

First Things – Genesis

Genesis 4:1-7

“God and the First Family”

1. **GOD IS COMPASSIONATE IN WHAT HE DOES**
 - A. The gift of life
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1. The family of the sitting U.S. President is traditionally referred to as the “First Family”. Probably no “first family” was as loved and admired as that of President John F. Kennedy. This January will mark the 50th anniversary of Kennedy’s inauguration.

2. When he and his wife Jackie, along with their two small children, John Jr., and Caroline, moved into the White House, some referred to it as Camelot.

3. Of course, we know that the supposed Camelot was ended by the assassination of President Kennedy in 1963, followed by the many other tragedies that have befallen that family.

4. In Genesis chapter 4, we meet the *real* first family. After having been forced out of the garden because of their sin, God blessed the first couple by giving them a pair of sons.

5. Unfortunately, the story of the Bible’s first family is one with its own tragic tale. It has been noted that in this fourth chapter of Genesis, we find not only the first mother, but the first murderer, and the first martyr as well.

6. Before we examine the record of Cain’s murderous assault on his brother, I want to us focus on the opening verses of this chapter, and on the goodness of God toward this first family.

7. Once again we are reminded that the God of the Bible, the Lord God Jehovah, is a good and gracious God, who continually reveals His love to His rebellious creatures.

8. Think with me about this passage of Scripture, and notice that in it we see the following truths about our Lord. First of all, we see that:

I. GOD IS COMPASSIONATE IN WHAT HE DOES

1. Genesis 3 ends with God's judgments upon Adam and Eve, and their expulsion from the paradise He had created for them.
2. Verse 24 of that chapter says, *"So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life."*
3. Man's life was forever changed because of his sin, and it is obvious that things were never the same as they were inside that garden.
4. However, even though their life was altered by their sin, God was still gracious and merciful towards them, even outside of the garden.
5. I am mindful of the words of Psalm 86:15, *"But thou, O Lord, art a God full of compassion, and gracious, longsuffering, and plenteous in mercy and truth."*
6. When we see Adam and Eve starting their family east of Eden, we are reminded of the compassion of God in His dealings with mankind.
7. Consider how His compassion was revealed to this first family. You see it in:

A. The gift of life

1. Look again at verse 1. It says, *"And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain, and said, I have gotten a man from the LORD."*
2. Though fallen in sin, Adam and Eve could still enjoy intimacy, and from their union, a son was conceived.
3. His name was Cain, and at his birth, Eve proclaimed, *"I have gotten a man from the Lord."* The *ESV* translates her words, "I have gotten a man with the help of the Lord."
4. After the birth of Cain, there was a second birth; a son named Abel. Both of these boys were gifts from God. They were tokens of His grace to this couple who had once rebelled against the Giver of all life.
5. All men everywhere, whether they acknowledge God or not have received grace from Him, if in no other way, through the gift of life.
6. In Acts 17:25, Paul said that God, *"...giveth to all life, and breath, and all things."* God is compassionate in what He does for mankind.
7. Someone has said that the worst holiday for an atheist is Thanksgiving, because they have nobody to thank.

8. I assure you, rather than shaking a defiant fist in the face of Christ, rebellious men should offer Him thanksgiving for the life He has given to them.

9. In Colossians 1, Paul says that by the Lord Jesus, all things were created, and by Him all things consist (1:16-17). He is the Giver of life.

10. We see God's compassion with this first family, not only in the gift of life, but also in:

B. The gift of labor

1. Look now at verse 2. We are told that as these two boys grew up, they took to a profession. It says, "*And Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground.*"

2. Even though this family had been locked out of the abundance of the garden, God did not withhold from them the other parts of the earth.

3. Taking the skills God had given them, and the resources of the earth God had created for them, this first family was allowed to work and prosper under God's grace. Their labor was a token of God's mercy and grace.

4. In his 2009 biography, called *Hard Work*, North Carolina Basketball Coach, and Hall of Famer, Roy Williams tells about his early days as an assistant under the legendary Dean Smith.

5. He says that his job as an assistant was a full-time job with part-time pay. That year, Williams actually had 5 jobs that he worked to help feed his young family.

6. The worst of those, according to Williams was selling team calendars. The coach recalls that he would see 15 people a day, and sometimes none of them would buy a single calendar.

7. He said of that job, "That summer I drove 9,000 miles, sold 10,500 calendars...and made \$2,400."ⁱ

8. While not all labor is easy, the fact that we can employ ourselves in hard work, and reap the benefits of it is a token of God's grace.

9. The ground was cursed after the fall, but it still fed Abel's sheep, and filled Cain's garden. God was compassionate in what He did for this first family.

10. Likewise, the fallen descendents of Adam and Eve must acknowledge that God has been compassionate with us as well.

11. Looking at this fourth chapter of Genesis, there is another truth we find. We see not only that *God is compassionate in what He does*, but notice also further that:

II. GOD IS CONSISTENT IN WHAT HE DEMANDS

1. Though the Scriptures do not record it for us, it appears that Adam and Eve taught their boys about the Lord God, and about how they were to worship Him.
2. Looking back in our text, verse 3 says, *"And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the LORD."*
3. Likewise, verse 4 says, *"And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof..."* Both brothers came to God with an offering – an act of devotion and worship.
4. Yet, the Word of God tells us that while God received Abel and His offering, verse 5 says, *"...unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect."*
5. Now it may seem that God was being unfair here, but the reality is that God was merely being consistent. What He demands from all men is essentially the same.
6. Consider with me what God demanded from this first family, and what He demands from all of us as well. First of all, consider:

A. The approach that God requires

1. Once again, we find in the New Testament a sort-of commentary on this passage in Genesis. In Hebrews 11:4 says, *"By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh."*
2. The writer of Hebrews indicates that what initially made the difference in Abel's offering was that it was offered "by faith."
3. Just a couple of verses later, that same writer says, *"But without faith it is impossible to please [God]: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him."*
4. When Cain approached God there was something other than faith in His heart. Perhaps it was pride in His offering. Perhaps he had a heart of greed, and was angry about having to give to God. We don't know.
5. We do know this; whoever comes to God must approach Him by faith. We must come believing Him to be who He has revealed Himself to be.

6. We must come believing that in seeking Him, we will find Him, and that in calling upon Him, He will answer.
7. We have all heard stories of people who looked up to the sky in the midst of some crisis, and prayed one of those, "God, if you're up there..." prayers.
8. I'm not saying that God never answers those, but He calls men to approach Him, not skeptically, as if He could be history's greatest myth, but with faith in who He has revealed Himself to be.
9. The protestant reformer, Martin Luther said, "God our Father has made all things depend on faith so that whoever has faith will have everything, and whoever does not have faith will have nothing."
10. Faith is the approach that God requires of all men. Consider also though, that God is consistent in what He demands, and that includes further:

B. The atonement that God requires

1. In Genesis 4, and verse 5, God rejected not only Cain and his lack of faith, but also his offering. It says, "*But unto Cain **and to his offering** he had not respect...*" [emphasis added]
2. In other words, there was not only something wrong with what was in Cain's heart, but there was also something wrong with what was in Cain's hand.
3. On the contrary, Abel's sacrifice was received, because, as Hebrews 11:4 says, it was "*a more excellent sacrifice*".
4. What was the difference in their offerings? It is simply this: Cain's was an offering of his own works, and Abel's was the sacrifice of an innocent lamb. In other words, it was atonement for His sins.
5. Cain laid the best of his own work before God. Abel laid the shed blood of the lamb before God.
6. I know the modern sensibilities of some people are bothered by all this shed blood in the Bible. They shun the gruesomeness of these sacrifices, but they forget that all these sacrifices were only shadows and symbols of the one, True Sacrifice.
7. In one of my favorite books, the great Scottish preacher, J. Sidlow Baxter asks, "...are those who say they cannot believe in a God who 'demands blood' prepared to face the

utterly *sublime* fact that it was God himself who, in the person of his incarnate Son, shed *his own* blood, for the sake of saving man?"ⁱⁱ

8. Yes, in Abel's accepted sacrifice we are reminded that we cannot come to God without the atoning blood of a sacrifice.

9. However, we must also remember that while God consistently requires atonement from men, He has also graciously provided that atonement through the blood of His Son Jesus.

10. As Abraham rightly prophesied to his son Isaac in Genesis 22:8, we look to Jesus and say, "*God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering.*"

11. Today we come to God, with the faith of Adam's second son, and the knowledge of God's only Son, and we say:

*What can wash away my sins?
Nothing but the blood of Jesus,
What can make me whole again?
Nothing but the blood of Jesus,*

*Oh, precious is that flow,
That makes me white as snow,
No other fount I know,
Nothing but the blood of Jesus*

12. God is not partial, nor a respecter of persons. He is consistent in what He demands from humanity. We must approach Him in faith, trusting in the atonement of His Son Jesus.

13. There is a third truth we glean as we look at the Lord God and His dealings with this first family. We see not only that *God is compassionate in what He does*, and that *God is consistent in what He demands*, but we see also lastly that:

III. GOD IS CONSTRUCTIVE IN WHAT HE DECLARES

1. The true condition of Cain's heart shows through when the Lord did not receive his offering. Verse 5 says, "*...And Cain was very wrath, and his countenance fell.*"

2. Cain's irritation with what had happened at the altar showed all over his face.

3. I must admit, were I God, and I saw Cain cock this attitude, I would probably have dealt pretty harshly with Him. Nevertheless, what God says to Cain is both merciful and profitable.

4. In verse 6, the Lord questions Cain about his anger, and then says to Him in verse 7, *"If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him."*

5. In the Lord's words to Cain, we are reminded that when God speaks to us, what He says may not always be what we want to hear, but it is always what we need to hear.

6. Think with me about the virtue and value of what God declared to Cain. First of all, notice:

A. His fairness with Cain

1. Cain was angry because God had accepted Abel's offering while rejecting His. As we later see, Cain was envious of his brother, and no doubt felt that God had not been fair.

2. However, what God says to Cain reveals that God offered to Cain the very same opportunity that He had given to Abel.

3. God said to Cain, *"If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted?"* In other words, God said, "Cain, if you do what is right, and approach me in worship the way that you should, you too will be accepted.

4. Many people chafe under what they perceive to be the narrow, restrictive, exclusive demands of the gospel.

5. They think it unfair of God to ask them to humble themselves and receive the sacrifice of Jesus Christ as the only hope of their salvation.

6. The problem with this Cain-like mentality is that trying to hold God to our notions of what is fair and right is like a grain of sand on the beach trying to tell the tide when to come in.

7. In the truest sense, were God to give us what is fair and just, we would all be in hell right now, paying the price for our sin and rebellion against God.

8. In Romans 9:20, Paul asks, *"O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?"*

9. Cain was angry with God, but what the Lord said to Cain revealed a gracious fairness that gave an opportunity for Cain to do what was right.

10. I've met people through the years who want nothing to do with the Church or the gospel, and when they are pressed, it is because they are mad at God about something in their life that they perceive as being unfair.

11. The reality is that we have no right to be angry with God. He has been more than merciful to us, and what He says to us in His Word gives us opportunity to partake of His grace.

12. Looking at what God declared to Cain, consider not only his fairness with him, but notice also further:

B. His frankness with Cain

1. Notice what else God said to Cain in verse 7. *"...if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him."*

2. This is the first appearance of the word "sin" in the Bible. Here God describes sin as being like a wild animal, waiting to pounce on Cain, and subdue him.

3. Now I am sure this was not what Cain wanted to hear from God, but it was exactly the truth that Cain needed to hear, and should have heeded.

4. Much of what God says in His Word is confrontational and even critical of humanity. God is very frank with us regarding our condition.

5. Many people hear what the Bible says about their sin, and rather than seeing it as the goodness of God in revealing the truth, they "love darkness rather than light", and they reject God's constructive honesty.

6. Though God is only telling us the truth regarding our sin, most men prefer to ignore God's Word, and continue to sail toward their doom rather than anchoring their souls in Jesus.

7. Abolitionist Henry Clay was once delivering a speech against the evils of slavery when a group of slave holders interrupted his speech with a torrent of hisses.

8. Undaunted, Clay lifted his voice higher and said to the crowd, "[That hissing] is the sound you hear when the waters of truth drop upon the fires of hell!"ⁱⁱⁱ

9. When the water of the God's Word drops into the lives of people, for some, it is refreshing and gladly received. Others just hiss as the truth of it collides with their sin.

10. Whether men like it or not, what God communicates to us in His Word is both good and gracious. When we receive it by faith, like Abel, we find the Lord grants us favor and acceptance.

1. This fourth chapter opens with such optimism. Eve gives birth to Cain, and some have translated her statement in verse one as, "I have gotten *the* man from the Lord!"

2. In other words, they have taken her words to mean that she possibly thought that Cain was the fulfillment of God's promise in Genesis 3:15.

3. All of her optimism was dashed, however, when Cain rebelled against God and slew his own brother.

4. What we see in Genesis 4 is, however, in some way a fulfillment of Genesis 3:15. This is the beginning of the enmity between the serpent and the seed of the woman.

5. Cain is the first in a long line of those who would resist God and despise His people.

6. The good news is that the rest of that prophecy has now been fulfilled in Jesus! The very God who showed grace to this first family is the very God who would one day come, and in Christ, reconcile the world unto Himself.

7. Far from resenting or resisting the Lord, let us bow in worship to Him, thankful for Jesus and the salvation we have in Him.

ⁱ Williams, Roy, Hard Work: A Life On and Off the Court, (Algonquin Books, Chapel Hill, NC, 2009) *Amazon Kindle Edition*

ⁱⁱ Baxter, J. Sidlow, The Master Theme of the Bible, (Tyndale House Publishers, Wheaton, IL, 1973), p. 294

ⁱⁱⁱ Waters of Truth, *anecdote.com*, accessed 10/21/10, <http://www.anecdote.com/index.php?aid=8794>