

# East of Eden

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, if I asked you to sum up what we have seen so far in Genesis, I wonder what words come to mind.

What have we seen, for instance, about God? That he is supremely good, wise, powerful, generous, trustworthy, and very, very, very gracious.

What might we say about this world? That it is beautiful, but now also terribly broken. And what could we say about ourselves?

Well, in the words of mathematician Blaise Pascal, human beings are both the glory and the garbage of the universe. God created a brilliant world.

He made human beings in his image to reflect his glory. But those human beings sinned. You saw last week, they distrusted God. They pushed him away from their hearts and did what he had said not to do.

[ 1 : 07 ] And the point of this chapter, chapter 4 in Genesis, is simply to tell us that none of that has stopped being true. In fact, Genesis now wants us to see that we in our world from there only dug deeper into sin.

When Adam and Eve sinned, sin broke into their hearts. And tonight we see that sin stayed in the human heart, like a squatter, refusing to vacate our hearts, to hand the keys back to our rightful owner.

And having stolen our hearts, we see that sin has since twisted and tainted everything that we human beings have done, imagined, invented, set our minds to, brought into being ever since. Now, perhaps that sounds a bit much for a Sunday evening. How have we got from a fight between two brothers to every person who has ever lived?

Well, remember what Genesis says it is telling us about. If you glance back to chapter 2 and verse 4, do you remember that word that we learned a few weeks ago?

[ 2 : 24 ] Toledot. These are the generations of, this is the family history of what in verse 4? The heavens and the earth. And that is still this section.

I think if we were writing Genesis, our instinct would be to put chapter 4 under Adam's family tree. But that doesn't start, Luke, until chapter 5 and verse 1.

And so Genesis is saying to us, this isn't the story of one family. It's the story of our world and us in it.

Because what was passed down to the second generation of humanity was passed down to every generation. Through every family, every one of us born into this world.

So what does Genesis say was passed down from Adam to his sons? Well, firstly, the deadly grip of sin on our hearts.

[ 3 : 25 ] Verse 1, chapter 4 begins with the birth of the next generation. Adam and Eve had a son, Cain. Then verse 2, they have another son, Abel. So what is life like for this generation?

It's a question that we find all over the internet, isn't it? People trying to characterize this and that generation. You boomers had it easy.

Millennials are entitled. Gen Z are free thinkers. Stereotypes, perhaps. But if we were doing a report on what characterizes the second generation of human beings, what would we say?

Well, unlike their parents' generation, Cain and Abel come into the world with a big, big problem. These two brothers, in a way, couldn't be more different.

Abel was a shepherd. Cain was a farmer. I assume we'll see that sibling rivalry end very gruesomely. But they both share the same problem. And it is a problem with God.

[ 4 : 30 ] Read with me from verse 3. In the course of time, Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the Lord. Abel also brought an offering, fat portions from some of the firstborn

of his flock.

The Lord looked with favor on Abel and his offering. But on Cain and his offering, he did not look with favor. So both brothers bring an offering to God from their respective fields.

But then God decides Abel's offering is the right one and Cain's is wrong. Now, lots of ink has been spilt trying to work out why that was.

Could it be? Because Abel brought his very best sheep and Cain just brought whatever fruits he had kicking around? Well, it could be. But that's not obvious from the text.

Or could it be because God saw that Abel really worshipped him from the heart, but Cain was just kind of going through the motions? Again, it could be.

[ 5 : 32 ] But we don't find that in the text. Now, as we have got into the habit of doing, we need to think like an Israelite. What would have been really obvious to those guys listening to Moses read this for the first time, was that these are two completely different offerings for doing two completely different things.

The offerings of fruit or grain or things that grow in a field were for praising and thanking and worshipping God. And offerings of firstborn lambs or goats, and especially their fatty portions, were for dealing with sin and seeking peace with God and making a way back into his presence after offending him.

Here on a side note, this is why it's important for us to press on through Leviticus and Numbers and Deuteronomy when we hit these books in our reading plan. Here you're wading through instructions about animals and blood and priests and thinking, what is going on?

Well, it is pointing us to what we need to come to God. It's ultimately pointing us to Christ. The law teaches us that before we come to God to thank him or worship and praise him, we have to be right with him.

Before we bring an offering of thanksgiving and praise, we need a sacrifice for our sin and guilt.

Those people in the desert had those books, didn't they?

[ 7 : 06 ] So then why did God accept Abel's offering? Because Abel is bringing a sacrifice for his sins, coming to God rightly, recognizing his sin, owning it, bringing something that would die in his place, taking the punishment.

He's coming to God on God's terms. Why did God reject Cain's offering? Well, because he came to God wrongly, ignoring his sin.

He's thinking that he had something to do for God or to give to God before being right with God, worshiping on his terms, not on God's. So what does this tell us about this second generation of humanity?

You've two very different brothers. But God's response shows us that both brothers needed his forgiveness from the very outset.

They did not need to fall like their parents to lose their relationship with God. They came into the world needing his forgiveness in a wrong relationship with their creator.

[ 8 : 18 ] That's symbolized, I guess, by the fact they were born outside of the garden, outside of the Holy of Holies, outside God's presence. Now to come back into his presence, these brothers need a sacrifice for their sin.

And the only difference at heart is that one of them recognizes it, responds rightly to God, and the other ignores it and responds wrongly to him.

Genesis wants us to see here that these brothers have inherited Adam's sin. That sin has become a hereditary heart condition.

And that is a difficult truth for us to stomach, isn't it? You know, I wonder if we have let that sink in, the depth of how devastating original sin is.

A baby famously is born every minute in the UK. 250 babies born every minute in the world. That's 44 babies since the service started.

[ 9 : 23 ] nearly, well, 11,000 in the world. I did make a note of that before. I didn't just work it out. Those babies are less than an hour old.

And yet every single one of them needs to be put right with their creator. Well, to put it differently, when did I begin to need a sacrifice for my sins?

Well, David wrote earlier, as we sang in Psalm 51, surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.

I needed a savior in the womb. Why? Well, because of all that I inherited from my mother and father, I inherited also a sinful heart.

passed down generation to generation from our very first parents, Adam and Eve. So that when I sin, as I do, you could say to me, I see your father, Adam, in ye.

[10:30] His sin didn't end with him. It beats through my heart and yours. It shows in every sinful thought, feeling, desire, word, behavior in our lives.

Because we have inherited God's image, but now broken. The spiritual heart, but now in the grip of sin. Now in the face of that, that hard and dark truth, we now need to see this in verse six.

Okay, Cain doesn't respond well, does he? He was very angry. But before he can do anything about that, the Lord says something to him in verse six. 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, desires to have you, but you must rule over it.

Now do you see God's undeserved grace here in the thick darkness of sin? Cain has been proud and self-righteous. He has not responded humbly to God's verdict on his offering.

[11:40] And even though God had turned his offering rightly away, God now comes to Cain to persuade him to turn back and do it right. See that if you do what is right, will you not be accepted?

The answer is, of course you will. You simply say, Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner, and you will be saved. Cain did not deserve to hear that, did he?

And yet God came to him and offered peace and forgiveness. That's so important for us to see as we gaze into the depth of sin, that our sin has not changed who God is.

He is still as good and generous and gracious as he has ever and always been. However deep our sin goes, and it goes further and deeper than we could ever imagine, he has not changed.

And still says to us today, if you come to me rightly, clinging to that only sacrifice that can make you right with me, holding on to Christ who died for the forgiveness of sins, you will 100% be accepted and forgiven and saved.

[12:56] God's grace has not changed. That door is indeed still open to us this evening. But if you don't come to him rightly, verse 7, he says, sin is crouching at your door.

It desires to have you, but you must rule over it. God warns Cain that sin is no longer a danger way out there, but it lurks on his doorstep.

He has a battle on his hands to survive against it. In the words of John Owen, be killing sin or it will be killing you. That is now the human condition.

And yet in the face of God's gracious invitation and warning, Cain did not kill his anger dead.

Rather, verse 8, Cain said to his brother Abel, let's go out to the field.

While they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him. Do you see how firmly in the grip of sin the human heart now is?

[14:03] The serpent had to persuade Cain's mother to sin. Now we find that God cannot persuade her son not to sin.

Things have changed, brothers and sisters. But for all the differences between these two generations, at heart Cain's sin is still a repeat, if you like, of that first sin.

Remember after Adam sinned, God called, where are ye? Now verse 9, he calls to Cain, where is your brother? Cain does what Adam did, tries to hide the truth.

I don't know. As Adam had hid behind the trees. And then just as God had said, what is this you have done? So now verse 10, he says, what have you done?

Okay, details perhaps, but really striking. And they're there to reinforce the sense of déjà vu. We've been here before. It's a replay of the first sin.

[15:02] But what is missing is a serpent. A lie. It came straight from the human heart, an overflow of Cain's anger and sin towards God and his brother.

And so before, as it is now, verse 11, God says, you are under a curse. Cain is driven from the land. His work becomes hard, separated from God's presence.

His life is vulnerable. See, sin's grip on Cain's heart was ultimately a death grip. And while it would be really easy at this point, wouldn't it, to short sack at the passage and get straight to the good news, as we will do, we do need to pause here and recognize, brothers and sisters, that this is still a problem for us.

His sin is still buried in our hearts. Perhaps you remember sometimes how in C.S. Lewis Chronicles of Narnia series, the human characters are called sons of Adam, daughters of Eve.

Well, that is what we are. Our trust is in Christ. We are no longer in Adam and under his curse, yet we still suffer the presence of his sin in our lives and will do until the day we are with Christ.

[16:28] To put it differently, Christ has taken the penalty for our sin and he has broken the power of our sin and yet the presence of sin is still in us.

And unless we know that and until we recognize that, well, we cannot respond rightly to God. We will not see our need for Christ.

We won't turn to him daily and pray for his forgiveness and for his rule to extend over our hearts. Instead, we'll ignore our sin and its grip will only tighten and we will carry on reliving that original sin over and over in a thousand different ways.

And so, hard news, you are not finished with sin yet. But good news, Christ is not yet finished with ye.

Only through Christ, his finished work, his sacrifice, can we be forgiven. Only through Christ will a deadly grip of sin in our hearts be broken.

[17:37] And so, the message is, don't ever stop doing what is right in God's eyes, clinging to Christ, turning from sin. Or in Jesus' words, repent and believe in the gospel.

And yet, that is made tougher, isn't it, by what Genesis shows us next. Our second point, the downward spiral of sin in our world. Now, we'd love to move on from sin, wouldn't we?

Get on to a different point. But Genesis doesn't let us do that. Because now it wants us to see that sin continue to spiral down through the generations to infect and invade every bit of human life.

In verse 17, Cain made love to his wife. She became pregnant and gave birth to Enoch. And then we get a genealogy that ends with the spotlight on this guy, Lamech. Now, if you count from Adam, Lamech is the seventh generation of human beings, which is significant because in Hebrew, seven is the number of perfection.

And so, by turning the spotlight on Lamech, Genesis is saying this is where the sin problem peaks. He could think of it like a snowball that started with Adam, snowballs down, grows and picks up speed through the generations till it reaches rock bottom in Lamech.

[19:01] And we see by this time sin has grown very big and very fast indeed. See in this guy's life how very far human life has fallen since the bliss of the garden.

Remember Adam's delight when God created Eve, the wonderful partnership they had together as they glorified God? Well, by the seventh generation, men have decided that one wife is not enough. In verse 19, Lamech marries two women, Ada and Zillah. And that is an indictment, isn't it? If Lamech had seen either of these women as his equal, his partner, well, he wouldn't have added a second.

And look how he treats his wives. Remember Adam sang a song, didn't he, over his wife at last? Here is bone of my bones, flesh of my flesh.

Well, in verse 23, we see a song that Lamech sings to his wives. Ada and Zillah, listen to me. Wives of Lamech, hear my words. I've killed a man for wounding me, a young man for injuring me.

[20:11] If Cain is avenged seven times, then Lamech 77 times. I don't know about you, I find it hard not to feel really sad for these women. The husband comes home singing about a time he killed a young guy, and how he would do it 77 more times if he needed to.

You have to wonder, why is he singing that to his wives? Feels very threatening, doesn't it? It's a heartbreaking scene, so far from the partnership that men and women were designed for, not least in marriage.

And yet it's so clear that Adam's great, great, great, great grandson did not marry for God's glory, but his own glory and pleasure. And so Adam's sin, we see, is snowballed into a version of humanity that kills without regret, devalues women, rules by fear, and glorifies violence.

Now hold that thought because tragically, Lamech has children of his own. And following that downward spiral, what would you expect to see in Lamech's kids?

An even worse version of him, right? For following the logic. Now have a look back at verses 20 to 22. Lamech's wife Ada gave birth to Jebal.

[21:39] He's the father of those who live in tents and raise livestock. His brother's name is Jubal. He's the father of all who play stringed instruments and pipes. Zillah also had a son, Tubal Kane, who forged all kinds of tools out of bronze and iron.

Now at first glance, we might think, what industrious and intelligent young men. And they are. But put this back in context. These are Lamech's offspring.

So what does Genesis want us to see in these sons? Well, the ongoing spread of sin. But what do these sons do? Well, they invent culture, music, technology.

They invent human civilization. And so do the maths. What does Genesis want us to see? that culture is a product of sinful human hearts.

Now we need to be really careful here, don't we? Because in God's common grace, sinful people can create good things that benefit human life. Otherwise, why would any of us go to work tomorrow?

[ 22 : 55 ] Something I think we find confusing about this passage. These things are really good things, aren't they? But look where they come from. In God's common grace, not every inspired piece of music or medical breakthrough or technological advance is done by Christian people.

Thank God for that. But what Genesis tells us about the soil out of which human culture grew should give us pause for thought.

Because it grew out of the soil of our rebellion. Meaning, friends, that our cultures in which we live, are never neutral.

Rather, human culture, technology, art, society, are tainted by sin and tilt dangerously towards sinful tendencies.

Now, perhaps you think this is a sort of you tin hat, start living in the nuclear bunker mentality, and it's not that. But it should caution us, shouldn't it, not to uncritically consume what our world offers, and fill our eyes and ears and stomachs and brains and hearts with stuff before we filter it spiritually, and ask, where is this coming from?

[ 24 : 17 ] What does it want from me and want for me? To take to cultural icons, unlikely maybe, McDonald's and Facebook, widely used, widely loved.

But I recently saw two films, widely available films that have really stuck with me. One was called The Founder, and it tells the story of how McDonald's became a global super brand when a paranoid salesman stole the business from two honest guys, stabbed them in the back, left his wife for another woman, all in pursuit of his own greed and ego, and the result was a Mackie D's on every corner.

The other film is called The Social Network, and it tells a similar story of how Facebook started when an arrogant teenager created an algorithm for ranking the girls in his class by their looks, stole a business model from two fellow students, stabbed them in the back, all in pursuit of popularity and power, and so Facebook was born.

Similar stories, both steeped in sin. Now that is not necessarily a reason never to eat at McDonald's again, or never ever to use Facebook, but the fact that these things, that are part of the everyday lives of millions of people around the world, grew out of such wickedness and sin should shock us. To think that's what our culture is built on? It's almost Blamech-like, isn't it? That's the point of these secular films, and that is exactly what Genesis is telling us about human culture and civilization as a whole, that brothers and sisters, we do not live on neutral territory, but on blood-stained ground, in a world that is tainted by sin in every department, in every product, in all of our lives.

[ 26 : 29 ] That worldview is not a given, is it? Remember those ancient myths that Genesis is kind of speaking against? Well, in those myths, art and civilization and culture were gifts from the gods.

Now, how different this sermon would be, and how different our worldview would be if that were the case, if Genesis said the same, but it doesn't. It says the origin of these things was sinful human hearts.

It should make us pause in question, shouldn't it? It is what I am enjoying, consuming, into, good, in God's eyes.

Before, downloading an app, listening to a song, scrolling through social media, watching a video, whatever, ask, what are the spiritual roots, and what are the spiritual fruits?

The author James K. Smith, in his book, You Are What You Love, talks about secular liturgies in our lives, how something as simple as going shopping or scrolling through our phones, shapes how we think, trains our hearts to want and to love certain things.

[ 27 : 52 ] Now, those things, let me be really clear, it's worth saying, isn't it? Those things are not in themselves sinful things. But in a world that is stained by sin, well, we need to be careful, don't we?

We don't get sucked into patterns and habits or loves and desires that feed our old sinful selves rather than our new redeemed selves in Christ.

We don't give ourselves to things that numb our hearts to God instead of giving ourselves to things that help us and enable us to thank and recognize and worship God.

In short, we need to guard our hearts above all things. Don't just gulp stuff down. Think about it. Pray about it.

Even if it's not sinful in itself, ask yourself, is this good for my soul? We cannot make a list of things that Christians can't do. That's legalism.

[ 28 : 56 ] But neither does Christ give us a blank check to spend on whatever pleases us, because that is lawlessness. Friends, we do have freedom, but we need to remember that freedom is in Christ and for Christ.

You're living a godly life in a sinful world takes wisdom and discernment and we can grow in those things. But above all, learning to live a godly life depends on loving Christ.

And so if we use our freedom to continually feed our sin rather than to grow in grace, we need to ask, who or what do I really love?

Who or what are we really living for? is it his glory? Or is it my pleasure? Now perhaps you're wondering, what hope do we have then?

If sin is in us and sin is in our world, how can we possibly be rescued and redeemed? What hope do we have? Well, Genesis lastly tells us, praise God, that he is still faithful to his promise.

[ 30 : 06 ] it's only two verses at the end of this very bleak chapter, but they are enough to remind us that God still hasn't forgotten.

Read it with me please in verse 25, Adam made love to his wife again and she gave birth to a son and named him Seth, saying, God has granted me another child in place of Abel since Cain killed him.

Adam and Eve have a third son, we often forget, but he is the most important son, he's so, so important to the book of Genesis and the Bible as a whole.

Notice Eve says he's the son in the place of Abel whom Cain killed. One son is dead, the other son is lost, so then the question for them is, who's left to inherit God's promise?

From chapter three in verse 15, that a child from the woman would come to undo the devastation and curse of sin, who would crush the head of the serpent, he would do that.

[ 31 : 13 ] What hope now is there for humanity? Well, here he is, says Eve, God has given us another son. Imagine what that meant for Adam and Eve.

all their hopes, the hope of redemption, the promise of rescue, the confirmation that God had not forgotten to be faithful to his promise.

Here is one born to carry that promise. Cain had a city built for his son's name, while Seth's son would call upon the name of the Lord.

And in time, from Seth's line would come a son to take away sin for good, the serpent crusher, the Lord Jesus Christ himself, a son whose blood would speak a better word than the blood of Abel, as we heard earlier, for where Abel's blood cried out for vengeance and justice, the blood of Christ cries out for forgiveness and mercy.

friends, what hope is there for sinners like me and you in a sinful world? Only the Lord Jesus Christ. He who took the penalty for our sin and his death, he broke the power of sin upon the cross, he who will come again to take away the presence of sin from our lives and from our world forever for all who call upon his name.

[ 32 : 50 ] Friends, God has not forgotten. He is faithful to his promise to save his people from our sins, to redeem us for a new creation.

And that promise is still yes and amen in his son, our savior, the Lord Jesus. Let's put our hope in him now as we pray.

Let's pray together. Amen. God, our father, we grieve and lament before you at the sinful state of our hearts.

Father, we are sorry for our sin and we confess that we are helpless sinners. Father, every day we prove your verdict on our lives that you are right to say that we sin.

But every day, our father, you prove to us your faithfulness and your grace, not only in sustaining our lives, but in having given us your son.

[ 34 : 06 ] Every day, our father, you tell us in your word that he is sufficient for us, that he is a right and fitting sacrifice for our sins, that in him we have forgiveness.

And so, father, we pray you would help us to cling to him, Lord, with all of our lives. Father, how we pray that you would day by day erode away the sin that is in our hearts. Lord, please do this. Father, please help us to set our hope fully on Christ. Father, we know that things are not right with our world, not right in us. and we pray with your saints down the ages, come Lord Jesus, come soon. How we pray that you would come, Lord, and take away sin from this world and from our hearts. Until that day, we pray that you would keep us clinging to you by your spirit, for in you we hope. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.