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Zombie: Dying to Be Happy Genesis 3:20 - 4:16

This morning we conclude our sermon series, "Zombie." Some might wonder, "Why would you choose 'Zombie' as a title for a sermon series? Aren't you just trying to play off our current cultural fascination with zombies? Just trying to be clever?" Well, of course! Who doesn't want to be "with it?" But I also believe that the idea of a zombie makes an important point about the power of sin in our life. Sin—disobedience to God, living our own way—is not just unfortunate or naughty. Sin is destructive. It is deadly.

A little boy was brought into the emergency room with two broken legs. He had chased his ball into the street and been hit by a car. Sometime later when he was being checked out, the discharge nurse asked him, "The next time your ball rolls into the street, what will you do?" "Send my sister," he replied. This morning we come to an awful story. Not only does a man send his brother into harm's way... he leads him there. Before we get there, we need to set some context. (Read 20-24)

I talked last week with another man who lost his house. What made it even harder is he built this house. This was their dream home! God provided a beautiful garden to be a paradise for Adam and Eve. But now, that is gone, too. The decision to disobey God by eating the forbidden fruit continues to have deadly, alienating consequences: alienation from God, alienation from themselves, alienation from each other, alienation from the very soil. And now, they are alienated from their dream home.

But even in this act of discipline, we see God's grace don't we? Look at verse 21: "The Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them." They were about to leave the comfort of the garden. But God still loves His children and wants to care for them. So He kills animals and uses their skins to clothe Adam and Eve. And we discover yet another deadly consequence of sin, don't we? Sin kills. (Read 1-7)

Now we turn to the story of the first children. And the beat goes on. Cain was a farmer; Abel was a shepherd. We are told that "in the course of time" they both brought an offering to the Lord. Cain brings some of his harvest; Abel brings portions of an animal. God is pleased with Abel's offering but he is not pleased with Cain's. Now, why?

Is it because God is a carnivore? My daughter Rachel is an avowed carnivore whose dear friend, Madeline, is a vegetarian. So when our family visited a famous burger joint on vacation, Rachel bought a T-shirt that she knew would tweak her friend a little bit. "Meat is murder. Tasty, tasty murder."

So is that the deal? Is God a carnivore who hates his vegetables? No? Then why was God displeased? Look again. "Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil." But Abel brought... what? "...fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock." This is not about God liking

animals more than plants. It's about the heart of the giver. Cain offered God his leftovers. Abel offered God his first fruits... the very first and very best of the product of his hand. Cain's offering was half-hearted, resentful perhaps. Abel's offering was one of genuine gratitude. Cain viewed his offering as an obligation by a demanding God. Abel viewed his offering as a privilege given to a gracious God.

One of the things you discover quickly as a pastor is the difference between the "Cain heart" and the "Abel heart" among your parishioners. There are some who, like Abel, are grateful to God, generous and give first fruits... they offer to the Lord the very first and very best of what they make. Unfortunately, there are many others who are resentful about "having" to give, who do not give at all or, if they do, it is from their leftovers. Obviously, when a church has more "Abels" than "Cains," stewardship-wise, it is a blessing for the ministry. But you will not find a story in the Bible that declares more clearly the spiritual nature of giving than this one. And it's worth pausing to ask yourself, "When it comes to the matter of my heart regarding giving, generosity, gratitude towards God...am I Abel? Or am I Cain?"

And notice this. When Cain realizes that his leftover offering is not pleasing to God, what is his response? Anger! He gets very angry. You would not believe the letters I have received over the years from people who were angry because I taught what the Bible says about first fruits and tithing. The letters never come from generous people. It's always the folks who give nothing who are the maddest. Cain didn't have to respond that way. He could have said, "You're right, Lord. I am being stingy. I'm sorry! Here, let me try again." Instead, he gets mad and pouts.

And God calls him on it. "Then the Lord said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? 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 master it."

We discover pretty quickly that neither plants nor animals are the issue. Cain's crummy offering is a symptom of a crummy heart... a crummy attitude toward God. It is the symptom of sin eating away at him. And God poses this powerful image to Cain: "Sin is crouching at your door." That is an ancient Babylonian phrase that meant a demon who was lying in wait outside a building, ready to pounce on the people who walked through the door.

We recently had a home invasion near our neighborhood. We are always careful about locking up but I guarantee you that now, as I leave in the morning, I look more carefully to make sure that no bad guy is crouching in the bushes to harm my family.

The next part of the verse is also fascinating: "...it desires to have you." Do you know the last time that Hebrew word appeared? Back in 3:16, in Eve's curse: "Your desire will be for your husband." Here's what that means: part of Eve's curse is the desire to use her beauty to seductively control and manipulate him. (Of course no woman in this room has ever done such a thing!) But here we discover that sin seeks to do the same thing... to use its seductive nature to manipulate and destroy.

I've been telling you throughout this series that sin is deadly. You will find no clearer description of what sin wants to do to you than right here. Sin crouches in hiding with seductive passion waiting for a vulnerable moment to pounce on you and destroy you. Did

you realize that you have that kind of enemy? Hiding behind your desk at work, waiting to pounce. Waiting at the school dance to pounce? Waiting underneath your kitchen table to pounce? Are you even aware of the danger that you are in?

How can we spot sin crouching at Cain's door? Anger. Resentment. Bitterness. Towards God? No! Towards his little brother! What had Abel done to Cain? Nothing. He simply did good toward the Lord. He gave an offering that was heartfelt and pleasing to God. Cain didn't have to get mad. He could have chosen to be proud of his little brother. He could have bragged on him. Stephanie and her friends chose to cheer for their teammates on the field even though they wanted to be playing!

But, no way. Cain had grown to hate his little brother. This whole offering issue was just the latest in a long-running series of sibling rivalries. But at least God caught it in time, right? God used this moment to pull Cain aside, give him a talking-to, help him recognize his out-of-control behavior and turn things around before it was too late. Right? (Read 8-16)

Are there any brothers here together this morning? Would you stand up? What do you think of this story? This is one of the most horrible moments in the Bible. Fratricide. A brother killing his own brother. Even those of you who have a horrible relationship with your sibling... even if you have ever said, "Ooooooh, you make me so mad I just want to kill you." ...you didn't mean it. You wouldn't do it. The thought of taking the life of your own mother's child... inconceivable.

With the exception of Judas, you will not find a more cold-blooded, treacherous act in the Bible than right here. Cain stands there...listens to God's warning... "sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it..." ...and in the very next verse, he leads his unsuspecting brother out into a field and kills him. Awful.

Notice the parallel between this and what happened after Adam and Eve sinned. Remember God's question in the garden? "Adam, where are you?" What's God's question here? "Where is your brother, Abel?" Notice the lie... the defensiveness. "I don't know! Am I my brother's keeper?" Just as Adam tried to hide behind fig leaves, this chip-off-the-old-block tries to hide behind deception and indignation. "How should I know where that spoiled brat is? Am I my brother's keeper?"

What is the answer to his own phony question? "Yes! Of course you are your little brother's keeper. At the very least, you are not your brother's murderer!" God continues: "What have you done? Listen! Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground!" God confronts Cain with his treachery and banishes him. But notice Cain's response. Does he repent? When God calls him on this horrible sin, does he throw himself on his face before the Lord, beg for forgiveness? No! This story is all about Cain. His offering. His anger. His resentment. His revenge for his humiliation. And it continues to be about him. "My punishment is more than I can bear. 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."

Not one word of repentance. Not one word of remorse. Even now, he still doesn't get it. He whines because he will be a wanderer over the face of the earth... forgetting that his still-warm brother lies beneath the earth by his cruel hand.

How do you spell "sin?" Really, it should be spelled this way: "sIn." Because at the center of all sin is "I." Remember when Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit? Their eyes were opened and immediately, they began to look at themselves. They became self-absorbed. All sin is self-absorbed. All sin is centered around "I." What I want. What I feel. How I have been wronged. How I am a victim. How I will have my restitution, my vengeance, my day in court.

A newspaper in London once ran this question for their readers response: "What is wrong with the world?" (How would you answer that?) Two days later, the following letter to the editor appeared. "Dear Sirs: I am. Sincerely yours, G.K. Chesterton." Chesterton, a famous Christian writer, had it exactly right. And it is only when we realize how sin is I-centered that we can be delivered from it.

Cain is the quintessential zombie! Every death, every alienation that we have looked at over the last few weeks, we find in self-centered Cain: Alienation from God, alienation from himself, from his brother, from the earth. And the most horrible thing is he never sees it. He never sees how sin has crouched and sprung and taken him out... he just whines is way into an isolated life of self-pity and blame.

One of the things I hoped to show by this sermon series is just how awful sin is. We don't see sin that way. Oh, we can point to Cain's sin or Hitler's sin or the sin of that man who stabbed his wife and kidnapped her baby—we can point to that kind of sin—and we think that is horrible. But the stuff we do? The "little" things we do? That's no big deal, right? That little lie to my parents. That stuff we did at the dance. My fudged expense report? A little porn on my iPhone. That's not that serious, right?

I saw a YouTube video recently. The family dog killed a squirrel, and the three year old daughter found it. Take a look! [Video] How many of you moms were horrified by this little girl petting and playing with a disease-infested rodent? Do you realize that this is exactly how we tend to treat "our" sin? We coddle it, protect it, make excuses for it...all because we like it. We like our sin.

So, what's to be done? Do you know what Paul says must be done with sin? Kill it! How? Do we pull out a shotgun and shoot it dead? How do we kill the sin that turns us into spiritual zombie? We can't. But Jesus can. And that is the heart of the good news. This sin that lives in each of us—that crouches at the doors of our lives to pounce on and destroy us—Jesus killed it on the cross. Sin tried to kill Jesus but it failed. And everyone who trusts in Jesus is set free. Rom 6:6: "For we know that our old self [that's Sin] was crucified with [Christ] so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin... count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus."

The terrible news of this Genesis story is that sin is real and destructive and ready to pounce on us. The good news of the gospel is that in Jesus Christ, the curse of sin is broken! And we find Him throughout this ancient story. It is Jesus who crushes the head of the serpent. It is Jesus whose blood is shed to provide a protective cover over us, just like the animals in the garden. And it is Jesus who is the good big brother... the one who comes looking for us when we are far away from the Father to bring us back to Him.

Have you trusted this good Big Brother to save you... to kill the sin that is killing you and give you real life?

SERMON DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- **READ** the passage out loud.
- **REFLECT & APPLY INDIVIDUALLY:** Each person take 5-7 minutes to circle words or phrases that jumped out at them; jot down your reflections; check the notes in your Study Bible for insight or help. Grapple with what the Spirit is saying to you, your group, the church—write down some applications.
- **REFLECT & APPLY TOGETHER:** Share your thoughts. Don't teach! Listen and reflect on God's word together; grapple with what God is calling us to do and be through this passage.
- **PRAY TOGETHER:** Tell the Lord one thing you are thankful for, and lay one concern before the Lord.
- **DIG DEEPER**
 1. Sum up the ways that sin brought death into the Garden of Eden.
 2. What kinds of alienation did Adam and Eve experience?
What was the difference between the gifts of Abel and Cain? Which "heart" do you possess when it comes to giving?
 3. How does Cain epitomize "Zombie" life? What is the only hope for dealing with sin as Paul describes it in Romans 6: 1-14?