

Sermon Topic: **I AM YOUR KEEPER**

Sermon Text: Genesis 4:1- 10

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“Now Cain said to his brother Abel, ‘Let’s go out to the field.’ And while they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him. Then the Lord said to Cain, ‘Where is your brother Abel?’ Cain replied, ‘I don’t know. Am I my brother’s keeper?’ The Lord said, ‘What have you done? Listen! Your brother’s blood cries out to me from the ground.’ [Vv. 8- 10]

INTRODUCTION: I have learned of an interesting Biblical interpretive and exegetical way of studying Scripture using what is called “*The Principle of First Mention*”¹. “*The Principle of First Mention*” says when you find the first occurrence of any main word, expression, or utterance God makes mention of in his Holy Word, it is there that you find the truth with which that subject stands connected in the mind of God; it is there that you find the fundamental understanding that God wants you to have about that subject.

I applied this principle and guess what I discovered? In this text, I found the first time ever- mentioned in the written word of God the word “*brother*”! Verse 1 says (LB), “*Then Adam had sexual intercourse with Eve his wife, and she conceived and gave birth to a son, Cain. She said, ‘With God’s help, I have created a man!’ Next child she gave birth to was his brother Abel.*” For the very first time ever mentioned in the Bible, you find the word “*brother*” in this verse (and mentioned 3 other times in the text) which according to the *Principle of First Mention* should give us the truth that is connected in the mind of God and the understanding He wants us to have about this subject concerning *brother*.

If this principle proves to be true, it is interesting to know from this text the truth connected in the mind of God and the understanding God wants us to have about *brother*. **First**

¹ This principle can be found in [Principles of Biblical Hermeneutics](#) by J. Edwin Hartill

of all, originally in the Hebrew, the term *brother* has several meanings. First of all it means what it means- *brother*, that is, a male person having the same two or one biological parents as another male/female. But the Hebraic term *brother* in this text branches off to include other persons in its original definition. It is a non-gender specific term that includes not only male persons but: sisters, near relatives, cousins, fellowman, friends ...In summation, the term refers to *every* other human person regardless of gender, age, color, race, nationality, religion, social status, geographical place, side of town, etc. It doesn't matter whether the relationship exists from the same father and/or mother or not. It's a generic term that covers every human relationship. *Brother*, in the text, is any person similar to another. So originally, the understanding of *brother* is if you are human, you are *brother*! In the mind of God, He made us all- regardless of who, what, where- to be family, related, kin...sisters and brothers! (Turn to your neighbor and say to them: "I am your brother!")

Based on the principle, the second understanding in the mind of God is that He made us all *related* because of one man and one woman- Adam and Eve. We all have come from the same product and point of origination. According to the Biblical story, all people are related whether they are red, yellow, black, brown or white because of Adam and Eve (which according to the Genesis story they are the progenitors, ancestors and originators of the entire human race). This is what Paul was getting at in Acts 17:24- 26, "*From one man (Adam) He made every nation of people, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and He determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live...* Because of Adam and Eve we are all interrelated; made from the same source and made of the same stuff-dust! The strongest among us, the most beautiful among us, the smartest among us, the wealthiest among us at our most bare and essential selves are differing configurations of dust! That's why none of us have

any business looking down our noses over another because we're all made out of the same particles of the earth- dust!

So in the perfect mind of God and according to His perfect understanding, we are brothers because we all originated from Adam and Eve. And from Adam and Eve we were all made in God's image (nobody of any gender or race is made more in the image of God than the other); and we were all made alive and animated by the same breath and the power of God which is the Spirit of God which is in all of us!

Let me illustrate it like this: As a child growing up, I loved Tootsie Roll Lollipops. I loved all colors- red (cherry), orange, brown, purple (grape). They all came in different colors and I loved them all. The reason I loved them all was because when I got down past the colors to the center, they all had the same little sweet chocolate core! So I illustrate this about each of us: No matter what color we are, at the center and the core we are more alike than different! Because of that core, God looks at us as brothers!

So if all of this be true- based on the definition of God that if we are human, we are brothers; and we are brothers because we were all made from Adam and Eve- why aren't we acting like brothers? Why aren't we loving and caring for each other as brothers and sisters? We are all products of the same source (Adam and Eve) and made of the particles of the same stuff (dust and dirt). We are brothers and sisters, so what's the problem?

Well, the answer to this question is found in the continuing and unfolding drama in our text (verses 2- 8) The NLT reads:

“The Lord accepted Abel and his offering, but he did not accept Cain and his offering. This made Cain very angry and dejected.

The Lord asked him, “Why are you so angry? Why do you look so dejected? You will be accepted if you respond in the right way. But if you refuse to respond correctly, then watch out! Sin is waiting to attack and destroy you, and you must subdue it.”

Later Cain suggested to his brother, Abel, ‘Let’s go out into the fields.’ And while they were there, Cain attacked and killed his brother.”

Since I introduced earlier “*the principle of first mention*”, it may interest you to know that in verse 8 is the first ever mentioning in the Bible of the occurrence of a murder, a homicide and

fratricide. Here is the first recording of a murder in Scripture and it is a brother killing his brother. KJV= "*Cain rose up against Abel, his brother, and slew [slaughtered] him!*" NIV, NRSV, NLT= "*Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him!*"

What happened that it led to a brother killing another brother? What was the cause of this dysfunction in the family? What was the reason for the breakdown in the community? Who is the blame for this tragedy- the parents, Adam and Eve? Was it due to any negative influences in their environment? What happened? *Cain suggested to his brother, Abel, 'Let's go out into the fields.'* *And while they were there, Cain attacked and killed his brother."*

Now I'm not going to try to explain why God accepted Abel's offering and not Cain's. That's an entirely different sermon that can be solely devoted to that issue. But let me offer some suggestions I came across while studying this text as to perhaps why Cain murdered his brother Abel. These are suggestions that we need to consider as to possibly why so many brothers and sisters today aren't getting along with each other.

First of all, there may be a hint we can take from Cain's and Abel's name. Cain's name is derived from the Hebrew word meaning "*to get.*" His name comes from an original word that suggests "*self- sufficiency, self- assertion*", "*the will for power and strength.*" Cain's name suggests the kind of person he was- a selfish getter, selfish asserter, and selfish aggressor.

Abel's name is derived from the Hebrew word meaning, "*vapor, nothingness, frailty.*" Abel's name comes from an original word that means weakling, nonentity, nobody; in today's term it could mean "count for nothing; or no count." One commentator said, "*Abel is the representative of those who get the short end of the stick.*" What I am suggesting is perhaps in their names, it is meant for us to discern a picture of their attitude towards one another. In Bible days, one's name was descriptive of one's character and it often reflected one's attitude.

Therefore, if Cain had a “get, get, get for me” attitude; an attitude of “self- sufficiency, self- assertion, self- aggression” and “the strong will for power and strength”, maybe and perhaps he took advantage of his brother, Abel, because he saw him as nothing, a weakling, good for nothing, a nonentity, a nobody or a “no good, count for nothing.”

Could it be that we attack, harm, hurt, demean, denigrate, dehumanize, devalue and kill one another because of our attitude and perception we have of our brother and sister. Could it be that there is the Cain tendency in us to take advantage, to prey, to attack the one we perceive to be weaker, lesser, no count to us. Could it be the reason why there is that Cain nature and tendency for the bully to pick on the weak; for the different to think others are deficient; for the mighty to mistake meekness for weakness; the aggressor to walk over, push over, climb over their perceived opponent; for the greater to think less of the least; the rich to rob from the poor...whether it's Jacob and Esau; Joseph and his brothers; Mary and Martha, it's the tendency of one sibling to envy the uniqueness of the other sibling.

Could selfishness, self- centeredness and sense of superiority be the sin that causes us to not treat each other as brothers/sisters. We see each other and see nobodies, nobody worth anything, no counts; we see differences and think of deficiencies...our get, get, get is all about me, me, me and if I have to attack, demean, harm, hurt and kill you to satisfy that then so be it! Whether black, white, brown, red or yellow brothers and sisters, this has always been our curse and sin: the attitude of some that we are somebody and while somebody else is nobody.

Think about our problems either between the races or within the races, we tend to classify folks who are not like us as somehow being inferior, worthless, valueless, useless, meaningless, substandard, below the norm, not quite up the par; deficient. How often we attack, demean, hurt, harm and kill each other because another brother or sister thinks themselves to be something but

somebody else as nothing. “*Cain* [selfish getter, selfish asserter, selfish aggressor] *attacked his brother Abel* [the weakling; no count] *and killed him!*”

Second of all, Cain chose to act in anger rather than love towards his brother! What makes this action so horrible is that the devil didn’t make anybody do this sin this time. Unlike Adam and Eve’s excuse, this sin was not due to the influence of an external serpentine tempter. Satan wasn’t the instigator of this sin this time! This murder arose from within the depths of Cain’s heart and willful decision! Verses 6, 7, “*The Lord said to Cain, ‘Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well,* [like a wild beast lying in wait for its prey] *sin is couching at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it* [dominate it, control it]!” In other words, Cain, be careful! You are responsible for your own heart and your own actions.

Brother/sister, you and I are responsible for our own heart! We are responsible for loving each other! It’s a choice. It’s controllable. We choose whom we love and whom we will not love. Love isn’t a feeling as much it is something that we do- a choice and an action. Cain chose to not act in love towards his brother. He chose to allow his heart to be filled with envy, jealousy, resentment, hatred, anger, superiority, arrogance.

On the other hand, brotherly and sisterly love chooses to show another brother and sister tender affection, sympathetic understanding, emphatic feeling, faithful commitment, courageous loyalty, benevolent action, sacrificial giving. Brotherly and sisterly love chooses to be affirming, forgiving, reconciling, supporting, nurturing, nourishing, encouraging, respecting, accepting, caring, cherishing, redeeming, appreciating. Brotherly love chooses to seek the other brother’s and sister’s well being and as brother and sister we count nothing more precious than the other brother’s and sister’s life. A matter of fact, brotherly love is more than willing to sacrifice its life

for the life of the other. Cain we are responsible for our *choosing* to love our brother! Cain, we are responsible for our own heart! We are responsible whom we choose to love and not to love!

Thirdly, Cain never accepted the reality and responsibility of the full meaning of being Abel's brother! The question and answer exchange between Cain and God in verse 9 is famous: *"Then the Lord said to Cain, 'Where is your brother, Abel?' Cain replied, 'I don't know. Am I my brother's keeper?'"* Though both Cain and Abel were born from the same parents, Cain never accepted the responsibility and reality of Abel being his brother. *Cain replied, "I don't know. Am I my brother's keeper?"*

Now what is interesting is that the word *"keeper"* is associated with the first time it is used in Scripture found in Genesis 2:15 where it says, *"And the Lord God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it! [take care of; to tend, to guard, watch, protect, keep safe and care for it]."* So Cain's response was, *"I don't know where Abel, my brother is! Am I supposed to take care of him? Tend to him? Guard him? Watch him? Protect him? Keep him safe? And care for him?"* Well, according to the original mind, intent and understanding of God, the answer to this is a thunderous, "Yes!" But Cain never accepted the reality and responsibility of being Abel's brother! Are we accepting the reality and responsibility of being each other's brother?

- Our Haitian brothers: The strongest earthquake since 1770 in what is now Haiti struck on January 12, 2010 at 4:53 p.m. The 7.0 magnitude quake's epicenter hit just 10 miles west of Port-au-Prince. As many as 200,000 were killed and it has left some 1.5 million people homeless in desperate and dire need of emergency aid, drinking water, food. I don't care what Rush Limbaugh or Pat Robertson says: *Are we accepting the reality and responsibility of being their brother?*
- Our Latino brothers: North Carolina has the fastest growing Latino population of any state. Mecklenburg County has the highest Latino population in North Carolina. Based on the US census figures, Mecklenburg County experienced a 571 percent increase in its Latino population from 1990 to 2000. *Are we accepting the reality and responsibility of being their brother?*

- Our young brothers: There was a report earlier this month saying there are about 3,000 homeless students² in the Charlotte - Mecklenburg school (CMS) district. And the report went on to alert the readers of the fact: They are struggling to stay warm during these freezing temperatures. Executive Director of “Child’s Place”, Annabelle Suddreth, said “You think that’s just a basic right. But we all have to think about it - when you are just trying to make ends meet, providing food or shelter over your head, you don’t always have the funds available to purchase a coat for a child.” *Are we accepting the reality and responsibility of being their brother?*
- While we are polarizing and politicizing and posturing over the Health Care Reform and we are numbering around 50 million uninsured; people having to decide over pills or meals; mortgage or prescriptions...are we accepting the reality and responsibility of being each other’s brother?
- What about the thousands of homeless and the jobless in our city and country...are we accepting the reality and responsibility of being each other’s brother?

Are we non- accepting of the reality and neglecting our responsibility like Cain when he said, “*Am I supposed to take care of him? Tend to him? Guard him? Watch him? Protect him? Keep him safe? And care for him?*” God’s answer still is, “Yes!”

Lastly, Cain did not understand the seriousness and significance to God of what he did to his brother! The Lord said, “*What have you done?*” Notice the emphasis on God pointing the finger at “you” (Cain)!

The late Shirley Guthrie, the Presbyterian theologian and author of the classic book, Christian Doctrine, said, “*Human negligence, selfishness and unconcern cause many forms of evil we like to blame God for. And human good will can remedy many forms of evil we think God ought to do something about!*”

Here’s a tone of shock and anger in God’s voice. It’s shocking to God the way brothers mistreat brothers! It angers God the way humanity mistreats humanity. It pains God to see children killing children; husbands beating wives, parents abusing children, men prostituting women; the young neglecting the elderly; elderly impatient with the young; whites hating blacks; blacks hating blacks; citizens hating immigrants; Christians hating Jews; heterosexuals hating homosexuals; saints hating “aint’s”...

² Homeless is defined by CMS as living in a shelter, with other family, or bunk in with friends. Some live in “pay by the week” motels.

I hear the Lord saying through the text to us, “*What have you done? Listen! Your brother’s blood cries out to me from the ground!*” Why was God so furious with what Cain did to his brother? Why is God so upset with brothers misusing, abusing, using, denigrating, fighting, hating, killing, slaying, shooting, stabbing, murdering brothers? Why is God so upset with the racism, sexism, classism, ageism and all the other “isms” we’ve created to separate us? Whoever mistreats a brother must face the riddle of God: “*What have you done? Listen! Your brother’s blood cries out to me from the ground!*” The mentioning of blood means that life is in the blood; it is what gives life. Simply put, *blood* means life is precious and holy to God! No one can injure a brother or sister without affecting God! A brother’s blood and life belong to God. To demean, devalue, diminish, dehumanize or even kill another’s life is to take from that person something which belongs to God!

“*What have you done? Listen! Your brother’s blood cries out to me from the ground!*” A brother’s and sister’s life is precious, valuable, prized! A brother’s and sister’s life is holy, blessed, sacred and divine! We are responsible for each other! We are all made in the image of God! We are brothers and sisters! Everybody was made and expected to be his brother’s keeper!

CONCLUSION: Everybody who can walk, go around to three people and say to them appropriate to their gender: *I am your brother/sister; therefore I am your keeper!*