

Origin Stories, Genesis 3-4, “The Cain in Everyone”, 3/10/24

Last week you may recall that I started with a quote from Beatrice Webb from the 1920s, but I thought I’d start with a more modern voice- Linkin Park from their 2011 hit song Catalyst written by the late Chester Bennington: *God, bless us everyone. We're a broken people living under loaded gun, And it can't be outfought, It can't be outdone, It can't be outmatched, It can't be outrun.* Bennington was lamenting the grim reality that no matter what man-made attempts to ushering in societal utopia, whether it is through education, war, technology, law, or social-engineering- there is something deeply broken that we can't fix ourselves...interesting that while he was not a Christian, Bennington recognized only God, if there is one, can do something about our brokenness. Something we will come back to later.

[Title Slide] Whether it was Beatrice the English socialist or a modern rock band, we all inherently know that something is not right with the world. And it's easy to see it in others- it's those liberals, it's those conservatives, it's those Cowboy fans, it's my ex-husband, it's my mother-in-law, my obnoxious neighbor, the mean girls at school... but we also know in our more reflective and honest moments, the problem is in us too.

Do you ever have one of those moments of anger, frustration, or impulsiveness where something slips out of you that totally embarrasses you. “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean that. That’s not really me.” Where did it come from then? Maybe a better explanation is that as we get older, we just get better at filtering what is in our hearts—we know when to keep our mouths shut but it’s still there...UNTIL WE GET REALLY OLD. The question is “What went wrong?” and the answer according to Genesis 3 is that three letter word SIN.

Now lots of people don’t like the word sin. It’s basically been erased from the modern secular vocabulary. After all, it’s outdated, too religious, and makes people feel bad. OK- well what words will you use that adequately capture reality? Mistake? Unwise choices? Maladaptive behavior? Yet none of these phrases are profound enough to capture what’s wrong. I believe we must recover the vocabulary of sin, we need to go deep enough...not to make everyone feel badly about themselves and live in shame, but in order to understand our utter need for more than behavior modification, but God’s grace and redemption...and experience freedom.

Last week, I said that the narrative in Genesis 3 flows through four movements. **The Fallacy, The Failure, The Fallout, the Future.** We’ve looked at the Fallacy and the Failure- Adam and Eve fell for the lie, desiring to become their own gods, and instead become hidens. So now let’s look at the Fallout. We are given a brief synopsis of the fallout in God’s conversation with Adam and Eve v.16-19. *¹⁶ To the woman he said, “I will make your pains in childbearing very severe; with painful labor you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.”*

¹⁷ To Adam he said, “Because you listened to your wife and ate fruit from the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You must not eat from it,’ “Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life.

¹⁸ It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. ¹⁹ By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return."

The first thing I want us to see is that **the Fallout from sin runs Wider than we Think**. Notice the how wide, how far stretching, the fallout of sin is. **Physical Fallout:** v.16- *Pain in childbirth*. v.17 *Painful toil you will eat*. v.18 *Sweat of your brow*. These are representative of a host of physical brokenness from the pain of a stubbed toe to disease, to the process of aging and everything in between until v.19 *to dust we return*. Even the greatest physical specimens among us will face this reality. If you go on a Holy Land tour with me some time, we will visit the world-famous Dead Sea...not only do you float in the Dead Sea, but it is home to many minerals that are good for your skin. At every stop along the Dead Sea there are shops with product demonstrations of the miracle anti-aging creams and mud masks you can buy...always demonstrated of course by young women in her 30s...during the demonstration I like to lean over to the people next to me and whisper- "This stuff is incredible, do you know that woman is 93 years old!" Listen, even Jennifer Lopez and The Rock will eventually prove Genesis 3 is true.

Natural Fallout: v.17 *cursed is the ground*. v.18 thorns and thistles. Again, representatives of the clash of man with nature. This message is just in time for spring...and if you are doubting the fallout of nature- I give you the challenge of not touching your lawn or your garden until the Fall and see what happens...nature fights back- famine, natural disasters, weather extremes...

Relational Fallout: v.16 *Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you*. The exact meaning of this phrase is debated, but the least we can say about what it means is that conflict was introduced to our relationships because of our self-centered desires and self-protecting nature of "me before you", "my wants and needs are prioritized about yours." Notice, that God was not so much punishing them with this statement, he was just pointing out what happens where sin enters our lives. Do you remember what Adam did when God confronted him about his sin? ¹² *The man said, "The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it."*

The blame game starts. We are all like this... I remember growing up, in my oldest brother's bedroom closet he had a large chest with a lock on it and my middle brother Jon and I always wanted to know what he was hiding in there. And so one day we snuck down to his room, found his key and we unlocked it and we were going through all his private stuff... and suddenly we hear him barreling down the steps and yell, "What do you think you are doing? Do are so dead." And we shot up straight, and all I could think to do to get out of this was to point my finger at my brother, then I ran for my life! Blame and run...it's still our instinct. Man is always looking to blame God, blame society, blame circumstances and each other and then tuck our tails and let someone else take the hit. But God is looking for personal responsibility and accountability. Sin is a tendency to throw anyone else under the bus in order to validate, excuse or secure ourselves.

[Wider than we think Slide] Do you see why a wider understanding of the fallout of sin makes sense of our world? How it makes sense of our own brokenness? Some of us struggle with body dysmorphia, self-harm, depression or personality disorders that medical intervention alone can't solve. It makes sense of why we have broken and dysfunctional relationships others that a self-help book or counseling alone can't repair. Do you see why there are injustices that more laws and regulations aren't going to fully fix or even make it worse? Or why there is corruption virtually wherever power and money are found and how politics alone can't eradicate? Sin runs wider than we think.

But sin not only runs wider than we think, it also **Runs Deeper than we Admit.**

We get one generation post-Eden and the sin that began with desire, manifests itself in murder. Let's set the stage. **Genesis 4:2 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 And Abel also brought an offering—fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The Lord looked with favor on Abel and his offering, ⁵ but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. Why did God bless Abel's offering and not Cain's? I think the answer is found not in the difference between the quantity of their offerings but the quality of their offerings. It would seem that while Cain went through the motions of worship by giving something out of his leftovers, that Abel worshipped from his heart by giving the firstborn of his flock, the best portions, not out of what was left. It's the difference between dropping some cash that you have on hand into the offering box in a flippant manner to cross off your religious duty list and giving from the first of your income before expenses out of a heart of trust and worship to God. You see the difference? Both give, and maybe the amounts are even different...and from the outside it might look the same. But one comes from a heart posture of indifference. One is a heart posture of gratitude. What God is trying to show us is we need to look deeper than the outward actions.

Sin runs Deeper than we admit: An Inward Posture not just Outward actions.

The Bible says, "Man looks on the outward appearance, but God looks at the heart." This is what Jesus was often after- everyone was impressed by the outwardly religious people of Jesus' day, but he said it's not just outward behavior. In the sermon on the mount he said, "It is said, 'You shall not murder.' But I say to you anyone who hates his brother is guilty of murder." Outward sin always begins with a heart posture. **Is there a deeper sin that you have allowed to reside in your heart?** Outward gossip begins with inward envy and insecurity. Outward materialism comes from inward greed and discontentment. Outward fighting, bigotry and racism comes from inward pride and judgmentalism.

Genesis 4 reveals that sin runs deeper in another way. Let's keep reading. **Genesis 4:5 So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast. ⁶ 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 rule over it." Notice how God

describes sin: *crouching at your door; it desires to have you*. Sin is more than something you do. The imagery is that sin is more like a predatory animal that is ready to pounce and eat you alive.

We don't think about sin like a predator usually, we think of it more like a pet. Something that we can tame and control and even play with and it's not going to harm us. A little porn here and there, what's the harm? An outburst of rage? A lie here and there...not a big deal. While we think we are doing sin, in reality, sin is doing us! It controls us. **James 1:15 *Desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.*** Every once in a while, you'll hear one of these stories about someone who raised a tiger as a **pet [Picture]** and then one day when the tiger was full-grown it snapped and killed its owner...I won't show you what happens next... And everyone seems so surprised, but that's what predators do!

Sin runs Deeper: Sin is a Predator not a Pet.

Sin starts seemingly innocent enough like a pet who play bites us...but when we don't take it seriously, and repeat it, it grows into a habit that gets harder and harder to stop until it consumes us. And this is exactly what happens to Cain. We don't know how long Cain harbored his sin of anger and envy and resentment toward God and Abel...but eventually that crouching tiger of sin that went unchecked, unconfessed, unmastered, lashes out and he murders his brother.

What are the crouching, predatory sins that you are treating as pets right now? You will know what they are because they are the things you least want to see and you rationalize them as OK. "I'm not greedy, I'm fiscally cautious. I don't have a drinking problem, I just like to have a good time. I'm not harboring anger I just care about injustice. I'm not a control-freak, I just care about doing things well."

The Future

As the narrative moves forward into the generations of mankind a theme becomes apparent. We see the amplification of sin in humanity. Sin runs wider and deeper in people and relationships and society. The predator of sin grows and grows, someone is going to have to do something about it or it's going to destroy everything. As we will begin to see next week, if not even the flood of judgment can stop it, what can be done?

Tucked away in the middle of Genesis 3 God inserts a tiny, subtle seed of hope. It's so subtle that we can read right past it and miss it. But this little seed is going to grow into the fullness of the Gospel. **Genesis 3:15 *And I will put enmity between you [the serpent] and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.***

Imagine a family and coming right at them is a deadly snake ready to attack and suddenly, the father jumps in the way and starts stomping on the head of the snake until it's dead. And saves the family, but only after the snake bites him and the venom goes into him and he dies. This is the imagery. But this snake isn't just a snake in this story is it? This snake represents Satan, sin and evil itself. God is laying the seeds of the gospel right from the beginning. One of the descendants of Eve, a human being, is going to stand in place of humanity to save us by

crushing Satan, the curse of sin, evil and death itself, but in the process of killing the deadly predator he will suffer a fatal wound. The first Adam should have done that. He should have protected Eve and got rid of the deadly predator right there in the garden, but he didn't. But the second Adam, Jesus Christ, did.¹

Jesus took on the predator himself. He took on the width and depth of sin and evil. He absorbed it all into his body on the cross. So much so that the Father had to look away. In fact, Paul says that Jesus "became sin" so that we could become pure and spotless before God. While sin runs wide and deep, **The grace, love and forgiveness of God in Christ Jesus runs wider than we can hope and deeper than we can dream.**

The Gospel.

¹ Thanks to Tim Keller Sermon for helping with this image.