or Jehovah, and that's the God who is personal, the God who is intimate, the God who enters into a covenant relationship with us. And so in the discussion about God creating Adam and Eve, and this very intimate relationship, the name for God is LORD God. You get into chapter 3, and both names are used. When Adam and Eve were going through the temptation, it goes back God—I think because when we're in the midst of temptation, sometimes God seems like He's a million miles away. But as soon as Adam and Eve sin against God, and God comes looking for them in the garden in the cool of the day, it goes back to LORD God as a reminder that God wasn't a million miles away. God was right there, and this is a very intimate personal God that Adam and Eve have sinned against and broken the relationship.

Now we get into chapter 4 and for the first time in the Bible the name LORD is used by itself. It's not LORD God; it's just LORD, all caps, which again is Yahweh or Jehovah. I think the reason for that is because clearly God is personal. He's talking to them; He's interacting with them like a father would his sons. But the problem is that Cain is unwilling to surrender to God as God. So yes, God's personal and intimate, but He's not worshipped as God, and the name reflects that. That doesn't change until Eve's statement when Seth is born, and now she says God—Elohim—and that is the name that's used on into chapter 5 to describe the godly line of Seth, which is the other path. So with all of that in mind, I think it sets the tone. This is about Cain, about his unwillingness to worship God as God, and the results of that. It says:

> **And Abel was a keeper of flocks, but Cain was a tiller of the ground.** (Vs. 2b)

Now one of my favorite all-time TV shows is *The Rifleman*. It's a 30-minute black-and-white cowboy show. If you watch *The Rifleman*, there's often conflict between the ranchers and the sodbusters. Lucas McCain was a sodbuster. Well, *The Rifleman* was theologically correct because it started all the way back into Genesis 4. Abel's a rancher; Cain is a sodbuster, and let the conflict begin. Verse 3:

So it came about in the course of time… That's a very interesting statement. How much time passed? There's no way to say with certainty, but what we could say is it's quite a bit of time. Cain and Abel are grown. As the story progresses, Cain is worried that there are other people in the world that might want to kill him, so obviously the world's been populated to some degree. He also marries, which means somewhere it would have had to be his sister, that the world has been populated beyond just Cain and Abel. So it's enough time for all of that to transpire—so a significant amount of time.

> **So it came about in the course of time that Cain brought an offering to the LORD of the fruit of the ground. Abel, on his part also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions. And the Lord had regard for Abel and for his offering; but for Cain and for his offering He had no regard.** (Vs. 3-5a)

So both Cain and Abel bring an offering. Now there are a lot of things that happened here in Genesis that we're not privy to. You'd have to assume God had had some sort of a discussion about what he expected from them, and so they're bringing an offering. And so we are told that God receives (regards) Abel's offering but He rejects (he doesn't regard) Cain's offering, and we're left with the question *why.*

Now some people immediately think it's because Abel's offering was a blood offering, and Cain's offering was not. In other words, it was just the wrong offering. But I don't think that's correct for several reasons. Number one, the language of the text says they're both offerings. It doesn't say Abel brought a sacrifice and Cain brought an offering. It's the exact same language for both. It also would make sense for Cain to bring something from the ground. In other words, he was a tiller of the ground. That's what he had; that's what he was responsible to steward, so that would make sense. We also know, as we read on in the Old Testament, that a grain offering was acceptable to God, so there's no reason to think that wasn't the case here.

I think the text tells us what the problem is. Look closely at the wording. The text says that *God regarded Abel, so He regarded his offering. And God did not regard Cain, so He did not regard his offering.* In other words, the language is very clear. The problem is not in the offering itself; the problem is with the person. Abel had a heart for God and was coming to worship God as God. As a matter of fact, the text is careful to say this was *firstling and the fatty portions,* which is Old Testament language to say *this was the very best he had.* Because God had Abel's heart, Abel brought the best that he had to worship God. Cain, on the other hand, brought *some* grain. The Hebrew is very clear there; it's very ordinary. He brought *some* grain. Why? Because God did not have Cain's heart. Cain was fulfilling an obligation. Cain was engaging in some sort or ritual obligation, some religion. *This is what God wants. This is what I have to do.* But what God didn't have was his heart, and that's what God wanted.

I think it's tempting for us to say the problem was just the wrong offering because that is easily correctible. In other words, if Cain says, "Okay, I misunderstood; I thought that's what you wanted. I'll go get something else," he can do that without a heart change. That's the easy part. But when the issue is not religious obligation, when the issue is an issue of the heart, that becomes much more difficult to deal with.

I would suggest to you that the world is filled with people that have a heart like Cain. These are not atheists. These are not agnostics. These are not people that are anti-God or anti-religion. But these are people that, practically speaking, function as their own god seven days a week. *I'll be my own god. I'll run my own show. I'll make myself significant. I'll decide what's right and wrong.* And what is the evidence of that? The evidence of that is what we do with our treasure. Where that treasure is, that's where our heart is. It's simply not possible to have a heart for God if God doesn't have our treasure. Where our treasure is, that's where our heart is.

There are many people that just simply want to know: what are the religious rules? *I don't want God to run my life. I don't want to surrender my life to God. I don't want God to be in charge, but I still want to do this religion thing to keep God off my back, so just tell me what the rules are. Tell me what the checklist is, and I'll check it off.* That's where Cain was in his thinking. God requires an offering. *Here's my offering—any old thing will do.* And God says, "I don't want that."

Now this shouldn't be hard for us to understand. If somebody gives us a gift and we know it is merely out of obligation, we would say the same thing: *I don't really want that gift if it's just an obligation to you.*

Let's imagine that it's Patty's birthday and I don't remember that until the end of the day, and so I'm desperately scrambling for something because it's an obligation to give her something on her birthday. So I swing by the Home Depot on the way home and I get her a grass trimmer because in my practical mind, we need a grass trimmer. *(laughter)* And I try to present this as a gift from my heart. We both know this isn't going to go well, and the issue is not the gift. The issue is an issue of the heart. She really doesn't care what I give her if it came from a heart that loves her and has thought about her and genuinely wants to express my love and passion for her. That's what she's asking for. What she wants is my heart. We understand that, so why would we think God's standard would be less? So it's interesting how the story unfolds. How does Cain respond?

> **So Cain became very angry and his countenance fell** (that's Hebrew for *he was bummed out.*) (Vs. 5b)

Isn't it interesting that Cain became angry—not repentant, not convicted—angry! Why? Because God had exposed his selfish heart, and nobody likes to have his or her heart exposed. Why do you suppose some people get upset whenever we talk about money? *"All churches ever talk about is money!"* Really? Is that really the problem? Is that really what you're upset about? Or is it possible that what you do with your treasure exposes the truth about your heart, and nobody likes to have his or her heart exposed, so you get angry—just like Cain.

I love the way God responds to Cain. God does not whack him. God does not tell him to take a hike. As a matter of fact, the response of God to Cain is very much like the father to the prodigal son. As a matter of fact, I imagine God as a father having a heartfelt conversation with a son, getting down on one knee and saying,

> **"Why are you angry, and why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will not *your countenance* be lifted up?"** (Vs. 6-7a)

This is God having a father/son conversation with Cain and saying to Cain, "Hey, listen to me, buddy! It doesn't have to be this way! All you have to do is rethink this and surrender your heart to Me, and let's move on." This is a line that I want to imprint in all of our heads—God saying, "It doesn't have to be this way." But then He gives Cain a warning:

> **"And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it."** (Vs. 7b)

There's a warning here: "Cain, if you stay on this path, I'm telling you, there's a wild animal lurking outside the door and it is going to pounce on you and it is going to devour you, and you better master it." It's very strong language in the Hebrew—that imagery of that wild animal crouching is a very vivid imagery. I would suggest to you that God would give every single one of us in this room this morning the exact same warning—that there is the risk of going the way of Cain, and I'm telling you that sin is crouching at the door and it's waiting to pounce on you, and it will devour you, and you'd better master it.

So what is this sin that God is referring to? The sin is *the* sin—what the New Testament sometimes referred to as *the lust.* The greatest temptation each of us faces as people made in the image of God is the temptation to believe *I can be God. I can be my own god. I can make myself significant. I can run my own life. I can decide what's right and wrong. I can make my life better.* And that sin crouches at the door and tries to tempt us down the pathway to the way of Cain. And so we hear the words of God: *We'd better* ***master it****!* Verse 8:

> **Cain told Abel his brother. And it came about when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him.**

The pace of that verse is very interesting. It's just 1-2-3 game over. Cain was not convicted. Cain did not repent. He had some conversation with Abel. It'd be interesting to know what that was. He probably was complaining because God was unfair, and Abel probably said something like, "Hey, maybe you should rethink this a little bit and maybe surrender to God as God, and find your life there." Whatever it was, Cain didn't like it, and the first chance he had he kills his brother dead.

Now this is interesting to stop and think about for a minute. You're talking about the very beginning of the story. There are just a few people in the world. From the text, Adam and Eve just have Cain and Abel, and yet one kills the other. There's no inner city. There's no ghetto. There are no gangs. There are no guns. There are no violent videos, no drugs and alcohol. This last week, both domestically and internationally, has been a terrible week for senseless violence, and everybody on the news is talking about it. But the one thing they simply will not talk about is the very point of this part of the story. What is the issue? The issue is that Cain had determined he would be his own god. And once you start down the path, you are willing to do whatever is necessary to ultimately have your way, including, if necessary, taking another human life. The farther we drift from God, the more violent and confused our culture will become. Verse 9:

> **Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is Abel your brother?" And he said, "I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?" (**He's getting a little mouthy with God, which reveals his heart.) **He said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to Me from the ground. Now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. When you cultivate the ground, it will no longer yield its strength to you; you will be a vagrant and a wanderer on the earth." Cain said to the LORD, "My punishment is too great to bear! Behold, You have driven me this day from the face of the ground; and from Your face I will be hidden, and I will be a vagrant and a wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me."So the LORD said to him, "Therefore whoever kills Cain, vengeance will be taken on him sevenfold." And the LORD appointed a sign for Cain, so that no one finding him would slay him. Then Cain went out from the presence of the LORD, and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden.** (Vs. 9-16)

Cain's response is classic. There's no conviction. There's no repentance. There's just, *"Woe is me. Poor me! This is all so unfair!"* Now the ground is not going to produce for Cain. He was a tiller of the ground, but God is shutting the ground off from him, and all he has left is to be a wanderer, to be a vagrant, to just move around and try to survive. He's fearful that someone will do to him what he did to Abel, but he's saying, *"Whoa, that wouldn't be fair! Poor me!"* And so God lays down the law to protect him and he ends up settling in the area of the land of Nod. The name *Nod* means *wanderer.* When it says *east of Eden*, primarily I don't think that's there as a geographical reference. I think it's there to invite comparison—in other words to say what God

wanted for Cain is in Genesis 1 and 2—this beautiful life-giving, life-filling relationship with God in a place called Paradise. But Cain thought he had a better idea, and the way of Cain leads to this vagrant, desperate, desolate lifestyle—and you're invited to compare what God wanted versus what Cain chose. The rest of the chapter lays out the family line of Cain and those that walked that path. We're introduced to Lamech who takes two wives; so we're only into Genesis 4 and "two shall become one flesh" is abandoned. Now Lamech's got two wives, and then he writes a cute little song about a man and a boy that he killed in cold blood because they mess with him a little. It isn't just recording that; it's actually a little song celebrating that, as God gives the picture of where the path of the way of Cain is going. And then it turns to the birth of Seth, where Eve makes a very different statement, uses the name *God*, and chapter 5 establishes another pathway which is the godly line of Seth.

The story of Cain and Abel, specifically of Cain, is something I have thought about a lot this summer. I've listened for these messages in the media, in commercials—everywhere I could find it. What started my thinking about this was a couple of months ago reading a book that referred to a painting that has captured my attention. It is a painting by a painter by the name of Fernand Cormon. He lived in the latter part of the 1800's, early part of the 1900's. This painting actually is displayed today in Paris, France. It is 23 feet long, 13 feet high. It is a massive painting. The title of the painting is simply *Cain.* You see at the front is Cain leading his family, spending a lifetime as a vagrant, as a wanderer, just trying to survive. The ground won't produce. All he can do is wander as a vagrant and desperately survive. For the painting to have its most impact in your mind, you have to go back to Genesis 1 and 2 and think of the alternative, that what God offered was paradise, and what Cain chose was this. And the words that keep ringing in my ear are the words of God as a father to his son, saying, "*Son, it doesn't have to be like this.*" That was the moment of truth.

I would suggest to you that millions upon millions and millions of people in our world today live a life just like that. Oh, we disguise it. We disguise it with money and we disguise it with houses, and we disguise it with cars and stuff and pleasure. But at the end of the day, when you strip all that away, that's the story—a soul that is empty, dry, desperate and barren—and understanding that when we die, if that's what we've lived for, all that junk does get stripped away and this is the definition of your story. But again, I hear the words of God. *"It doesn't have to be that way."*

Are you traveling the way of Cain? I don't know. Only you can answer that question. But I can tell you this: If God doesn't have your treasure, He doesn't have your heart. Jesus was very clear about this. *Where your treasure is, that's where your heart is.* You tell me, are you going the way of Cain?

Our Father, we're thankful that You love us, that You warn us, but You have made us in Your image with a will to choose. Every single one of us here today can choose the way of Abel, the way of life, but we can also choose the way of Cain. Lord, for every single one of us here this morning, sin is crouching at the door waiting to pounce, and the sin is becoming our own god, thinking somehow that will make life better. Lord, in Your words, help us to master it—to surrender to You, to find our life in You, that You would have our treasure and You would have our hearts. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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Lincoln Berean Church, 6400 S. 70th, Lincoln, NE 68516 (402) 483-6512
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VIDEO:

Shirley: We went to school together. He lived in the country, and I lived in town. Well, after I graduated I got a job keeping books at the grain elevator, and when his dad would come in I would always ask, "What's Jim doing?" And so when Jim got out of the service, his dad said, "Hey, there's a redheaded girl there in town and she's always been asking about you." So the next time Jim came in and asked me for a date, and so that's where it started.

As far as really knowing the Lord, neither one of us did. It wasn't until after we had both of the boys—Jeff was three and Tom was one—Jim's folks in the meantime had come to know the Lord and so they asked us to go to church with them in Scottsbluff. We were saved June 19, 1958. It was something that I had really been looking for.

Jim: And so by the time we got acquainted with Curt and Claudine Lehman, they began to work with us and disciple us, and we worked at church then, and that helped our development considerably. But he said, "You know, when you go out to eat at a restaurant, you don't go across the street to pay for it." And it was kind of a homey illustration, but he was laying it on us a little bit that this is the way you do it. And so we began to realize something about priorities and giving. Stewardship became a real meaningful thing as we studied the Scriptures year after year, and so that was helpful in maturing us and realizing that it wasn't what you made compared to what someone else was making in the church. That's always dangerous. It's what you do with what you have.

Shirley: There were times when it was hard, but we'd made that decision that we were going to start giving to the Lord, and if there was going to be a shortage somewhere, it was going to have to be somewhere else because the Lord saved us, and He was going to bless us, and we were going to trust Him to meet our needs.

Jim: Going back to when we still lived in Mitchell and the boys were big enough to start doing things, we'd take them on Friday night and go clean the church, and so we did that for two or three years just to train them to be servants.

Shirley: And they learned to slide underneath the pews and pick the gum off from underneath the pews, and they thought that was terrible to think people would put their gum underneath the pews.

Jim: And then in 1967 was a big leap of faith when we came to Lincoln and had that opportunity to come to the bookstore.

Shirley: Well, when we went to get a loan, we weren't making enough money and the bank wasn't going to loan us the money. And so I have a sister and her husband that lived here, and he put in a good word for us, and so we did buy this little brick house. You know, there were a lot of things we wanted, but sometimes we had to say, "Is this a need or this is a want? If the Lord wants us to have it, He'll provide. And if He doesn't, He won't." And so that's pretty much what we lived by—is this a need or this is a want?

Tom had just started playing the trumpet. He came home one day and he said, "Mom," we're going to have a concert," and he said, "and I have to have a suit jacket." So I said, "Okay, we'll have to pray about it." And that was another thing. They learned to pray for their needs. So I said, "Thursday when you get home from school, I'll pick you up and we'll go out to Miller & Paine Budget Store." I'd never been out there before, but we went in there. And so I said, "Okay now,

let's look." And pretty soon he came yelling at me, "Mom! Mom! Look what I found!" He found a little green suit jacket for five dollars. So I said, "Well, I think we can afford five dollars," and kind of laughed, and then you're amazed, too, at how the Lord really worked.

Jim: We realize that sometimes we're maybe on the low end of the socioeconomic scale, but our relationship to God is the basis for making these other decisions that are less important but that all add up to whether you're really running the race and winning.

Shirley: My life verse is Philippians 1:6, "He which had begun a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Jesus Christ." And I think if people keep their eyes on the Lord, faithful in attending church, faithful in reading their Bible, knowing what it teaches, knowing what God wants of us, how can you not give?

Jim: We have given to the Lord's work over 46 years and we have seen Him provide for our needs faithfully. And I've asked Shirley several times if she had the choice of seeing her sons grow up and mature spiritually as Christian young men or to have a million dollars, which one would she choose. I guess the answer is the way it's worked out.