

Genesis 4:17-26

We are continuing this morning in our study of the Book of Genesis, picking up at Chapter 4, vs 17, and working through to the end of that chapter. Last week we looked at the story of Cain and Abel who, while they had the same mother, and came from the same family, nevertheless belonged to two different lines of humanity: the seed/descendants of the woman and the seed/descendants of the serpent/Satan - both of which are referred to in Genesis 3:15.

You see, as a consequence of the first sin, and as evil continued to work its way out in more and more sinister ways, there arose a promised war between these two lines of humanity. It was a war which manifested itself, right from the start, in a murderous encounter between Cain and Abel. Further it was a war which, sadly, did not stop with them but which was passed on to subsequent generations of humankind. Indeed, the seriousness of Adam and Eve's sin, which may not have seemed so tragic in its first expression, is becoming increasingly apparent as the story line develops, and will become even more evident in the verses before us this morning.

In short, the impression that should be forming in your mind - and which Moses wants you to form as you work through the opening chapters of this book - is that while things started out well in God's world - something has gone deeply and seriously wrong - not only with Adam and Eve - but with all who are descended from them - with the result that things are rapidly spiraling out of control. That's the subject before us this morning, before we go any further, let's pray together....

(Pray and Read)

The first thing I want you to notice this morning is Cain's response to God's dealings with him. If you remember from last week, after Cain's sin, God tracks him down to confront him over the murder of his brother. And Cain's response, not unlike Adam and Eve's, was terrible - he was greatly concerned about his *punishment* and welfare and not at all concerned about his *sin* - the horror of his murdered brother and how his actions were perceived by a Holy God. Cain does not seem to be concerned about any of that.

And, in the midst of this whole interchange between Cain and God, we saw that one of the most important things to the self-absorbed *Cain* was his fear that other people might be tempted to take revenge against him. In response to that, God - with amazing graciousness I might add - assures Cain that He will severely punish anyone who seeks vengeance. Then God sets a mark on Cain which - whatever it was - served as something that would prevent or at least discourage people from carrying out any violence against him.

Well, after all of this, Cain moves away - physically and spiritually - from "the presence of the Lord" as the passage puts it, and settles in a land called Nod (which means "wandering") and that, no doubt, was named after its infamous early settler. The text then tells us that "Cain knew his wife and conceived and bore Enoch" and then, at some point later he built a city, naming it after his son Enoch. Now, in relaying this part of the story, it is important to think through a couple things.

Firstly, Cain's wife appears on the scene as a pre-existing reality. We are not told when or

where Cain obtained a wife - only that he *had* one. There is, undoubtedly, a story there, but apparently not one that is crucial to the author's intent.

However, given the information that we have in Genesis, we can respond to the question of where Cain's wife has come from by assuming that she was, in fact, *one of his sisters*. Now, in thinking about this sort of thing, you have to keep in mind that we are dealing with a very *selective* recounting of history, which, of course, is always the case - but we still need to remind ourselves of this fact. And so we have this selective account in terms of its details, as well as what could also be described as a *compressed* account, in terms of the passage of time.

That is, many months and years are assumed and raced right through in the space of a few verses. For example, you may remember from last week how we saw that chapter 4:1-2 refers to the births of Cain and Abel, in one verse, and then jumps to the description of their occupations in the very next verse. And so, within the space of 2 verses you have all sorts of details of time and circumstances that are skipped right over. The result is that, when we read that Cain was a farmer and Abel was a man who looked after sheep - we have no idea whether these two brothers are 15, 25, or 50 years old at the time when these events took place.

Well, those sorts of dynamics and realities also factor in here. Moses is giving us the principal characters and key events in this storyline - but not *every* character and *every* event, and he is compressing a great deal of time. We see the same thing in the NT in the Gospel accounts of Jesus where, at one point, the writer of John's Gospel tells us that if everything Jesus did were written down the whole world could not contain the books. Remember that? In other words, the Gospels are also highly selective accounts. Well, this is what is going on in Genesis too.

As such, while the storyline focuses on *certain* individuals and descendants - Cain, Abel, Seth, Enoch, Enosh, etc. - it doesn't relate, or even *begin* to relate, all of Adam and Eve's descendants to us. Genesis 5:4 confirms this when it says that Adam and Eve had "other sons and daughters" - brothers and sisters who *exist*, but who remain nameless. So, Adam and Eve had lots of children - how many we do not know. But given their unusually long life spans at that time - they could have had, literally, dozens and dozens of them. Well, it is one of these nameless, numerous other children, you see, that becomes "Mrs Cain".

Now this sort of relational possibility was something that was a necessity for a limited period of time. God's people, you will remember, had been given the instruction to "be fruitful and multiply" and fill the earth with God's images. And, in spite of their sin and its permanent consequences, that mandate remained in place. This situation then - marrying a close blood relation - was a temporary necessity - permitted and superintended by God - until such a time when the population had grown to a stage which rendered such close unions un-necessary. When that time came, God, through Moses, formalized the changed circumstances by instructing his people about these things in Leviticus 20. However, there are indicators even as early as Genesis 20, that these sorts of relations were no longer practiced, or regarded as valid. And so, Cain has a wife, from among his own very close blood relations.

Now, beyond those sorts of historical curiosities, the more significant thing that happened

here is not that Cain had a wife but that Cain and his wife had a *child*, and they named this child - "Enoch" - a name that refers to *initiating* or *establishing* things. The significance of this name is seen in the fact that this seems to be the very thing that Cain set about doing after he departed from the presence of the Lord. He set out to launch or initiate his own little empire, to create his own space in God's world - a city - that was *in* but *independent of* God's agenda.

And one of the reasons why Cain resorts to such actions, as one commentator points out, is because he doesn't want to be in a position where he was dependent upon God's mercy for his protection or safety. He doesn't want to be wandering around, exposed, in the open, counting on God to preserve and spare his life from avengers. Cain wanted to take his future and his security into his *own* hands - so he creates a city by which he attempts to manage his curse, and control his circumstances, and guard his own back - not trusting God to make good on His word.

And so, while God had so cursed him that he was consigned to the life of a wanderer and a nomad, Cain takes steps to resist this curse as much as he could or, at the very least, to confine his wanderings to a space he felt he could *control*. So he sets up a *city*. And, again, you have to remember that these verses are compressing both time and details. Even more, it is not necessary to imagine that Cain set up some sort of *elaborate* city with high walls and towers, and rows and rows of streets, etc. The important thing is not so much the nature or elaboration of the city which Cain built, but simply *the fact that he built it at all* and that, once he did build it, he named it after his own Son - Enoch. In rebellion against God, and resisting his curse, he establishes a city and sets it up as a monument to his own family, his own legacy, his own name.

That's the first thing I want you to notice. The second thing I want you to notice this morning is the very impressive and even gifted descendants that are to be found within this line of Cain, this "seed of the serpent". Moses lists here seven generations from Cain through Lamech, and when he gets to Lamech he elaborates just a little bit. He informs us, for starters, that Lamech had two wives - which we'll come back to in a moment - but he then goes on to tell us about the children that came from these two wives.

From the one - Adah - two children are named. One was Jabal, who made a name for himself as "the father of those who dwell in tents and have livestock" - referring, most likely, to his business prowess and pioneering efforts in that area. His brother's name was Jubal who was a musician and had a reputation of his own as "the father of all those who play the lyre and pipe. From the other wife - Zillah - came a child named Tubal-Cain who was also known as a "forger of all instruments of bronze and iron".

In short, among the descendants of Cain were all manner of people with varying degrees of technical and artistic ability. Cain may be under a curse, and his descendants may be at war with the "seed of the woman" - but clearly being under a curse does not mean that Cain and those in his line are going to turn out to be a bunch of freaks and misfits. Far from it, his descendants are actually *leading the way* in a number of different areas of technical, social, and artistic development. Now, I think that is significant, and we'll come back to this in a moment to see *why*.

The third thing I want you to notice here, along with Cain's actions and his descendants'

accomplishments is the train-wreck of a person that *Lamech* has become. Now, it seems fairly clear from the way that Moses has laid out this passage that what he is really trying to do by means of this miniature genealogy, is making sure that you see the connection between Cain and Lamech. He sort of races through the various other descendants and it is only when he gets to Lamech that he slows down a bit to talk about his wives, and his kids, and his actions. Why? Because Moses doesn't want you to miss the fact that *Lamech* is a descendant of *Cain* who murdered his brother, *Abel*.

Well, as we've already seen, one thing about Lamech is that he had gifted children. But another thing to consider about Lamech is this fact that he *took two wives for himself*. Now, we have already seen in previous studies of Genesis how God created the marriage institution for various reasons. And one of the primary reasons He created it and set it up as He did was so that it would stand forever as a living illustration of the way that *God* perceives the relationship between Himself and his people - between Christ and His Church.

As such, there are a number of things about the marriage relationship that are instructive for God's people - and one of those things has to do with the *exclusivity* of the relationship - the fact that it is about ONE man married to ONE woman. Because God will not share His love for His people with any other rival, and because there is no other God but Him anyway, the marriage relationship is meant to reflect that reality in precisely this area of *exclusivity*.

Sadly, Lamech's taking TWO wives to himself was a blatant and calculated challenge to all of this. Indeed, as one scholar has suggested, it may have been all a part of his plan to take matters into his own hands - one component of which was to rapidly produce and populate his "city" with descendants of his own. In that scenario - more wives meant more descendants - and more quickly.

At any rate, Lamech's action, at the end of the day, was a rebellious one and was a challenge to the marriage institution as God intended it to be. And, while this is one of those things that the Bible does not speak as directly or as loudly about as perhaps some would prefer, the truth is that Lamech's polygamy here is NOT right and the testimony to this is seen in watching the trials and woes of those who entered into it - people like Abraham - and all the problems that occurred between Sarah and Hagar, and Jacob - with Leah and Rachel, and then later on we see the troubles that resulted for others - like King Solomon - because of this same sort of situation. Lamech's kids may have been the "fathers" of various technical and artistic developments, but Lamech himself was the "father" of marital disaster with his blatant disregard of God's design for human relationships.

A third thing to see about Lamech himself is his *brutality and violence*. In verses 23-24 we have a bit of Hebrew poetry - a song really - that Lamech "sings" to his two wives. And this song is a celebration of Lamech's arrogance and brutality - not unlike some of the music being produced in our day which sings about brutality toward women, for example. Contemporary so-called "songwriters" who produce this sort of trash - whether they know it or not - are simply following in the footsteps of Lamech who did these same things long, long ago.

In this song to his wives, Lamech boasts about capriciously murdering another person - and a young person, maybe even a teenager - at that. Whatever the circumstances of this

encounter - and they are far from clear - the reality is that Lamech is standing here, before his wives, boasting to them about the fact that he has murdered another human being. He is singing to them about it - as if this is some sort of Broadway musical, as if he is reciting some epic poem relating the heroic deeds of some great adventurer. But there's nothing heroic about it.

And, to make matters worse, not only does Lamech boast about his murder, he then goes on to make a mockery of God's promise to protect Cain, saying, that if Cain's revenge was sevenfold, then Lamech's revenge will be seventy-sevenfold. Here Lamech puts words in God's mouth - who has said none of these things to Lamech. But he puts words in God's mouth and issues these statements, really, as a kind of *taunt or dare* to anyone who might consider coming after him for what he has done.

And so the ugly progression of sin and evil just continues in the unfolding Genesis account - epitomized in this descendant of Cain who is a polygamist that has rejected God's designs for marriage, who is also - like his ancestor - a murderer, and who is, on top of all that, an arrogant, vile, proud man who boasts in the destruction of human life and despises and mocks his own Creator.

Well, after parading us through all of this, Moses then very abruptly turns our attention, in the last two verses, from the development of the one line of humanity - the line of Cain, the seed of the serpent - and begins focusing on the other line: the line of Seth, the "seed" of the woman referred to in Genesis 3:15. The descriptions of *this* "line" will begin here and will continue right through chapter 5 which, Lord willing, we will be looking at next week as a unit.

But for now we'll stick with verses 25 and 26 of chapter 4, noticing as we do that Adam and Eve once again conceived and had a child - this time named Seth. And some scholars have noted that her remarks about *this* child are a little more humble and reserved than her previous ones. If you recall, at *Cain's* birth Eve, in her exuberance, said, "I have gotten a man with the help of the Lord". But, after all the tragedy that has happened - and that continues to happen - she now says, at Seth's birth - that, "God has appointed for me another offspring instead of Abel, for Cain killed him". In the birth of her most recent son, she acknowledges the murderous actions of her first one.

And then we are told that Seth, eventually, has a son of his own whom he called Enosh, at which point we are informed that it was *at this point in time* that "people began to call upon the name of the Lord". The word for Lord here is Yahweh, and it is its first appearance in the OT in that form, and this is the name that God used in reference to Himself in relation to his covenant people. Now, as we know from the beginning of this chapter, the family of Adam were already involved *as a family, and as individuals* in the worship of the Lord through sacrifice and offering.

So, that being the case, then verse 26 must be referring to something else and, most likely, what we are seeing here is the point at which God's people began to worship the Lord

together - covenantally, communally - as a gathered people. We see this same sort of use of this phrase later on in the OT, in Psalm 116:17-19, for example. But the bottom line here is simply that the one thing we are told about the descendants of Seth - the "seed of the woman" - the one description that is associated with this line is that "at that time people began to call upon the name of the Lord" - they began to worship God - not just in families - but across family lines - as a community of worshipers.

Now when you put all of this stuff together, and you compare the line of Cain over against the line of Seth - as they are presented here - then you see an interesting contrast. Among Cain and his descendants, you see a number of people who, in various ways, are persons who have made a name for themselves. Cain sets up his own city, names it after his son, seeking to preserve his legacy and name through that. A number of Cain's descendants are known as the "father" or founder of various technical and artistic developments - making a name for themselves in these different areas. Finally, Lamech makes a name for himself - albeit a shameful one - but is nonetheless a proud, boastful man, singing about his perverse, wicked behavior and wearing it like some sort of badge of honor.

Over against Cain's line which seems to be all about making a name for themselves, we have the line of Seth, very sparingly described as people who are concerned about the Lord's honor and reputation, people whose desire is "making a name" for Him, so to speak, wanting His name to be honored and adored and remembered, people who are known for their worship above any other thing. That is a very great contrast and, I think, is what this whole passage is all about: the distinguishing mark that worship is, and which sets the seed of the woman apart from the seed of the serpent.

Now there are a number of implications that flow from all of this, and which would have been greatly significant to God's people in Moses' day as well as in our own. You can well imagine how important these words would have been to the people of God as they prepared to go in and take the promised land. There were going into a land with great cities - like Jericho - and which were constructed on some of the same assumptions and designs as the very first city under Cain.

Further, they were going to face many different kinds of people - people who were probably more technically advanced than they, people who were more artistically developed than they were, people who had created all sorts of new and interesting things. But regardless of all those things, God's people were not to fear them, nor were they to envy them. Because these same people, like the descendants of Cain, in spite of their skills and abilities they were not a people that called upon the name of the Lord, or who worshiped him truly. In spite of all appearances which might suggest otherwise - they were a doomed race. They were a race that appeared to be going somewhere, but who were, in fact, going nowhere at all.

So, these verses would have been very important for God's people in Moses' day, just as they continue to be extremely important for God's people in our own day. We look all around us, within this society, and we can see all kinds of people who are as clever and creative as the

descendants of Cain described in these verses. Everywhere we turn there are all kinds of people who are making, and have made names for themselves in all sorts of impressive ways. They are smart, funny, beautiful, gifted people.

And all of these things are evidence of God's common grace exhibited to humankind - a grace that - like the rain - is allowed to "fall" on both sides of the great divide - benefitting people who are the seed of the serpent, as well as people who are the seed of the woman.

And yet, in spite of what we see, in spite of the accomplishments and recognition that has been gained, and will continue to be gained by these people - we must never think that the presence of these kinds of things in a person's life means that that person belongs to God, or that the presence of these things in a certain culture means that that society or culture is the special possession of God. We have only to see the descendants of Cain here to be reminded of that.

The presence of technical ability and artistic creativity is not any sort of necessary indicator of a person - or a society's - standing before God. Because when we DO look back on the account of Cain's descendants we see this *disturbing* truth that right alongside all these advances and developments and business savvy exhibited by Cain's descendants is this sick, perverse, underbelly of moral decay and disintegration so clearly evidenced by the exploits of Lamech.

And so it was, and still is the case that both *individuals* and *whole societies* can make great advances, amazing advances in so many ways, and yet remain *moral infants*. Even as advances are made in all sorts of scientific and technical areas a culture can, at the same time, be moving *backwards* in its moral character, experiencing development and decay simultaneously. Great sophistication in science and culture can go hand in hand with sophistication in the ways of sin and moral failure.

Indeed, citing just one example, as I look around in our culture it terrifies me to know that we are on the verge of amazing advances in reproductive and genetic capabilities at the *very moment* when we are *incapable* of responsibly dealing with them - from a moral standpoint. And in this regard we are very much like children playing with boxes of dynamite.

And so it is that we should look at the account of the descendants of Cain and the descendants of Seth and take our cues from there. We can, to be sure, take advantage of developments in science and culture as they continue to be made. But we should never be taken in by these things or imagine for a single moment that they are a sign of God's favor, or that they are, ultimately, the most important things, the things to be most sought after. Further, we should not be blind to the fact that behind the veneer of development and advance that seems so promising is a sinister and opposite process going on - a process of moral disintegration and decay which is making itself known in more and more ways - and as boldly and arrogantly as the boasts of Lamech himself.

Just as in Genesis 4 - the thing that we should be most concerned with - as the seed of the woman in a world dominated and controlled by the seed of the serpent - but the thing we should be most concerned with is the fact that as God's people we are not to be preoccupied with making a name for ourselves, or building our own empires and establishing our own legacies.

Rather, the thing that we should want to see, the reputation that we should want and be more concerned with is *God's reputation*. We ought to be known, as the descendants of Seth were known, by the God we worship, not by the self-worship we crave. If anything distinguishes us as a people, it should be that. We too, ought to be known as "those who call upon the name of the Lord" because it is this, in the end, that points to our salvation. It is this that will be the characteristic of the people of God that will continue to distinguish them until Jesus returns.

Turn to Acts, chapter 2, vs 17 ff. Here we have an account of the Apostle Peter, preaching after Pentecost to all sorts of people in Jerusalem, and he chooses for his text the prophet Joel and quotes the following passage to them,

(Read vs 17-21)

Do you see it there? Do you hear the echo of Genesis 4? Here, in the prophecy which is expressly dealing with the "last days" - here in the words of the prophet Joel we see the people of God - the seed of the woman - still being distinguished in the very end by the simple fact that they are the ones who call upon the name of the Lord, they are the ones who look to the Lord, and the Lord alone, as their hope and their salvation. This distinguishing mark which is introduced in Genesis 4, and which shows itself throughout the remainder of the Bible's plot line, will be brought to its resolution when the Lord finally returns.

If you are here this morning as one who cannot say for sure that this is a description of you; if you do not know or understand what it means to "call upon the name of the Lord" - but would like to know, let me encourage you to talk with a friend that you think *does* know, or to come and talk with me, and we'll be glad to talk with you. Don't go looking in other places, or be fooled by people or by our culture which uses its technical and cultural and artistic sophistication to mask its spiritual poverty and moral decay.

Give up the desire to make a name for yourself and enlist yourself instead - with the nameless millions whose hearts have been captivated by a loving Savior. Align yourself with those who call upon him and look to him and who have discovered, and continue to discover, to their great surprise, that it is in the midst of losing ourselves and immersing ourselves in the worship of Him, that we discover, for the very first time, who we really are.