

## Justice, Vengeance, and Mercy

### Aim for Change:

1. EXPLORE God's justice in the face of human sinfulness
2. REFLECT on the dangers of allowing sin to control us
3. REPENT of thoughts and actions that could harm others and ask for God's mercy and forgiveness

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*How do you react when someone confronts you about your harmful actions, attitudes, or behaviors? Do you have an open mind and heart to listen to what is being said? As you're being addressed, are you trying to find ways to play the victim?*

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### Background:

- Sons were important to the Hebrew people for a variety of reasons
  - ability to farm and herd animals as it was vital to their survival
  - having multiple sons gained a certain measure of respect from the community
- Cain and Abel are not just a story about sibling rivalry
  - Reflects the willingness and desire to be a good and faithful servant of the resources God had given
  - Reflects wanting God's favor without putting forth his best effort to get it

*What works have you done to demonstrate your faith and/or your relationship with God? Were there any that you regretted? That you could've done differently if you went to God in prayer first.*

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### The People, Places, and Times:

- **First fruits**
  - Reference the choicest examples of the harvest that should be dedicated to God (Exodus 23:19; Leviticus 23:10; Numbers 18:12; Deuteronomy 26:2)
  - God promises prosperity to those who honor God with their first fruits (Proverbs 3:9)
  - A person or small group that represents a special, preeminent treasure, Israel (Jeremiah 2:3)
  - Christ, in His resurrection, for those who have died (1 Corinthians 15:20, 23)
  - The Holy Spirit (Romans 8:23)
  - Believers (James 1:18)
- **Firstborn**
  - Required to be dedicated to God in remembrance of the *Passover* when God claimed all the firstborns
  - Included a double portion of the family estate and leadership in the family
- Upon death of the father, the firstborn could keep the inheritance, sell it as Esau did (Genesis 25:29-34) or forfeit it due to misconduct, as Reuben (Genesis 35:22)

*How do you give the first and the best to God in your offerings, including time, talent, and money?*

**Focal Verses:**

***Genesis 4:1-7 – The First Brothers***

- Adam knew Eve – doesn't just mean sexual relations, it is also an intellectual, spiritual, and emotional depth
- Eve knew she had gotten a man from God – remembering childbirth as part of her curse, it was only by His help that she survived
- Cain, which means acquired/possession was born first
- Abel, which means transitoriness or vanity was born next (no specifics if they were twins as in Genesis 25:24; 38:27)
  - Eve thought that Cain was the promised seed, she was taken back when she had Abel
- The brothers performed the oldest professions in existence: keeping the flocks, keeping the fields
- Cain tilled the ground while Abel tended the flocks
- Even though they both knew God, there was a contrast amongst their worshipping attitudes
  - The sacrifice of animals was to bring thanks to God and a way to express gratitude to God as the One who owns everything
    - Abel brought the firstlings of his flock and the fat thereof (Exodus 13:12; Numbers 18:17; Proverbs 3:9)
  - Grain offering was acceptable but only if conducted in the proper manner (Leviticus 2)
  - Regardless of the type of offering, if done incorrectly, it can lead to rejection and divine displeasure (Leviticus 10:1-2)
  - Not all gifts are equal before God as it's not about the gift, but the heart and attitude
  - Cain accepts the curse, while Abel tries to build something beautiful from it
- God gave the opportunity to master sin by engaging in conversation, but Cain refused and became angry (Hebrews 11:4)
- Cain wanted a righteous reward without the demonstration of righteous
- The prophets record that sacrifice without inner righteousness is not pleasing to God

***When was the last time you had a conversation with God and heard Him especially where your offering is concerned? Where was your heart? Do you see your offering at work in your life? If not, reevaluate before giving, so God can bless you.***

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***Genesis 4:8-9 – Jealousy Leads to Sin***

- Anger can provoke you to do/act in a way that is out of character for you
- God attempted to draw Cain into talking about the source and reason for his bitterness, but Cain refused to listen to the wisdom of God

***When God sends a messenger to help in times of distress, how receptive are you to acknowledge Him?***

- Sin will make you feel no sense of responsibility for what happened, just as Cain did
- Since Cain could not rise to the same spiritual level as Abel, his anger overtook him to the point of killing his own brother

## Justice, Vengeance, and Mercy

- God tried yet again to have a conversation with Cain (shows God is a loving, merciful, and listening God as He has given Cain multiple opportunities to save face)
  - God wanted Cain to focus on the sin itself and not the specifics of the sin
  - Our Father asks more questions to call him into righteous consciousness
- Cain didn't like the accountability, so he had his own rebuttal: "Am I my brother's keeper?"
  - Our Father didn't give in to this type of behavior, said yes and continued to ask questions knowing he could act differently

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### ***Genesis 4:10-16 – God Deals with Cain***

- (v. 10) the voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground represents that Abel's blood asked God (because of their relationship) to help administer the justice that he did not receive in life
- The first time a curse is placed directly on a human being
  - Refrained from cursing Adam and Eve, God cursed the ground because of Adam and cursed Eve with future anxieties and pains concerning children
  - Cain's parents would still be able to yield freely, but know they had to put in sweat (work) to put forth the yield (Leviticus 26:20; Deuteronomy 11:17)
- Cain finally exhibits sorrow for his punishment, but not the misdeed, complaining that it's more than he can bear
  - Became of no significance, doomed to stagger, become a wonderer with no purpose in mind
  - Driven out from the face of the Earth
  - Hidden from the face of God
  - A fugitive and vagabond (to run scared)

***Have you ever received a punishment that you thought you couldn't bear? Those who walk upright with God don't receive punishment. If you are, evaluate your relationship with Him. It might just make a difference.***

- Cain's sin was unpardonable as he displayed no desire of repentance or reconciliation with our God
- The broken covenant between Cain and God was due to Cain's lack of faith and not God's lack of mercy
- God listened to Cain's plea and showed mercy, while Cain showed none
  - God's ways are not our ways
  - God took away capital punishment, which would have been fair judgment
- Sometimes even after receiving mercy sin separates us from right relationship with God
- We remove ourselves from His presence, His divination, and the only rightful place to find justice and mercy when we disregard the place of God before all creation or disregard those who bear His image

**Discuss the Meaning:**

1. Why was it easier for Cain to focus on Abel rather than on himself and his own offerings to the Lord?
  2. Are you your “brother’s” keeper? Look for biblical references to support the fact that believers do bear some responsibility for one another. (**Galatians 6:2**; Matthew 25:35; James 5:16; Romans 12:17-21, **15:1**; Ephesians 4:15-16, 6:12; Colossians 3:9-10; **1 Thessalonians 5:14-23**; 1 John 3:16-18)
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**Application for Activation:**

- Take an honest assessment of yourself to determine if anything is hindering your walk with God.
- Your walk with God will determine the outcome of any relationship you have
  - Parental, children, external family, friends, coworkers, parishioners, etc.
- Our Father is the only way to true peace, both internally and externally (Exodus 14:14, 18:23; Luke 1:79, 24:36; John 14:27)