

## Scripture Reading Genesis 4:1-16

<sup>1</sup> Adam made love to his wife Eve, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Cain. She said, "With the help of the LORD I have brought forth a man."<sup>2</sup> Later she gave birth to his brother Abel.

Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil. <sup>3</sup> In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the LORD. <sup>4</sup> And Abel also brought an offering—fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The LORD looked with favor on Abel and his offering, <sup>5</sup> but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast.

<sup>6</sup> Then the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? <sup>7</sup> If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it."

<sup>8</sup> Now Cain said to his brother Abel, "Let's go out to the field." While they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him.

<sup>9</sup> Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?"

"I don't know," he replied. "Am I my brother's keeper?"

<sup>10</sup> The LORD said, "What have you done? Listen! Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground. <sup>11</sup> Now you are under a curse and driven from the ground, which opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. <sup>12</sup> When you work the ground, it will no longer yield its crops for you. You will be a restless wanderer on the earth."

<sup>13</sup> Cain said to the LORD, "My punishment is more than I can bear. <sup>14</sup> Today you are driving me from the land, and I will be hidden from your presence; I will be a restless wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me."

<sup>15</sup> But the LORD said to him, "Not so; anyone who kills Cain will suffer vengeance seven times over." Then the LORD put a mark on Cain so that no one who found him would kill him. <sup>16</sup> So Cain went out from the LORD's presence and lived in the land of Nod, east of Eden.

## Morning Message

### “House Cleaning: Time to Throw Out Some Junk” #3 - “Toxic Emotions: Resentment & Envy

The story of Cain and Abel is a story of emotion gone awry. While the love of Adam and Eve created Cain & Abel, Cain’s envy and resentment destroyed his brother Abel; homicide, pre-meditated murder from emotion gone awry.

Had Abel done something wrong? NO!

Were Cain’s feelings of envy & resentment justified? NO!

And even if they were...murder?

In this brief narrative God even warns Cain about the destructive force of emotions, justified or not:

*Then the LORD said to Cain, “Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? <sup>7</sup> If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it.”*

Like his parents who began life in the Garden of Eden but now found themselves on the outside, Cain does not listen to God’s warning; he chose not rule over his emotions but allows his emotions to rule over his actions. Soon his brother is dead, and Cain the farmer becomes a wanderer (Nod), somewhere “east of Eden”; a description of a life lived farther and farther away from the LORD’s presence.

This Lenten season, we are seeking to draw closer and closer to God, so it serves us well to note and get rid of those toxic influences that drive us from God. Last week we spoke of toxic behaviors, and this week we begin to consider toxic emotions; this week the toxic emotions of Cain;

envy & resentment, which have the power to short-circuit our desire to draw nearer to God.

The Merriam-Webster's online dictionary defines "Resentment" as:

*"a feeling of indignant displeasure or persistent ill will at something regarded as a wrong, insult, or injury."*

Resentment is a feeling some people generate against siblings, bosses, ex-spouses.... to name a few common targets. It is a feeling I've sensed from many Bostonians against a particularly successful rival professional baseball teams located in NYC, whose name I will not even mention because we resent them ;-)

While resentment is a feeling we hold against other people, it can also be a feeling we hold against a company's policy or a nation's law.

It describes that bitterness you feel when someone or something has hurt you directly (attack) or indirectly by limiting your freedom to get something or do something you want. Tax-season is an appropriate time to take about resentment, isn't it? Does anyone here resent the amount of money taken by our government from our paychecks?

For Cain, resentment against Abel began when Abel's offering was judged better than his. While this was not Abel's fault; indeed it was the fault of Cain for failing to offer his best to God, Cain's feelings blamed Abel, feelings he failed to "rule over".

Unlike "righteous anger" which we will talk about next week, "resentment" or "bitterness" is a slow-growing destructive force that pulls us away from God and from one another. It is toxic to our souls, so we need to

rule over it; we need to recognize it and rid our lives of its simmering destructive power if we want to draw nearer to God.

God warned Cain, and through Cain's story as well as other scriptures **God is warning us today to rule over these toxic emotions lest we too find ourselves farther and farther away from God in the land of Nod, east of Eden.**

## **1. Resentment/Bitterness**

In light of the reality of resentment/bitterness, the scriptures instruct:

### **Hebrews 12:14-15**

*<sup>14</sup> Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord. <sup>15</sup> See to it that no one falls short of the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.*

### **Ephesians 4:31-32**

*<sup>31</sup> Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. <sup>32</sup> Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.*

A good Christian friend & counselor used to say; *“When we fail to deal with our emotions our emotions will deal with us.”* While we all know the feeling of resentment & bitterness, we certainly do not want those feelings to define us; to be labeled by others as being a “resentful” or “bitter” person. We need God's help to rid ourselves of this toxin.

To do so, let's begin by outlining a usual pathway of resentment/bitterness. Have you ever said:

1. "I can't believe they did that to me...."
2. I would never do that to my worst enemy...
3. I'm so angry I could kill someone.
4. Why do you let them get away with this God?

Just this past week, a Wayland young man was convicted of killing his high school sweetheart, Lauren Astley. It was a brutal crime against a sweet and kind girl whom he had dated for 3 years, but with whom he had recently broken up.

The young man pleaded temporary insanity, even though it was revealed that a number of people including the girl's mother had warned this angry young man to stay away from Lauren.

In the end, his uncontrolled resentment/bitterness following their breakup destroyed more relationships than you want to count.

If we fail to deal with resentment/bitterness, it will have its way with us. Our emotions, justified or not, can easily become the catalyst for our own sin. Our ill-will prays to God for "fire", it asks for "payback", and if something doesn't happen, we sometimes forget that judgment belongs to God, and in sin we dish out our own retribution.

The feelings of resentment/bitterness convinces us that retribution will make the pain go away, but it only makes matters worse. Victims often find themselves jailed; an added insult to a painful emotion that cannot go away without the power of forgiveness & mercy.

And it is there that we must allow God to take us and our emotions; the God who did not justify resentment/bitterness when men & women rejected Him, but forgave us, and did the hard work, and paid the necessary price so that love would reign over hatred.

*See to it that no one falls short of the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.*

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1. "I can't believe they did that to me...."

Believe it. Human beings sin like fish swim.. without much effort at all.

We need to remember that, like Cain, our feelings may have their origin in something we failed to do that makes "another's" actions so offensive to us.

2. I would never do that to my worst enemy... (self-righteousness)  
Of course you could, you're actually heading in that direction right now....

3. I'm so angry I could kill someone (exaggerated thoughts of revenge?)

They are going to pay for this, one way or another.

I really wish something bad would happen to them!

Pray: "Dear God, given them what they deserve!"

"Kill someone?".. Cain did, and Jesus taught that such thought is the same as actually killing someone!

#### 4. Why do you let them get away with this God?

Remember: God's mercy/love saves us along with "them".

God has given us a way to grow beyond the "eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" manor of social justice in the Old Testament, He has given us salvation in Jesus; a salvation based in forgiveness & mercy we are to live out through obedience to Jesus' teachings:

#### **Matthew 5:38-48.**

*<sup>38</sup> "You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.'<sup>39</sup> But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. <sup>40</sup> And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. <sup>41</sup> If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles. <sup>42</sup> Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.*

*<sup>43</sup> "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'<sup>44</sup> But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, <sup>45</sup> that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. <sup>46</sup> If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? <sup>47</sup> And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? <sup>48</sup> Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.*

Let God's way help you deal with emotion of resentment/bitterness, so that you can draw nearer and nearer to our perfect Heavenly Father.

## **2. Envy**

Now what about envy?

Envy and resentment are not all that different. In fact, our English word “envy” derives from the Old French word *envie* which in turn came from the Latin word *invidia*, which literally means “to look upon with malice or resentment”. In Groeschel’s book *Soul Detox*, he suggests that when we think about “envy” we ought to think about discontentment, dissatisfaction and covetousness, all born of the marriage of comparison and resentment.

When someone has something we want, we feel envy.

When we believe that we deserve that something more than someone else, envy gives birth to jealousy.

And very soon our soul are filled with a discontentment that gives birth to lust, greed and avarice (desire for more money... “money buys happiness” mentality.)

So... welcome to America, and what may well be our greatest corporate sin that keeps us from drawing nearer to God; envy! I say this with love for the United States, and with respect for all the good that we do in this world, but do you realize the power of envy in our country? Can you join me in acknowledging how the sin of envy fuels the American economy?

If not, then let me ask, when was the last time you saw a commercial encouraging you to be content with what you have? Is it not “the American way” to convince you that you need something you don’t already have?

I think it is in a Prilosec commercial (“purple-pill heartburn medicine) where Larry the Cable Guy openly says that their new flavor of Prilosec is a great example of America offering something “we didn’t even know we needed”!

So what’s so bad about envy?

- It robs us of feeling satisfied with what we do have.
- It makes us feel unfulfilled or disadvantages, as TV's get bigger and cell phones smaller and we're stuck with yesterday's technologies.
- It robs us of contentment in what God has given us.

The Apostle Paul describes a different way of living:

### **Philippians 4:12**

*<sup>12</sup> I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.*

I don't imagine American advertisers liking Paul's contentment!

And yet, rather than following Paul's example, we are always looking for more, asking God for more rather than being content and thanking God for what we do have.

Envy causes us to lose sight of God's blessings in our lives, by causing us to focus upon the blessings He gave to others. As Harold Coffin said so succinctly:

*Envy is the art of counting the other fellow's blessings instead of your own.*

It is an "art" that creates distance between us and God, for not only does it suppress thankfulness to God, but envy led to all kinds of sin.

Envy fuels the Old Testament story of Israel & his son Joseph:

### **Genesis 37: 3-4**

<sup>3</sup> Now Israel loved Joseph more than any of his other sons, because he had been born to him in his old age; and he made an ornate robe for him. <sup>4</sup> When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of them, they hated him and could not speak a kind word to him.

The story of Joseph, like Jesus' parable of the Prodigal Son, highlights our common failure to appreciate the father's love for us when we focus upon the Father's love for someone else.

- The envy of Joseph's brothers brought unnecessary grief upon their father and Joseph's mother. It robbed them of a brother whose administrative gifts might have blessed their family had he been allowed to grow up with them.
- The envy of the Prodigal Son's brother kept him from partying with this father & sharing in His father's joy. It also kept him from understanding that his father's love had always been there for him to enjoy.

It scares me that we live in a country so "comfortable" with envy; in many ways, so dependent upon envy to "prosper" our economy. As children of God we need to take the destructiveness of envy seriously. James says it like it is:

**James 3:14b-15**

*..bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, ... <sup>15</sup> Such "wisdom" does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic.*

## **Proverbs 14:30**

*A heart at **peace** gives life to the body, but **envy** rots the bones.*

We need to consciously fight against envy because of its pervasive presence in our culture. And here how you can do it:

### **1. Stop the comparisons.**

Recognize that God made you special, and that all you need is to be you, not someone or something else. Paul wrote in..

#### **2 Corinthians 10:12**

*<sup>12</sup> We do not dare to classify or compare ourselves with some who commend themselves. When they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are not wise.*

### **2. Take pride in own work.**

Don't judge your intelligence or strength against that of others. Know yourself and push yourself to be the best you can be. We read in

#### **Galatians 6:4-5**

*<sup>4</sup> Each one should test their own actions. Then they can take pride in themselves alone, without comparing themselves to someone else,  
<sup>5</sup> for each one should carry their own load.*

### **3. Rejoice with those who rejoice,**

even as we mourn with those who mourn. (Romans 12:15)

I think that our culture of envy makes us much better at mourning with others, than in rejoicing with others. We fight off envy when we learn to be

genuinely happy for others. Practice it whenever you have a chance. Hang around people who are really grateful and joyful for what they have.

And finally, we need to

#### **4.– Focus on what God has already given you.**

Our world would have you believe that the grass is always greener in someone else's yard. Advertisers will try to convince you that the bird in your hand is worth giving up to go after the two in the bush.

But the wisdom of Solomon says:

#### **Ecclesiastes 6:9a**

*Better what the eye sees  
than the roving of the appetite.*

Focus on what God has given to you, and embrace His goodness by rejoicing always, praying continually, and giving thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus<sup>(1 Thessalonians 5:16-18)</sup>; It is God's will to draw you closer to him by helping you to push envy out of your life..

The Bible records that often a "little child shall lead" us; so as a final word on envy, let me share a story found in Soul Detox. Craig Groeschel writes:

*When I first became a pastor, there was a six-year-old girl in our church who was dying. We prayed and prayed for her, but she just continued to get worse. Near the end, I went to visit this precious little girl in the hospital. Her treatments had taken her hair, her color, and the last of her strength. I did the pastor thing, making small talk with her and her*

*parents, trying to smile a lot and lift their spirits, and praying with them. But I felt so helpless.*

*Finally I said, "Sweetheart, what do you want? Anything. You name it. If there's anything at all I can do for you or get for you, please just name it, and it's yours."*

*For a moment, she just locked eyes with me and didn't say anything, like she was deep in thought. As I waited for her answer, I couldn't help thinking of all the things she might have been dreaming about in the past weeks: Playing with other kids? Going to see a movie with her friends? Going home? Just taking a walk outside?*

*This tiny six-year-old girl drew in a deep breath and sighed. Then she said, "Well, I've got my mommy and daddy here. I've got my two favorite sticker books. I've got my dolly, and I've got Jesus in my heart. What else could a little kid want?"*

*Just a few weeks later, I did that little girl's funeral.*

Groeschel, Craig (2012-05-01). *Soul Detox: Clean Living in a Contaminated World* (p. 121-124). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

Will you let a little child lead us this morning? Will you rule over your feelings of envy & resentment and draw nearer to the One who really matters; the One who gives us all we need for today, and the One who has given Himself to us as a treasure forever.

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