

✠ *In the Name of Jesus* ✠

It's rare to hear a sermon about Cain and Abel. Maybe because the story is so depressing, huh? Hatred, murder, banishment, unhappy ending. But if we take the time to delve into this Bible history, God will bless us with great learning for our daily living as his people.

So who wants to be like Cain? No? Not even one taker? Well, isn't that the point of the story? DON'T BE LIKE CAIN.

Cain doesn't bring the Lord a good offering. "What is wrong with Cain's offering? Does God love shepherds like Abel but not farmers like Cain?" No, the problem isn't what occupies the time of these two brothers but what occupies their hearts. Cain acts like he does not trust in God. We find not even one fruit of faith from Cain in this whole account. There is no faith in his heart.

"Whoa, Pastor, that's a little harsh, isn't it? After all, Cain brought God an offering." Yes, and if it weren't for the Holy Spirit pulling back the cover of Cain's heart so we can see inside, we would have to be as charitable to Cain as we are to everyone who comes to church or calls themselves Christian. But the Holy Spirit does help us see inside Cain. In 1 John 3 the Spirit teaches, *12Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother's were righteous.* That's why the Lord does not look with favor on Cain's

offering. It comes from a heart without faith. (See Hebrews 11:6.)

DON'T BE LIKE CAIN. He brings his offerings to God out of a sense of obligation ("I have to do this.") Or perhaps Cain is trying to get God to bless his fields. If so, Cain's offering is really a bribe. \*Do we do that? Do we ever entertain the thought, "I better give something because I don't want God to send disaster my way"? We gather a thank offering every week to pay for the spread of the gospel here and around the world. Do we ever think, "O boy, here comes the offering plate. Better put something in. Don't want people thinking I don't give my share"? We hear that Cain brings some of the fruits of the soil. Do we think of our offering as giving God some of our money? O friends, DON'T BE LIKE CAIN.

Abel is a much better example. He is so grateful to God for blessing his flock with mostly healthy stock and mostly good milk and mostly good wool that, when it's time to give his offering, he looks over his flock carefully, separates out the firstborns, and chooses the best of them. Can you see Abel herding several really nice looking sheep and goats toward the place of sacrifice? Look closely at Abel. That's a smile on his face! Do you think perhaps Abel is remembering that the Lord does more than bless his flocks, that the Lord has also promised to send a Savior who will crush the serpent's head (Genesis 3:15)? Without a doubt! In Hebrews 11 the Holy Spirit reveals: *4By faith Abel*

*offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was commended as a righteous man, when God spoke well of his offerings.* Let's be like Abel when it comes to our offerings. Decide how many dollars you will give the Lord out of every hundred that comes into your home. Choose a number that you and your closest Christian friends would say is generous for you, if they knew. When your income comes in, set aside the first portion for the Lord according to the number you've decided on. Give the best to the Lord from a heart that smiles because in Christ God counts you pure and holy.

Cain finds out that the Lord looks with favor on his brother Abel and on his offering, but not on Cain. Now what would be the believing thing to do? That's right, repent. Cain should say, "What's wrong with me that God looks on me with disfavor? Gracious Lord, can we talk about this? What am I missing? My heart is open. Teach me your ways." But instead Cain is angry and his face downcast. In his heart he hates Abel. **DON'T BE LIKE CAIN.** When you consider others in this congregation, you see people who are better at things than you. Don't hate them. Thank God for them. Study them. See if you can imitate the good they do? Or see if you can do good things which will complement what they do by filling in the gaps of what's not being done here at St. John's. Then the body of Christ will be built up as each part does its work (Ephesians 4:16).

*Then the LORD said to Cain...* He speaks

to Cain. Isn't that just like the Lord? It isn't enough that he already promised to send a Savior someday. No, he shows how faithful he is to his covenant by calling Cain to contrition. And look at the wisdom oozing out of the words God chooses for Cain. "*Why are you angry? Do you have a good reason? Or are you angry because your brother and my favorable regard for him have exposed the unbelief in your own heart? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted?*" Some will seize on God's words saying, "Ah-ha! I knew I could find a passage which teaches that good works gain God's favor!" Well, actually not. God knows that a believing heart shows its faith by what it does, that you can't separate saving faith from the good works that it will produce. Other Bible verses also teach that good works don't gain God's eternal favor (e.g. Ephesians 2:8-9). But good deeds sure can show that saving faith fills the heart, just as evil deeds reveal an evil heart.

It is as the Lord says to Cain: "*If you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it.*" "You must master it." Doesn't that sound like we have it within our power to overcome sin? All we have to do is grab our whip and a wooden chair, stick that chair in the face of the sin, crack the whip, and behold how sin cowers at our feet. Really? It seems more likely that the Lord is using the law to expose how weak Cain is—how weak we are when sin sets its sites on us and waits, crouching outside our heart for us to open the door.

And then it pounces. \*I believe that if Cain had taken this warning to heart, he would have concluded that sin is too strong for us to master by ourselves. We need our Lord's help to overcome whatever is tempting us. The fact that the Lord is talking to unbelieving Cain is proof that the Lord is eager and ready to help Cain. **DON'T BE LIKE CAIN.** Call on the Lord for help against the temptations that crouch outside the door of your heart. He who hates sin so much that he saved us from it will surely help you master it, and he will forgive you for Jesus' sake if you fail. And then you can try again.

Cain does not heed God's warning. Perhaps he approaches Abel, shares what God told him, and pretends to take God's warning to heart. "Yeah, yeah, brother Abel. My anger about that offering thing, it's all gone now." Abel, willing to trust his brother, goes out into the field with Cain. **DON'T BE LIKE CAIN.** Don't let your hatred have a home in your heart. Don't murder your brother or sister or neighbor. Don't assassinate them with your words. Don't even plan to harm others.

Some will ask, "How could Cain do such a thing?" The sinful mind does not think clearly. If twisted Cain could not silence God's voice, maybe he could silence the cheerful voice of his brother and his 'I'm-happy-to-give-my-best-offering' attitude. "See if my brother ever makes **me** look bad again." I know. It doesn't make

sense. But then remember some of the crazy things you say to yourself when you are angry or when you want something really bad and it's denied to you.

*9Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?" "What? You mean the Lord doesn't know where Abel was?" Of course he does. But a question can give people a chance to fess up. **DON'T BE LIKE CAIN.** When he has the chance to be honest, he lies. "Where is your brother Abel?" "I don't know," he replied. I guess lying works on people sometimes, for a while, until they find out you lie. I don't know how Cain thinks he's going to get away with lying to God when God knows everything. Especially when Cain throws in that sarcastic comment about Abel's occupation: *Am I my brother's keeper?* He's the keeper of sheep!*

Well actually, Cain, yes you are your brother's keeper. We are all responsible to watch out for each other, to guard and protect each other, to help each other, and not just with physical problems, but especially with spiritual matters. Fellow redeemed, we are our brother's and sister's keepers. You get to talk to any member about their relationship with Jesus, and they all get to talk to you. That's part of what it means to be a church member. We get to love each other enough to speak up when something is wrong.

To Cain's cocky comment, *10the LORD said, "What have you done? Listen! Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground. 11Now you are under a curse and driven from the ground, which opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. 12When you work the ground (remember, Cain has been a farmer up till now), it will no longer yield its crops for you. You will be a restless wanderer on the earth."*

"Wait a minute. I thought murderers were supposed to receive the death penalty." Well, yes, later on the Lord imposes the death penalty on murderers as a matter of law. Death will eventually come to Cain, but the Lord isn't done with him yet. He wants to give Cain a lifetime to think about what he has done in hopes that Cain might repent. Gracious God, be so good to us too!

"Wait a minute. 'So good?' Cain was basically grounded for life!" Yes, and when the Lord decides to mete out discipline to us for the willful sins we have committed, where we knew it was wrong but proceeded anyway, let us say, "Thank you, my Lord, for being so good to me. I knew doing 87 was too fast. So I thank you for the ticket. I thank you for the increase in my insurance. I thank you for the injury I sustained in the accident. I have learned a valuable lesson."

**DON'T BE LIKE CAIN.** When the Lord announces the consequences of his sin, *13Cain says to the LORD, "My punishment is more than I can bear. The law written*

in my heart is telling me that murderers should die, and I'm afraid that one of my relatives will try to bring down vengeance on me for killing their Uncle Abel." **DON'T BE LIKE CAIN.** Don't whine! Don't say, "But, Lord, everyone else was cheating too. It's not fair that I was the only one caught. It's not fair that I won't be able to get into the college of my choice. I'm going to make less money because you let the teacher turn around and look at me too soon." **DON'T BE LIKE CAIN.** Let us say, "Lord, you are right to let me suffer the consequences of these troubles in my marriage. I did not put my spouse ahead of myself. I did not keep my tongue in check. I used that naughty tone of voice. And now it's going to take a lot of time to build up what I myself have helped to tear down. But you haven't given up on me, Lord. So I'm not giving up on my vows while I am still married." **DON'T BE LIKE CAIN.** Don't whine when God's discipline settles in. Be honest with God about what you did. Ask him to look on you with favor for the sake of Jesus whose death on the cross paid the punishment for all your sins. **Bear up under the discipline, reminding yourself,** "This is so much better than the eternity in hell I deserve. This discipline can last only until it's time to go to heaven. And in the meantime, what a great reminder not to turn away from my gracious God. He really loves me. I am so blessed."