

98-03-08a

And as we begin our worship this morning, if you'll turn with me to the Psalms, we want to look at Psalm 10. Psalm 10. This is in the context of our study of Genesis chapter 4, Cain and Abel.

We've seen the murder of Abel. We are looking at the statement that God makes to Cain when after several opportunities and reminders and encouragements from God, Cain is not interested in reconciliation to God. He's not interested in acknowledging the wrong that he has done through his anger, through his self-righteousness and lack of attention in the sacrifice, and ultimately in the murder of his brother.

And as a result, God is now pronouncing sentence on Cain. And the sentence is a curse. It is a divine curse.

Divine curse is a serious thing. But you have at the same time the issue of justice for Abel, because Cain does not receive the death penalty, at least not in the physical sense. He continues to live for many years.

He's going to have offspring, which will be detailed in the verses to come in Genesis 4. And so where is Abel's justice? Well, this is one of the things we're going to see this morning. Psalm 10 could almost have been written by Abel. Why do you stand afar off, O Lord? Why do you hide in times of trouble? The wicked in his pride persecutes the poor.

Let them be caught in the plots which they have devised, for the wicked boasts of his heart's desire. He blesses the greedy and renounces the Lord. The wicked in his proud countenance does not seek God.

God is in none of his thoughts. His ways are always prospering. Your judgments are far above out of his sight.

As for all his enemies, he sneers at them. He has said in his heart, I shall not be moved. I shall never be in adversity.

His mouth is full of cursing and deceit and oppression. Under his tongue is trouble and iniquity. He sits in the lurking places of the villages.

In the secret places he murders the innocent. His eyes are secretly fixed on the helpless. He lies in wait secretly like a lion in his den.

He lies in wait to catch the poor. He catches the poor when he draws him into his net. By the way, these verbs for lying in wait have the connotation or implication of crouching.

Crouching in wait. And it explicitly says this in verse 10. He crouches, he lies low, that the helpless may fall by his strength.

Reminds us of our study of the croucher that God warned Cain about back in Genesis chapter 4. He has said in his heart, God has forgotten. He hides his face. He will never see.

Arise, O Lord. O God, lift up your hand. Do not forget the humble.

Why do the wicked renounce God? He has said in his heart, you will not require an account. But you have seen, for you observe trouble and grief to repay it by your hand. The helpless commits himself to you.

You are the helper of the fatherless. Break the arm of the wicked and the evil man. Seek out his wickedness until you find none.

The Lord is king forever and ever. The nations have perished out of his land. Lord, you have heard the desire of the humble.

You will prepare their heart. You will cause your ear to hear. To do justice to the fatherless and the oppressed.

That the man of the earth may oppress no more. Of course, Cain is the original and archetypal man of the earth. The tiller of the soil and so forth.

This section in the Psalms, Psalm 10 through 15, is especially pertinent to our study. And we will return here shortly to see the progression of ideas through these Psalms. In fact, it goes from 10 through 13 to 15 and all the way up to Psalm 18.

Where the resolution is acknowledged by David that the justice of God does vindicate. Even though the pangs of death surround the believer. But we want to examine this morning the nature of God's justice.

Because on the surface, in Genesis chapter 4, we know that the penalty for murder, in the law of Moses certainly, is death. You can see this as clearly as any place in Numbers chapter 25. Numbers, in this chapter, not only records the punishment for various other crimes.

But it also talks about the occasion of accidental murder or accidental death. And whether justice is going to be served in those cases. In Numbers chapter 35, I think I said 25 a minute ago.

In Numbers chapter 35, God provides for the six cities of refuge in Israel. And of course, this is before they have entered the land. But in Numbers 35 verse 6. Now among the cities which you will give to the Levites, you shall appoint six cities of refuge to which a manslayer may flee.

And to these you shall add 42 cities. So all the cities you will give to the Levites shall be 48. These you shall give with their common land.

And the cities which you will give shall be from the possession of the children of Israel. So these six cities of refuge out of the 48 that are given to the Levites. You recall that the Levites have no physical inheritance in the land.

The land is divided into 12 portions according to the tribes of Israel. But the 11th and 12th correspond to the sons of Joseph, Ephraim and Manasseh. And there is no land or region like there is for the other tribes.

Benjamin and Judah and Gad and so forth for the Levites. Because they are the servants of the Lord. And they are to be sustained by their brethren in the land.

So these cities are gifts from the other tribes to the Levites. And six of these priestly cities are cities of refuge. In verse 11, when you cross Jordan into the land of Canaan, you shall appoint cities to be cities of refuge for you, that the manslayer who kills any person accidentally may flee there.

They shall be cities of refuge for you from the avenger, that the manslayer may not die until he stands before the congregation in judgment. And of the cities which you give, you shall have six cities of refuge. Three cities on this side of the Jordan, three cities in the land of Canaan, which will be cities of refuge.

These six cities shall be for refuge for the children of Israel, for the stranger and for the sojourner among them, that anyone who kills a person accidentally may flee there. But, here is where Cain's situation finds expression. If he strikes him with an iron implement so that he dies, he is a murderer.

The murderer shall surely be put to death. And if he strikes him with a stone in a hand by which one could die, and he does die, he is a murderer. The murderer shall surely be put to death.

Or if he strikes him with a wooden hand weapon by which one could die, and he does die, he is a murderer. The murderer shall surely be put to death. The avenger of blood himself shall put the murderer to death.

When he meets him, he shall put him to death. If he pushes him out of hatred, or while lying in wait hurls something at him so that he dies, or in enmity he strikes him with his hand so that he dies, the one who struck him shall surely be put to death. He is a murderer.

The avenger of blood shall put the murderer to death when he meets him. Now, there's the catch. The avenger of blood shall put him to death when he meets him.

The avenger of blood is the near kinsman, the near relative to the murder victim. Now, here's the catch. What happens if this is fratricide or patricide? This is something that takes place within the family.

Who is the avenger of blood? It's going to be your own brother or your own father who is now the avenger of blood. And in that case, you have the tension between family loyalty and the future of the family and the duty as the avenger of blood. And that's why this little phrase is in here that says the avenger of blood shall slay him when he meets him.

The avenger of blood has a choice. And if he never meets up with the murderer, then he is not going to be required to execute the sentence of death. What happens with Cain? Does he remain in the area where his father Adam and where the other offspring of Adam and Eve are located? No, he is banished away.

He's driven away from the land and is off in the land of Nad. Nad in Hebrew means wandering, literally. And so he is away where the avenger of blood is not going to meet him.

And this is a provision for those who cannot bring themselves to execute someone from their own household for the murder of another. You see a classic example of this in 2 Samuel 13. I might turn there quickly.

You remember that the books of Samuel deal largely with the life of David. In 2 Samuel 13, you have David on the throne and Amnon, one of the older sons, rapes his half-sister. And Tamar, the sister, has a full brother.

David has several wives. And Tamar's brother Absalom seeks vengeance for this great wrong that has been committed against his sister by his half-brother. And so Absalom, in the middle of chapter 13 of 2 Samuel, goes to a feast for the king's sons, rises up and kills Amnon, his brother.

Now, this is a murder. It's premeditated. He waits a couple of years to do it.

And once he does this, he flees. And you can see in 2 Samuel 13, 37, Absalom fled and went to Talmai, the son of Amihud, king of Geshur. And David mourned for his son every day.

So Absalom fled and went to Geshur and was there for three years. These are the people that his mother came from over in Geshur. King David longed to go to Absalom, for he had been comforted concerning Amnon because he was dead.

Now, in order for justice to be served, one of two things has to happen. Either the murderer... See, David or David's sons are now in the Avenger of Blood role for Amnon. Even though Amnon did a terrible thing, murder is not the answer.

And Absalom is guilty of murder. That murder requires justice. So either Absalom is executed by the Avenger of Blood, which in this case would be someone from David's immediate household, or Absalom has got to stay well away.

He's got to remain banished so that he does not come in contact with the Avenger. If he comes back and the Avenger of Blood does not execute him, now there is a further wrong, a further injustice, because now the Avenger of Blood has failed to fulfill Numbers 35, which requires that when he meets the murderer, he slay him on behalf of the murder victim. So Absalom must remain banished.

And now you can begin to see why there is so much trouble in the house of David, because as you recall, David allows himself to be convinced to let Absalom return, and he does not fulfill the sentence that the Law of Moses requires. Cain, in his case, is banished, and he does not return. And he doesn't meet up with any of his brethren.

And you will recall, and we will review here shortly, what God does to preserve Cain's life. He says if anyone takes the life of Cain, he will be avenged sevenfold, because God has driven Cain out so that he will not meet up. It's God's will that Cain live long enough to have offspring.

There are so few people at this time that it doesn't serve God's purposes for Cain to be executed. And so God drives him out so that there is no contact with the avenger of blood. No one from the family should meet Cain.

And if someone goes out there to where God has banished him and pursues him to take his life in vengeance for Abel, God will requite that sevenfold. So there are cases where the curse, and this is where a couple of weeks ago when we talked about the idea of the Law of Talion, or Lex Talionis, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, there are things that are the equivalent of death and banishment, being cut off from one's people, cut off from the opportunity to worship God. The prevailing circumstances that attend that curse are as bad as physical death, and in some cases worse.

I was reminded this morning, listening to Dr. S. Lewis Johnson on the radio, a lesson he taught some ten years ago, and he referred back to 1961 where Adolf Eichmann's war crimes trial took place. And because of the number of Jews that he was responsible for executing during World War II, he was brought to trial and found guilty and was hanged. And there were survivors and people from the Jewish community who said, you know, it's a shame that all they can do is hang him.

He is deserving of so much more. Apparently the number of lives that he was responsible for taking was the equivalent of the population of the city of Chicago. And they said, you know, just death isn't a sufficient punishment for this individual.

The heinousness of the crime is such that it would almost be better if they could keep him alive and make him suffer. And you have probably run across this attitude from time to time on the part of survivors or of family members of victims that hanging is too good for this murderer. And there's a sense in which the justice of God is served more by the murderer living under the curse than by the simple execution.

And you can see this illustrated in the life of Absalom who is the heir to the throne and yet by being banished loses those and is conscious of that loss throughout the rest of his life but he's allowed to return and this is not God's purpose. Bad things result. So this gives us a little bit of framework and a little bit of context for understanding why Cain is not executed, why he is banished, and what the nature of this curse is.

I pointed out something to you last week that is a very important observation to keep in mind and that is that these things foreshadow later events in history. Cain is the firstborn son but Cain does not conduct himself, does not orient himself to God and forfeits his inheritance, forfeits his place as the firstborn son. He's Adam's heir.

He is by birth the heir of the promises and the heir of the covenant that God has made which will extend down through the ages to all of the human race but by self-indulgence, by his lack of obedience to God in the performance of the sacrifice, not having a right heart toward God, he forfeits that and yields himself over to the dark elements that have entered at the fall and the croucher pounces on Cain and takes him captive by Cain's own choice. He doesn't heed God's warning and he ultimately murders his brother and is banished. The brother, Abel, who performs the blood sacrifice of a lamb who is a shepherd obviously foreshadows the Lord Jesus Christ.

We're going to see this morning as well as the story moves forward that Adam and Eve are going to have another son who in many ways stands in for Abel and this is Seth. Let's go back and just read the verses here in Genesis chapter 4. We're going to skip over for the moment the genealogy of Cain in verses 16 through 24. After pronouncing the curse on Cain in Genesis chapter 4 verses 11 and 12 and Cain's complaint in verses 13 and 14 and God marking him and preserving his life with a covenant in verse 15, skip down to verse 25 of Genesis 4. Adam knew his wife again and she bore a son and named him Seth for God has appointed another seed for me instead of Abel whom Cain killed.

Notice that they no longer consider Cain to be the seed. He's been disowned and this happens even today in Jewish circles as well as in other religions where someone who is seen to commit a terrible wrong by converting to Christianity whether it's in the Arabic world or in the Jewish world, many times they are considered to be dead for all intents and purposes. So Adam and Eve basically consider Cain to be dead.

They don't consider him to be their seed or their offspring anymore. So the birth of Seth, Eve names him Seth because God has appointed another seed for me instead of Abel whom Cain killed. And you recall that once again this ties us back to God's comments at the fall that there's going to be enemyship between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman.

So now Seth is standing in that place and as for Seth, to him also a son was born and he named him Enosh. Then men began to call on the name of the Lord. And so in the line of Seth and of Enosh you find those who are calling on the name of the Lord.

And in the foreshadowing sense, in the prophetic sense if you will, there is the beginning of the principle that's going to find full expression when Christ comes and is killed by the disobedient son, Cain in this case foreshadowing Israel who rises up against the one who is faithful in the offering of a sacrifice and who kills him. And yet you have here the idea of new life when Seth is born and that Abel and the principle that he represents as the seed of promise is carried forward. And in many ways Seth represents not only the resurrection of Jesus Christ but also the church in the sense of the body of Christ and the carrying forward of the seed and the fulfillment of God's promises.

And so then we think well here's Cain and he's now under a curse and he must wander as a fugitive and a vagabond. These two words by the way, fugitive and vagabond literally in Hebrew have the idea of wandering and fluttering. Not having a stable place, not having a foundation to lay, a city to build, a place to call home but being wanderers, being driven out from the rightful land and so forth.

And the picture that is fulfilled in the national life of Israel is quite plain. Israel as a result of rejecting the offer of the kingdom, as a result of rejecting Jesus Christ when he came, falls under this same curse. And you remember that the Jews are dispersed following the destruction of the temple in 70 A.D. They have already been dispersed even earlier than that.

Peter writes to the Jews of the dispersion doesn't he in his epistle. They're scattered throughout Asia Minor and beyond. And from 70 A.D. until 1948 there wasn't a Jewish homeland.

And yet when you think about Cain and God marks him and sets a mark on him lest anyone finding him should kill him. Cain's life is preserved even though he lives under the curse. This is another hint that Cain, although he is disobedient and has done some awful things, is a believer.

He's not utterly wiped out. It's a reminder to us about Israel as the people of God who after the crucifixion of Christ and the destruction of the temple in 70 A.D. are dispersed. But the people of God, the nation of Israel, the people of Israel are a marked people.

And they are extraordinary in human history as not having disappeared. You think of the peoples of the ancient world. You think of the Hittites and all the other Hittites that lived in the land of Canaan.

There's no remnant surviving them. But Israel is extraordinary as a people because for thousands of years they have retained their identity, their cultural identity, their racial identity in many cases. And they are now resuming their national identity after 2,000 years of being dispersed throughout the nations because they are marked.

And God will not permit them to disappear as a people. He has promises to fulfill. He has

covenant relationship with that people that requires their preservation even under the curse.

So last week we looked at some of the passages in Scripture where God warned them the way he warns Cain. If you do well, there is a lifting up. There is a forgiveness of sin.

And over and over again in the law of Moses and in the prophets and in the writings of the Old Testament Scriptures, Israel is warned, if my people who are called by my name will come and confess, I will cleanse them, I will preserve them, I will bless them. But if not, and then you have passages such as Leviticus 26 where you have the cycles of discipline on the nation. And I'd like to look at those very briefly just to refresh our memory because we're going to see a graphic illustration of these things.

In Leviticus 26, beginning at verse 14. Actually, we can begin at verse 3 on the positive side. God commands them to not make idols or carved images nor set up an engraved stone.

For I am the Lord your God. You shall keep my Sabbaths and reverence my sanctuary. I am the Lord, he says in verse 2. In Leviticus 26, 3. If you walk in my statutes and keep my commandments and perform them, then I will give you rain in its season.

The land shall yield its produce and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit. Your threshing shall last till the time of vintage and the vintage shall last till the time of sowing. You shall eat your bread in the full and dwell in your land safely.

I will give peace in the land. You shall lie down and none will make you afraid. I will rid the land of evil beasts and the sword will not go through your land.

You will chase your enemies and they shall fall by the sword before you. Five of you shall chase a hundred and a hundred of you shall put ten thousand to flight. For I will look upon you favorably and make you fruitful, multiply you and confirm my covenant with you.

All of this depends on acknowledging God, giving God his rightful place in their lives and being obedient, seeking out what it is that God asks of them and fulfilling it. It's a simple case of the life of faithful obedience, the life of obedient faithfulness. Look at verse 14.

But if you do not obey me and do not observe all these commandments, and if you despise my statutes, or if your soul abhors my judgments so that you do not perform all my commandments but break my covenant, I also will do this to you. And the following verses from verse 16 all the way down to verse 39 details what has been called the five cycles of discipline. The first phase of discipline occurs.

And he says in the first chastisement here in verse 16, I will appoint terror over you, wasting disease and fever, which shall consume the eyes and cause sorrow of heart. You

shall sow your seed in vain, for your enemies shall eat of it. This harks back to the curse on Cain, loss of agricultural blessing.

Your sowing of seed will not yield crops that you will benefit from. I will set my face against you. You shall be defeated by your enemies.

Those who hate you shall reign over you, and you shall flee even when no one pursues you. And that's the first phase. And that's designed to turn them.

It's designed to wake them up. It's designed to cause them to review their priorities and reestablish an obedient life of faith before God. If that doesn't work, God says in verse 18, if after all this, if you do not obey me, I will punish you seven times more for your sins.

We've seen this word seven come up in Genesis 4, haven't we? The sevenfold curse on those who pursue Cain. This means that seven is the number of fulfillment. It's the number of perfection or completion.

And it has the idea that the perfect justice of God is going to kick in once again. I will break the pride of your power. I will make your heavens like iron and your earth like bronze.

Your strength shall be spent in vain, for your land shall not yield its produce, nor shall the trees of the land yield their fruit. At first they were going to sow their crops, but somebody else was going to take that produce away from them. Now the crops are not even going to grow.

Verse 21, then if you walk contrary to me and are not willing to obey me, each of these is designed to turn them, to wake them up. God does not want to do this and He's willing to suspend these judgments that people will only turn and confess. I got an email within the last week or two.

I haven't been very faithful about collecting and reading my emails, so I don't remember exactly when it came in. But it was forwarded. There's lots of Bible study up on the Internet now that people are putting out.

And someone forwarded this regarding the idea of confessing our sins, 1 John 1.9. And it was remarking on the fact that there appears to be only one verse in the New Testament, 1 John 1.9, that explicitly encourages us to acknowledge our sins before God. And in this rather lengthy discussion or study, the bottom line was that this individual felt that it's unique in the church age that because of the work of Christ, we don't really have to worry about our sins. It's not really a requirement to acknowledge our sins and that even 1 John 1.9 is looking back at the day of our salvation, that when we acknowledge Christ as Savior, acknowledge our sinfulness, that fulfills 1 John 1.9 and we really don't need to revisit that issue anymore because Christ has paid for sin and so forth.

It was a lengthy study. It made several points. And I will not address those arguments point by point.

I will simply say this. That is the equivalent of someone in Israel saying, you know, the priest went in just this past year on the Day of Atonement and offered the sacrifice and went into the Holy of Holies and sprinkled the mercy seat with the blood of that sacrifice. And so there's no need for me to offer any sacrifices this year because the great high priest has gone in and offered the Atonement sacrifice for the entire nation.

And that is not the case in Israel, is it? Individuals, even though the nation has been cleansed and even though corporately and in the ultimate sense, salvation is pictured in that Day of Atonement sacrifice, they still have the personal responsibility to acknowledge personal transgression. And we have that same responsibility. And you recall just this past Friday night when we were in 1 Corinthians 10, Paul reminds us believers right now that all of these things in the Old Testament have been recorded as examples for us and instruction for us.

It's critically important for us to acknowledge our sin. We don't have to dwell on it. We don't have to wear a hair shirt.

We don't have to wallow in misery and say, well, I'm going to do penance and I'm just going to make myself miserable over my sins. That's not the point. But we do have to acknowledge them.

It's a healthy thing. You can't fix a problem that you refuse to acknowledge. This is the principle of recovery in many of the STEP programs and the anonymous programs and so forth.

You've got to acknowledge the problem before that problem can be solved. And God is the inventor of that principle and He is the first proponent of it. This is Cain's great mistake long before the Law of Moses.

He doesn't acknowledge that there's a problem. And without acknowledgement, there can be no reconciliation. There can be no reconstruction and restoration.

It requires humility. And a lot of us are not humble enough to do that. And God says, I will force you to become humble.

I will humble you if you will not humble yourself. And that's what these five cycles of discipline are designed for. So each of these five phases, like in verse 21, if you continue to walk contrary to me and are not willing to obey me, I will bring on you seven times more plagues.

And then you get the wild beasts and so forth. Verse 23, if by these things you are not reformed by me, but walk contrary to me, then I also will walk contrary to you and I will

punish you yet seven times more for your sins. I haven't worked out the math on this, but seven to the fifth power is what we apparently have here.

And that's an awful lot of divine discipline. Down in verse 27, after destruction by the enemies, if after all this you do not obey me but walk contrary to me, then I also will walk contrary to you in fury. And even I will chastise you seven times for your sins.

And you get into these awful cannibalism desperate times. And in verse 32, I will bring the land to desolation. Your enemies who dwell in it will be amazed at you.

I will scatter you among the nations and draw out a sword after you. Your land shall be desolate and your cities waste. This was fulfilled in the national life of Israel, wasn't it? They were dispersed among the nations.

Their land was made a desolate wasteland. But look down at verse 40. It's sort of a depressing picture.

But, if what? What is the remedy? What is the means of avoiding all of this? If they confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their fathers with their unfaithfulness in which they were unfaithful to me and that they also have walked contrary to me and that I also have walked contrary to them and have brought them into the land of their enemies, if their uncircumcised hearts are humbled and they accept their guilt, then I will remember my covenant with Jacob and my covenant with Isaac and my covenant with Abraham. I will remember. I will remember the land.

The land will be left empty by them and will enjoy its Sabbaths while it lies desolate without them. They will accept their guilt because they despised my judgments and because their soul abhorred my statutes. Yet, for all that, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not cast them away, nor shall I abhor them to utterly destroy them and break my covenant with them.

For I am the Lord, their God. It's an awful thing to remember that these things are all happening to believers, to people who are going to be resurrected and live with God eternally. But, for their sake, I will remember the covenant of their ancestors whom I brought out of the land of Egypt in the sight of the nations, that I might be their God.

I am the Lord. This illuminates our understanding of Cain's fate. And we see that Cain, in many ways, foreshadows the fate of the nation of Israel who kills the righteous son.

But rather than being utterly destroyed, rather than suffering a death penalty himself, he is banished and becomes a wanderer in the land of wandering. But I believe that Cain, like the nation of Israel, will ultimately be resurrected. He has a covenant with God.

God sets a mark on him, just as God has set a mark on the nation of Israel. And that nation of Israel is going to be restored and is going to enjoy the fulfillment of covenant

blessings in the millennial kingdom. Now, the curse that God pronounces on Cain, He says, My punishment is greater than I can bear.

Surely you have driven me out this day from the face of the ground. I shall be hidden from your face. I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond on the earth, and so forth.

We don't really sense the gravity of that curse. We think, well, how bad can it be? I mean, he's going to be driven out, but there's lots of nice places on the earth, and maybe he's not going to be able to farm much, but obviously he lives a long time and has sons and daughters, so how bad could it have been? We're going to pause and take our break, and when we come back, we're going to explore simultaneously Cain's curse, the curse on Israel, and the meaning that that has for us, not only as a warning, but also the emphasis that it places on the remedy and the importance of understanding that remedy and taking advantage of it ourselves. Let's pause now and take a break.