

East of Eden
#4 in a Series on The Story: From Creation to Christ
Genesis 4:1-16
Faith Community Church – January 27, 2008

Introduction:

In 1952 author John Steinbeck wrote what he considered to be his greatest novel and called it *East of Eden*. It may be more well known as a movie starring James Dean.

Steinbeck took the title of the book from the last three words of Genesis 4:16. I have to confess that I have neither read the book or seen the movie. But I know that the novel is a sad story, because it is based to some extent on Genesis 4:1-16, the passage I want to look at this morning.

So let's read it together and see what God has put there for us.

Setting the Stage for Cain's Tragic Choice

In verses 1-7 we are introduced to Cain and Abel.

1. Some background information. We know very little about either of them:
 - a. We know that Cain's name means "to acquire," and may have come from Eve's reflection on his birth (1). Abel's name means "breath" or "vapor."
 - i. We know nothing about their childhood, or even how old they were at this point in the story. What is told us simply is that Abel was the keeper of sheep and Cain worked the ground.
2. This paragraph is centered around an offering and God's response.
 - a. There are two things that we should assume:
 - i. God had given instruction on what kind of offering would be accepted, and
 - ii. There was some kind of interpersonal – I'll use the words "face to face" for lack of a better term – communication between God and people.
 - b. What was the offering? The Hebrew word that is translated "offering" is not the same as the word translated "sacrifice." It represented a gift given in tribute, acknowledging a superior. (See 1 Samuel 10:27 & 1 Kings 4:21).
 - c. Why was Cain's offering rejected?
 - i. There are three possibilities:
 1. Cain was to have brought a blood sacrifice.
 2. The quality of their offerings was different (firstfruits)
 3. The spirit behind Cain & Abel's offerings were different.
 - ii. My own preference is the 2nd or 3rd choice, but in point of fact the story does not tell us, probably because the offering is not as important as the matter of Cain's reaction and God's response.
 - d. Cain's reaction and God's response.
 - i. We are told that Cain becomes angry and his face falls. He is visibly upset.

- ii. God, seeing Cain's countenance, and responds to it:
 - 1. Question: Why are you angry?
 - 2. Reminder: If you do what is right you'll be accepted.
 - 3. Warning: If you don't do what is right, sin is crouching at your door like something poised to attack. And you must master it or it will master you.
- iii. Before we move on, let me point out that God's response is an expression of his grace. God's design is to bring about Cain's repentance (Romans 2:4). And he does that with you as well, facing you and facing me with His Word and prompting us to respond correctly.

Cain's Choice and Punishment

- 1. Murder: The text says that Cain spoke to his brother. Some of you have the NIV, and it contains a snippet of text that is not found in most translations: "Let's go out into the field." And while they were there, Cain kills his brother.
- 2. Opportunity: And again we see the grace of God – he gives yet another opportunity to Cain. 1 John 1:9 says that if we confess our sin God is faithful and just to forgive our sin and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Scripture is filled with people who are forgiven for the same sin Cain commits. But Cain's heart is progressively hardened – and in response to God's question, "Where is your brother Abel," Cain gives God nothing but a smart-mouth sarcasm.
- 3. Judgment: So God pronounces the sentence on Cain. Look again at verses 10-12.
 - a. Cain's punishment will consist of:
 - i. The loss of livelihood from the ground.
 - ii. Being separated from his family and having to wander.
 - b. How does Cain respond? Self pity. Complaint. Fear.
 - c. God marks him (what that is we don't know) in order to protect him (grace again!) and we read the saddest of words, "Cain went away from the presence of the Lord."

Learning from the Cain & Abel Story

- 1. What are we to learn from this story? I believe that the key to it is in verse 7 – it is on that text that the point of the story turns. Read it again.
- 2. The lesson here is not about jealousy, or about learning to control your temper, or about bringing the right offering, or about being nominal/careless in our relationship with God.
- 3. The lesson is about our need to master sin. And here's the point. We cannot master sin! Without Christ.
- 4. Colossians 3. Look at verses 5-11. Look at verses 12-17. How on earth can that happen? The answer is in verses 1-4. People who are raised with Christ because they have died with Christ – been included by faith in his death and resurrection – are able to do this because God has done something new. He has implanted a new dynamic.

5. That is the hope and good news of the Gospel. People who cannot master their sin can put it to death. They can have its penalty cancelled and its power broken.
6. Our inability to master our sin is intended to cause us to turn to God for help. Cain never does that, but you and I have the opportunity to make a better choice. I hope you will.