

## **Fallen But Marked as God's Own based on Gen. 4, David Jahnke, 10/18/15**

I spoke last about why we should focus on Original blessings from God rather than the Original Sin of man. Another reason for this is that God is all about blessing and has nothing to do with sin, other than destroying it. And we always begin and end because God is the beginning and the end, the alpha and the omega, the creator and redeemer of everything. And between the beginning and the end-- in this murky middle— keeping our eyes and our ears— our hearts and our minds upon God fills us with strength that overcomes all of our weakness and hope that overcomes the sin and death that lead to despair.

Focusing on God does this by bringing God's image to life inside and around us. God is magnified within and without. And our hearts and minds and our view of the world begin to conform more and more to the wonderful things which we gaze upon and ponder. This is why Paul told the Philippians in his final exhortation to them to always think about "...whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable--if anything is excellent or praiseworthy-- think about such things. And the God of peace will be with you."

I say all of this at the beginning of my sermon and I will come back to it at the end...because here in the middle, I need to talk about humanity and sin. After the Original Blessings of Gen. 1 and 2, the next eight chapters are filled with how humans mess creation up. The mistakes of Adam and Eve in chapter three lead us into one of their sons murdering the other in chapter four. Why would Cain do this? It was rooted in his feelings of rejection and envy.

I have always been troubled by God's not looking upon Cain and his offering with favor. Why would one offering be received with favor and the other rejected? I think that Cain must have done something wrong for which he had not apologized or made up for. This may be the first biblical example of trying to pay God off with a sacrifice instead of dealing appropriately with wrongdoing; something which Israel's prophets spoke out against time and again. Amos says, **22** Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them. Instead let justice roll on like a river, and righteousness like a never-failing stream!"

This was one of the main issues that Martin Luther had with his own church. In the early 1500s, sins were literally thought of as debts to the church. So the church sold "indulgences" which allowed people to make payments for sins and be returned from a state of disfavor to a state of "grace."

Luther rightly understood this to be a terrible distortion of God's Word and Spirit which require no payment for the free gift of grace. But they also call us to repentance. And repentance means change-- changing our hearts and minds-- turning away completely from the Old Way in order to fully accept the New Way of Jesus.

Luther said God will never accept a few leftover fruits of our labor that we might carry on in the same sinful pattern of life. He followed in the footsteps of John the Baptist and said we must bear the fruits of repentance by seeking to live as God intended with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength.

I was talking with a fine man at the Y this week. He knows I am a pastor and he has told me a few times that he is a secular humanist who did not believe in waiting on some supreme being to make things right. But he was also a pragmatist who accepts the prayers of anyone, just in case there is a God; and that he lived in a way which made sure he was on the right side of the fence, just in case. I told him that if he was pursuing love, truth, peace and goodness that he was on God's path. But I should have also told him that occasional good deeds for supreme being who may or may not be there, just in case...this might not exactly be pleasing to that supreme being.

A friend of mine posted a Johnny Cash quote on Facebook this week. "I have learned that there is no sitting on the fence between Heaven and Hell." We either choose to struggle mightily to live according to the Kingdom of heaven as revealed by Jesus or we accept the alternative Kingdom in which sin and death reign. That involves shrugging our shoulders at the hell around us; thinking nothing much can be done; perhaps occasionally taking on a good deed or two for the sake of social convention or to assuage our nagging conscience.

That friends, is life under the fearful curse of Cain whose sin led him to believe that the world out there was out to get him; that out there, God's presence is hidden so he could die anytime. Cain's good work would feel like toil and, in general, he would feel as if he was aimlessly wandering through life. This is the human condition which every humanist struggles with...and plenty of religious folk as well!

But check out the miracle that happens next to Cain. God chooses to mark him— even right after the murder of his brother-- promising to protect him from death. And Cain went out and started a new life, getting married and having his own children.

I watched a movie this week called Baby Box. It is about babies being abandoned on streets in Asia by desperate mothers. The root of the problem is young people not knowing how much they are loved; not having the support they need; feeling rejected and not good enough.

When teens feel this way due to a broken relationship with their parents, they seek affirmation from their peers. Affirmation feels good as it should...but so do feelings of physical intimacy and drugs and alcohol. Some end up with addiction problems. Others get pregnant and impregnate. Shame and ostracism and hopelessness increase to the point of many young people throwing away the gift of life-- not only their own but that of their babies, either within the womb and sometimes after birth.

So in one city where this is happening, a pastor made a baby box for desperate, young mothers to leave their babies somewhere safe and warm and where someone will take them in. Many of the babies have Down's or other serious physical disabilities. And the love showered upon these children of God by the pastor and his team.

Here we see the choice always before us—life or death. Cain and the desperate mothers feel unworthy, insufficient and defeated...so they give into death. The pastor and his volunteers know the unconditional love of God and the promise of eternal life. So they give themselves over to the salvation and care of unwanted children.

So which of these Kingdoms do you believe in? Does death or life win in your view of the world? Do you have a nagging sense that it is all meaningless or an empowering trust that everything matters? Does skepticism toward others reign or gracious trust? Self-service or loving others as ourselves?

Our worldview largely determines how we live. And while our offerings of faith and faithfulness will always fall short, just as Cain's did, we cling to and give thanks for the one offering which suffices; Jesus' offering his own life on the cross. In him, we have been marked for life by God. All human sins died with him on the cross and he rose to show the world that we too will rise into eternal life. And as we put our sins to death and as we rise with him, even now, into

eternal life, we gain the strength and Spirit to press forward in saving God's children—hungry, homeless, orphans, those desperately on the run from war and persecution.

You will have many opportunities to do so in the weeks ahead here in the church in addition to daily opportunities to bless others. So give yourself over to the one who can do far more abundantly in us than all we can ask or imagine...to God be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus, now and forevermore. And God's people say...