



Sermon – May 1, 2022
Phillip Bethancourt

Verses Covered This Week

Genesis 4:1 – 16

Hebrews 11:4

1 John 3:12

Luke 11:49 - 51

Hebrews 12:24

Well, as you take your seats, let's open our Bibles back to the book of Genesis. We're going to be back in chapter 4 this morning. And if you're a guest whether you're in the room or catching us by video, welcome home. We study God's word beginning with this first book because we believe it has a power to change our lives. And I want you to remember that this morning, we're going to be responding to God's word through the Lord's Supper. If you haven't already grabbed your elements, you can make your way to the tables during the response song to do that. I also want to let you know that for those of you ready to step into membership in the church, right after the service we're going to have our next New Member Workshop out the doors in the Grand Room. And we have a few spots left if you're ready to take that step today.

So, let's remind ourselves of what's happening in Genesis. We've been away from it for a few weeks during our 21 days of prayer focus, wrapped around the reality that Easter changes everything. And as we have journeyed through Genesis, here's what we've seen. In Genesis chapter 1, God creates. He takes a universe where nothing exists and speaks the world into existence by His word. Then, in Genesis chapter 2, God commissions. He establishes man and woman in His image and He calls them to be fruitful and multiply, to take dominion over the world. But then, we get to Genesis 3 and what we find is that sin corrupts. That with that first partaking of the forbidden fruit when Adam and Eve find themselves on the sin cycle, it drives us to a moment of brokenness, of a fall, of a curse, of judgment. They're cast out of the Garden of Eden. And here we find ourselves in Genesis chapter 4, where the first family in history is trying to figure out how to make life work outside the place of God in the Garden of Eden. And what we're going to see this morning as Genesis three 3 into Genesis 4 is that the sin that corrupted the world in Genesis 3 is now going to result in a violence that erupts right in the middle of that

creation. And I want you to see the way that this text begins now starting in Genesis 4 in verse 1. Here's how Moses talks about what occurs.

¹Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, "I have gotten a man with the help of the LORD." ²And again, she bore his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a worker of the ground. ³In the course of time Cain brought to the Lord an offering of the fruit of the ground, ⁴and Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering, ⁵but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his face fell. ⁶The LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? ⁷If 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."

Let's pray together.

Father, in this time, we turn our hearts to Your word. We want to lay it all down in front of you, God, asking for You to lay bare every spot in our heart. That it would be brought into conformity to Christ. That we would hold nothing back, Lord, that You would do whatever it takes to change everything about us to make us more like Jesus. And I ask now through the, as we come to Your word, Lord, that You would do exactly that. That Your Spirit would work in our hearts, and reshape us, to live in a way that is pleasing to Christ. We ask these in His name. Amen.

Alright, let me get a sense by show of hands. How many of you grew up with brothers or sisters in the house with you? Whether that's right now or in the past. Okay, so we just got a small handful of of only children. My wife's an only child. I was one of four. We're raising four boys. And if you grew up in a home where you had brothers or sisters, then, you know the term sibling rivalry, right? We all know what that's like where there's that tension in the home that can often bubble up and overflow. And what I found in my childhood and now as a parent is this theme, proximity can lead to hostility. That when you're together all the time, those tensions can flare. There can be envy, strife that leads to malice. I remember one time in the past in our home where a sibling rivalry was bubbling up. And I could hear it going down the hallway and before I could get down there to intervene, all I heard was the sound of smashing happening in a room. In 5 seconds later, I heard smashing happening in another room. And I walked in, and you remember how the Bible says that Abraham's offspring will number like the number of sand on the sea? Well, I found something that's greater than the number of sand in the sea. It's the number of Legos that had been smashed all over the floor of these rooms. And in that moment of rage, it crescendoed right there. Something you would have never intended to do in the moment had now taken place. And we all know that type of experience. That type of strife. And when we come to the book of Genesis, we see what seems like several significant sibling rivalries playing out. I mean, of course, you have it right here between Cain and Abel. But we'll fast forward. We'll see something similar in with Jacob and Esau. Perhaps, even with Joseph and his brothers. But what we need to recognize this morning is that when we come to Genesis 4, it's not just that this text is showing us that a sibling rivalry got out of hand. Instead there is something deeper and more significant that's going on here in the text. See, what's happening is that we are seeing not just a sibling rivalry but a spiritual warfare beginning to unfold. And as we look at this, we see this battle between the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness.

And we see behind this crouching sin, there's a hidden dragon that's there behind it. And what we know is that the hardship and hate that we encounter in Genesis 4 doesn't stop there. It keeps moving forward even until today. You see what had happened here in Genesis 4 is that Adam and Eve had left the Garden of Eden. But the serpent had never left them. And that sense of peace, that sense of shalom that was shattered in the garden is now given way. It's been corrupted by the curse so that now humanity turns from community to contempt. From dominion to domineering. And as we work our way through the first part of Genesis chapter 4 this morning it's going to reveal the depth of our sin and the depth of God's grace. What we're going to find as a mirror in Genesis chapter 4 is that we are capable of greater sin than we could ever imagine. But He is capable of greater grace than we ever deserved. And the choice that this text is going to put in front of each one of us is that we can choose to follow one of two ways. Will we follow the way of Cain that leads to sin and death or will we follow the way of Christ that leads to life and peace?

So, let's pick up where the text begins now in verse 1. Let's see first, the way that the way of Cain leads to sin. So, see the temptation is when it comes to Genesis 4, we're so familiar with the first murder that takes place that we forget and overlook the first birth that occurs right in verse 1. Because at the beginning of this passage there is good news for all of us. Look at the way it starts.

¹Now Adam knew his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, "I have gotten a man with the help of the LORD."

So, think about what happens here. The curse of sin remains but the intimacy of man and woman continues. The curse of sin remains but the the command to be fruitful and multiply continues. The curse of sin remains but the the call to take dominion and to rule over the land continues. I mean, think about it. Here is born, Genesis 1 tells us, both Cain and Abel. These ones who are the fruit of that marital union and if for a group of Texas A & M graduates filling the room here this morning, we see the first two Aggies in human history. One's a rancher, one's a farmer, Cain and Abel. And as they are raised up, it is reminding us of this good news reality. That a promise of God in Genesis 3:15 still stands. Remember that promise, that one day God will raise up an offspring of the woman and the serpent will bruise the heel of the woman, the the offspring of the woman, but that offspring will crush the head of the serpent. And with that new birth, there is hope. That's why you look back at verse 1 and Eve gives glory to God saying, I have gotten a man with the help of the lord. She knows that there is a gospel hope that still stands. And as the text unfolds, it begins to contrast these two sons. One, a rancher, one a farmer, one who brings one type of offering, one another. But ultimately underneath them both, they're charting two different ways, two different paths to pursue God. So, let's look at each one of them. So, notice there in verse 4, we see the way of Abel satisfies God and here's what it says.

⁴and Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering,

So, what's Abel's sacrifice? Well, right here in Genesis 4, we see what seems like the first field dressing in human history. He takes one of those lambs. He he brings the best portion. He, he makes that available. It's from his first born and it's the fatted portion, the best part. He gives of

his first and best to God through the shedding of blood. And as God sees that offering, when he sees that humility, look back at verse 4 and how God responds. He had regard for Abel and his offering. And what we find right here in Genesis 4 is a pattern that presses all the way through the Old Testament of animal sacrifice, of the the shedding of blood without which there can be no forgiveness of sin. Now, Hebrews chapter 11 in verse 4 is going to help us make sense of that. You'll see it on the screens here in just a minute. The author is writing about the nature of Abel's sacrifice and its significance for today. And here's what Hebrews 11:4 says:

⁴By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteousness, God commending him by accepting his gifts. And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks.

So, how does Hebrews 11 speak about this offering from Abel? That it's not just better than Cain because of the nature of what it was. It's better than Cain because of the heart that it. A heart here as it describes as one of faith, a heart that through that faith still speaks today even though we never hear Abel speak in the Bible. That's the way of Abel. Now, let's look back at the text in Genesis 4 and see the other path. Let's look next at how the way of Cain sins against God. So, pick it up with me in verse 3. It says:

³In the course of time Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground,

Now, fast forward to verse 5,

⁵but for Cain and his offering He had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his face fell.

So, we see this contrast here. There's different offerings that take place. You see, Abel brings the lamb chops. Cain brings the Brussels sprouts and the broccoli, the pears. Do we need to wonder if God likes meat or not? Settles the dispute right there. Why is it that this offering is rejected? Look at verse five. It says, God does not regard it. Why? Well, it's not just because of the method, it's also because of greater issues. Because we know elsewhere in the Old Testament, we see grain offerings brought to God and be received. The vegetation of the ground coming as a pleasing offering to God. It's not just how he made the offering or what it is that he offered. It's the mindset and the motive behind it. So, look at mindset. Here Cain comes. He brings an offering from the ground. But remember what had just taken place right before this text plays out is that at the end of Genesis 3, after God pronounces the word of judgement upon Adam and Eve, what does he do? The first sacrifice of an animal occurs and God takes the skins of that animal. He fashions clothing for them. He sheds blood in order to cover over the shame of sin. And that sets a pattern of the shedding of blood being necessary to absolve us from the curse of the sin from that point forward. And it's as if Cain has forgotten what has just taken place. He's living as if the fall into sin has never happened with the nature of his offering. There's a miss when it comes to his mindset. But then also look back at the end of verse 5. Because you're going to see that there's a miss when it comes to his motives. So, the end of the verse says so Cain was very angry and his face fell. In other words, when Cain responds to the problem, we find that the issue here is not just with Cain's offering but with Cain himself. It's an issue of the heart. Not the offer. He responds in anger. There's this contempt that wells up in him. And it's something that if we were to look ahead in the New Testament, Jude in chapter 1,

verse 11 refers to this as a pattern. It calls it the way of Cain. This wasn't a one-time event. It was something that established a pattern for all of human history that we respond to God's goodness instead of with respect, we respond with rebellion. A hardness of heart that takes place here when we face the judgment of God. And so, what happens is Cain responds with the contempt of unmet expectations. He saw God Abel's sacrifice and he assumed that his would be received as well. And yet it is not and in that reality, it seems as if he's trying to put God in his debt. And when it doesn't work, he responds with rage. So, let's keep going in the text. Let's see how God responds to Cain's anger. Let down in verse 6 here's how it describes it.

⁶The LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? It goes on to say. ⁷If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is contrary to you, but you must rule over it."

And so right here in God's response to Cain, we see three dimensions of God's call on Cain's life; a call to waiting, a call of warning, and a call of war. So, look at the call to wait there. It says, if you do well, will you not be accepted? God is reminding Cain of the same reality. Some of you may, may need to hear this morning which is the fact that your sin doesn't have to define you. That your failures in your past do not have to determine your future. He tells Cain, if you wait, if you do well, will not things go well with you. There's a call to waiting but then there's also this called the warning right after that. If you not do well, sin is crouching at the door. And you can get that mental image in your mind. It's there. It's hidden. It's poised. It's ready. It's lurking. There's a warning that God is offering that sin is waiting to destroy Cain. It's ready to come after each one of us. But right there in the text, you also see this called war. Look at the end of the verse. In verse 7, what does he tell him to do? You must rule over it. Put that sin to death. Fight that spiritual battle. Continue to grapple with that temptation that seeks to drive you onto the sin cycle and away from God. You see, we've been away from Genesis for several weeks which means I haven't talked about snakes in about a month and a half. Last time we were in Genesis, I had a church member come up to me afterward and just say, can we take a few weeks off from any conversation about snakes? So, you've had that and now we're back. See, I've got a pastor friend of mine who, who told me that story one time about a woman he knew who had a snake in her house. And if that doesn't trouble you enough, I've never heard anything like this before but according to my pastor friend, she allowed this python to sleep in the bed with her. Yeah. And she had she had it from a young age and over time, you know, it gets older, it grows, it gets bigger and bigger, and it would nestle up right beside her, all coiled up in the bed. Until one day, it started doing something different. You see, this snake had grown so long. It was about her length and size and rather than sleeping up coiled next to her in the bed, it started to stretch out, elongated right next to her. And it, she noticed, in addition to that unusual behavior, it also lost its appetite. So, she was concerned about the health of this snake. She took it to the veterinarian. She described the problems to him and asked him, "What should I do to help this snake get healthy again?" And the veterinarian, you know what he said, he said, "This snake isn't sick, it's sizing you up. It's wanting to see if it's long enough, so that if it tries to eat you, can it actually accomplish it? And if you continue to allow that sin, that snake to stay right there in the bed next to you, you are putting yourself in danger. You are facing the risk of being devoured." And yet how many times do we find ourselves pulled in the exact same way when it comes to the temptation of sin in our life? That we let the enemy into the bed with us. That lust, that covetousness, that greed, that envy, that desire, that grips each one of us. The text is warning here that it is sin that is crouching at the door and it is calling us to war. That if we

don't want to follow in the way of Cain, we need to put that sin to death. Speaking of death, that's what happens as we go on in the text. Let's look down beginning now in verse 8. You'll see the second reality here that the way of Cain also leads to death. Look at how this death unfolds now beginning in verse 8. It says,

⁸Cain spoke to Abel his brother. And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him. ⁹Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is Abel your brother?" He said, "I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?" ¹⁰And the LORD said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground. ¹¹And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. ¹²When you work the ground, it shall no longer yield to you its strength. You shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth."

So, notice what happens here. The way of Cain doesn't just lead to sin, it leads to death. And the challenge for us as we read this text is that we are living in a moment in human history where death feels familiar. Not just in the loss of loved ones but you can turn on the news and see stories of death. You can see bloodshed playing out on social media. You can do it as part of your gaming when you're playing video games. There's this loss of the rawness of what takes place here. But right here in Genesis 4 is the first murder in the Bible. And this should land on us in a significant way because it's unfolding that first clash of the kingdoms outside of Eden. And what is it that happens? Look in verse 8. It says, Cain rose up against his brother and killed him. So, think about it. Cain, the firstborn of Eve, the one who she thought was the offspring of the woman who would crush the head of the serpent. Instead of crushing the head of the serpent, he crushes the head of his brother. Kills him in cold blood. Why? This is not just some sibling rivalry that's gone bad. This is not just some sign that Adam and Eve needed better parenting techniques. 1 John 3:12 actually tells us why this took place. Let me show you on the screen. It tells us the real issue that Cain fulfills exactly what the apostle Paul, Paul, John warns us about later in the Bible. 1 John 3:12 says this,

¹²We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's were righteous.

So, what John is reminding us of is that the core reality underneath this, this fact that the way of Cain leads to death is that at its heart, it's a sin issue. That that sin bubbles up and then anger with God when he holds him in contempt for not receiving his offering. And that that contempt overflows into hostility towards his brother that finds its culmination here in the killing of his brother. At the heart of what's going on here in Genesis 4:8, is not just that Cain hates his brother. But that Cain hates the God in whose image his brother was made. And he takes that rage about God out on someone else. And what we need to recognize this morning is that way of Cain we see on display can lead to death in our own lives as well. Now, how can you know that to be true? You might be wondering it. I even had one of our boys as we were talking about the passage this week when I brought up this way of Cain. He said to me, "Well, at least I haven't killed anybody." It's true. And you may be thinking the same thing right now. That this is a varsity level sin and my my sin is more compartmentalized. It's more contained. It's less significant. But all of us need to recognize the pull towards following the reign of Cain. That it's not just for those of us who shot a man in Reno just to watch him die. Then Matthew 5:22 as

Jesus speaks in the Sermon on the Mount, He tells us that if we have anger in our heart towards someone else, it is as if we've committed murder against them. We will face the same judgment and accountability. And that speaks to everyone of us who's living life in a broken world. We don't have to look very far to see that brokenness all around us where there's wars taking place, pandemics continuing to linger, economic effects continuing to shape take take shape. And in addition to that, we can see that strife in our own homes. Broken marriages, broken relationships, broken hearts. This text tells us why that is. That underneath those layers is the same pull to the way of Cain. This same pull towards sin. And that can show up not just in our natural families but also right here in the spiritual family of the church. That's why when you look at the New Testament, the apostle Paul spends so much time addressing strife and conflict in the church. In other words, when that takes place, it's not just a clash of personal preferences. It is a spiritual battle that is taking place. So, here in just a few weeks, we're going to be welcoming a new worship minister. Can't wait to have Ben Prater with us. And one of the temptations that can happen when someone new comes in to lead is that we can retreat to our personal preferences and judge him perhaps even be tempted towards conflict and strife based on those preferences. And we need to recognize whether it's that here in a few weeks or something in the future that when we find ourselves in conflict with our brothers and sisters in Christ we're actually waging war against God himself. That that pull to division, gossip, slander, is something that is contrary to Christ. It's living in the way of Cain. And as we come back to this text, I need you to see as we pick up now in verse 9 that this way of Cain that leads to death repeatedly echoes significant moments in Genesis chapter 3 in the Garden of Eden. It's like a repeat of what has taken place. So, look back at verse 9. God asked Abel where, er Cain, where is your brother, Abel? It's not as if God doesn't know that. It's an echo of the same type of question he asked Adam in Genesis 3. Adam, where are you? And then look at the way the text keeps going in verse 9 with Cain's response. He said, "I do not know am I, my brother's keeper?" And there he's echoing his own father who when God confronts him in his sin, Adam responds and criticizes God for "that woman that you gave to me". Notice how it keeps going down in verse 11. You see, it says, now you are cursed from the ground. And with that curse, we see echoes of Genesis 3:17, where part of the original curse is that the ground will be cursed. It will now be against you. And then later on in verse 12, you'll find the way that that brings an effect on him. When you work the ground, it shall no longer yield to you its strength. It's an echo of Genesis 3:19. The way that Adam will bring forth vegetation and production through the sweat of his brow. And now at the end of verse 12, you'll see one more echo there when it says at the end, You should be a fugitive and wander on the Earth. It's echoing right there at the Genesis end of Genesis 3 where in 3:24, God cast Adam and Eve out of the garden. He sends them east of Eden in judgement for their sin. Now, you probably heard this story a time or two in your life. And so, the familiarity might reduce the shock of the moment. Could you imagine the reaction of Adam and Eve when they learn what's happened? We don't know if they saw it occur. We don't know if they heard about it later, but here's one son attacking another, ending his life through the first murder in the Bible. And when that occurs, when Adam and Eve learned of that reality, it probably find themselves echoing back again to Genesis 3 that when they brought sin into the world so came death. They probably never imagined that they would see someone else die before they died because of their sin. And yet, that's where we find ourselves. And what we need to notice as we look at this text is that Abel is not just murdered, he's martyred. Why do I say that? I want you to see some more words on the screen. This comes from Luke 11 beginning in verse 49 and Jesus speaks here about the death of Abel. He's confronting the Pharisees and the scribes and telling them how they will be held accountable for

the the, the enemies of God killing the prophets of God. And look at what he says, Luke 11, beginning in verse 49.

⁴⁹Therefore also the Wisdom of God said, 'I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill and persecute,' ⁵⁰so that the blood of all the prophets, shed from the foundation of the world, may be charged against this generation, ⁵¹from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who perished between the altar and the sanctuary.

So, as he's describing these martyrs for the faith. These prophets of God who have lost their lives because of the persecution of the enemies of God. He describes it from Abel to Zechariah. And as you look back at our text here in Genesis 4, I don't know about you, but I don't see any prophecies coming from Abel, do you? He doesn't even speak in the text. So, how could he be regarded as a prophet? Well, you might overlook this reality back in verse 10 of Genesis 4. Notice the way it describes it. God says to Cain, the voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground. So, Jesus sees that blood on the ground, the voice that cries up from it as the first of the prophets speaking of what was to come by the power of the gospel. And it's so easy in a moment like this to look back in Genesis 4 and condemn the clear sin of Cain. Yet the whole Bible is making clear that everyone of us apart from Christ has followed that way of Cain. We've lived for ourselves. We function with contempt towards God, expressing itself in rivalry towards others, and the wages of that sin is death. Just like Cain, the blood that comes from the effects of our sin and from its curse, cries out against us. And just as verse 12 tells us here that Cain will be exiled. He'll be sent out. That is the fate that we face. It's as if he's getting right now the promise of a foretaste of the hell that we will all encounter if we go to the grave, trying to make things right with God for our sin.

But as we look back to the text, I want you to see this isn't the end of the story. That in these first two sections, we've seen the text talk about the way of Cain but let's finish now with a third dimension of it where beginning in verse 13, we see how it talks about the way of Christ that leads to life and peace. So, follow along with me now in verse 13 as we finish out this portion of the text.

¹³Cain said to the LORD, "My punishment is greater than I can bear. ¹⁴Behold, 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." ¹⁵Then 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 it should attack him. ¹⁶Then Cain went away from the presence of the LORD and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden.

So now we've seen the way that the way of Cain leads to sin and death and now we're going to see it's aftermath. What happens as a result of it. You see in the moment, Cain responds to God's pronouncement of judgement by turning inward in self-preservation rather than upward in self-surrender. And as he does this, we're going to see the way that Cain responds, contrasted with the way the Bible calls for us to respond in Christ. Everyone of us face this choice. Will we face the judgment of God that we deserve through the way of Cain or the way of Christ? So, notice back here in verse 13. You'll see the way, how the way of Christ leads to remorse. Sorry,

let me say that again. The way of Cain leads to remorse but the way of Christ leads to repentance. And you can hear the remorse in his heart there in verse 13. He says to the lord, my punishment is greater than I can bear. Behold, I, you have driven me today away from the ground and from your face I shall be hidden. I still remember when I was a college student here at Central. One of the most powerful sermons I heard Chris Osborne preach was about Judas and the the difference between remorse and repentance. And the way that Judas had remorse for his sin but not repentance. It has stuck with me 20 years later and we see it right here for the very first time in the Bible in this text. That what Cain does is respond to a sin with remorse and not repentance. So, what's the difference? Remorse, the sorrow in remorse is over the consequences of our sin, not the commission of our sin. It's like the child who disobeys parents and they keep correcting him and he won't listen. His heart is hard towards them. But the moment they take the video games away, there is a deep and lasting sorrow. Why? Not because of what he's done but because of what how what he has done now affects him. And that's what we see here with Cain. He he's more concerned about his standing than God's standing. He's more concerned about the consequences for him than the consequences for his brother that he is just killed. See, remorse groans at the consequences of sin. Repentance grieves at the commission of sin. That's the way of Christ. That repentance. That when we're confronted with the reality of our own sin, the way that we walk away from God, there is a Godly grief that draws us to turn from that sin and turn towards Christ. We either follow the way of Cain towards remorse or the way of Christ towards repentance. But there's another contrast in the text starting down at the second half of verse 14. You'll also see that the way of Cain can mark you with mercy for a moment. But the way of Christ will mark you with mercy for eternity. So, look at the way it describes this temporary mercy for Cain. It says in at the end of verse 14,

I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me.”
¹⁵Then 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. ¹⁶Then Cain went away from the presence of the LORD and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden.

So, notice what happens here. Cain is worried about revenge. He is worried about someone coming after him in response to his attack on Abel. And he probably has every reason to be afraid of others. Because not too much longer in the book of Genesis, the sons of Seth face this kind of vigilante justice. And right here, when he responds with this fear of man, he cries out to God. He pleads with him for mercy. And you would expect that God's response to him would be, “You should have thought about that before you picked up the rock.” Or, “Let me ask Abel what he thinks I should do with you.” And instead of responding in judgement, there is this moment of mercy where God tells him he will be protected, that he will be marked out, and that no one will be able to harm him. In other words, Cain receives mercy for a moment. Remember what mercy is? It's not getting what we deserve for our sin. And for that limited time, that's what he receives, a mercy for a moment. He's given this mark that protects him. We just wrapped up the NFL draft yesterday which is both fun and terrible at the same time because that means we've got a four-month stretch until football season is back. And we know that when football practice picks back up in the fall, as those players go out on the field, often times, the quarterbacks will wear a different color jersey than the rest of the team. And what's the purpose of that? It's so that the defense remembers, they are not to be hit. That there should be no violence that's carried out on them even though they deserve it because they are the opposing

quarterback when they're practicing. They are marked out for mercy so that they don't get what they deserve. That's the picture that we see right here in the text. Cain is marked out for mercy for a moment. But that's not the only example we see. We can fast forward to the book of Exodus. When Israel is about to come out of Egypt. As the last plague is set to come, they paint the doorpost of their homes in the shed blood of the lamb and through that Passover, they are marked out for mercy for a moment. And that is the gift that God gives to Cain. But we know one day Cain dies. We know that every person that fled from Egypt in the nation of Israel didn't live forever. See, the way of Cain might find you mercy for a moment but notice the reality that the way of Christ can provide mercy for an eternity. That's why I want you to see this text. The last one we'll look at in Hebrews chapter 12 in verse 24. You'll notice on the screen here that when the author speaks about what is taking place here, he describes how it is that we can receive the mercy for eternity that comes through the way of Christ. It's because Jesus is the new and better Abel. So, look at how Hebrews 12:24 says it.

²⁴and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

He sets them side by side. The death of Abel, and the death of Christ and as he speaks about the significance of Abel's blood, he speaks about how the sprinkling of the blood of Christ offers a sacrifice of greater significance because here, one has come as the new and better Abel. So, think about the contrast here. When Abel dies, his blood is shed and the blood cries out bringing a curse from the ground. When Jesus dies, he becomes a curse for us by going to the cross, cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree. And he doesn't just become the curse, he reverses the curse through His death and resurrection because Jesus is the new and better Abel. But you also think about this reality. Abel here is the offspring of the woman who is crushed by the offspring of the serpent. It's a foretaste of the way that his, that the heel of the offspring of the woman will be bruised. It's a foreshadowing of the coming of Christ that when he stands on that cross, yes, his heel is bruised as Roman nails are dragged right through his feet. But in that act on the cross, Jesus is the new and better Abel, who succeeds where Abel fails. He's the offspring of the woman who crushes the head of the serpent. And it gets even better than that. And think about the sacrifice that Abel brought. He is a shepherd who lays down the life of a sheep to shed blood in order to offer a sacrifice that God regards once. But think about the way the Bible speaks about Jesus. He's the good shepherd. The Lamb of God who lays down his own life. His blood is shed, offered as a sacrifice, not to be regarded by God once but once and for all. That's the power of the cross. That's the way of Christ. And everyone here this morning, whether in the room or watching by video, is faced with the same choice that was there for Cain and Abel. Right outside the garden. Will we follow the way of Cain, or the way of Christ? That's why it's so fitting we come to this text on a day we celebrate the Lord's Supper. Because if you just think about it, the Lord's Supper is a, in a sense, a combination of this story. There's two offerings that are made in Genesis 4. One of vegetation, one of bloodshed. And when we take of the bread and the cup, we are bringing forward and offering to God marked by vegetation, the grain of the field. The pressed juice from the fruit of the vine. It's, it's a restoration of the failed offering of Cain. And yet also in this taking of the Lord's Supper, it's a reminder to us the way that Jesus fulfills the offering of Abel. That when he speaks to his disciples, he says, you must eat my flesh and drink my blood. That his blood is spilled for you and me. And so as we celebrate this family meal this morning, just as we do each month, I want you to remember that reality. And you're invited to partake of it. If you followed in Christ as a baptized believer, this

is a meal for you. It's a meal that reminds us of what God has done for us on the cross. And so after I pray here, during the response time, you can make your way to the table and get the elements and we will respond following the song to the taking of the Lord's Supper.

Let's pray together.

Father, as we come to You in this moment we remember what You've done for us in Your Son. We remember that apart from Christ, we were all following in that way of Cain. Hardened in heart, resistant to You. Overwhelmed by shame and guilt. And yet by the power of the Gospel, You have made a way for us to be made right with You. We're asking now, Lord, that You renew our spirits to follow after You, not in the way of Cain, but in the way of Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.