

WORSHIP: FIRST PRINCIPLES

Genesis 4:1–10 • Pastor Luke Herche

Well good morning again. Turn with me if you would in your Bibles to Genesis chapter 4:1-10. That'll be our sermon text for this morning. Before we read Genesis 4:1-10, let's pray together one more time.

Our Father we come to you again to worship you, to worship your Son, to rejoice in what you have done. We come to your Word, we come to hear from you and come to hear what you would say to us this morning. And we pray that you would give us ears to hear and minds to understand and hearts to receive the message of your Word. And most of all, the message of your Son. We pray that you would draw us close to you and that you would pour out your Spirit to those ends. We pray these things in Jesus' name, amen.

Genesis chapter 4, beginning with verse one:

Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, "I have gotten a man with the help of the Lord." And again, she bore his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a worker of the ground. In the course of time Cain brought to the Lord an offering of the fruit of the ground, 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, but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his face fell. The Lord said to Cain, "Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? 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." Cain spoke to Abel his brother. And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him. Then the Lord said to Cain, "Where is Abel your brother?" He said, "I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?" And the Lord said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground."

Well, this may seem like a bit of an odd text for Easter morning. I tried to come up with an outline that would really show its relevance to Easter, and I could talk about this text in terms of offerings, like there are three offerings that we're going to talk about the theoffering of Abel, the offering of Cain, and then the offering of Jesus. I could have talked about it in terms of tombs: the martyr's tomb, righteous Abel's

death, the whitewashed tomb, Cain's hypocritical religion, and the empty tomb of Easter morning (I liked that outline). But the text itself kept pushing me in another direction toward worship. It's still fitting, of course, because Jesus came to restore true worship to restore us to our God. Fitting because we have been physically apart for so long, and this is a good time to be reminded of what worship is really about. Fitting because this is our first official Sunday in our new building, I know that some have already been here for the afternoon service, and some are not yet here because of COVID, so this is what people might call a soft launch, but it's a launch nonetheless. And again, it's good for us to remember that as we gather together, it's good to remember what worship is all about.

And yet as I talk about worship this morning, I'm not going to talk about liturgy or song selection or sermon styles. If you know me, you may know I do have opinions about all of those things, but that's not what this text is about. The story is about something more basic. It's about the first principles of worship. There are four that we're going to look at together: one that worship flows out of our work, worship flows out of our hearts, that worship flows out of the war, and that worship leads into our lives.

First, the story:

Alright, you may or may not be familiar with the story of Cain and Abel. We've been in the Book of Genesis for a number of months now and in the beginning, you may remember, God creates all things he creates human beings made in his image as a capstone of creation. He gives them a job to do to fill and to form and to rule the Earth. He places them in the garden which they are to work and to keep to serve and protect. But the serpent comes along leading Eve astray, while Adam just stands there watching. This is the advent of sin into the world. It's the essence of sin is our disordered loves and Adam and Eve here fail to love God for who he is by disobeying him as their creator in their king. Instead, they set their hearts on themselves and self-promotion that they want to be as God. By this act of cosmic rebellion, all kinds of pain enter into the world, including shame and blame. And they're sent out of the garden out of the presence of their Father. It's here east of Eden that the story picks up in Genesis 4.

It begins, naturally enough. Adam knew his wife Eve, implying intimate marital knowledge, and she conceives and bears a son Cain. And then another Abel. And in the course of time, or more literally, at the end of days, which makes it sound more ominous, the two brothers bring offerings to the Lord. Abel and his offering are accepted, but Cain and his offering are not. Cain gets angry, is talked to by God himself, but nevertheless storms off and kills his brother. God approaches Cain with a question, giving Cain the opportunity to confess and to come clean. But Cain's hardness of heart shines through, and Abel's blood cries out for vengeance. So the

context of this whole story is worship. There's two brothers, two offerings, but only one is accepted. So what does this story tell us then about worship?

First worship flows out of our work.

For many people, worship and work seem disconnected. What does sweeping floors on Monday have to do with singing songs on Sunday, right? For some of us it's kind of a genuine enigma how our daily labor, whether a blue-collar or white-collar, full-time or part-time, whether employee or gig worker, or whether you are still a student or you have joined the workforce. Whatever your job, your vocation, your daily employment, it's hard to see how that relates to worship. In a sense, you might say whatever I do Monday through Friday, that doesn't change what I do when we gather together. We all have different jobs, but when we gather, those distinctions disappear. We come not as plumbers or lawyers or students, but as worshippers of the Father through Jesus by his Spirit. And of course, that's true. But we can't end there, and so let's look at our text and see where that takes us.

Now Cain and Abel come to God to offer the fruit of their labor. The word for "offering" here is a gift. The offering that's mentioned here is called the grain offering in Leviticus Chapter 2. You offered a portion of your produce to God. It's a token. It's a kind of stand in for the whole and it says a few things. First, that all of their work is done unto the Lord. When Cain and Abel bring a portion of the fruits of their labor unto the Lord, they are saying that all of their work was done unto God, that the part represents the whole. So Paul says in Colossians 3, **"Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men,"** (Colossians 3:23). because all of our work is to be done unto our God, this is, a part of our worship right you worship the Lord through your work as you do your work unto him that as you honor him as the Lord, by doing your work for him, whatever that work is, a second Cain and Abel's offering shows that the fruit of all of their work is from the Lord in bringing the fruit of your hands is in part a recognition that whatever fruit we have, whatever good our hands have done, it's from the Lord and not from us. And so, Psalm 127 highlights this when it says, **"Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain."** (Psalm 127:1). See we can neither work nor keep, neither labor nor watch fruitfully apart from God's blessing. And so, when we bring the fruit of our hands, we do so in recognition that whatever good I have done, it is from the Lord. Eve recognized this, by the way, when she said, "I have gotten a man with the help of the Lord." She recognized God's help in her work.

Third, Cain and Abel's offering shows that we offer ourselves by offering our work. This is true in a couple of ways. First, when we give gifts as a token of our love or a token of our appreciation, we recognize that the gift is just a small thing; it's representing something much larger. What do their gifts represent? Well, they

represent their whole selves. We offer ourselves, our lives to our God. You see the connectedness, by the way, between each brother and their offerings in verses two and three. When we're told that the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering, and no regard for Cain and his offering. The offering and the person go hand in hand. The one represents or stands in for the whole. And then finally, just to state the obvious, Cain and Abel each brought the fruit of their hands, the fruit of their labor. They brought what they had. Now in our economy, our work is quickly translated into dollars and cents. That's why our offering consists of collecting money rather than collecting produce and livestock, besides the fact that it's a lot cleaner. But we should always be considering "How can I offer my work directly to my God? How can what I do be in offering to Him?" And so our moment of worship, our morning of worship, our acts of worship, flow out of our work.

And so, the questions you might be asking yourself are, "Well, how can your work be done unto the Lord?" Whether that's an attitude, right, joyful, humble, hopeful. Whether that's in manner, gracious, diligent, honest, sacrificial. Second, how can you work in dependence (not independent of but in dependence) upon the Lord? What does it look like to rely on God for the fruit of the work of your hands; o recognize that whatever you're trying to do, if it is worth doing, it cannot be done apart from God's blessing? What does it look like to remember with Psalm 127:1 **"Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain."**? Unless God is in your work, whatever your job is, it's in vain unless God is in it. Third, how can you offer yourself to the Lord through your work? What will it look like to give your whole self to God, and for your work to be an overflow of that? And finally, how can you give some of your work to the Lord? How can you use your gifts and talents that God has given you to directly serve God, His church, or His world in His name?

So, weekly worship as we gather together, is just an expression of offering ourselves Monday through Saturday to our God. And what this means, of course, is you can't be a Christian on Sunday and then live like the Devil during the week. We can't do our worship in one way, and our work in another; they're intimately connected. So first worship, flows out of our work. Second, worship flows out of our hearts.

Worship can at times feel like mere motions. I come to work, I come to worship, I do certain things I sing, I pray, I recite, I listen, I sit, I stand, I go home. It can feel rote; it can feel routine. Now, just to be fair, just because something is routine doesn't mean it's bad. Brushing your teeth should be routine; that doesn't make it a bad thing. And I'm also not saying here that you need to feel a certain way every time you worship that's not what I mean by the heart. I'm not advocating substituting certain motions for certain emotions. When I say worship flows out of the heart, I mean worship flows out of the core of who we are.

Cain and Abel both bring offerings to God. They each bring an offering from their respective fields, no pun intended. Cain brings an offering of the fruit of the ground; Abel brings of the first born of his flock and of their fat portions. One brother is accepted, the other is rejected. The question is why? You have two brothers in the same family, both come as priests with offerings, both bringing the fruit of their labor, both worshipping the same God, both desiring the same acceptance. Why is one accepted and the other rejected?

There are a couple of options for that. There are at least three that are legitimate and not even mutually exclusive. They might all go together in different ways. Some say it's because Abel offers a bloody sacrifice and Cain does not. The idea here is that atonement comes through the blood. Cain doesn't bring a bloody sacrifice, therefore no atonement, no forgiveness. And while that principle is true atonement in the Bible, it comes through the blood, ultimately the blood of Jesus, the problem is the word for offering used here is not for an atoning offering, but a grain offering; the one unbloody offering in Scripture. That word is even used of Abel's offering in this passage. On the other hand, in Genesis 3, Adam and Eve try to cover themselves with Fig leaves, but God covers them with animal skins. Maybe God is already hinting about the necessity of the shedding of blood for atonement, and the inadequacy of the work of the fruit of our hands. While there may be something to that, there seems to be more. The second option is that while Abel brings the best of the best, Cain brings his leftovers. We're told that that Abel brought the first born and the fat portions in the Old Testament; that was considered the best of the best. Abel offered the best of what he had to God, as would be commanded later in the Book of Leviticus, but Cain did not bring the first fruits, just the fruit of the ground. God takes Israel to task in the Book of Malachi, and in Isaiah as well, but in Malachi for bringing second-rate offerings. He even says, **"[Offer] that to your governor; will he accept you or show you favor?"** (Malachi 1:8) If your birthday is coming up, and as I am about to leave, I realized, "Oh I, I need a present!", and I take a half-eaten peanut butter and jelly sandwich and I scarf it down, and I throw it in a paper bag and scribble your name on it and bring it with; if it's the thought that counts, that doesn't count very much. Cain's offering seems half-hearted compared to Abel's. Abel brings the first born in the fat portions, and Cain brings some of the fruit of the ground. And I think that's part of the point, but we need to say more because the point is never that God is greedy for what you have (He owns the cattle on a thousand hills), He doesn't need what you have. What God wants is not your stuff, not even your best stuff. What God wants is your heart. And our gifts, the gifts that we give, our telltale sign of our heart.

This comes out when Cain's offering is not accepted. Notice that the sparseness of the biblical narrative. We're not told how Cain knew that his offering was not accepted; that's not important. We're only told that it wasn't and his response: he was

very angry, and his face fell. His head went down, and he brooded in anger. What does that show? That shows where Cain's heart was even before his offering. If Cain's heart was to please God, his rejection would have been brought. sadness, maybe repentance, perhaps a question: "God, why have you rejected me? What can I do to please you?" But Cain's offering was not to please God, but to placate Him. If I give Him a little of this, He should be happy. I've done my duty, I gave my tithe, I fulfilled my obligation, I should be accepted. Cain clearly thought that by going through the motions, he deserved God's acceptance. Which is why he gets angry when he doesn't receive it. In New Testament terms, we would say Cain did not approach God by faith, but by works. Hebrews Chapter 11:4 says, **"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."** By faith, Abel offered a more acceptable sacrifice and Abel receive the righteousness of faith, but Cain came to God without faith, and so his gift was rejected.

And we could state a principle here, as we look at Cain and Abel, formally, they are pretty similar. We might even overlook the missing first fruits because the grain offering of Leviticus 2 is just for any grain, not necessarily the first fruits, and in that case they both bring Levitical sacrifices, meaning sacrifices that God commands in the Bible. So what's different about these two men? What's different is man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart. You have two religious people going through the same motions: one is accepted, the other rejected. Why? Not because of what they do necessarily, but because of what is going on in their hearts. God does not just want certain motions, nor even certain emotions, He wants you. He wants your heart. He wants all of you, and your heart is the core of who you are.

Frequently in the Old Testament, God rejects his people's offerings because their heart is not for serving Him, but for serving themselves through the means of religion. As Jesus put it, quoting the book of Isaiah in Matthew 15 he said, **"You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said: "This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me;"** And here's the point: Whenever religion is used as an attempt to control God, to get on His good side, to placate Him, to earn His favor, to feel good about yourself, that is a religion that God hates. It's manipulation, not worship. Proverbs 21:27 says, **"The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination."** How much more when he brings it with evil intents? Now we need to step back for a second. We have gathered together this morning to worship to celebrate the Risen Jesus, and that's a good thing. But we must not come to God thinking that we can earn anything from him by that coming, or that he will love us because of anything that we can do in our flesh. Rather, we come by faith in Christ, the Risen Christ. But we're not quite there yet. We'll get there.

So first, worship flows out of our work. Second, worship flows out of our hearts and often reveals what's really going on there. Third worship flows out of the war.

Worship and war have often gone hand in hand. Just think about the Crusades of the Middle Ages or the *jihad* of radical Islam. But let me assure you that those are not what I'm talking about. But there is a war. Worship flows out of a war. God spoke of it in Genesis 3:15. He said the children of the serpent, the Devil, will be at war with the children of the woman with children of Eve. Children take on the characteristics of their parents. Jesus said to some in his day in John Chapter 8, **"You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies."** (John 8:44). What are we about to see about Cain? Well, he was a murderer and a liar. He kills his brother and then he lies about it to God. He bears the image of his father the Devil.

On the other hand, we have Abel. Abel is a man of faith. We just read about that from the Book of Hebrews. Where does he get that? Well, he takes after his mother. Eve is actually the first worshipper in this passage. In verse one, **Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, "I have gotten a man with the help of the Lord."** Notice her exclamation of praise, her dependence upon God with the help of the Lord, and she's actually the first person in Genesis to use God proper name: the Lord, Yahweh, Jehovah. Eve turns out to be a woman of faith, and Abel takes after his mother. He is the seed of the woman.

And we'll see in a minute that the battle of Genesis 3:15 does play out externally, as Cain kills his brother Abel. But first it plays out internally in Cain's heart. In verse 6 God approaches Cain with kindness and a question. God says in verse 6, **The Lord said to Cain, "Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen?"** You see, He's inviting Cain to self-reflection and so to repentance. And then He says, **"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."** Here's what this seems to be saying: "Cain, if you don't do what's right, sin is like a crouching lion, waiting to pounce, ready to control you, ready to have you ready to dominate you. But you must rule over it." One commentator said that the crouching is an allusion to the Serpent waiting to strike the heel. There is this predator type nature to sin. In other words, "There is a war over your heart, Cain, and you must fight and win. You must be on your guard, or you will be overtaken."

In modern language, we might say that sin is like an addiction. Sin once and then again and then again, and pretty soon, sin is ruling over you. It would seem Peter picks up on this imagery in 1 Peter 5:8 when he says, **"Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking**

someone to devour.” “Sin is crouching at your door,” he says, “what will you do?” Will you be alert? Will you be watchful? Will you be ready? Will you fight or will you let it take over to become its slave? You see, there’s a battle going on really in every human heart and some have just given up and ceded their hearts to the enemy. God called Cain and He calls us to fight.

Now you can’t do this in your own strength of course. In fact, we all start out as fallen people, as children of the Evil One. Paul says in Ephesians 2: **And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.** (Ephesians 2:1-3) See, Paul is saying we’re all born into sin. If we are to move, then from being the offspring of Satan to children of wrath, we must be born again and become children of God, who then fight sin by the power of the Spirit. But here’s the point of this text this morning: our worship flows out of this war. Who you worship and how you worship will flow directly out of this battle in your heart, whether you fight against the roaring lion or just give in and become his slave. Maybe you found that you have not been pleasing to God. Like Cain, you feel as if you have been rejected by God, but God invites you to turn back to Him. Notice his patience with Cain. He is patient with someone who had turned from him, even who had rejected him. Well, He’s patient with you as well. He calls you to turn to your Father and to join the fight.

So, worship flows out of our work. It flows out of our hearts. It flows out of the war in and for our hearts. And fourth and finally, worship bleeds into our lives.

I’m always struck by mob movies and how religious mobsters tend to be portrayed. Thinking of mob movies that are set 60-70 years ago or whatever and they go to Mass on Sunday morning and then they order hits on Sunday night. And they seem not to notice the inconsistency in that. And there is this sense in which many people experience a disconnect between worship and life. I mean, if every Christian just in America took their faith seriously, and the Bible seriously, and Christ is called a sacrificial love seriously, I think the world would be different. But the truth is, what we worship, what is at the core of our hearts bleeds over into our lives. We’ve danced around this already, but let me just put it this way: what you worship is what is at the core of your heart. That will either be God and His glory, or self and created glories. Those are the only two options. There’s only two things in existence. There’s God and the things that He has made. And you can fill in their whatever created glory you choose: reputation or money or status. You can fill in pleasure or power or beauty or strength, or learning, or quiet or family or church buildings or styles of worship. Anything can be placed there at the center of our hearts. Something will be

at the center of your heart, either God in His glory or self, and created glories. That's what you worship. Whatever your outward actions might suggest, whatever is at the core of your heart is what you worship.

Cain loved himself. He loved the idea of himself as righteous because of what he did. He was a pretty good guy after all, right? He offered God some of the fruit of the ground God should have been thankful for that display of devotion. Cain's identity hinged though on seeing himself as a doer of good deeds. He deserved God's acceptance. When he didn't get it, what happened? What happens when the core of your identity is unmasked? How do you feel? Unbalanced, sad confused? Cain really did only have two options: repent or murder his brother. I know that may sound extreme, but I say that because Abel stood as a symbol of the righteousness of faith. He was a moment-by-moment reminder that Cain was not accepted by his works. Abel's very existence was an attack on Cain's identity as a good person, so again, Cain had two options: repent or get rid of Abel, and he chose the latter. Verse 8 says, **Cain spoke to Abel his brother. And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him.** The scene is very brief, only one verse, but you can imagine it was horrific. Cain gets his brother out in the field, where no one could hear his cry for help. There were no guns. There were no swords involved. So what did Cain do? He beat him, bludgeoned his brother to death. It was an act of violent mad hatred. God confronts him again graciously with a question, not because God doesn't know, but He's giving Cain yet another opportunity to confess and to repent. But Cain responds with a lie, and a dismissal of his filial responsibilities as if to say, "How should I know where he is? It's not my job to look after him." So, God asks one more question. This time, it's rhetorical because He doesn't even wait for an answer. In verse 10, he says, **"What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground."** So what you worship will bleed out into your life one way or another. And really, it will happen in one of a few ways. Life is ultimately about sacrifice. That's what it was for Cain and Abel. Why is that? Because love is about sacrifice, and life is about love. When you love someone, you give up yourself for the good of that person. That's the act of love, you offer yourself to them when you love, you serve. Abel offered himself to God. He loved God, and so he served God. But Cain loved himself. And when you love yourself, when self is at the center of your heart, rather than seeking to serve others for their good, you see others as there to serve you for your good.

In love, I sacrificed myself for you. In self-love, I sacrifice you for me. Some have pointed out that Cain did not offer a sacrifice of blood to God, but he did offer a sacrifice of blood to himself, his brother in the field. If he was going to survive, he needed to get rid of his brother. Something will die in your life, on one altar or another. Either you will offer yourself to God, or you will see every other human being as they are to offer themselves to you. But the blood of Abel cries out from the

ground. And this is the first of a deep theme in Scripture that God hears the cries of the oppressed. He listens to their pleas for help, their pleas for mercy, their pleas for justice. And that's what Abel blood cries out for: justice. Wrongs cried out to be righted. Jesus said in Luke 18, **"And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night?"** (Luke 18:7). The martyrs in revelation Chapter 6 cry out with a loud voice, **"O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?"** (Revelation 6:10). How long? God hears the cries of the oppressed and he will bring justice, Scripture says, which is a warning if we seek to use people for our good and it's a comfort if we are undergoing oppression.

But there is a greater comfort to be found. A greater comfort. All Abel's blood can cry for is justice, judgment for the oppressor. But as we read through Scripture honestly and openly and humbly, what we realize is that none of our hands are clean. So Hebrews 12:24 gives us this hope. It says that Jesus is the mediator of a new covenant whose sprinkled blood speaks a better word than the blood of Abel. What is better about Jesus' blood? What's better about Jesus' blood is that it cries out not for justice, but for mercy. As the Charles Wesley hymn puts it, "five bleeding wounds he bears received on Calvary. They poor effectual prayers, they strongly plead for me. 'Forgive him, oh forgive,' they cry, 'nor let that ransom Sinner die.'"

Jesus blood cries out to our Father, but not for justice, for mercy, so that we whose hands are not clean, whose worship is not pure, might find mercy and grace to help in our time of need. Jesus, out of love, took on the form of a servant and gave himself for us. Of course, Jesus is better than Abel in another way, and that is that Jesus did not stay dead. This is Easter morning after all, right on Sundays every Sunday, we celebrate not just the death of Christ, but His resurrection. And Jesus, having offered himself without blemish to God, rose from the dead and ascended into heaven, and now presents Himself His, offering His blood to the Father. And Jesus says "Here, on the basis of these scars of this blood of my death, forgive, have mercy, show grace." And then Jesus pours out His Spirit on the church so that we too might not be like Cain, but like Abel, offering ourselves in faith. Paul exhorts us in Romans chapter 12, verse one. He says, **"I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship."** Now, our offering ourselves that doesn't make us right with our Father, that's the offering of Jesus; He died, He rose so that we are right with His Father. And now in light of that, in response to our Father's love, and out of love for our Father out of love for His Son, we offer our lives.

If you believe in Jesus, you are in Christ. You have been forgiven by His blood and made new by His Spirit. And now, go and offer yourselves a living sacrifice to your Father. In your work and in your worship day by day, knowing that your labor is not in

vain in the Lord. Our worship flows out of our work. Our worship flows out of our hearts. It flows out of the war. It bleeds into our lives, as what we truly love shapes the way that we live day by day.

Let's pray,

Our Father, we thank you for Jesus. We thank you for His death and resurrection that, in light of that we can now live new lives for you by the power of your spirit, in the hope of our resurrection, the resurrection to come. Father, we pray that you would fill us with your spirit now that you would enable us to give our lives to serving you for your glory. In Jesus' name, we pray Amen.