

Prayer

I praise You, Lord Jesus, because You have done for me something that is impossible for my mind to grasp, my heart to comprehend or my feelings to appreciate; You have loved me without condition and made me Yours. Somewhere within my spirit lies the unspoken yet powerful bond by which You draw me heavenward, and I praise You for Your amazing love, Lord Jesus Christ; I will not let You go! AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Local Services

Pray today for those who are active in community affairs in your neighbourhood. Ask God to bless their work, and pray that they will do a good work without political hindrance.

On-going prayers

- Give thanks for those who are working to find peace in the world
- Pray that the benefits of science will be shared for the good of all
- Pray for people who are working to restore broken communities

Meditation

My soul cries out to the true and living God:
Save me from all sin, and deliver me from evil;
Save me from what this means, both now and always.

Save me Lord God, for just like everyone else
I 'miss the mark' in all the normal things of life,
Yet cannot understand why things go wrong.

Save me, Lord Jesus, from rejecting what is right,
And rebelling against the truth within my heart:
for though I know my sin, I'm powerless to stop:

Save me, Holy Spirit, from the oppression of my guilt,
Which holds my spirit down when I want so much to rise;
And break the stranglehold of Satan on my soul.

My soul cries out to the true and living God;
Save me from all sin, and deliver me from evil.
Set me free to be, to serve You guiltless, evermore.

Bible Study - Genesis 4:1-7

¹ Adam made love with his wife Eve, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Cain. She said, 'I have produced a man with the help of the LORD.' ² She also gave birth to his brother Abel. Now Abel became a shepherd, and Cain worked the land.

³ In due course Cain brought an offering to the LORD of the fruit of the ground, ⁴ whilst Abel brought the fat portions of the first and best of his flock. And the LORD was most pleased with Abel's offering, ⁵ but He was not impressed with Cain and his offering. So Cain was furious and utterly downcast.

⁶ Then the LORD said to Cain, 'Why are you so angry and upset? ⁷ If you do well, should you not take heart? And if you do not do well, sin is hanging around the doorway; its desire is for you, but you must conquer it.'

Review

The story of Cain and Abel is a well known tale of two brothers, the sons of Adam and Eve, who fall out with each other over the work they do. It is a story that eventually ends in tragedy when in the passage which follows this, one kills another. It is a very ancient tale that can be understood at many levels, but here in its place within scripture immediately after the story of the Fall (Gen 3), it illustrates the power and extent of the sin that has now entered humanity. Eating an apple, as Eve and Adam did could hardly be described as a sin; but it was done in direct disobedience to God and what He had commanded, and the spiritual significance of what was done was immense. Now, although God may not have specifically forbidden the committing of murder at this point in the general history of humanity, it was certainly against the natural order of what was good within His creation. The story of Cain and Abel graphically illustrates the depths of human sin and depravity generated by the Fall.

The older and the younger, Cain and Abel Today's reading relates the beginning of this story, and introduces the two characters, Eve's sons, Cain the eldest, and Abel the youngest. Frequently in scripture, names have meanings; however, the two brothers have names with no immediately obvious meanings or connections in Hebrew. There may be a play on words involved in Cain's name, which is similar to the Hebrew word for 'produced', and this is referred to in Eve's declaration at his birth; 'I have produced a man with the help of the Lord' (4:1). This expresses the overcoming of fear after God's pronouncement of difficulty in labour (3:16), but this does not help our understanding of the passage in general. What does help us is to remember that Genesis has a general theme throughout, in which the younger is favoured over the older (for example, Isaac prefers Jacob to the elder Esau - Gen 27, or see Jacob's special treatment of Joseph over his jealous brothers - Gen 37).

The favour of God The whole of today's story is about God's favour shown towards Abel instead of the elder Cain, for reasons that are not immediately clear, and which evidently create much distress. This is a sign of things to come, and a significant mystery of God's dealings with His people. Yet if we think about this a little more, we may realise that here there is a reflection of the general mystery of God's grace. We do not ever know why it is that God chose Abraham and not Lot, or why you or I have been blessed with faith, and others have not. Our attempts at understanding the 'why's and wherefores' of this all end in as much failure as scholars attempt to figure out why Abel was favoured over Cain.

Towards the end of the passage, The Lord spoke to Cain after his offering had not been accepted, and reminded him that if he had offered his best (he originally brought a sample rather than 'the best', see v3), then he would have had nothing to worry about, favoured or not. The implication is that he had not really put his all into the first offering and knew it, and that as a consequence, sin was lurking around the corner (4:7). These words of God were prophetic, as we shall find out tomorrow.

Numbers! Within the stories of Genesis are some remarkable word structures which can surprise us today because they are so unfamiliar to us. One of these features is the use of numbers, and in particular the number seven. In the story of Cain and Abel which is split between today and tomorrow, Abel is mentioned seven times, and Cain is mentioned twice that, fourteen times! The number seven, of course, was regarded as a 'complete' number. Other examples of this way of constructing stories to make them 'complete' are found in the use of the Hebrew word 'erezt' meaning 'earth' which is contained seven times within the

second account of the Creation (from Genesis 2:4ff). In addition; the name of God (in different forms) occurs 35 times in the first account of creation (Gen 1:1 – 2:4), and 35 times in the second account (Gen 2:4 – 4:26)! This gives a total of 70, and the last and seventieth use of the name of God is in Genesis 4:26, where it says 'at that time people began to invoke the Name of the Lord!' This concludes the opening stories of Genesis.

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. What different forms of work cause division between people today, and why?
2. What are the key differences between Abel's and Cain's offerings to God? Why do we think that what God did was unfair?
3. What issues in the life of the church are like sin that 'hangs around the door' and what can be done about this?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

At the heart of this passage of scripture lies reactions of jealousy and cultural self centeredness which bedevil the life of the church even today. As you consider this, make sure that you could not be accused of fermenting unnecessary division and strife amongst God's people by taking views on things that are more akin to cultural assumptions than the Word of God. Try to ensure that you help others to rise above both themselves and popular culture in matters of faith and worship, and challenge them when you see these kinds of divisions being created. God's people have surely moved beyond the failings of Cain, or does he still represent the failings of many people who worship God?

Ideas for discipleship programme

- *Think about why God has blessed you. Has this come at someone else's expense, or their perceived expense? Is there anything you can do about this, or should you leave this alone?*
- *Pray for all those who find it hard to understand either their brother or their sister, and find that family relationships are very hard to sustain. Pray that they will be able to rest in God's love and place their family into His hands.*

Final Prayer

Heavenly Lord, in your mercy, listen to my prayer. I pray your blessing on those I love, and on those who trouble me. I pray for your will to be done in my life, and in the lives of all for whom I now pray. Lead me day by day to do Your will, and may I not come into conflict with others unnecessarily. Thank You, heavenly Lord; AMEN