



I come from a family of 2 sons—my brother and I—and I have 2 sons. Genesis 4 is also a story of 2 sons, 2 brothers. In this story, the older brother doesn't protect his younger brother. Just four chapters into the Bible and we have our first murder, and it's the murder of a brother!

It's really a story about more than brothers; it's two different ways of relating to God. It's about worship. One brother, Cain, will show us how **not** to worship. The other brother, Abel, will show us the kind of worship that the living God wants from his people.

Ask yourself, does your relationship with God look like Cain or Abel? This world is full of Cains; the world is desperate for Abels.

**"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 for 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'" (Genesis 4:1–10).**

## Abel

*"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" (verses 1–5a).*

Eve is ecstatic over the birth of her son Cain. In Genesis 3:15 we hear of the hope of the Serpent Crusher. Is this him in verse 2 Eve gives birth to a second son, Abel. Adam and Eve have 2 sons of different ages: Cain was the older brother; Abel the younger brother. They had different professions: Cain was a farmer, like his dad; Abel was a shepherd/rancher. They also had different names: *Cain* means to acquire, to get, to possess. *Abel* means vapor or breath.

The brilliance of this narrative is that it's not immediately clear why God accepts Abel and his offering, and not Cain. On the outside these brothers look the same. They both give offerings to God, they both do religious activities. But any Israelite hearing this story would've picked up right away on the huge difference between the brothers and their offerings.

This is before the giving of the Law. There were no instructions yet on different types of sacrifices. This is simply a sacrifice, an offering of adoration. Worship! This is coming to the altar, laying a sacrifice on God's altar to say "I love you."

Abel *"brought of the firstborn of his flock and their fat portions."* It represents words like lavish, love, total belief, adoration, best, fat. Cain *"brought to the Lord an offering of fruit."* It represents words like scraps, holding back, unbelief. Abel put it all on the altar, he gave God his best. Cain gave God some fruit. The story of faith in Hebrews 11 is about worship. *"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" (Heb. 11:4).*

Sacrifice is giving up something valuable for something more valuable. Abel gave up the most valuable of his resources, he laid it on the altar because he valued God more. Abel worshipped God, not his work.

The Christian life is about two T's: Trust and Treasure. To be in a relationship with God, to know him, means you trust him and you treasure him above all. Who, or what, do you put your trust in? Who, or what, is your greatest treasure?

Jesus tells the story of the widow and two small copper coins worth a penny; all she had to live on. The rich people gave some money, doing their religious duty. The widow gave more, she

gave all she had because she was in love. She had a different trust and treasure. She put it all on the altar.

Abel and the widow put it all on the altar because they loved God with all their heart. They were in love with God, and this is what you do when you truly love, trust, and treasure someone.

What does your worship, your relationship with God, look like? Can you put it all on the altar, or have you lost your first love?

## Cain

*"But for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his face fell" (v.5).* Here's the difference between these two brothers: Abel is a Lover. Cain is a Calculator. Abel loves God. Abel the Shepherd gives God his best. Cain calculates. Cain the Farmer calculates how much fruit to hold onto and how many apples he can spare for God.

Cain is the opposite of his brother. Cain worships his work, not God. Work is Cain's Keeper, not God. Cain trusts in his work, his effort, his produce, to take care of him, rather than God.

What you treasure and trust will control you. Cain treasures and trusts the work he does, and it controls him. He can't give it up. God is not pleased with Cain's offering, or with Cain. Cain is angry; his face falls.

Are you a Calculator or a Lover? Is there something that has become too valuable to you, too much of a treasure, that it's begun to control you, that you could never put on the altar?

Jesus tells another story about a woman's treasure, her precious jar of ointment, worth about 9 months of wages. She breaks this jar and pours the oil on Jesus' feet. This woman was in love with Jesus, Jesus had become her treasure, so she didn't think twice about offering him her treasured jar. She put it all on the altar.

What's in your jar? That costly jar that you can't give up, do you treasure it too much, does it control you too much? What would it take, what would you have to experience, to break that jar and pour it all out on the altar?

## Murder

What we're talking about this morning is dangerous. Do you know what happens to a human heart, to a person, and to people around that person, when you follow Cain's path? *"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 for you, but you must rule over it'" (verses 6–7).* Sin wants to control Cain. Sin becomes a presence in your life, a force that will ruin you.

How do you view sin? Sin is not a cute little puppy you pet and snuggle with. Sin is "crouching at the door" (like a wild beast that's out to kill you). *"Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8).*

What sin is crouching at your door? What's crouching at your door—the wild beast that's going to destroy you—is what you haven't laid on the altar before God. If you've begun to treasure and trust something more than God, that is sin. It's crouching at your door (you can't see it), but it's going to destroy you if you don't do something. John Owen says: "Be killing sin or sin will be killing you." You must know your sin and fight it.

See the mercy of God. He is gently trying to talk Cain out of his sin. But Cain will not let God talk him out of 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'" (verses 8–10).*

Cain does not master sin, sin masters him. The power of sin in Cain's life led to murder. This is the first murder in human history. And the first murder in human history is of an elder brother killing his younger brother. Imagine the horror for Adam and Eve, seeing what their sin has led to. Cain failed to be his brother's keeper. Cain failed to obey Genesis 2:15 *"to work and to keep."* This is what human relationships were supposed to look like, keeping one another.

Just like he did with his dad Adam, God pursues Cain with two questions that are opportunities for repentance:

"Where is Abel your brother?"

"What have you done?"

But Cain refuses to repent. His heart has grown too hard. All Cain can say is: "I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?"

Long before, Cain had made a choice to worship something other than God. Cain didn't love God. Cain didn't trust and treasure God. Cain didn't put it all on the altar before God. So sin became such a presence in Cain's life that he murdered his own brother.

## Put it All on the Altar

Who is your Keeper? Maybe you've been putting your trust in your work, or your money, or your stuff, or your abilities, or in a brother (a relationship) and now you see, it's not going to keep you. Aren't you hungry for something better?

You're never going to experience true freedom in your life until you discover the true Keeper and put it all on the altar before him.

I have good news for you today. I get to tell you about your true Keeper. I want you to lift up your eyes to the hills with me.

*"I lift up my eyes to the hills.*

*From where does my help come?*

*My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.*

*He will not let your foot be moved;  
he who keeps you will not slumber.  
Behold, he who keeps Israel  
will neither slumber nor sleep.  
The Lord is your keeper;  
the Lord is your shade on your right hand.  
The sun shall not strike you by day,  
nor the moon by night.  
The Lord will keep you from all evil;  
he will keep your life.  
The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in  
from this time forth and forevermore" (Psalm 121)*

I want you to lift your eyes to one great hill: Calvary. See your Keeper there. See Jesus, hanging from that cross—for you! This elder brother will keep you. This brother, he put it all on the altar...for you! Hebrews 12:24 tells us that we have come ***"to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel."***

The blood of Jesus speaks! This brother, this Jesus, this Keeper, will protect you and take care of you.

So, will you trust him? Will you make him your treasure? Will you put it all on the altar because his love has done something to your heart and you now love him more than anything? The world and other religions say: You must keep yourself, manage your life, calculate. The Gospel says: "The Lord is your Keeper. You have a brother named Jesus." And Jesus put it all on the altar for you, so you can trust him completely; love him with abandon, he will take care of you.

The world says you're risking, you're foolish, to live free like this. I say you're smart, you're trusting the only one you can truly trust. What's the worst thing that can happen to you? Someone kills you? So what! You get to be with Jesus sooner!

God is calling some of you to a new beginning today, to start a new chapter of your life. For so long you've lived like Cain. Sin has mastered you, and you haven't even known it. You don't know what it's like to live free. Something transformative happens when we put it all on the altar. When you put it all on the altar you discover that you don't need anything from anybody because you already have everything you need in Jesus, Your Keeper, and now you can love and live in a whole new way. This is the life God created you to live: total trust and dependency.

I think Cain and Abel had different eyes—they saw something different. As he approached the altar, Cain focused on what he was giving up. I think Abel focused on who he was giving to. Cain's eyes were on the ground. Abel's were lifted to the hills, to his Keeper.

Put it all on the altar because the Lord is your Keeper.

All it takes is faith; faith in God, not yourself. How will your life speak? Hebrews 11:4 says, Abel, ***"through his faith, though he died, he still speaks."*** I've done funerals for both Cains and Abels. How do you want your life to speak, both now and after you die? Put it all on the altar because the Lord is your Keeper.

Put your handicap, your excuse, on the altar. I've found this is often the hardest thing to place on the altar, some defect in ourselves or in our past. The people God used the most, whose lives speak faith, are the ones who put their handicap on the altar.

Consider the people of faith that God used. Is your excuse on this list?

Abraham was a wimp

Sarah was way too old

Rahab was a prostitute

Noah was a drunk

Jacob was a liar

Leah was ugly

Joseph was abused

Moses couldn't speak well

Gideon was afraid; and he came from a bad family

Samson had a sexually immoral past

Naomi was a widow

Timothy was too young

David was an adulterer and a murderer

Elijah was suicidal

Jonah ran from God

The woman at the well was divorced

Job lost everything

Martha was a worrier

Mary Magdalene was demon-possessed

Peter denied Jesus

Paul was too religious

Zacchaeus was too short

Lazarus was dead

Put it all on the altar. Give him your whole life. Don't hold back. He will keep you. He will take what you put on the altar and transform it into something beautiful.

The world is full of Cains. It needs Abels.

*This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.*

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*Catalog No. 1342-21FC*

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This message from Scripture was preached on Sunday, March 14, 2010 at Central Peninsula Church  
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