

Envy East of Eden

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Date: 13 January 2019

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[0 : 00] Good morning, St. Marks. How are you all doing? How many of you are back at work? Indicate with your... Alright, well I'm going back tomorrow. And I can't believe that December has gone by so quickly.

In fact, I have the privilege of preaching the second Sunday of 2019. That's quite something. How many of us have started thinking about New Year's resolution?

I was thinking about New Year's resolutions. And as I read through this passage recently, I was thinking about contentment as Christians. Contentment in Christ.

How's that for a resolution for 2019? Now we're going to have a look at contentment this morning, but we're going to have a look at it in a new way. What we're going to do is we're going to look at contentment from the perspective of a lack of contentment.

So in other words, as we look at this particular story... We're going to look at what it looks like. We're going to study what envy looks like.

[1 : 06] What a life without contentment looks like as we look at Cain. So my title is simply Envy East of Eden.

And we're going to look at Cain's story. Now when you think about the story, you ask yourself, is envy and jealousy really that much of a problem?

Who would have thought that envy can lead to murder? And the story confronts us, doesn't it? It teaches us that envy and jealousy are potentially far more deadly than we think.

And as we think about these terms ourselves this year, there are two main questions that I'm going to try and cover this morning. First of all, what caused it? What caused Cain's envy?

And we're going to look at the circumstances that led up to this tragedy. And then secondly, I'm going to ask the question, where did it lead? What are the consequences of Cain's envy?

[2 : 17] And then I'm going to close with some practical observations for us, some practical comments on the tools we need to tackle envy as we go into a new year and as we consider the importance of contentment.

Contentment in Christ. All right, what caused it all? What caused Cain's envy? A couple of introductory issues. Because while it is unlikely that those of us who are struggling with envy today, it's unlikely that we're going to commit murder.

But if we're really honest with ourselves, we need to acknowledge that envy and jealousy is a problem. It's pervasive in our world, is it not?

It's pervasive in the home. It's often pervasive in the workplace. It is a problem. And if we are really honest with ourselves, we will acknowledge that many of us are also struggling, aren't we?

We're struggling with envy and jealousy in all kinds of different areas, even if it's not acknowledged. Sometimes we internalize these things and they boil up inside of us.

[3 : 34] So what caused Cain's envy? Well, first of all, let us come to terms with different types of envy. I suspect that there are basically two different types of envy.

First of all, there's the kind of envy that comes from material wealth. Material envy. The kind of envy that results from the material wealth of others.

Because deep down inside, I envy other people because of what they have. I envy the houses and I envy the cars and I envy the comfortable lifestyles that wealth brings.

Secondly, there's what I call status envy. I envy not so much what others have, but I envy who they are.

It's a different kind of envy. Perhaps it's even worse. I envy other people because of their status or because of their gifts.

[4 : 38] Here we can include things like professional jealousy. Somebody has a more senior position in the organization than I do. Or perhaps somebody is held with greater favor in the home than I am.

Or somebody has a more senior position, as I say. Or somebody is promoted above me. Somebody's contribution in the business environment is regarded with greater respect than mine. Or others are simply more capable than I am. That's a tough one, isn't it? Some folk are just more gifted than I am.

And they are better at what they do than what I am. And often that causes a lot of envy. And envy, of course, is tragically part of the world outside of the Garden of Eden.

It is our world. Cain's world is our world, is it not? Envy was not originally present in the Garden of Eden.

[5 : 52] Not until Eve began to desire something outside of God's plan for her. Something she didn't have.

And so this morning, as we study how sin, specifically envy, grew in Cain's heart, we learn something not only of the power of envy, the power of envy in us, but the very human condition itself.

So what causes it? Before we come and have a look at Cain in a bit more detail, what causes envy? Well, envy or jealousy at heart is simply desire.

The heart of an individual is defined, is it not, most profoundly by desire or what I want.

Look at yourself that way today. Ask yourself the question, what do I want more than anything else?

[7 : 08] There you'll get to the heart of who you are. Our desires point to who we really are. But you see, envy is more than just that.

It's more than just desire. It's desire for that which I cannot have. That's what envy is, isn't it? Going deeper, envy originates in a restlessness.

A restlessness of the self. There's an unhappiness with one's life. There's an unhappiness with one's lot.

And therefore, envy and jealousy is rooted in a lack of contentment. I started out this morning talking about contentment, didn't I? Contentment in Christ.

Well, envy starts out, it is rooted in a subtle lack of contentment. And related to this is a lack of trust in God.

[8 : 17] Is that not so? To those of us who struggle with envy and jealousy, those of us who are just not happy with our lot in life, we have questions that bubble up in our hearts.

Questions like this. Is God's will for my life really enough? Is Jesus and the gospel all I need?

Is the gospel really sufficient? And of course, the Bible suggests to us that contentment and godliness are related together.

We see that in 1 Timothy 6 and verse 6. But godliness, writes the apostle, with contentment is great gain.

Spiritual contentedness finds its rest in Jesus. Acknowledging the adequacy of his will for my life.

[9 : 21] Sin itself has its origins in the mistrust of the gospel.

Mistrust of God. And interestingly, when you open the Bible and you read about the first sin, Adam and Eve in the garden, and you read about that in Genesis chapter 3, and then you come to Genesis chapter 4, and you read about the second great sin in the Bible, of all the sins that could have occurred in Genesis chapter 4, isn't it?

Interesting that our writer speaks of envy. All the sins that could have occurred between Cain and Abel, it is jealousy, it is envy that leads to murder.

In other words, our writer, I suspect, is saying that it is this particular sin that uniquely reveals the twistedness, the twistedness of the human heart and its potential, believe it or not, for murder.

Who would have thought? How can envy be that bad? And Abel's murder, therefore, is no normal crime.

[10 : 48] It is a portrayal of the outworking of the fall of man into wickedness. It is a profoundly revealing snapshot of sin's unbridled power.

Let's see how that works itself out. See, if you've got your Bible there in front of you, have a look at verse 1, verse 2. Now we've got the introduction where the two sons are born.

Cain and Abel. And the first thing we've got to appreciate is that the birth of the two sons is actually a sign of grace. And that even after the fall, even after Adam and Eve disobeyed God, God still

enables the line of Adam to continue.

God is not done with us, thank God. The gospel is coming. God is not done with the human race, despite sin. So there is a sign of grace there. The birth of the two children. But notice that even in the naming of the two boys, we learn a lot.

Abel's name in particular is interesting because it reveals to us something of envies, tragic pointlessness. There's something pointless and wasteful about the story, isn't there?

[12:08] Just like all the violence in the world, it is just not necessary. Now in Cain's birth, Eve simply says, I have brought forth a man with the help of the Lord.

And by the way, here for the first time in the Bible, we've got the special relationship name of God that is given, or what we would say the covenant name of God.

I have acquired a man. A choir is Cain in the original. It's a play on Cain.

By the way, Cain in the original, the sound Cain or Kwanah, is constantly being referred to in the original language.

Very powerful account. But what about Abel? What does Abel mean? Because that's interesting.

[13:07] Abel probably means hebel. You might say, well, that means nothing to me. Well, you ever can point to the book of Ecclesiastes. Have you read the book of Ecclesiastes?

And all the time when you read Ecclesiastes, it's meaningless, meaningless, everything is meaningless. You say, wow, this is really a negative writer. Now, meaningless or everything is vapor.

The word is actually hebel. Hebel, hebel, everything is able. Hebel, hebel, everything is hebel. How about Ecclesiastes 4 and verse 4? I have seen that every labor and every skill which is done as a result of rivalry between a man and his neighbor, this too is hebel.

Or this too is vanity and a striving after wind. Now, I suspect that what is being indirectly referred to here with Abel's name, Eve calling her son Abel, is the tragic consequences of Cain's envy, the absolute pointlessness of Abel's death.

Here the narrative thrusts us as readers into this tragic, pointless world, forcing us to reflect on its tragedy, to share the hebel, to share the brokenness and the tragedy of it all.

[14:34] Now, from verse 3 to verse 5, the story begins, and the narrative is now going to start to pick up. And Cain and Abel bring their offerings to God.

But even here we've got grace. Because even after sin, even after man has been cast from the garden, the soil still produces its crops.

Even if it's not as fruitful as it was before, there's still hope. And there's no vocational change after sin. Let's look at a work in 2019. There's no vocational change.

There's still work to do, praise the Lord. Cain works the ground and Abel keeps flocks. And despite banishment from the garden, even worship continues.

God hears our prayers. And so each brother has the same opportunity before God. Each brings a sacrifice appropriate to his vocation. Cain brings some fruit of the ground.

[15:33] Abel, the first fruits of his flocks. Now, the original tells us that God looked intently or paid close attention to Abel's offering.

But to Cain's, he paid no attention. Now, God clearly knows the heart. And Cain's heart, as we're going to see, lacks something.

Because that's where the great struggle is for all of us. Wherever you stand today before God, the great struggle in every human life is the struggle in the heart.

Is that not so? I sin indeed because I sinned in my heart. So Cain is envious of Abel because God accepted his brother's offering but not his own.

And the heart, again, is where the battle for sin is. But why does God reject Cain's offering?

Perhaps the clue lies in the text telling us that Abel brings choice portions, the fattest part of his offerings, whereas with Cain we have no such indication.

[16:52] In fact, later on in Israel's law in the Old Testament, the fattest parts and significantly the blood belongs exclusively to God. Maybe the best answer to our question is provided in the New Testament in Hebrews 11 and verse 4 where we read, By faith, Abel brought a better offering than Cain did.

So it appears that the offering itself is not the problem. The issue lies with the heart, folks. The heart of the worshipper.

There's something wrong here. There's something wrong with Cain's heart. It seems that Cain's offering is not rooted in a deep sense of worship and contentment before God, a sense of gratitude for God's provision.

He merely, it would seem, goes through the motions. But his true love is ultimately for himself. Now from verse 6 to verse 7, we have more grace because we've got a warning from God.

We've got two questions, two rhetorical questions and a statement of fact. One of the greatest blessings that you can enjoy from the Word of God are its warnings.

[18:20] A sign of his grace. Observe that God has rejected Cain's offering but he hasn't rejected Cain. Cain is given an opportunity.

Cain is given an opportunity to reflect. Cain, think for a moment. Stop. Master your rage.

Master the jealousy. Think about what you're going to do. Reflect on your heart. Reflect on your attitude. There's still time, Cain.

There's still time. Perhaps you need to hear that today. Perhaps you're contemplating something evil. Something wicked.

And the Word of God comes to you this morning and says, as it said to Cain, stop. And think before it's too late. There's still time, Cain, to repent.

[19:27] Two rhetorical questions and a statement of fact. Let's have a look at the first question. Why, Cain? Why? Why are you angry? And then the second question, why has your face fallen?

Because we know that during moments of anger and great emotion, God would have us clearly evaluate our motives before we act because it is precisely at these moments that we do things, that we say things, that we'll later regret.

And it is often under those circumstances that we hurt the people we love. We hurt God and the Gospel. You know, in the original language, the Hebrew is laid out in such a way that it's very similar to the idiomatic expression, His face burns.

Original there, why has your face fallen? It's more like, why is your face on fire? Why is your face burning?

So Cain is overcome with emotion and anger. We've got also this idea of dropping and hiding. So Cain's face reveals this primal, brutish expression of depression and then rage.

[20:54] Do you know what I think? I think that Cain's anger is ultimately directed to God. How is that possible? Do you know that man, given half a chance, will murder his own maker?

Do you know that? Such is the nature of the heart. They mock that nonsense. Isn't that what we did with Jesus?

But you see, because Cain can't strike out at God directly, he decides to deter his anger to his brother and he kills his brother, I suspect, as a surrogate for God.

We've got a similar idea with Saul, King Saul's anger in 1 Samuel 18 and verse 8. Remember the story when Saul and David came back from battle? And do you remember all the Israelite women sang and sang and they were so happy with the victory on the battlefield?

And you know the story tells us that the ladies sang more about David's heroism after the battle than they did about Saul. They praised David more than they praised Saul and Saul was furious and the expression that the Bible uses there to talk about Saul's rage is very similar to that of Cain here in Genesis 4.

[22:10] Two rhetorical questions. Why are you angry? What is happening with your face, Cain? What's going on? And then we've got the statement.

Literally in the original it says, if you do well, lifted up. Or, if you do well, accepted.

Perhaps we can translate it as you will be lifted up. If you do what is right, you will be vindicated. If you do well, lifted up.

Now, later on in the story, in verse 8, the same idea of lifting up comes back again. Same words. Cain does exactly what God suggests that he does.

If you do well, you'll be lifted up. Cain decides in verse 8 he's going to do that. He's going to lift himself up. He's going to lift himself up, but he's not going to do well. He's going to kill. He's going to lift himself up and he's going to kill.

[23:09] He's going to kill his brother. He's going to do what God suggests, but not in the way that God wants. But again, as a measure of grace, God warns us, doesn't he?

He warns us in the gospel. He gives us, God willing, a long life and he warns us. Isn't he a patient God?

You know that he's a patient God, don't you? Perhaps you've been coming along to this church for some time and you hear the same call of the gospel Sunday by Sunday.

You hear the warnings of the word of God and you still hear and you still hear the voice calling you to make right with God before it's too late.

God is a patient God. Of course, God's patience doesn't last forever. Cain must take responsibility. Cain must decide and now we come to the crossroads.

[24 : 13] Now, if you look at the second half of verse 7, there are another interesting connections with the story in Genesis chapter 3. Now, in Genesis chapter 3, you'll remember how after Adam and Eve sinned, God tells us in his word that Eve's desire would be, her desire would be for her husband and he would rule over her.

It's not a very pleasant picture that is painted for us there in Genesis 3. Desire for her husband. Desire there, I don't think is sexual desire. It is desire for control.

He will rule over you. There's going to be something that is going to be a source of conflict in marriage. Same words in the original language appear here in chapter 4, verse 7.

Now, envy, Cain, envy and jealousy desires you. Becomes personified. Envy, jealousy, now becomes almost human.

It becomes a kind of a person. It desires you. It urges for you. Sin and envy like a blazing fire in a forest.

[25 : 26] It wants to desire you. It wants to rule over you. The sin of envy is portrayed as a demonic wild animal, like a wild dog crouching outside of your front door.

It's demonic. And also, we mustn't miss the supernatural element. There's a disturbing supernatural element under the story.

There's something demonic about what's going on here. There is a force. There is a supernatural force behind the story of this family that is not of this world.

It's the devil. You find strife in a family. You find jealousy and envy and bitterness.

The devil is not always far away from that. We read in 1 John 3 and verse 12, Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother.

[26 : 32] Evil one. All right, well, let's move on. Where did the envy lead? What are the consequences? Let's have a look at that. And then we'll wrap up with a few practical observations for 2019.

Well, let's have a look at verse 8. The climax, the murder itself, again, rose up. The original language. He rose up against his brother Abel and killed him.

By the way, brother, brother appears a lot in the story. What have you done? Where is your brother? Cain rose up and killed his brother. He killed his brother. Where is your brother?

Brother, brother, brother, over and over again. The narrative would have us come to terms with the heinous nature of this crime. He killed his brother. He rose up and he killed his brother.

The first murder in the Bible. Again, we've got these word plays in the original language. The play on Cain all the time. For example, he rose up against his brother.

[27 : 37] Wakaom Kayin. Cain rose up. Again, it's designed to stun us. It's designed to stun the reader, the sudden, unexpected, unspeakable, irrational act.

Cain has not heeded God's warning. He has not taken the opportunity to consider the end of the path that he had chosen. And even the word for murder is carefully chosen by our writer under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

The writer uses the word harag. It refers to premeditated killing. It's the worst kind of word.

In the law, later on, you can have a word that speaks in the sixth commandment of manslaughter. That's not the same thing. That's not what's used here.

This is not an accident. The word that is used does not allow us to conclude that this is an accident. No, it's not an accident. It is a specific word in the Old Testament that refers to premeditated ruthless violence by a private individual.

[28 : 51] It's not state-sanctioned murder or punishment. It's premeditated pointless murder. Now, have a look at Cain's reaction to the divine rejection of his offering, by the way.

Much, much more serious than either of his parents. You know, when Adam and Eve sinned in Genesis chapter 3, and when they were confronted by God, what did they do?

Well, they resorted to excuses, didn't they? But Cain doesn't even bother. He just rejects God's judgment. man, where is your brother? How am I supposed to know?

Don't come and talk to me about my brother. I don't know. You see the change? The sickness that has entered into the human race in Genesis chapter 3 is becoming worse.

You know, later on in the law in Deuteronomy chapter 2, from verse 25 to verse 27, we read that if murder is committed in the field outside of the reach of help, it's premeditated.

[29 : 57] That's what we got here. Let's go out into the field. The original sin in the garden now has grown exponentially. But from verses 9 to verse 12, we know that God is always going to have the last word.

Envy leads to judgment. There is going to be a day of judgment. God always has the last word. Not sin. Not murder, not the devil.

And now, God shifts in his role in these verses. If you look at your story, God is no longer just the interrogator, now he's the prosecutor. Cain, you had your chance.

You know, the letter to the Hebrews tells us that you live once. there's one life to live. Only one. And then there's the judgment.

Cain's had his chance. What have you done? It's not a question. Of course, God knows what Cain has done. He's calling Cain to account.

[31 : 11] It's not a question. It's a statement of fact. All sin is accountable. And just as God strode through the garden in Genesis chapter 3, calling for Adam and Eve, Adam is hiding away, God now comes through the field looking for Abel and of course Cain.

And God asks, where is Abel your brother? Your brother. Where is Abel your brother? The very question that the Creator presents, we have enshrined the horrendous, heinous nature of what has happened.

Observe Cain again, his cruel, heartless answer. There is no remorse. He will not face himself and he will not face his own heart.

Always been convicted myself that one of the greatest gifts in the gospel is the God given gift of self reflection.

Because by nature as sinners we don't want to be confronted with our selfishness, our pride and our wickedness. Isn't that true?

[32 : 21] We will do anything to evade accountability and not to have to endure the pain of having to look inwardly and come to terms with my selfishness, my jealousy, my envy, my rebellion against Jesus so that I can be driven to my knees and repent.

It's a great gift. Cain never had it. He would not reflect on his own wickedness. He's full of excuses. I don't know. Where's your brother? I don't know. Am I the shepherd of the shepherd? Amazing God's patience. God doesn't just strike him down.

Abel's blood cries out to God from the ground and as a result Cain is cursed from the ground. You know Leviticus chapter 17 verse 11 reminds us that life is in the blood.

To murder, to shed blood is to pollute the land, making it unfit for God's presence. And do you know that the Hebrew word for cry here, Abel's blood, Cain, cries out from the ground.

[33 : 43] You know the word cry here is the scream for help of a woman being raped in Deuteronomy 22 and verse 24. Same word. And now we are presented with the consequences of envy, which in this case led to murder.

Cain loses an essential part of his humanity. He no longer belongs. He goes off into exile, ban from the land, or perhaps more precisely the land's productivity as well as God's gracious presence. He's sentenced to be a wandering fugitive, now one nud. These words can describe, similar words in the Old Testament describe a swaying movement like a tree, like reeds that are swaying, now one nud in Judges 9 in verse 9.

We also have similar words in the Old Testament are used to describe a blind man shaking and struggling along through life, trying to find his way, staggering and falling.

He settles in the land of nod. Now nod is related to the verb earlier on, nud, which had been used to apply to Cain in verse 14. He who has been sentenced to wonder, he who has been sentenced to nod, now settles in the land, sorry, sentenced to wonder, now settles in the land of nod.

[35 : 15] So the wanderer himself, I think what the Bible is saying, lands up in the world of wandering. We've got somebody here who has nowhere to belong.

He's somebody, he's got nowhere to go. mother, he might have a car, he might have a wife, he might have the children, he might be living in Cape Town, he might be you.

He has the trappings of belonging, but in his heart, he is estranged from Christ and he has nowhere to belong. He has nowhere to go.

He wanders through his life, empty inside. That's Cain. All right, time has passed me by and I need to close.

What a great New Year's resolution. Contentment in Christ. Something we need to pray for this year. How do we tackle envy?

[36 : 14] You struggling with envy this morning, how do we tackle envy? Four quick questions as we wrap up. Question number one, you've got to ask yourself the question, do you lack contentment? That's where you've got to start.

Think of it, everything about our modern world in the West, our consumerist society, everything about the West, everything about our consumerist society is geared to produce people without contentment from advertising to constant upgrades.

Everything is geared that we become miserable, uncontented people. Take stock of your own heart. number two, do you struggle with envy? Has your lack of contentment led to jealousy? You see, Cain refused to reflect on his own life. Perhaps you should.

Ask yourself, do I find myself deterred from serving Jesus in the church and in my home and in the workplace? Do I find myself deterred from serving the Lord, focusing on the gospel because I'm so consumed by envy of others who have other things or other gifts, gifts and things that I don't have?

[37 : 23] Question number three, what do I want more than anything else? That is such a powerful, scary question. What do you want? What do I want? What do I want? Perhaps not just what do I want, but what do I desire more than anything else?

Are my desires rooted in myself, my wants, my career, my need to be important, to be rich, to be praised, to be number one, or do I really desire Jesus and his glory more than anything else?

You see, lack of contentment is a gospel issue, folks. The less rooted in Jesus I am, the further away from Christ I am, the less content and the more of a wanderer I will be no matter whether or not I have the right address in the right car and even a jacuzzi, it doesn't matter. And number four, and finally as I close, will you return to Christ? Will you come to him today? You see, to repent is to return, but how do we repent of envy?

A couple of things I want to say here. Repenting means I need a change. In other words, people struggling with envy shouldn't pray for their circumstances to change.

[38 : 34] Oh Lord, take that guy out of my work, place. Lord, take his car and give it to me and I'll be okay with you. No, the right solution is not to ask God to change me or to give me what my heart desires if it's not God centered.

Neither does it lie in removing the other person and their good fortune, the source of my envy to repent. If I'm going to change today, if I'm going to repent for 2019 this morning, I need to ask God to change me.

That is when your life will turn around, when your prayers change, when you start rather praying, Lord, don't necessarily change my circumstances that are causing my envy, change me.

Change my heart, not necessarily my circumstances. friends. Always remember this, when you truly surrender your life to Christ and his Lordship, you need to remember that your value as a Christian, your value as a human being lies not in your circumstances, your looks, your wealth, your marks at university, your culture, your gifts, your income.

No. Your value as a human being lies in who Christ has declared you to be on the cross and that is infinitely valuable.

[40 : 03] The cross tells you and me this morning that we are infinitely precious in God's eyes because of the divine life that was given up for you and me. Once you truly acknowledge that, once you truly understand that, you will be freed up to focus your attention on serving Jesus.

others. Rather than obsessing about others. That's the great New Year's resolution for us this year. God-centered contentedness. The opposite of envy is servant-heartedness, a sense of contentment and trust in the sufficiency of the gospel.

Amen. I am going to hand over to Nick, brother. Perhaps you can lead us in prayer. Thank you. Thanks so much, Mark.

1 John 3 verse 12 says, Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brothers were righteous.

[41 : 20] Do not be surprised, my brothers. If the world hates you, we know that we have passed from death to life because we love our brothers. And then it says later on, this is how we know what love is.

Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. Let's pray. Yes, Lord, we do pray at the beginning of this year that you would grow in us a deep contentment in our ultimate brother, the one who laid down his life for us.

And that in the gospel we would find our value and in the gospel we would find our motivation to live not for ourselves but for one another and for you and your glory.

And so would you help us to put into practice what we've heard this morning in Jesus' name. Amen.