

Counting Ripples

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[0 : 00] Folks, wonderful to see you this morning. Let me encourage you to have Genesis chapter 4 open in front of you. It's so imperative that we have the word of the Lord with us.

So if nothing else, you can check that what I'm saying is hopefully what is in the text. Let me just clarify before we get there. The membership class isn't this evening. It is next Sunday evening. But let me encourage you to get along to that next Sunday evening at half past five. So Genesis chapter 4 is where we are. But why don't we just pause for just a moment and let's pray. And let's ask that the words of the living God who we are encountering this morning would speak to us by his Holy Spirit. So let's pray. Father, we're so grateful for our time together already. Singing your praise, it's hearing, recalling who you are. The God of all grace, the holy God, the merciful God, the compassionate God. And Father, we just pray now that as we turn to your word, help us remember and delight in the fact that you are a God who has and is revealing himself through his word.

[1 : 09] And so Father, I ask that as we come here today, Lord, that you would help keep our minds attention and that you would help fire our hearts affection for you. So Father, we pray these things knowing that you hear us because we pray in Jesus's precious name.

Amen. Well, folks, as I say, Genesis chapter 4 open in front of you. This is where we've got to in our little series in the opening chapters of this book. So chapter 4 is where we are.

Let me just tell you, as I've spent the hours in this text this week, what it's reminded me of. And it's reminded me of holidays we used to go on in Fife, summer holidays.

Grew up just going to Fife. There's another kingdom for you, right? But maybe not the other one we're thinking of. Kingdom of Fife. So brothers, got two brothers. If we weren't on these summer holidays playing golf, what we were doing is we were going for walks along the beach, right? We used to love walks along the beach. And what we used to love to do on those walks was to skim stones, right? Any other skimmer of stones, right? Anyone else love doing that game?

[2 : 14] Right, love doing that game, walking along the beach. And we'd spend ages looking for the stones, the perfect stone, right? Because it wasn't just any stone that would skim. You had to find the ones that were kind of the circular ones and the thin ones.

And then you would spend ages trying to working on your grip to see how many skims that you could get with your stone. And you can imagine, right, three brothers. This got really competitive really quickly.

So the game that we used to play was called Count the Skims, right? Count the Skims. So we used to fire it up. There it went. And it went one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine.

Always ended on ten. I don't know how that happened, but it always ended on ten. That was the game, skim the stones. But we used to keep going on this walk on the beach. And after a while, we'd get quite bored of this game. And the game turned into find the biggest rock that you could find on the beach, right?

And some of you will know where I'm going with this. Find the biggest rock that you could find on the beach. And hurl it as far in the air as you could out in the direction of the water. And see how big an impact you could make on the sea, right?

[3 : 17] Normally, at that time of the night, the sea was quite still. The game became not Count the Skims. The game became Count the Ripples, okay? How much of an impact could your stone make on the water?

Now, you say, why has that been in my mind in Genesis chapter 4? Okay? It's been in my mind because the author, Moses, as he presents us with Genesis chapter 4, is inviting us to come and play Count the Ripples.

Okay? Let me just back up and show you what I mean by that. If you've been in church the last number of weeks, we've been in Genesis. Genesis 1, if you remember, we saw the three-in-one God whose word this is.

The three-in-God-one of the Bible. The all-powerful God who created the cosmos through the power of his word. And do you remember that repeated phrase we saw in Genesis chapter 1? God saw that it was good. Yeah? If you need to remind yourself, go back to Genesis chapter 1. It was good. And in Genesis 2, we kind of zoomed in on creation day 6, where God made man and woman.

[4 : 24] The human beings that he made in his image. And he declared, and again, you can turn back, he declared that it was not just good. It was very good. It was the cherry on the cake who'd reached the top. And then last week, we saw that that harmony was severed.

Severed by sin as the creatures reject their creator in Genesis 3. As the stone of sin, as it flings it in the air. And as it impacts the harmonious water.

Right? The harmony that existed between creator, creature, and creation. As the stone of sin impacts and hits it. And what is known in Christian theology as the fall.

And so, the question we should be asking as we leave chapter 3 is, how big an impact has the fall had on human beings in particular?

How big an impact has this had? And the answer is, it has had a huge impact. It's had a huge impact. So, chapter 4, we're presented, the author presents us, particularly with this guy called Cain.

[5 : 34] Right? And he becomes almost the case in point as to what the fall, as to what sin has done in human beings. Right? And here's maybe the key thing to notice as we come to these verses.

Genesis chapter 3, sin is out there. Yeah? It's out there. We hit Genesis chapter 4, and sin is in here. It's a heart thing now.

It's inside. And we'll see this as we go through it, how much of this connects with the world in which we live and the hearts that we know we have. Sin is in here now. The human heart is fallen. And here's the two things I want us to see today.

I want us to see just how much the fall has impacted our hearts. And I want us to be thrown upon the God who is in the business of changing hearts.

And forgiving sin. And dealing with sin. So that is what I want us to see in Genesis chapter 4. And really, we're talking about those ripples, right? There's two ripples that I want us to see in these verses.

[6 : 32] Here's the first one. First one. Come with me. There's a devotional ripple. We want to think of it, right? There's a vertical ripple. Devotional ripple. So come with me.

By the grace of God, do you see that Eve has two sons? Now, remember that God had promised that one of Eve's offspring in the story so far is going to be the serpent crusher.

He is going to be the curse crusher who would deal the fatal blow to the snake who tempted them in the garden. And if you see it there, verse 1, you can hear the optimism in her voice, can't you?

As if to say, is it one of these boys that's going to be the serpent crusher? It's one of these guys. Is this the offspring that God was talking about? So in this passage, we have these two boys, do you see?

Cain and Abel, these two brothers. Information in the text. They work in different jobs. And do you see how they both come to worship the Lord and to bring their sacrifice to him?

[7 : 32] So they come to the Lord to worship him. And this is what we read at verse 4. The Lord looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering, he did not look with favor.

However, headline, God loves Abel's offering, but he's got no time for Cain's. And the question is, isn't it, why?

Why? It's on the surface of it. These two guys are just bringing their things. They're doing their thing. They're worshiping. But God knows that there's something deeper going on here. Because remember what we said, this is about the hearts.

Do you see there's a clue in the text? In the course of time, Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the Lord. So what is this God worthy of in the sight of Cain?

What will he bring to show his adoration? Do you see the clues in the word some? Yeah? Some of the fruits of the ground. You want to think of it like this.

[8 : 34] Here is Cain saying, here is a token gesture. You know, you go to the restaurant and here's a tip. Here's a tip. Look what Abel brings.

And Abel also brought an offering, fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. So what we need to understand is that Abel brings his best. The best of his flock and the best bits of the best bits of his flock.

I mean, this is the cut. This is what's going to earn you the money. This is what's going to taste delightful. This is what he offers. Now, Hebrews 12 will pick up on this and talk about how Abel's offering was accepted because it was offered in faith.

Right? So, in other words, acceptable worship, the kind that God is after, is from a mind that's set on his truth. And it's from a heart that is overjoyed with who this God is.

Of course, we get to the New Testament. We hear Jesus talking about how the worshippers that the Father is seeking are those who worship him in spirit and in truth. And here's what we need to see.

[9 : 44] Cain's heart ain't in it. So God's not having it when it comes to his worship. Right? This false image of religiosity.

I don't even know if that's a word. I've just made it up. Right? This false image that Cain is presenting like he's in this. And I think that's why in the text it's quite subtle because there is no difference on the outside. But God sees.

They all know in God. They all see in God. He sees. Cain's heart's not in it. So God's not having it. And how does Cain respond?

I find this fascinating. Right? Verse 6. Do you see the description? How does he respond? He's angry. Right? Just one of those little emojis on your phone. Right? You get that little burning up face.

That's literally what the Hebrew means there. He's very angry. He is hot. He is hot with anger. And do you see how for the very first time in the Bible. Remember the words we saw in Genesis 1, Genesis chapter 2.

[10 : 41] It was good. It was delightful. It was beautiful. And now all of a sudden here. Chapter 4. We've just turned the page. And all of a sudden here's anger. Anger mentioned for the first time in the Bible.

Friends, as we live our lives in the world. First of all, knowing our own hearts. Right? But as we live our lives in the world. Is this beginning to click? Right? Anger. So the question is.

What's Cain going to do with his anger? Right? Love what God does next. What does he ask him? Cain, why are you angry? Do you see it in the text? Why are you angry? Here's the thing. It's not like God doesn't know the answer to that question.

They're all seeing one. They're all knowing one. So what's he doing? It's not like God. Well, here's where we see that this God is the ultimate pastoral counselor. Right? I love learning this this week. Notice what God doesn't say to Cain. He doesn't say, are you angry? Because that would be what kind of question? Closed question, yeah?

[11 : 43] What does he say? He says, are you angry? Why are you angry? Sorry. Why are you angry? Which is an open question. So do you see how God is almost inviting Cain to come and take his hand and walk with him and have a chat and explore what's going on in his heart?

Right? You ever see that? Just the stuff that comes out your heart? We've got a choice in that moment, don't we? Do we run from it? Or do we run to the Lord with it? Let me just tell you how this has worked out for me this week.

Okay? Two little girls were in bed during the week. Got them down at 7 o'clock. 7 o'clock is bedtime. 7.30 comes. I can hear them.

They're still up and they're still at it. Right? There's a few fights going on. They're still at it. I can feel it in me. Right? I'm going, oh! Why are they still up? But nothing's come out of my heart yet. Okay? 8 o'clock comes.

One of them comes out. Probably just wanting a hug. Right? A bit upset. Do you know how I reacted? Come here. No, I did not react like that. Why are you not asleep?

[12 : 51] Why are you not in your bed? What is going on? Right? I freaked her out. And eventually she went back to bed. But I'm sitting there thinking, boy, a man alive, where's that come from?

Yeah? And in my head I'm trying to justify it. Because this question comes at me. Why are you angry? And in my head I'm trying to justify it. Saying, Lord, it's these girls. Four-year-old. The three-year-old.

Why are they just going to bed? Do they not know that dad's got emails to send after this? Do they not know that dad's had a hard day? No, no, no, no, no. That's not why I asked you. That's how you got angry. I'm asking you why you got angry.

It's a different question, isn't it? So after a bit of soul searching, looking deep within my heart, asking that the spirit would come and convict me of where I need to change, help me. Do you know what the answer was?

The answer was it was because it was my night off. And I had stuff to do, right? I had a game to watch. I had stuff to read. I had this night planned in my head. So the root issue in my heart, friends, was selfishness.

[13:50] Because they were getting in the way of me enjoying my time. And so you find yourself just humbled, being like, Lord, thank you for bringing people and circumstances into my life that show me my heart.

And would you thank you that you are this kind of God. Would you help me by your spirit to change that my character would be conformed more to the image of Jesus? So let me ask you, friends, what do you see coming out of your heart?

Yeah? Yeah? Jesus talks a lot about what comes out of a person's mouth comes from the heart, doesn't he? As we turn to the gospel. What is coming out of your heart? Do you see in this case? Coming out of Cain's heart is anger.

And do you see that God doesn't condemn him for it? That God asks him to come and explore it. And do you notice what God says next to Cain? How his open question becomes a closed question. If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? Answer. Yes. Yes. So here's what God is saying.

[14:57] He's saying, repent, turn around, lower your protective defensive walls, tell your inner lawyer to pipe down and come to me. Know who I am, the holy God, the gracious God.

The one who made you, the one who knows you, the one who sees you. And notice in passing how God describes sin to Cain, right?

That anger in his heart. How does he describe it? And I find this really hard to take it. But look how God describes it. The sin in Cain's heart is crouching at the door, right?

This is like a predator waiting to devour you. We've all watched those shows on TV, right? You know the people that normally features a person who's, for some weird reason, has made a point thinking it's a good idea to keep a dangerous pet in their home.

You watch those kind of programs, right? And so you turn on and there's Sally. She's stroking her pet lion cub, right? She's giving it a name. She's tied a bow on it. She's holding it up like she's Rafiki, pretending to be the lion king.

[16:03] But the show goes on to tell you how that lion cub, right? It grew up. And eventually it did the one thing that lions were put on the earth to do, to hunt, to kill, and to eat.

And we're all watching it thinking, what else did you think was going to happen? God says to Cain, see that anger in your heart. See if you don't kill it, it will kill you.

It will take you places. It will cause you to do things that you don't want to be doing. Places where you don't want to be. And maybe here's a wake-up call to some of us here today who are, as it were, are stroking sin.

Playing with fire. And in our heart, in our heads and in our hearts, we're trying to justify what we're doing. God loves Cain. He says, come and explore the anger in your heart.

Let me warn you, lovingly warn you, where that will take you. As the sirens of sin, as they lure you with the promise of life. But when you get there, what happens is that they deal you death.

[17:07] They deal you death. What's going on in our hearts in that moment is that we believe that we've stopped believing, rather.

Maybe we even haven't believed for the first time that at the Lord's right hand are pleasures forevermore. And it's in his presence that we will be truly satisfied. You see how there's a devotional ripple going on that leads, secondly, to a relational ripple.

Because here's the question, what is Cain? This jumps at you in the text. What's he going to do with the anger in his heart? What's he going to do with the stuff that's festering in there? The jealousy, the envy.

Where's he going to go with it? Well, verse 8, Cain speaks to his brother. Do you see, which I assume is his way of kind of luring him to the field out in the open, right? Equivalent. This is the back of the bus.

Yeah, nobody can see what you're doing up the back of the bus, so you think. Cain says, come out to the field. Away from the action. No one can see. What does he do? He kills his brother. I mean, how quick and how cold does that come at you in the text?

[18:13] It just, boom, there it is. There it happened. And here for the first time, we've seen anger. Here for the first time is murder in the Bible. And do you see how far we have come from Genesis 1 and Genesis chapter 2?

And you notice in the text that the author keeps reminding us who was murdered. Do you see there the word brother comes up six times in quick succession, as if to remind you of the tragedy. His brother, his brother, his brother, his brother, his brother, his brother.

Tragedy. And do you see how Cain's anger that was festering in him has just absolutely devoured him. God confronts him. Where is your brother?

Now, again, do you see God graciously giving Cain a chance here to come clean? Where is your brother? Again, it's not as if God doesn't know. But do you hear the echoes of his parents' response, Adam and Eve, when God asked them a very similar question in the garden back in chapter 3.

Where are you? Where is your brother? Right? I don't know. That's his response. I don't know. Why should I care? God saw. He saw.

[19:20] Cain thinks he played a blinder. No, God saw. And again, do you see how we're building up this picture? Genesis 1, Genesis 2, Genesis 3, Genesis 4. Who this God is. Right? All-powerful God.

The personal God. The all-knowing God. The all-gracious God. And here we get he is the all-seeing God. He sees it. And nothing escapes his sight.

I remember when we were on a, during a university summer, driving from Malawi. And going to Mozambique. And having this experience, just driving along for hours and hours and hours. And coming across hundreds of people. Right? Who found themselves living in the middle of nowhere. And hearing reports about how in the area at the time, land grabbing was everywhere. People just stealing things. And looking at these people, just feeling who is speaking for them? Who is seeing what is going on here? Right? They ain't got no 999 they can ring. They don't have expenses that they can bring to hire an attorney to come and stand for their rights.

[20:27] Who is it that sees what is going on to these people? And the answer from these verses is that this God sees. He sees.

He sees everything. Nothing is out with his sight. One day, every wrong will be put to right. Every hidden deed will be brought to light.

Every perpetrator will be held accountable. And for some of us here today, that truth is a massive comfort. Right? Some of you have been through the most horrific stuff in your life.

And you think, I did not get justice. And this text tells you that this God sees every tear. Right? We often don't think he sees.

He sees every tear. He knows every thought. He hears every voice. And we can leave it with this Lord because he will have perfect justice one day. Let's also let this truth comfort us.

[21:23] But it should also chill us as well. As those who know that we are guilty in the sight of a holy God. God sees. Right? He sees everything.

Because our sin, isn't it? We never sin in a vacuum. It always affects people. That's the lie we tell ourselves. It's only about me. No, it's not. It affects others. God sees. Cain's not getting away with this.

God curses Cain. Do you see that? That his work is going to be unfruitful. He will be a restless wanderer his whole life on the earth. And that punishment overwhelms Cain. Do you see verse 13?

As he kind of comes to terms with what life will be like for him from here on in. But again, do you see how God is so gracious here? Right? He puts his protective mark on Cain.

Right? Which I think is what's going on here. Is God saying enough with death. Enough with this. Why does God do this? Surely this guy doesn't deserve to take another breath.

[22:22] Right? God's saying enough with death. But is this also God saying? And we read this elsewhere in the Bible. Don't we? The answer being, why does God do this? That God's kindness, his unmerited goodness, is always meant to lead him and us where?

To repentance. To run back to him. To say, Father, I am sorry I have got that wrong. Would you help me change? Thank you for Jesus, my Savior.

And so do you see how for the third time in these verses, right? The character of God, he is a gracious pursuer. Do you see how for the third time in these verses, he holds out his arm of forgiveness and restoration to Cain for him to grasp? Will you come back to me? Will you come back? You see how Cain's heart has been so affected by the fall.

And it shouldn't surprise us, folks, that as we've looked at him, we see our own hearts as well. That we have been stained by our sin. For, I guess in one sense as well, Abel's blood cries out to God as to Cain's guilt.

[23 : 27] We've got to understand that the blood of our evil deeds, the things that we've done, the people that we've hurt, the gods that we have rebelled against, that blood, as it were, it cries out to God's guilty.

Guilty before a holy God, all of us. But the central truth of the gospel is that there's another blood that cries for us. The atoning blood of Jesus.

Blood he shed on the cross, shed for our guilt. Abel's blood cries out guilty. Jesus' blood cries out for all those who would trust in him, covered.

Paid for. I did it. And that's why the writer to the Hebrews talks about Jesus' blood speaking a better word than the blood of Abel. In the words of Charles Wesley, Five bleeding wounds he bears received on Calvary.

They pour effectual prayers. They strongly plead for me. Forgive him, oh forgive, they cry. Forgive him, oh forgive, they cry. Don't let that ransomed sinner die.

[24 : 30] And this means if you're here today and your trust is in Jesus, friends, the mistakes that you made last night, the stuff that came out of your heart, Jesus says paid for. This morning, the stuff that you did, you shouldn't have done, Jesus' blood says paid for.

Every sin that you and I will commit if our trust is in Jesus, from here on in, his blood will say paid for. Paid for. I took the hit. Paid for. Paid for.

An incredible, gracious God. Pursuing God. The thing about Jesus, friends, though, is he's not just a saviour who gives me a get out of hell, get into heaven free card.

He is a saviour who is in the business of transforming lives and hearts. I love this. One of the promises that God made in the Old Testament about his new covenant is that one of the things he would do for his people is take out their hearts of stone and give them a heart of flesh.

A new heart. He says, well, we need, isn't it? A new heart. The transforming grace of God in our hearts. I love this. That God would be so committed to us that he would do that. Sin had caused a devotional problem.

[25 : 34] The spirit of God at work in my life helps me. The God that I had no interest in loving transformed hearts. He says, Father, I love you. I love you. Thank you. Thank you. The relational problem that sin had caused.

People that I had no interest in loving, I just wanted to climb over to get my own way in life. I look out and I say, I love them, Father. Thank you because you love them and I love them, my brothers and sisters. Answer to our heart problem cannot come from inside of us, right?

Remember that song, end people search for the hero inside yourself? Nah. Nah. Not having that, right? The answer to our sin problem must come from outside of us. It must come from this savior, King Jesus Christ.

And here's what I want us to see as we close, right? Come with me to verse 16. And we'll close it here, okay? One last time, how will Cain respond to this pursuing God?

How's he going to respond, right? Let me tell you how I would have written this ending. Okay? I would have written it Hollywood style. Scene would have been really dark.

[26 : 37] Then all of a sudden, Cain would drop to his knees. He would tear his shirt. He would look to the sky. The lights would go on. And then fix you from Coldplay. We'd play in the background, right? That's how I would have written this. And Hollywood would have loved it.

But that isn't how it goes, is it? You see how the story ends? Almost every word spells out to you the tragedy of Cain's reaction. Cain went away from the presence of the Lord. And he settled, right? Which means he said, no, I'm living here. I'm staying here. Where is he staying? He's staying in the land of Nod. The Hebrew word there literally meaning wandering. Right?

Cain's going nowhere in his life. And where is Nod? It is east of Eden. East in the Bible. Symbolic of always moving away from God.

Do you see how that sentence is an absolute tragedy? And just as we close friends, maybe that's some of us here today. Right? As it were, you're living your life in Nod.

[27 : 36] Just wandering. See the pursuing heart of God in these verses. The God who would give us his only son. And just as we close, and I want to finish with a passage kind of finishes that note.

Let's just take a moment to examine our hearts before this God. They all see in God. They all know in God. They all gracious God. So why don't we just have a moment of silence. And then I'll lead us in prayer just as we close.

Who else would rescue me from my failing? Who else would offer his only son? Who else invites me to call him father?

Only a holy God. Come and behold him. The one and the only. Cry out, sing holy. Forever a holy God.

Come and worship the holy God. Father, we pray that you would help turn our eyes upon Jesus. Help us look to him as our saviour and our king. Father, for those today for whom your word has, by your spirit, impacted hearts.

[28 : 44] I pray, Father, that you would long resonate the impact of your word in our lives as we go on from here. Father, we commit these things to you, knowing that you hear us. You hear us because we pray in Jesus' precious name.

Amen.