

**Genesis 4**  
**The Reviews Come In**  
**Notes from a sermon preached at**  
**Christ Church Liverpool**

ENTJ. Extroverted thinking with introverted intuition. That's me. At least according to the Myers Briggs type indicator scheme. According to this people with ENTJ preferences are:

*"Natural leaders and organisation builders. They conceptualise and theorise readily and translate possibilities into plans to achieve short-term and long-term objectives."*

Less positively ENTJs can be...

*"Too impersonal and critical; intrusive and abrasive."*

Myers Briggs is a personality framework that explores preferences for taking in information and making decisions. You answer a number of questions and, according to your answers, are assigned a type that best expresses your preferences. According to Myers Briggs there are 16 types of people – varying in extremes, some sitting right on the borderline between a number of sets of preferences – but 16 basic types.

Some of you may have done learning styles questionnaires which identify 4 ways that people learn – abstract concepts, concrete experiences, reflective observation and practical experiment. 4 types of learning styles.

Some people are quite uneasy about this whole approach. They don't like the idea that people can be categorised. Even with appropriate qualifications and caveats they aren't comfortable with the idea that we can say anything at all useful about people simply with 4 letters – ENTJ or whatever they may be.

So what about the Bible?

Do Christians have anything useful to contribute to the discussion of whether or not we can legitimately say that there are different types of people?

Well at one level the Bible seems to side with those who are uneasy about the whole approach of categorising people into "types".

God's Word celebrates and rejoices in the diversity of humanity and the specific gifts of individuals.

So here in chapter 4 we have, v20, Jabal, the model farmer.

We have Jubal, the first semi-professional musician.

And we have Tubal-Cain, the first engineer.

And on through the rest of the pages of Scripture we find great diversity and creativity in humankind.

The Bible celebrates the individual. Not individualism. But individuality. Not the idea that we can do things on our own. But the idea that each of us is unique and significant in God's universe.

But, it seems to me, the Bible has more to say than that. Because the Bible does recognise types of people. At one level, and we've seen this last week in Chapter 3, there is only one type of person.

3:23 – *"So the Lord God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken."*

In one vital sense we are all the same. There is, according to the Bible, a human condition, common to us all. We are all living outside the garden. Rebels against God by nature, living under his judgment and excluded from his presence. That is the result of Adam's unique sin that brought exile to humanity. AND it is the result of our own individual and deliberate choices to reject the God who made us and live as if we were kings of our own lives.

If the Bible recognised types they could be denoted by just one letter:

S

Sinful. We are all S.

But that Bible has more to say even than that. Because Genesis 4 introduces a theme that will run throughout the whole of the rest of the Bible's account of humanity.

Genesis 4 introduces us to the idea that, though we are all S, all sinful, there are two types of people living in God's world. Two types of people. Two lines in the human race. And those lines are clearly seen in the true story of Adam and Eve's family where we find...

**1 Two different brothers (v1-2)**

It must have been a moment of great joy – the first birth. Not only the wonderful and profound sense of awe that all new parents feel but the hope that this might be the serpent crusher.

After all hadn't God said that Eve's offspring would be the one who would crush Satan's head?

That's probably what Eve means when she names Cain: With the help of the Lord, she says, I have brought forth a man"

After all you wouldn't describe a new born boy as "a man" – it suggests Eve has a hope that he will do some great thing to reverse the judgments God has brought upon them. Well he will indeed do great things. But not great good.

What an indictment on humanity – the first human born will be the first murderer and the second, Abel, literally "breath", will be his victim.

## 2 Two approaches to worship (v3-5)

It all started with their offerings. Abel, the shepherd, brought... well sheep. As you do. And Cain, the worker of the ground, brought... well vegetables. As you would.

But whereas God has regard for Abel and his offering he did not accept either Cain's offering or Cain himself.

Now, as you may be able to imagine, there has been an inordinately large amount of ink spilt discussing how it was that Cain and Abel knew that God had accepted their offerings, or not.

Was it because God still appeared in some way outside the garden and told them?

Was it because the smoke from Abel's offering rose to the heavens and Cain's didn't?

Well we simply don't know. The text doesn't tell us and it's always a stupid idea to try and find things in the Bible that simply aren't there to be found.

And even more ink has been spilt trying to work out why it was that God accepted one offering and not the other.

Lots of people suggest that it's to do with the fact that Abel's offering involves the shedding of blood. And that only a sacrifice of an animal is an acceptable way of entering God's presence.

Well it's certainly true that later in the Old Testament God does make it clear to the people of Israel that only by the shedding of blood can there be forgiveness for sin. And the sin offerings that they were to make were always of animals.

But we have no reason to suppose that Cain and Abel knew that. If that was the reason it's odd that the author of Genesis doesn't tell us.

And in any case the word used for an "offering" here for both Cain and Abel is the word usually used for an offering of grain or oil in the rest of the Old Testament. So I don't think it can be anything to do with the fact that God isn't into vegetables.

Others have suggested that it is the quality of what is offered that was the problem with Cain. After all the text says that Abel brought the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions. That is definitely the language of quality in the Bible and does suggest that Abel brought the best that he had to God. Whereas all we are told about Cain's offering is that he brought "an offering of the fruit of the ground." Could it be that Cain's offering was a bit scraggy? A few tatty leeks and slightly mouldy carrots? Well possibly. But even if that was the case I think the passage makes it clear that this wasn't the primary problem.

*V4: "And the Lord looked with favour on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favour."*

The problem isn't mainly with the offering – the problem is with Cain. I think Cain could have brought exactly the same things as Abel and God would still not have accepted them. Because the problem was in Cain's heart. The fact that what he brought may not have been of the best was merely a symptom of the attitude to God that was developing in Cain's innermost thoughts.

The book of Hebrews in the New Testament clarifies this for us: *By faith Abel offered a better sacrifice than Cain.* It is the faith here, the attitude to God, that is most important. And Cain's reaction demonstrates the true state of his heart. *Cain was very angry, v5 there, and his face was downcast.*

He thought he had earned God's favour. He thought God SHOULD accept him. Whereas Abel came by faith. Faith is not a worship technique. Faith recognises that God is not a slot machine that we should be able to put in the right sacrifices and out come the right blessings. Faith recognises that no matter how many times we sing a chorus we have no claim on God to bring revival. Faith recognises that no matter how many 24/7 prayer weeks we hold there is no technique that can force a blessing out of God. Faith sees that no matter how many all night vigils we hold for a sick person we cannot presume any right to healing. Faith understands that God is sovereign and that what we must do is throw ourselves on his mercy.

Still today there are two approaches to worship. Cain's spiritual descendents think that what they do means that God should bless them.

Some think that they live pretty decent lives and never hurt anyone and, despite the fact that they have never even acknowledged the existence of the God of the Bible, he should look after them.

Others think that if we only sing enough, if we pump up the volume of our choruses, then some worship leader will be able to bring us into God's presence and his blessing.

Well both of those are terrible insults against God. Because they are both worshipping like Cain. No obedience, no singing, no offering you bring will make you acceptable to God.

Faith understands that God is sovereign and that what we must do is throw ourselves on his mercy.

### **3 Rejecting God brings death (v6-16)**

But Cain will not do that. Despite God's encouragement that if Cain repents and trusts God he will accept him. Despite God's warning that sin will take over his life if he does not fight it by throwing himself on God's mercy. Despite all that Cain continues to reject God.

And his hatred of God is expressed in his slaughter of his brother.

And that is how it has always been.

If our theology is wrong. If we do not understand God rightly. If we reject his sovereign rule. Then our ethics will be wrong – we will not treat other people rightly.

The ultimate statement of the state of Cain's heart and attitude towards God wasn't seen in the fact that his veg were a bit class B.

That wasn't how much he despised God. It was when he murdered his brother that he demonstrated what he really thought of God.

Now that's not to say of course that any given person who does not understand and love the God of the Bible will always be a murderer or that they will be particularly and noticeably wicked.

But it is to say that if we do not take seriously what God says about himself we will not take seriously what he says about other people either.

Cain murdered his brother. A human being, made in the image of God.

That was where his rejection of God was most clearly demonstrated. That was where what lay in his heart was exposed.

And in our society too it is because our theology is wrong, because we do not believe what God has said about himself, that our ethics are wrong – we do not believe what God has said about other people.

You see that in the xenophobia of the red top tabloids about immigration – whereas God's word is quite clear that those who trust in him are always to be welcoming the alien and stranger amongst them.

You see it in the hypocrisy of a society where the worst crime imaginable is killing a child but which allows the killing of 180,000 unborn children every year.

You see it in each of our lives where our failure to really believe what we say we believe about God's character means we fail to treat other people as we ought.

If our theology is wrong. Then our ethics will be wrong – we will not treat other people rightly.

And so we see another way in which rejecting God brings death.

Not this time directly by God's judgment.

But because rejecting God human beings bring death to one another.

When God came searching for Adam and asked him what he had done he prevaricated. He told partial truths and evaded responsibility.

But Cain's heart is harder. He tells a bare faced lie.

*"Am I the shepherd's shepherd?"* he asks, no doubt sounding very irritated that anybody should think he might know where Abel is.

But Cain does know where Abel is. And so, v10 does God.

*"What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground."*

The blood that I caused to flow in your brother's veins, Cain, has been spilt on the ground that I created. Don't you think that I know about that? Do you really think you can hide your deeds from me?

And, just as it did with Adam, God's judgment on Cain affects his relationship with the very world he lives in. Now not even sweat and toil will be sufficient to make the ground yield its fruit. Cain will have to find new ways to live in the desert places to which God is sending him.

But even here, in the face of Cain's heinous sin and God's terrifying judgment there is mercy.

For though rejecting God brings death God will not allow just anyone to deal in death.

Though Cain is a murderer, God marks Cain – we don't know how he did that, the text doesn't tell us – but he marks Cain to make it clear that God has judged him and that no one else from Adam's line should think it their place to exercise vengeance on him.

Death, destruction, judgment. These are the fruit of rejecting God.

And then, a most striking line, Cain went away from the presence of the Lord and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden.

Rejecting God bring death.

And the way the New Testament applies this terrifying story is not as a condemnation of a godless world.

It is as a warning to Christian people.

*Do not be like Cain*, the apostle John wrote to the churches of the 1<sup>st</sup> century.

*Do not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother.*

*For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.*

And if we don't it demonstrates that we don't love God.

#### **4 Godless Cain's line develops AND degenerates (v17-24)**

Cain's line still lives east of Eden. Godless humanity builds cities, and names them after itself. Godless humanity develops agriculture, v20, music and the arts, v21, and science and technology, v22. And godless humanity morally degenerates.

Lamech, 7<sup>th</sup> generation from Adam, introduces the gross and obvious sin of polygamy – he subverts God's creation pattern of one man, one woman, faithful forever.

And he glorifies violence. The original action man. No room for God's justice in Lamech's life. For just a scratch he will kill a man. The glory of war and strength is his code.

Godless humanity multiples sin and violence.

Sound familiar? What will God do in the face of such rebellion and rejection of his rule?

Well firstly he will limit the lifespan of man. They will not reach out and take from the tree of life and live forever.

They will die. Every one of them. As a way of limiting the violence and horror and sin.

But despite the fact that all are sinners. Despite the fact that all die. Despite the fact that all humanity is in the same boat.

There are two types of people in God's world.

And...

#### **5 Godly Seth's line leaves hints of hope (v25-26)**

V25 is a flashback.

Having seen through the generations to godless Lamech the writer now takes us back to the first couple who give birth to a 3<sup>rd</sup> son.

And whereas v16 ends with Cain, who Eve thought might be the serpent crusher, going away from the presence of the Lord, v26 ends with people calling on the name of the Lord.

Expressing their dependence on him.

And in that is hope. For when a serpent crusher comes he will come from God.

7 generations through Cain's line takes you to godless Lamech.

7 generations through Seth's line takes you to godly Enoch, who walked with God.

And a few generations later again there is another Lamech. But this Lamech does not take multiple wives. He has a son, a son named Noah, who will feature very significantly when we come back to Genesis in a few weeks time.

Seth's line will produce the serpent crusher.

Still today there are two types of people.

There are those who call upon the name of the Lord. And there are those who go away from the presence of the Lord in the land of wandering.

And the question this passage is asking of us this morning is: which type of person are you?

Skillful, inventive, creative, brilliant, but ultimately godless?

Or humble, dependent, calling on the name of the Lord?

Are you someone who brings their offering believing that your service offered to God – your good deeds, your prayers, your songs, your church attendance – means that God flipping well ought to bless you?

Are you a Cain?

Or like Seth's descendants do you recognise your helplessness and call on the name of the Lord? Cry to him for salvation, help and mercy.

The Christian life is grace from beginning to end. It is trusting in God's serpent crusher, Jesus, for rescue.

And as soon as we begin to call on our skill, our intelligence, our service, our sacrifice, as soon as we begin to call, to trust on anything other than the name of the Lord we demonstrate we are in the line of Cain.

And that leads only to death.

Andrew Evans  
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