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Genesis 4:1-16

Raising Cain

Intro: I embrace the Bible as true. All of it. And I embrace Genesis as history. Real history. Not allegorical. Not mythological. Not fairy tales or fables. Not poetry, though parts are poetic. True history.

Not necessarily a science book, although no true science will ever contradict it. God gave us this book—especially the first 11 chapters, to show us where we came from. It's our origin story.

That's becoming increasingly important in these days. Why?

Because we have questions about the way things are. It's part of our worldview. Everyone has a worldview, even if you don't know it

What's a worldview? A set of unconscious assumptions that frames your sense/view of the world. Your worldview answers 3 questions. (1) What's the world supposed to be like. (2) What happened. (3) How can it be fixed and made right. The Bible has **very specific answers** for all three of those questions. Not only do the first three chapters of the Bible answer those questions. But starting in chapter 4, it gives us a preview of life East of Eden.

SLIDE: Therefore the Lord God sent him [Adam] out from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken. ²⁴ He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life. —**Genesis 3:23–24**

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

has your face fallen? ⁷ If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is contrary to you, but you must rule over it."

⁸ Cain spoke to Abel his brother. And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him. ⁹ Then the Lord said to Cain, "Where is Abel your brother?" He said, "I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?" ¹⁰ And the Lord said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground. ¹¹ And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. ¹² When you work the ground, it shall no longer yield to you its strength. You shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth." ¹³ Cain said to the Lord, "My punishment is greater than I can bear. ¹⁴ Behold, you have driven me today away from the ground, and from your face I shall be hidden. I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me." ¹⁵ Then the Lord said to him, "Not so! If anyone kills Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold." And the Lord put a mark on Cain, lest any who found him should attack him. ¹⁶ Then Cain went away from the presence of the Lord and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden. —**Genesis 1:1–16**

Today's sermon title is **Raising Cane**. That's either a restaurant chain selling chicken fingers...or a phrase that means: *to cause much trouble or support extremely destructive behavior*. That's it!

We often make two serious assumptions when considering notorious sinners in the Bible. (1) We assume they *started out that way*. (2) We assume *we could never end up that way*.

I don't think Cain would fit in many profiles from Children's Bibles. I don't think he was the kid your mom would warn you about. On the contrary. On the outside, I believe Cain had put himself together.

Cain's name = *To bring forth. To be fruitful. To produce. Success.* I'm sure he was, humanly speaking. He's a hard-working farmer. But what happened? This would be a Netflix Crime doc in our day.

Cain and Abel pursue two different vocations. Cain is a farmer. Abel is a shepherd. They both bring God an offering or tribute of some kind. God accepts Abel and his offering but rejects Cain's.

We're not initially told why, although we find some hints and even more clarity in the New Testament. But let's not get ahead. Cain is angry and crestfallen. There is conflict that leads to murder. How?

What happened to Cain? Who's to blame? What lessons? Three...

SLIDE: Life's Hardship. Sin's Subtlety. God's Grace.

Pt. #1. Life's Hardship: Life is hard east of Eden. Note that phrase at the end of chapter 3, and again at Cain's banishment. It's a narrative marker telling you something important. A distant God. Painful childbearing. A cursed ground. A cunning enemy. In a word, CONFLICT—everywhere. With God. With the creation. With Satan. With one another. We see this in one of the most infamous murders in history. Cain and Abel. God front loads the Bible with this conflict to serve us notice. How do we know how serious Adam and Eve's fall was? Wind? Earthquake? Fire? No. Conflict.

SLIDE: During Hurricane Helene's landfall Thursday night. I was on my computer, distracted. My kids argued to go outside. My cat attacked me, while nature itself was wild and out of control. It was a parable of life East of Eden. Me. My kids. My cat. The weather.

East of Eden does not represent the "good life." It's a fallen world under a curse. No living thing is untouched. But the center of the drama is humanity. We unleashed sin, death, and conflict...

The old romantic notion that humans are inherently good, noble, honorable, and trending upward? The idea that bringing up sin and evil is primitive and unintelligent...that's *gone*. Mass shootings and world wars & our own experience have sobered & made us honest

Experience has disenchanted us of the lie that people are good. But no satisfying answers have come as to why or what's next.

In fact, we see cosmic disappointment. Why? Because leaders have made claims that they can fix the world; which in itself is an admission that it's broken. It's fallen. It's wrong. But people make claims that they can usher in an era of peace, love, harmony, unity.

Religious leaders have made that claim. Political leaders have made that claim. Sociologists. Anthropologists. Philosophers.

Psychologists. Educators. Most of them can't agree on where or how the world went wrong to begin with. Who are the villains and who are the victims? Who are the oppressors and who are the heroes? What happened? Was it *nature* or *nurture*?

Thomas Harris wrote a novel. *Silence of the Lambs*. It became a popular movie when I was a teenager. It centers around officer Starling, a young optimistic FBI student from the academy (Jody Foster), brought in to help solve a sociopathic crime spree, kind of an intern getting her first go. She wants to make a difference.

She's interviewing Hannibal Lecter, a serial killer in prison who can help her solve the case. He's intelligent, but he's a killer. She needs his insight. But as she realizes what he has done, and sees his attitude, she asks, "How did you become like this?" IOW. What made you into this monster? Who hurt you? What went wrong?

Her question represents a modern response to evil, crime, brokenness: "What happened to you? You're breaking bad; therefore, something must have happened to you. Something from outside. It couldn't be something inside." Now that's a huge philosophical leap of faith. Yet everybody does it. It's the cultural air we breathe. Victimhood is not just a political play. It's a deeply held—but faulty—belief to explain how we got so sideways.

Hannibal Lecter is not having it. He exposes her inadequate worldview, and ours. Here's what he says: This is out of the book.

He says, "Nothing happened to me, Officer Starling. **I happened**. You can't reduce me to a set of influences. You've given up good and evil for behaviorism...Look at me, Officer Starling. **Can you stand to say I'm evil?**" There you go. Evil!

This is the conundrum of the modern secular worldview. They have no answer. They have no category for a monster like Hannibal Lecter, or for Cain. But the Bible does. Genesis does.

Genesis explains the origin of evil but gives us enormous hope at the same time—if we're paying attention. But let's go deeper.

Pt. #2. Sin's Subtlety: Sin has a strategy for YOU.

Pay attention here, young people. The very first time sin is mentioned in the Bible and an eerie but instructive description is given. God is talking about sin. He sets the pace for us. What does he say? *"At the door, sin is crouching. It's desire is for you."* That means it wants to master you. To dominate you. Rule you. Overthrow you. But the word to describe it is eerie. *Crouching*

That word is used to describe a predator looking to take a victim. But it's also used to describe an animal like a donkey or camel under the burden of a heavy load who is laying down or resting.

IOW. Sin always hides itself. It wants to initially escape your notice, like the leopard in the weeds. Of course you recognize the crime when it happens. It's inescapably obvious. The murder. The robbery. The homicide. But in the beginning? Sin is crouching at the door. It stays in the shadows. It hides. It crouches down low.

It's waiting. It's like a volcano waiting to erupt. Desire. Master. Sin is waiting in the corners. Patiently. Crouching. Sin wants to stay off your radar. It wants to present itself as something else than it is.

You're not a tattler. You're a justice warrior.
You're not a workaholic. You're just productive.
You don't have an anger problem. It's just righteous indignation.
You're not addicted. You're coping.
I'm not stingy. I'm just prudent.
You don't struggle with porn. You just admire beauty of body

Pay attention when you are dealing with someone. You'll know you hit an idol when the conversation changes—when a person gets defensive. Then you've hit a nerve. You've hit a root.

Sin is not just a personal force, it's a power! It's like Venom in Spider man. This outside force that seeks a host to dominate.

It's like the ring in Tolkien's Trilogy. It's seductive and deceptive.

Sin stays down, hidden, concealed, disguised. Coiled up.

Then one day...BANG. Out it comes. Expresses itself. Manifests.

When you give in to the temptation and commit a sin, it creates a force in your life. It takes shape. It's staggering. Do you think this is just metaphorical, when God says, "Sin wants to have you"? This was a gracious warning to Cain. He ignored it. Despised it.

It's alive. It's subtle. It wants to remain concealed. It wants to be fed and to grow, but not to draw too much attention. To get strong.

Here's the point: when you give in to selfishness, you give in to pride, you give in to dishonesty, you give in to greed, you give in to those sorts of impulses, the next thing you know, you have allowed something in your life that overpowers and controls you, owns you.

God says "If you pursue sin, sin will pursue you." It's what we warn our loves ones about. Maybe kids. Don't play with that. It's dangerous. Don't trust it. It will take over your life and hurt you.

Moms say to their kids don't play with fire. Don't play with matches. Fire chief in CA said: People—whether purposeful, reckless or simply careless—are responsible for about 95% of the wildfires in CA. Then this: ["I believe in the ability of humans to recognize what is not in their best interest, but people constantly prove me wrong."](#) —**David Acuna, CA FIRE BATTALION CHIEF**

Remember those black, shiny, indestructible crystal balls in LOTR. Palantir? Remember when the hobbit Pippin got too fascinated with it and snuck a peak when Gandalf fell asleep? He got stuck and burned—unable to avert his gaze as the stone showed him Sauron. Nearly killed him and compromised the mission.

Sin is not just something you commit. It's a power that will control you and dominate you. And you won't even realize it until too late.

That grudge you're nursing.
That lustful thought you won't kill.
The hankering after more stuff, nicer things.
The urge to be beautiful, loved, powerful, wealthy.

It's like a drug. First hit is free. You choose it. But after that, power is out of your control. You are under the influence.

QUESTION: Do you know the sins that are crouching for you?

By definition, the things in your life right now that can most destroy you are the things you don't think are that bad.

That's why you tolerate them. That's why you brush off concerns of others. That's why you're irritated by questions about them.

Maybe it's your relationship to your phone
 Maybe it's how your spending money
 Maybe it's how distant you've grown from the people who care
 Maybe it's how much you work
 Maybe it's lust, anger, bitterness.

More than likely, they are the things you've been making excuses for. The things you are justifying. The things that cause conflict.

In other words, sin always crouches down, but it will poison you. It will have you. You can't stay bitter without it hardening you and distorting you. Changing you into a monster.

SLIDE: The deadliest snake in the world is Australia's inland taipan. The venom from one bite can kill 100 full-grown humans. Imagine you came home to find this killer coiled up in your bed. If you ignore it, you're going to get bit eventually. Same with sin...

If you ignore it and tolerate it. It won't be long before it will uncoil. It will poison you, and it will harden you, and it will embitter you in all sorts of ways you won't even see. Why? It means to have you.

There's nobody more under the power of something than someone who doesn't know they're under anybody's power.

One of the reasons we encourage D-groups here is so that you can talk to someone about that. It's not just to shoot the breeze. We want you to get down to business in your times together. East of Eden, sin is a power to be reckoned with. That's life

If you don't deal with it, it will deal with you.
 Be killing sin or sin will be killing you, John Owen said.

When some kind of scandal happens, I remember the words of a dear friend of mine from seminary. He said: "A man has long failed privately before publicly." You can choose your sin, but not the

consequences of your sin. What a word for Cain. Sin is complex. Sin is hidden. It's always hiding itself, and it's always waiting. Just assume it. Like germs in a Porta Potty.

This is the way of the unrepentant sinner. The NT tells us.

Woe to them! For they walked in the way of Cain. —Jude 11

Pt. #3. God's Grace: God offers mercy to humble sinners. First was the warning God gave about sin. But as the story continues, Cain ignored God and acted out his murderous impulse on Abel. We're not sure what kind of conversation he and Abel had. It says they spoke. Maybe Abel lovingly confronted him. It didn't go well.

But God is not finished with Cain. Is this not astonishing? God is appealing to Cain. Who else can? This is shepherding. It's brotherhood. It's discipleship. It's mercy. It's compassion. It's God.

Note the manner in which God comes to Cain. As a gentle father. As a brother. As a friend. A counselor. Asking questions. Probing. Appealing. Seeking a confession. Not as a prophet. Not waving a finger in his face. Not with clenched teeth and a tight fist. No. Love

God initiates. What views of God do you have, friend? Ever hear that the God of the OT is harsh, vindictive, irrational, impulsive?

This is as OT primitive, ancient as you can get. God's first interaction with sinners East of Eden. 1st discussion of sin in Bible. Yet see how God still offers hope to Cain—if he will confess. If he will repent. If he will turn and ask God for forgiveness. He won't.

Nobody called God to come and help. He came. Same with Adam and Eve. Same with sinners who are saved by Grace. **We love because he first loved us.** When you see God pursuing a sinner, he doesn't have a pitch fork in his hand and an angry scowl on his face. He wants a sit-down. He wants to reason with us. **Come let us reason together, says the Lord.**

What do you not see here? In Cain's response? Humility. Openness. Tenderness. Repentance. Honesty. Remorse. None. Why was God unhappy with Cain? Why did God not respect him or accept him? Or his offerings? Those are connected.

God wants your heart before he wants your gift/offering/sacrifice. Were Cain's sacrifices half-hearted? Why was God not thrilled with them? It isn't exactly obvious—at least not in Genesis. But...as is so often the case, we get clarity in the New Testament.

SLIDE: By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts. And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks. —Hebrews 11:4

Note the conclusion and lesson from Abel, 2 verses later.

SLIDE: And without faith it is impossible to please God. -Heb. 11:6

I think it's clear that Abel offered his sacrifice with a worshipful heart. He knew blood atonement was required by God. He, a sinner, needed a substitute. Probably a lamb/ram. He brought His offering in faith that God would forgive him and rescue him. God has always required faith to be appeased. We're told elsewhere:

SLIDE: For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin. -Rom. 14

I believe the issue was one of faith vs works. That's not small.

Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. ⁵ And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness — Romans 4:4–5.

Cain, on the other hand, did not have faith. I believe his offering was brought as a work or performance of some kind. Sure, grains were a provisional offering allowed in Leviticus, but I don't believe that's what Cain was offering. He was a hard working farmer. Perhaps he believed God would respect his hard work. The fruit of that labor. He brought his sweat. God rejected it. Abel brought blood and God was pleased. It drove Cain to envy, jealousy.

For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. ¹² We 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 righteous. —1 John 3:11–12

To conclude here, let's get to the hope. Cain slaughtered Abel. He struck him and either hid his body or buried him. It was a bloody murder and the ground soaked up his blood and "cried out to God" as the Lord reminds Cain. Be sure, your sin will find you out.

Have you ever wondered what Abel's blood cried out? Justice. Vengeance. Retribution. That's the response of the law when broken by sinners. We're all in that boat. That's the Old Covenant. Listen to Hebrews compare the old and new covenant. The law and the gospel. He ends comparing Abel's blood & Christ's...

SLIDE: LAW. For you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest ¹⁹ and the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them. ²⁰ For they could not endure the order that was given, "If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned." ²¹ Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, "I tremble with fear." —Hebrews 12:18–21

SLIDE: GOSPEL. But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, ²³ and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, ²⁴ and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel. —Hebrews 12:22–24

Then verse 25, "See that you do not refuse him who is speaking."

The Bible is not a series of disconnected stories. It is a single narrative in which every story, every character points beyond itself to One who is greater—Jesus

Jesus is the true and better Adam, who passed the test in the garden, His garden – a much tougher garden, and whose obedience is imputed to us. Jesus is the true and better Abel who—though innocently slain—has blood that cries out, not for condemnation, but for acquittal. —Tim Keller

Do you know him...? Will you refuse that blood?
Let's pray...