

The World's First Unbeliever, part 1

Genesis 4:1-16

(preached Pine Grove 9/2/18; Sunday PM)

Introduction

We live in an age of incredible technology.

In my lifetime of 44 years, the changes to the phone are incredible..

I have seen a public pay phone.

I have seen a corded home phone.

A wireless home phone.

A mobile phone in a bag to take in the car.

A mobile phone with an antennae to attach to the outside of your car.

A wireless phone that had a huge keyboard below it for calling and typing..

A wireless phone that flips to open.

A smart phone that can call, text, send pics, surf the internet and just about everything else..

In 44 years, phones have drastically changed..

Yet there are things in our world that haven't even changed that much since they were invented..

Take for instance, a train..

Trains have been around since the 1800s but ones today are still very similar to those very first ones..

The same is true of the clothes iron..

Yes, they are now electric, but the overall design is similar to the first iron in 1882.

The most glaring example of very little change since they were invented is the light bulb..

When Edison produced the first home light bulb in 1880, the design of it has changed very little..

Though there are LED light bulbs today, the design and even the cost adjusted for inflation is still very similar to the original cost in 1880.

Just like the saying goes..

The more some things change, the more other things stay the same ..

Well, in 6000 years of human history, not much has changed in the heart of the unbeliever...

Rejectors of God today look very much like the very first rejector of God named Cain..

Tonight, we are going to get part of the way through the story of Cain, and the point of the story of Cain is to show the progression, determination, and eventual destination of unbelief..

As the world's first unbeliever, Cain is a model of unbelief for all cultures at all times..

The unbelief of Cain is found in millions of people today.

Let us examine ourselves to make sure that unbelief doesn't reside in our hearts...

We will begin in verses 1-2 of Genesis 4 with what I call...

I. Unbelief Is Hidden (1-2)

Verse 1...

1 Now the man [a]had relations with his wife Eve, and she conceived and gave birth to [b]Cain, and she said, "I have gotten a [c]manchild with the help of the Lord." 2 Again, she gave birth to his brother Abel. And Abel was a keeper of flocks, but Cain was a tiller of the ground.

As we get to chapter 4, we leave the ugliness of chapter 3 behind.

Sin is now in the universe.

Death is now part of the universe.

The curses are now upon Satan, Eve, and Adam for each of their roles in the fall...

But as we saw last week, God is still at work..

He has made coverings for Adam and Eve's physical appearance, but God has also covered their sin with an animal sacrifice as well...

And there is also hope in the promise of God that one of Eve's descendants will come along to crush Satan...

So, Adam and Eve are sinners who will have to deal with the consequences of sin all around them now, but they are not quitters.

In fact, they get pregnant for two reasons...

Number 1, God's command to multiply and fill the earth is still in place after the fall..

And number 2, I am sure they are hoping that the deliverer from sin will be found in this child..

Remember, God did not give them a time frame.

He simply stated that Eve's seed would crush Satan, so it is only natural for them to believe that this first child may be that head-crushing descendant..

In fact, Eve even shows her faith in God by saying that this child was a result of the the Lord helping her, which seems to suggest that she has great hope in this first child..

Then we read in verse 2 that Eve gave birth to a second child...

Some say that Cain and Abel were twins.

Though the Bible never says that, it is quite possible that was the case..

Then at the end of verse 2, we skip ahead in time as the children have grown into older teenagers or maybe young men...

And the reason we say that is because verse 2 notes their professions..

Cain the oldest is a tiller of the ground and Abel the youngest is keeper of the flocks...

Now a lot of people have read a lot into these verse to try and offer some hidden truth here, but what we simply have at the end of verse 2 is the world's first family.

There are 4 people on the earth...

Two parents and two boys and all seems fine in the world..

There is nothing wrong with being a farmer, and there is nothing wrong with being a shepherd..

Both jobs are fulfilling God's call to rule and subdue the earth..

At this point, nothing seems out of place..

Though Cain will be the first murderer, there is nothing to suggest anything in his upbringing has contributed to it..

In fact, we can't help but think that Adam and Eve were incredible preachers to these boys.

Surely, they told them about their initial fellowship with God..

Surely, they told them how good God was to them..

Surely, they told them of the sweet fellowship that they had with God in the most perfect place on earth...

Surely, Adam spoke of the good ole days when the dirt was good and everything grew..

And most surely, these parents warned their children of the horrible consequences of sin..

There is no doubt they would have encouraged both their boys to obey the Lord so that the boys wouldn't suffer like dad and mom had suffered..

And at this point, it looks like both boys were doing good.

Both were working and obeying the Lord, but in that picture, we are reminded that unbelief is often well disguised..

Sin often lurks well hidden in hearts but sooner or later, it reveals itself and that is exactly what happens in the next section ...

Let's call verses 3-5...

II. Unbelief Is Proud (3-5a)

Verse 3..

3 So it came about [d]in the course of time that Cain brought an offering to the Lord of the fruit of the ground. 4 Abel, on his part also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions. And the Lord had regard for Abel and for his offering; 5 but for Cain and for his offering He had no regard.

Again, we don't know how much time passed but it would seem that Cain and Abel were young when they brought an offering to the Lord.

Now people always ask...

How did they know to bring an offering to God?

Well, it would seem that the Lord had instructed them to do that...

Maybe after God killed the animal to clothe Adam and Eve, he told them to offer their own sacrifices every so often and they had passed that on to their children..

Maybe God spoke directly to Cain and Abel and told them to bring an offering to Him..

The Bible simply doesn't say why they knew to bring an offering to God..

All we know is that they did..

And what we see in verses 3 to 5 is that God accepted Abel and his offering but rejected Cain and his offering..

Now the question that has been asked over and over is why did God accept one and reject the other..

Well, I think we find the answer in a couple ways..

The first thing to consider is what does the Bible say about that question, and here is what we read in Hebrews 11:4...

By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained the testimony that he was righteous, God testifying about his gifts, and through faith, though he is dead, he still speaks.

In other words, Abel acted in faith which means that his sacrifice came from a heart of worship while Cain's sacrifice wasn't from the heart..

In face if you look back at verse 4, notice that it says that God had regard for Abel and for his offering..

In other words, God was looking at Abel's heart and his offering....

And it also says that God had no regard for Cain and for his offering..

In other words, Cain's heart was unacceptable along with his heart..

What does that mean for us?

It means you could give \$10 million to the church and God have no regard for that offering if your heart wasn't in it..

And it means you could give \$10 to the church and God be pleased if your heart is in it heart...

In one sense, the substance of the offering wasn't the issue.

It was the heart of the worshipper.

Now, I would also say this.

The substance of the offering can't be ignored either.

Abel gave the best of the best...

He gave the fattest of the first litter...

As the OT progresses and God institutes a sacrificial system, he always rewire the best of the first fruits..

In other words, it is a matter of faith to give away the first of the crop or litter to God..

And what makes it a matter of faith is that you don't know if the second crop or litter will come in..

So you have to give of the first of the best and trust God to provide more..

Well, that is what Abel did here, and it should also be noted that he brought an animal sacrifice...

As I said last week, God offers the first sacrifice in the Bible in the form of an animal that he kills and provided clothing for Adam and Eve...

And though the Bible doesn't tell us, it would seem that animal sacrifice and the shedding of blood is the pattern that God has set for future sacrifices..

Therefore, it makes sense that if God was calling for a sacrifice from Cain and Abel, that they would naturally assume an animal..

However, it is clear that Cain didn't think that way.

First of all, his heart wasn't in tune with the Lord, and when your heart isn't in the right place, you can't properly worship...

Which explains why Cain brought from the fruit of the ground instead of bringing an animal...

I think we see something interesting here..

Cain is a farmer and when God calls for worship and sacrifice, he brings something that he produced with his own hands..

This is the first picture of the false religion of good works..

Cain is coming to God with his head high.

He has grown this fruit and it is what he wants to bring to God..

IT doesn't matter what God has asked him to bring.

Cain is going to worship however HE WANTS to worship..

Cain is filled with pride and arrogance, and he is determined to offer what HE WANTS to offer as a sacrifice to God...

This is high handed religion...

This is the opposite of Abel, who has a heart for God and obeys in bringing an animal to God..

Cain is someone who is trying to please God with the works of his hands...

Cain is a self-righteous man..

In other words, he doesn't need to do what God requires of everyone else because he is special...

This is the pride of unbelief..

Other people may need to go to church but not me.

Other people may need to read the Bible but not me.

Other people may need to put off sin but not me.

The pride of unbelief is the pride of Pharisee in the temple beside the tax collector..

The Pharisee is holding his head up thanking God that he is not like all the sinful people of the heart, while the tax collector is on his face asking God for mercy..

In Cain's mind as he walked by his brother, he was probably thinking in his heart..

Abel needs to bring an animal to sacrifice since he has a lot more sin than me.

I should be good with just this piece of fruit..

Sadly, a piece of fruit sent Adam and Eve out of the presence of God, and a piece of fruit is going to send Cain out of the presence of God as well..

This is pride of unbelief..

It never sees the need to obey the Lord.

Rather, it creates its own religion and worship..

Cain knew the true God but worshipped him in the wrong way, and that is just as deadly as worshipping the wrong God.

So God has accepted the true worship of Abel and rejected the false worship of Cain...

How will the unbeliever react to that?

III. Unbelief Is Angry (5b-8)

Let's look at the second half of verse 5..

So Cain became very angry and his countenance fell.

The response of the false worshipper is anger at God.

The response of the unbeliever is anger at God.

There are people in the world who live and breathe and enjoy all the blessings of God in their life but despise God their entire life..

Cain is the father of those who not only reject God but hate him with a passion...

And the reality is this...

All unbelievers are angry at God..

Yet despite the unbeliever's anger, God is compassionate...

Look at verses 6-7..

6 Then the Lord said to Cain, “Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? 7 If you do well, [e]will not your countenance be lifted up? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it.”

This is incredible grace.

God had asked for a sacrifice.

Cain had brought the wrong sacrifice and the wrong heart of worship.

Yet God is by nature patient and kind and long suffering, so he offers Cain a second opportunity.

Cain, go get the right sacrifice and a proper heart and come back and do the right thing..

And if you do the right thing, you won't be angry at me.

But if you choose to stay in your unbelief and pride and anger, sin is going to pounce on you and dominate the rest of your life..

This is incredible mercy and restraint on the part of God.

He could have executed Cain on the spot for his disobedience, yet God shows grace to the sinner..

Sadly, Cain's anger only grows...

He not only stays mad at God for His rejection of his worship, he now explodes with anger at his brother..

Verse 8...

8 Cain [f]told Abel his brother. And it came about when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him.

In the first part of verse 8, we read that Cain told or talked to his brother..

Some translations see this conversation as Cain inviting his brother in to the field to kill him.

The Hebrew is written in such a way that it seems that the conversation between Cain and Abel happened and then some time later, Cain killed Abel in the field..

It's not really important, but I think what we see here is this..

Cain goes to his brother looking for sympathy.

“God didn't accept my sacrifice. What should I do?”

To which Able would reply.

Here take one of my flock and go back to God and make things right..

Obey God and you will be okay.

Don't get mad Cain.

God has given you a second chance.

Go make things right.

This would make sense.

Abel loves his brother...

Abel doesn't want to see his bother angry at God.

And so he does what beliers do today..

HE urges Cain to believe in God by worshipping him in the right way..

Adam and Eve were the world's first evangelists but Abel is probably the world's first pastor and counselor..

But how does unbelief react to counseling and preaching?

He slays it..

This is the rage of unbelief.

It not only wants to live life by its own rules, it also seeks to silence anyone who tells it different.

This is the fury of unbelief..

It lashes out at the truth.

Why did the Jews kill Jesus.

He told them to repent and worship God in the way that God desired.

He told them to give up their false religion of good works..

And behind the scenes, they raged at his world until they found the opportunity to capture Him and kill Him..

The way of Cain is the way of uncontrollable anger at those who speak the truth..

Unbelief is angered by God and by anyone who does right and tells others to do the same..

One final trait of unbelief tonight and then we will finish this off next week...

IV. Unbelief Is Dishonest (9)

Let's read verse 9...

9 Then the Lord said to Cain, "Where is Abel your brother?" And he said, "I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?"

Several things to note here...

First of all, God is not seeking information from Cain here..

God knows what Cain has done because God has seen what Cain has done..

The eyes of the Lord are everywhere over the earth, right?

So this isn't a question looking for an answer..

It is a question calling Cain to admit his sin...

Second, it is also apparent that Cain has left the scene...

If Abel's body was right beside him, God would not have asked the question...

Third, Abel lies about his crime...

He claims that he doesn't know what happened to Abel, which is clearly a lie..

What you see here in this one verse is the dishonesty of the unbeliever..

Cain is hiding his sin.

Just like Adam and Eve hid from God, Cain has gotten away from the scene of the sin..

He is also lying to God, claiming that he has no idea what happened to Abel.

We sit here and think how sad and hopeless it is for Cain to think that he can hide something from the One who sees and knows all..

Yet, there are millions of people who do that everyday.

People who think they can hide their sin from God..

People who think they can lie to God and He will believe it..

All Cain had to do was admit his sin to God, demonstrate repentance, and God would have forgiven him..

God forgives murderers everyday...

This is the nature of God.

He desires to save the worst of sinners if they will simply turn from their sins..

Yet instead of being an example of repentance and forgiveness, Cain remains in his unbelief..

He remains in his sin...

And he remains in the delusion of unbelief that says he will be alright in the end..

Well, we will have to wait until next week to see what happens..

Conclusion

Let me close with just a few thoughts...

#1 - Unbelief is ugly.

We see the world's first case of unbelief in Cain.

And I would point out that unbelief is not harmless in the world.

Some people say..

Just leave me alone and let me believe what I want to believe.

Besides, I am not hurting anyone.

Yet, guess what.

Unbelief is always dangerous..

Cain's unbelief resulted in false worship.

Cain's unbelief resulted in anger at God and others.

Cain's unbelief resulted in lies and deception..

And Cain's unbelief resulted in the world's first murder.

Do you realize that Cain really invented murder?

How did he know to kill his brother?

And besides that, why did he want to do it?

Ultimately, Cain killed his brother because Abel believed in God and Cain didn't.

That is the ugliness of unbelief.

It is not a personal problem.

Yes unbelief is personal but it quickly become a global problem..

#2 - *God is gracious.*

My nature is not grace.

I like swift justice when someone does me wrong.

Thankfully, God is not like me.

Yes, God is always just, but God is always gracious as well..

Even in the face of Cain's disobedience and anger, God demonstrates patience and kindness even beyond what we can imagine.

WE live in a culture that extends zero grace.

WE live in a culture that hears a word out of someone's mouth, thinks the worst, and prepares to attack.

WE live in a culture where everyone wants grace but no one is interested in extending grace to others..

May God make us more gracious like Him.

May we as believers offer grace to others.

May we as believers leave justice to the Lord while extending grace to the world..

Cain disobeyed God.

Cain pouted to God.

Cain was mad at God.

Cain killed Abel who was made in God's image.

Cain ran from God.

Cain lied to God.

Yet God showed him grace over and over and next week, God's grace will continue..

This is the nature of God.

He extends grace to the unrepentant sinner in hopes that the sinner will see his sin, repent of it, and trust in Christ.

May be found just as gracious.

Let us pray.

- V. Unbelief Is Judged (10-12)
- VI. Unbelief Is Bitter (13-14)
- VII. Unbelief Is Shown Grace (15)
- VIII. Unbelief Is Doomed (16)