Enjoy the Lord today!

*“One dies in his full strength,*

*Being wholly at ease and satisfied;*

*His sides are filled out with fat,*

*And the marrow of his bones is moist,*

*While another dies with a bitter soul,*

*Never even tasting anything good.*

*Together they lie down in the dust,*

*And worms cover them.”*

 Job 21:23-26

As gruesome as these words of Job are, they are true. It doesn’t matter if one has had a full and easy life with every good thing. Or if their life has been spent in poverty and misery. Both will die and both will see corruption in the grave. There has only been One who was laid in the tomb and rose again without corruption: Jesus.

Job mentions these things and it expresses the view of one who believes that this life is all there is. They believe that once we die, that’s the end and there are many today who believe this to be the case.

If this is true, what is the point to life; what is the point to anything? And whether someone consciously thinks of this or not, this is the reason why so many have no hope in life. They turn to anything that will help them forget, even if it is self-destructive.

Here is why the Christian has hope; we know that this life is not the end. Yes, our bodies will die and see corruption; but for the believer in Jesus Christ, it is just the beginning of eternal life with Jesus. And we also know that some day our bodies will be made new and join our souls with God.

Because of these things, our lives do have a point. Our work is to expand the Kingdom of God, as we wait for the promised eternity of bliss.

In Christ’s love

John

 3-20-22

Genesis 4:1-15 (2)

We began looking at chapter 4 last week. Although Adam and Eve sinned, and would therefore suffer the consequences, God’s mandate to them was still in effect; it’s just that everything would be more difficult now. They were still to cultivate the ground and work for their food, they were still to be fruitful and multiply; they were to have children and fulfill God’s plan for the nuclear family.

God’s plan for a man and a woman to be husband and wife was something He established from before the fall of mankind into sin. Even after the fall, He did not change this arrangement. Some people do have a calling to remain single, and this too is good. It is a special gift that God choses to give to certain people for His own purposes. For most people, Biblical marriage is the key to stability and a most fulfilling life; and the way for us to be fruitful. It is also the key to a stable society.

The marriage of a man and a woman is also deeply theological: It is the closest representation to the relationship between Jesus and the church that we have in this life. In a Biblical marriage, the husband leads the family in way that honors his wife and loves her with a self-sacrificial love; the kind of love with which Jesus leads the church. The wife is submissive to the husband, not is a sub-servient manner, but with love and respect; in the way the church should be submissive to her Saviour.

Because we are fallen human-beings, this doesn’t always work out really well. That is why we all need a healthy dose of humility and forgiveness. Still, the relationship between husband and wife should reflect the relationship between Jesus and the church.

Eve gave birth to Cain and Abel. These grew into men who had different occupations: Cain tilled the ground like his father and Abel was a keeper of flocks. We mentioned that while God had not yet given people meat to eat, the flocks would have been used for clothing, milk, and sacrifice. Both of these men made sacrifices to God; each out of what they did for a living. Cain offered from the fruit of the ground; Abel offered out of the fruit of his flocks.

We looked closely at Abel last week. Verse 4 told us, “*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.*” The LORD was pleased with Abel and with the sacrifice he offered. Abel did bring the better sacrifice; he brought the best of what he had. But that is not why God was pleased with the sacrifice; He was pleased because of Abel’s heart. His heart was in the right place. He truly wanted to honor God and wanted to please Him. In other words, his faith was in God. It was Abel’s faith that made him and his sacrifice pleasing to God.

It is the same for us today. We do not sacrifice sheep and goats, but our time and resources. We give to God directly in time spent in prayer and in His word. We also give when we do good works in Jesus’ name. These sacrifices of ours are acceptable and pleasing to God when offered selflessly; when offered in faith. If we do these same works with a begrudging attitude or just for show to other people; we and our offering are not acceptable to God.

This also shows why good deeds done by non-Christians are completely unacceptable to God: they are not offered in faith. It doesn’t matter how good or generous works may be, those done by unbelievers are not accepted by God. We cannot work our way into heaven; our salvation is only by faith in Jesus Christ.

Now, let’s give some consideration to Cain. We are told, “*So it came about in the course of time that Cain brought an offering to the Lord of the fruit of the ground.*” and “*for Cain and for his offering [the LORD] had no regard.*” We know that Cain didn’t bring as good an offering as Abel did. Cain brought from the fruit of the ground, but notice that it wasn’t the best; it wasn’t his first fruits. Still, that is not the reason God was not pleased with Cain. As we read further, it becomes obvious that Cain’s heart wasn’t right. The rejection had nothing to do with the offering coming from the ground which was cursed; it was Cain’s lack of faith.

Cain made an offering because that is what was expected. If he had faith, Cain would have offered his first fruits knowing God would have provided more. He would have wanted to offer to God his very best if he had truly wanted to please Him. His mediocre offering showed what was in his heart; just as Abel’s offering showed what was in his heart; and, what our offerings show is in our hearts. We Christians must follow 1 John 5:3, “*For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome.*”

Verse 5 tells us Cain’s reaction; he “*became very angry and his countenance fell*.” As a Christian, put yourself in Cain’s place: say you just made an offering to God and He didn’t accept it. Would you be angry, or would you be sad? Would you pout, or would you wonder what was wrong and how you could make it right? The answers to those questions are important and each of us should give them honest consideration. If we believe that we would react like Cain, becoming angry and sullen, we have some work to do. First would come repentance, asking forgiveness, and seeking the Holy Spirit’s help in getting our hearts right. Remember that even though we are responsible for trying to have a right heart, we must fully depend on the Holy Spirit to make it happen.

Cain was angry: as we learn through the chapter, he was angry at Abel and he was angry at God. From our vantage point it is obvious that he had nothing to be angry about except possibly himself. But that is the nature of sin; that is the nature of fallen mankind. Have you ever been angry at someone who received a benefit that you didn’t receive? Did it cause you to feel that it wasn’t fair? This is the normal human reaction.

James refers to this in part in chapter 4 verse 1, “*What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members?*” James goes on to reference lust for other people’s possessions and envy. The effect of this lust and envy is apparent in the carnal world; this same thing can tear a church apart and we must be diligent against it. Hopefully, each of us has been changed enough by the Holy Spirit that we can be genuinely happy for someone else who receives a blessing.

Keeping in mind that God already knew exactly what Cain was going to do, He had a talk with him. We might wonder what was the point of God’s talk if Cain wasn’t going to listen. One reason is God’s mercy; He gave Cain a chance so it was Cain’s decision to ignore God’s advice. The other more relevant reason is for our instruction. This is God’s word which is living and active, even after several thousand years. The things God said to Cain are things we should take to heart.

First God asked him some rhetorical questions, “*Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen?*” These questions were meant to make Cain think and really consider his feelings. As we discussed earlier, Cain had no reason to be angry.

This is a good question for ourselves. Anger is a natural emotion that all of us experience. As we are sanctified by the Holy Spirit, we should become less prone to anger. But it still happens and we must deal with it in a Christian manner. If we can, we need to back away from the situation and give ourselves time to deeply think about why we are angry; we also need to consider what it will lead to.

Certainly, the Bible tells us that there is such thing as righteous anger; Jesus Himself became angry. But righteous anger is very narrow. For example, it is right to be angry about abortion. It is right to be angry with the demonic forces behind it. It is not right to hold anger against someone who has had an abortion, performs abortions, or even advocates for abortion being legal. These people are deceived and need prayer and the Gospel.

But the idea of righteous anger must be countered with other Biblical teaching. James 1:20 tells us, “*[T]he anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God*.” That one by itself ought to give us pause when we become angry. There are several verses that tell us to put aside anger and these are referring to habitual anger. Ephesians 4:26 warns us of how careful we must be with anger, “*Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger.*”

Perhaps the greatest warning against anger comes from our Lord Himself in Matthew 5:21-22,“*You have heard that the ancients were told, ‘You shall not commit murder’ and ‘Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.’ But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, ‘You good-for-nothing,’ shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, ‘You fool,’ shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell.*”

These two verses deserve an entire sermon in themselves to fully develop what is being said. Briefly, murderous anger is not loving your neighbor which is a primary attribute of Christianity. In Jesus’ description there is an escalation in the mind, of anger to hate, that will eventually lead to physical murder. This is what happened to Cain.

As God speaks with Cain, He lets him know that it doesn’t have to be this way. If he turns his heart to the LORD, things will be okay for him. It is not out of line for God to want this; He is the creator and He gave Cain and all of us everything we have. He wants our faith in Him and now in His Son; and He deserves it. How blessed we are that God will have us at all when we consider how unworthy our thoughts and actions; how much we rebel against One who is so good and loving.

God gives Cain encouragement and the way to life. But He also warns him, *“[I]f you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it.*” There is a lot here, and it didn’t do Cain any good. The desire of the LORD is that we would read it, meditate on it, and that it would help to deliver us from evil.

Sin is any disobedience to God. Sin was unleashed into the world when Adam and Eve disobeyed God in the Garden of Eden. Eventually, God will completely contain sin and it will no longer affect His creation. He has His reasons for letting sin go for now; and it is up to us to simply trust Him. Sin comes about when we yield to temptation. Temptation has three sources: satan, the world, and our flesh. By satan, I mean all his demons that do his will. The world is full of evil and the people that follow satan entice us to sin in many ways. Our own wills are corrupted by sin and our natural desire is to rebel against God and rule our own lives. None of the temptations themselves are sin; it becomes sin when we give in to it.

God speaks in a way here that personifies sin. It helps to give us a visual. We can think of sin as some horrible beast that is hiding; and it is ready to pounce on us if we aren’t watching for it. It is a predator, and it is stealthy and it is merciless. It will destroy us if it can. It is good to think of sin this way; perhaps it will help us to understand the reality of its power and wickedness; how much it is not something for us to take lightly or play with.

The last part of the verse is important: “*but you must master it.*” Notice the responsibility placed on Cain; that same responsibility is placed on us too. Yes, the Holy Spirit is necessary to strengthen us in resisting sin; yes, prayer is necessary, especially when dealing with a besetting sin. But we are called to do what we can to avoid the sin.

Sometimes people are fighting with a specific sin in their lives. They tell others that they have prayed and prayed, yet they still commit the sin. The answer is: Quit committing the sin! It’s as if they feel God should simply stop them from doing it. No, ultimately, any time we sin, we have made the choice to do so.

One of the biggest keys to resisting sin is to avoid the temptation. Joseph had no problem running away from Potiphar’s wife. In so doing, he didn’t sin. Avoiding a besetting sin calls for drastic action. This is what Jesus was talking about in Matthew 5:30, “*If your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to go into hell.*”

Does He really want you to cut off your hand? No. But if internet pornography is your problem, get rid of your computer. That will be really inconvenient, you’ll have to go to the library to get your e-mail. But it is better than eternity in hell. Is someone at work enticing you and tempting you to be unfaithful to your spouse? Get another job. As hard as that is, it’s better than committing adultery and facing all the consequences that come with it. This is the kind of hard action Jesus is calling for in resisting sin when He says to remove a body part.

The good news for the Christian is, of course, Jesus Christ. He has paid the price for our sins so that we don’t have to. Sin will be something we fight with for the rest of our lives here on earth. He will give us strength and discernment in the fight. Jesus’ atonement does not give us license to sin. On the contrary, if we have truly accepted Jesus as our Saviour, we will be even more motivated to resist sin in order to please the One who loves us so much.

Prayer

Lord God, thank You for recording the life of Cain in Your word. By his life, You provide us ample warning. In following his way, which is the way of satan, we separate ourselves from You forever. You have made it clear that sin is a powerful force; that evil lurks in hiding, waiting to catch us unawares. You let us know that it seeks us out; that it is not passive but aggressive and merciless.

Under Your rebuke, Cain became angry and sullen; he stubbornly clung to his own ways; he clung to rebellion against his Creator. Lord, we know that sometimes Your hand is heavy upon us. Our tendency is to fight against Your hand. But may Your Holy Spirit remind us that You discipline those You love and when Your hand is heavy, You are seeking to guide us in paths of righteousness.

Father, we confess that we often fail You; that many times we fail to be aware of the awful sin crouching in wait for us; that we even play with the sin as if it is a harmless pet. But our heart’s desire is to be pleasing to You and follow Your wonderous commands. Be patient with us; help us to live according to the righteousness of Christ. Give us the discernment and wisdom necessary to recognize and avoid sin.

In all these things we praise You in Jesus’ name

Amen