

When I was a little kid I got a \$20 check for my birthday, and I asked my mom if I could take it to school and put it in the offering plate. She agreed. So I told her I wanted a big check so that everyone will see me give my big offering. Well she told me that's not why we give offerings—we don't do it so people will see us. We do it because we are thankful for what Jesus has done for us. Well I didn't like that much. I got bitter because she told me I was doing the wrong thing. You've been bitter like that, when you know you didn't do something right, but you don't want to hear it.

Today I want to tell you a story from God's word about bitterness. It's a story most of you know. It's a story about a bitter man in a messed up family, and a stubborn God who just would not give up on trying to save him.

And this story starts with Adam and Eve. Adam and Eve in their first days on the wrong side of paradise. They sinned, and that made a mess of their relationship with God, but it made a mess of their relationship with one another, and now they start a messed up family. The first family was four sinners, Adam, Eve, Cain and Abel, all with messy relationships. If you've ever wondered why your family has so much fighting, so much resentment, so much bitterness it's because your family and every family is still on the wrong side of paradise.

But these boys grow up and Abel becomes a shepherd and Cain becomes a farmer. They brought two very similar looking offerings to the Lord, but there was one big difference. Abel brought his offering to say because he trusted in God and he wanted to say thanks. I know that because the New Testament says that. Hebrews 11:4 says, **"By FAITH Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did."** Cain's offering was fine, but his heart was in the wrong place. He was like me in grade school,

he wanted to look good, or maybe he thought he had to. But he didn't have the same faith as Abel. And that is a sin. That's why God looked with favor on Abel but not on Cain. And God made sure Cain knew it.

So this is the critical moment. How will Cain respond? How would you respond? See this is interesting. **"Cain was very angry and his face was downcast."** He was ticked off, and he was sad. The Bible doesn't tell us exactly what he was thinking but it isn't hard for us to imagine. "This is ridiculous. I bust my tail to get some crops and I don't get any recognition. It's all about Abel's offering. It's always Abel. But I am a good person too! I gave a good sacrifice and nobody around here treats me like a good person. Ridiculous!" And immediately God shows up. And Cain's got to be thinking, "Oh great! What's he going to say? 'I've been meaning to talk to you about your sacrifices...'" but he doesn't.

Do you remember what the Lord said to this furious, depressed, worn out man? **"Why? Why are you angry? And why precisely are you so sad?"** Now that is an interesting question. Because the answer is not so obvious, right? Why was Cain so bitter? Why do you get bitter at your family? "It's you God! If you would have just acknowledged that I did a good job!" or "It's Abel!" (pause) Is it? What exactly was Abel supposed to do differently? What, is God supposed to just pretend that Cain is holy when he's not? No. Cain's problem wasn't with Abel, and it wasn't with God. Cain's problem was Cain.

The Lord said, **"If you do what is right, will you not be accepted?"** Cain, the problem is you. If you did the right thing, you wouldn't have these problems. Cain, the problem is you. You are not a good person. Adam knew that he was not a good person. That's why he was on the wrong side of paradise. But

God was good and good to him. Abel knew that he was not a good person. But God was good and good to him. That's why he brought that offering—out of thanks for God's goodness. But Cain needed to learn that he was not a good person. So God warned him.

"If (like Adam, and like Eve, and like Abel) you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it." My friends if you and I are anything like your great-grandpa Adam, if we really do come from our great-grandma Eve, if you can relate at all to your great-uncle Cain, if your family is anything like theirs or anything like mine then you do not do what is right. Then sin is crouching like a wild animal at your door. Sin is crouching at your kitchen table. Sin is crouching in the family room. Sin is crouching in your car, and it wants to rip your family limb from limb, but you must master it! The Lord is pleading with Cain, "Just confess your sin! I will forgive you! But don't let this happen. Let go of this bitterness! Don't let it destroy your family!"

"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."

There was a lot of blood, a lot of innocent blood. I wonder how long it took before Cain realized that his brother wasn't getting up. That's the story of how the first person went to heaven. Cain didn't confess, and his sin tore his family apart.

The Lord said to Cain, "How dare you!" No. The Lord said to Cain, "What will your father say!" No. The Lord said to Cain, "Where? Where is your brother Abel?" The Lord said to Cain, "Confess! I will forgive you! I can save you! But you need to let go of your pride. You need to admit you are wrong. So tell me,

Cain, where is your brother Abel?" And Cain lied. **"I don't know."**

But there was a lot of blood, a lot of innocent blood. There was blood on the ground. There was blood on Cain's hands. And the scene was screaming bloody murder. The blood was screaming for justice! **"Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground. Now you are under a curse and driven from the ground, which opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand."** There was a lot of blood, too much blood for God to stand by and do nothing. So he tries one more time to get Cain to admit he is wrong. To let go of his bitterness and his pride. And he got Cain's attention.

"My punishment is more than I can bear! Whoever finds me will kill me!" A lot of sadness, a lot of fear, a lot of regret, but no confession. Cain would not admit that he was bad. He would not acknowledge that God is the only one who is good. He still can only think of himself.

So the Lord tries one last time to get Cain to confess, and throw himself on God's mercy, and be forgiven. **"The Lord said to him, 'Not so; if anyone kills Cain, he will suffer vengeance seven times over.' Then the Lord put a mark on Cain so that no one who found him would kill him."** The Lord gave Cain a small taste of his goodness. See, Cain!? I love you! I can forgive you! I can save you! And Cain walked away, bitterness still in his heart, blood still on his hands. The end. That's the end of the story, kind of.

Because this is a true story about real people who really lived and died. But it is also the story about what it's like to be human. It's the story about what it's like to be a messed up family. So even though you know how Cain's story ends, you're

in the middle of your story and I have some hard questions for you.

Cain's bitterness was triggered by his sacrifice. What triggers your bitterness? What at home irritates you? What at home feels so unfair? What causes anger and sadness and self-pity in your home?

And what if God came to you like he came to Cain and asked why? "Why are you angry? Why are you sad?" That's an interesting question because the answer isn't so obvious. I am sure there are times when your family sins against you. But even if you will help them deal with their sin, you can't do it if you're still carrying that bitterness in your heart. Why are you angry? Why are you sad? Your problem isn't your family. Your problem is you.

Confess it! Admit your sinful attitude! God will forgive you! This is how God gets rid of bitterness.

When you don't confess your sin, when you get bitter and lash out at others, when you feel like a failure and you take out your stress on your family, when you get short with the kids, when you disrespect your parents, when you fight, do you know what you have done? You have taken the way of Cain, who belonged to the Devil. Sin is crouching at your door and it wants to tear your family apart! There may not always be blood but there is yelling. There are broken promises and broken hearts. There are tears, a lot of innocent tears. Tears in your home is blood on your hands. Those tears and that blood is screaming for justice just like the blood of Abel.

But if your family has bloody hands, then you have come to the right place. Look at what God says in the book of Hebrews.

"You have come to Jesus, and to the blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel."

See Jesus knows what it's like to come from a broken family. At one point Jesus had a perfect family. He had a perfect relationship with his Father in heaven and they had that relationship from eternity. If you think you love your kids whom you've known for a decade, if you think you love your spouse whom you've known for a 50 years, imagine how the God the Father loves Jesus, since they've had a perfect unity for infinity years! But that relationship was broken not Jesus's sin, not by Cain's sin, not by my sin.

But the Father knew about our sin and the blood and the tears and he needed to do justice the only problem is that he loved us. He loved you too much to make you pay for the blood on your hands. So in love, he sent his son. Love broke up the perfect family in heaven. That's how much God loves you!

So Jesus came to earth and the people here cried for his blood. "Let his blood be on us and on our children!" they said. And there was a lot of blood, a lot of innocent blood. And at noon one Friday Jesus cried out **"My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?"** But you know why. He did it because he loves you. He did it so that he will never ever ever forsake you. You want proof? The blood. The blood is the evidence. Jesus' blood speaks a better word than the blood of Abel, because Jesus' blood screams, "Forgive them!" It screams "Not them, Lord! We both know what they've done, but remember what Jesus did! We both know that they've shed blood but remember that I shed mine! We both know they've caused tears, but remember that I've taken away all their sins!" The blood of Jesus is screaming that justice has already been served! You will not be punished! You will not be punished.

So confess! There is sin that wants to tear your family apart. Confess it! You will not be punished! Because Jesus blood speaks a better word than the blood on your hands. And when Jesus' blood screams that you are innocent, The Father listens. Do you? If you do, who needs to hear an apology from you?

Listen up if you are a father, or a single mom, or a grandpa, or if you have custody of your kids. Anyone who sets the tone for the home, listen up. Do you know what the Bible records right after Cain and Abel? It's the story of Cain's family. Cain's descendants were warlords, and arms dealers. Cain's great grandson took two wives and killed two men, and bragged about it. Cain had started a culture of bitterness and sin.

But you're still in the middle of your story. You don't have to have a Cain culture. You can have a confession culture in your family. There's no sense in pretending your perfect. You are washed in the blood of Jesus! So live, like your God is the forgiving God! When you mess up, confess it. Apologize! And let go of the bitterness that poisoned Cain's family. On your way home from church today, turn off the radio, and tell your family, "I'm a sinner. I'm sorry. Please forgive me. And when you sin, I want you to confess it. Because the blood of Jesus is screaming that you are forgiven too. And I'm listening to that screaming bloody forgiveness."

Amen.