

“THE FIRST CULTURE WAR” **(Genesis 4:17-26)**

This morning I want to talk to you about the first culture war. Culture is a word we hear a lot about today, and according to the dictionary, culture is “a shared pattern of beliefs, values, norms, and practices within a group of people.” Wherever your travel in the world you find cultures that are unique that country or people group. Within our own country, we have rural culture and city culture, red state culture and blue state culture. Southern states have their own unique culture and ways of looking at things, as do the northeastern states and mid-west states. Gold Beach has its own unique culture... “No hurry in Curry.”

Every workplace has a distinctive culture, as do churches and families. Try staying a few nights with relatives and you discover cultural differences. You get up early, they get up late. You have a set time of eating, they eat whenever they eat. You like a little space, they like to invade your space. Benjamin Franklin said, “Guests, like fish, begin to smell after three days.”

As we come to Genesis 4 this morning, we see a contrast between two cultures that form from within the first family of Adam and Eve. One branch of the family is godless and the other is godly. One is the secular line that builds a name for themselves, the other is the sacred line that proclaims the name of the Lord. One disappears from history, and the other brings the Messiah into the world.

The first is the line of Cain – the firstborn of Adam and Eve – and his younger brother Seth – born after Cain killed Abel. Both brothers have the same upbringing, are taught the same values, and have the same opportunities – but Cain goes one way, and Seth the other. In verses 17-26 their cultures are contrasted, and this passage gives us a snapshot of what the world was like between the creation of Adam and Eve and the flood – about a 1600-year period.

We don’t know much about what happens during this period, but we do know that things deteriorate so badly that it causes God to send the flood. The spiritual condition of the earth is summarized in Genesis 6:5, “The Lord saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time.” How did we go from paradise in the garden of Eden to a world only evil all the time? What was it that caused the world to get so bad that God would judge it so severely? Genesis 4:17-26 helps provide some of the answers. I’m going to read the entire passage, and then go back and see what we can learn about the culture we adopt for ourselves and our family...

So Cain went out from the Lord’s presence and lived in the land of Nod, east of Eden. Cain made love to his wife, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Enoch. Cain was then building a city, and he named it after his son Enoch. To Enoch was born Irad, and Irad was the father of Mehujael, and Mehujael was the father of Methushael, and Methushael was the father of Lamech.

Lamech married two women, one named Adah and the other Zillah. Adah gave birth to Jabal; he was the father of those who live in tents and raise livestock. His brother’s name was Jubal; he was the father of all who play stringed instruments and pipes. Zillah also had a son, Tubal-Cain, who forged all kinds of tools out of bronze and iron. Tubal-Cain’s sister was Naamah.

Lamech said to his wives, “Adah and Zillah, listen to me; wives of Lamech, hear my words. I have killed a man for wounding me, a young man for injuring me. If Cain is avenged seven times, then Lamech seventy-seven times.” 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.” Seth also had a son, and he named him Enosh. At that time people began to call on the name of the Lord.

Here we have two brothers, two families, and two different cultures. We begin with the line of Cain, and as we saw last week, after Cain kills his brother and refuses to repent and turn his heart to the Lord, God graciously spares Cain's life, but curses him to a life of wandering and restlessness. Cain then departs from the presence of the Lord and becomes his own god – living life on his own terms – and becomes the forefather of secular culture.

He goes out, finds a wife, and has a son. Now, the question people always ask is, “Where did Cain find his wife?” If he's the first person born, where did his wife come from? The answer is pretty simple – he married someone in his own family – a sister or a niece. There's really no other possibility. What we forget is that, before the flood, people lived a long time. Adam himself lived to be 930. That's a lot of time to have babies and grand-babies. I've read some who think that Adam lived to see a million descendants. That's quite a family reunion. There was a huge population explosion between creation and the flood.

Over time, Cain would have no trouble finding a wife within his extended family – and since this occurred early in human history, there were not the genetic problems that occur today with the offspring of close relatives. Later, in the book of Leviticus, God would forbid marriage between close relatives, but early on Cain married someone from his own family since there was no one else to choose from.

What jumps out about Cain and his descendants in these verses is that they seem to prosper. They do pretty well. Cain builds a city, and some of his descendants become famous for their accomplishments – one for skills in raising livestock, one for the development of music and the arts, and another for the advancement of early technology.

Why the wicked prosper is a mystery that puzzled more than one person in the Bible. Why does Cain, who kills his brother in cold blood, who shows no remorse, and defies God even as he is extended mercy – why does he get to go out and build a city and have successful kids and grandkids? Why do the bad guys often come out the winners in life?

The prophet Jeremiah asked, “Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why do all the faithless live at ease?” (Jeremiah 12:1a). Job said, “Why do the wicked live on, growing old and increasing in power?” (Job 21:7). The psalmist in Psalm 73 almost lost his faith as he pondered why the wicked, who mock and defy God, enjoy good health and wealth.

There are three things we need to keep in mind, and the first is that **God does not always deal with sin in visibly discernable ways**. Some of the healthiest, wealthiest, most successful people are also some of the most unhappy people in the world. We look at their Facebook pages and think they are living the good life, but there is an emptiness deep inside that we cannot see. When someone leaves God out of their life to pursue money, pleasure, fame, and fortune, and God says, “I won't stop you, but apart from me you'll end up miserable and empty.” God is dealing with their sin, just not in ways we can always see. That's one thing to remember.

The second thing we must remember that **any prosperity the wicked enjoy is short-lived**. No matter how wealthy or healthy or popular a person is apart from God, it is temporary. One day they will stand before God to give account for the life they've lived. As Psalm 73:17 says, the wicked are on “slippery ground.” Just when they think they are standing firm and secure and have it made, the day of judgment comes and they are swept away. No one who rebels against God gets away with it – God will not be mocked – justice will be served.

The third thing we must remember that **even people who rebel against God enjoy what's called "common grace."** Common grace is the favor and blessing that God pours out on all people – including sinners, atheists, and rebels. As Jesus said, "God causes the sun to rise on the evil and the good, and the rain to fall on the just and the unjust." The farmer who lives as though God does not exist, receives the same sunlight to grow his crops as his God-fearing neighbor. And when it rains, it's not just the godly who receive its blessings, but the ungodly as well. Both crops grow and are harvested. That's common grace. It's the same grace that God showed Cain by allowing him to live.

Given these three reasons, we should not worry about the wicked prospering, because we see the bigger picture and know the final outcome. We just keep serving God and leave judgment in His hands.

As successful and impressive as Cain's line appears to be, they build a culture that is eventually going to crumble. Everyone in Cain's line will be swept in away in the flood and disappear from the pages of history. As the old saying goes, "He who does not learn from history is condemned to repeat it's mistakes." There are five things we learn about Cain's culture that serves as a warning for the culture we cultivate for ourselves and our families.

First, Cain's culture is **a godless culture**. Verse 16 says that Cain went out from the presence of the Lord. In spite of God's mercy, Cain chooses to live a life apart from God. He chooses to be his own man and live life on his own terms. As punishment for killing his brother and for refusing to repent, God consigns him to a life of wandering and restlessness. That's what life apart from God is – it's a life without peace and contentment and joy. Augustine said, "Lord, you have made us for yourself. Our hearts are restless until they find rest in you."

Instead of finding rest in God, Cain turns to busyness and activity to fill the void. Verse 17 says he builds a city. It's interesting that God did not place Adam and Eve in a city, but in a garden, a quiet serene place where they could fellowship with God and God would provide for them. A city, on the other hand, is filled with constant activity and distraction – a perfect place for Cain to avoid dealing with his guilt and shame. And instead of trusting God to provide for him, he's going to provide for himself, and build his own kingdom.

In building a city Cain seems to be thumbing his nose at God who cursed him to a life of wandering for his rebellion. Cain says, "I'm not going to be a wanderer – I'm going to build my own empire, my own civilization – I'm going to build a name for myself." So Cain goes out and builds a city and names it after his son Enoch.

Cain builds his city with the same motive with which the tower of Babel would later be built. After the flood God told people to spread out and fill the earth, but the people said to each other, "Let's build a city with a tower, and make a name for ourselves." In both cases there's a defiance of God, and a desire for power and independence... "God's not going to tell us what to do – we'll do what want we want to do."

Most of the time when we read about cities in the Bible, it's not in a positive light. Cities like Babylon and Nineveh and Rome symbolize human pride and power – where the brightest and best gather together to build the tallest buildings, create the richest businesses, the finest universities, and the best entertainment. Large areas of population like New York, Los Angeles, and the Silicon Valley have a huge influence on the way the rest of society thinks and votes and acts. And these cities are almost entirely godless – if you go to church in these cities – if you believe in God and the Bible – you are almost like an alien.

Cain builds the first city as he tries to deal with his restlessness, and builds his city in defiance of God.

The second characteristic of Cain's culture is that it's a **permissive culture**. Their philosophy was summed up by the last verse of the book of Judges that says, "Everyone did what was right in their own eyes." This attitude was exemplified in the life of one of Cain's descendants, named Lamech, who came seven generations after Cain. The first thing we learn about him, in verse 19, is that he marries two wives – he's the first polygamist.

From the beginning, God designed marriage to be between one man and one woman. He puts a boundary around marriage for the well-being of society. He knows that anytime we step outside his boundary – whether it is fornication – sex before marriage – or adultery – sex outside of marriage – or homosexuality or polygamy – anytime we ignore God's boundaries, there's trouble – there's pain, there's broken relationships and sorrow.

Instead of accepting God's loving design and living within God's boundaries, Lamech boldly defies God's boundaries. He does what we're doing right now in our culture as God's divine order and design – as well as thousands of years of Judeo-Christian values and wisdom – are being tossed to the side, and morality is being redefined to fit the spirit of the age. Boundaries that have safeguarded humans for centuries are being torn down so that anything goes. Whenever a civilization redefines God's created order, it builds a house on sand and that house will eventually collapse. God will not be mocked. Lamech is mocking God. If I feel like doing something, I'll do it.

The third glimpse we get into Cain's culture is that it is a **sensual culture**. This is seen in the names of Lamech's two wives, and suggests his motivation in marrying them. Adah's name means "beauty" or more specifically "ornament." Adah was an ornament to Lamech – what we'd call today a "trophy wife." She was a looker, and Lamech – driven by his sensual impulses, takes her as his wife. Zillah means "sweet sounding," likely meaning that she had an alluring, captivating voice.

When Lamech is seeking a wife, he doesn't seem to zero in on character or inner qualities – he likes how they look and how they sound. He is like Samson who tells his parents, "There is a Philistine woman down at Timnah who caught my attention. Get her for me; I want to marry her" (Judges 14:2). In other words, "What's love got to do with it? I like what I see – go get her for me."

Lamech is driven by the lust of the flesh, and focuses on outward appearance and not the inner qualities Peter describes in 1 Peter 3:3-4, "Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as elaborate hairstyles and the wearing of gold jewelry or fine clothes. Rather, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight."

The point of these verses is not that beauty is not wrong – God is a God of beauty – and it's not that women shouldn't dress nice or look good – it's about *emphasis*. Outward beauty comes and goes, but inner character endures. Real beauty is found inside. One of the dangers of pornography is that people become impersonal objects to be looked at for our own gratification – not as people with a soul and spirit. Any culture that gives itself over to sensuality becomes weak and shallow and will collapse within itself.

This leads to a fourth characteristic of Cain's line – it's a **progressive culture**. Lamech has three sons, who all turn out to be highly successful, skilled, and accomplished. They were pioneers – the first in their field to do something – and what they accomplished helped ease the curse for everyone. The first son, Jabal, was the father of all those who live in tents and raise livestock. He was a pioneer in the science of breeding and raising animals, and his skills helped people in his culture become financially prosperous. The second son, Jubal, was the father of music. Music is like a tonic for the soul, and it helped ease the hardships of everyday life. And the third son, Tubal-Cain, was the father of industry and technology. He was Bill Gates. He figured out how to make tools, which made work easier and more productive.

All this cultural progress comes from the line of Cain – purely secular people who had no regard for God. It's another example of common grace – and the fact that although the sons of Lamech are godless, they are still made in the image of God, and they reflect the intelligence and creativity of God. Many of you have an I-Phone that was invented and designed by Steve Jobs, who was a self-proclaimed agnostic. Some of you have been operated on by doctors who are atheists, and you buy food from the grocery store that comes from pagan farmers. That's common grace.

Today we enjoy comforts and conveniences unlike any time in history. Jabal, Jubal, and Tubal-Cain would be blown by all the technological advances we enjoy today – with comforts and conveniences even our grandparents could not have imagined. Medical advances alone have increased life expectancy in America by 10-15 years in my lifetime, and we can talk to people around the world by just clicking a button. It's an extraordinary time to live.

The common grace God bestows on us – even by those who don't honor God – should cause us to be very grateful, and very cautious at the same time. The temptation, when surrounded by all these comforts and conveniences, is to depend on the gift and not the giver. God warned Israel of this very thing in Deuteronomy 8:11-14, “Be careful that you do not forget the Lord your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day. Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, then your heart will become proud and you will forget the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.”

No civilization has been blessed more than our own western civilization, and we should be grateful. At the same time, we should remember that past civilizations that prospered were eventually destroyed because they forgot God – and we dare not do the same.

We come then to the fifth characteristic of Cain's culture – **a violent culture**. In verses 23-24 Lamech composes a little song in honor of himself and sings it to wives... Lamech said to his wives, “Adah and Zillah, listen to me; wives of Lamech, hear my words. I have killed a man for wounding me, a young man for injuring me. If Cain is avenged seven times, then Lamech seventy-seven times.”

Lamech loves him some Lamech... “Adah and Zillah, do you understand what an awesome man you're married to? The other day some young punk tried to mess with me – he offended me – and I killed him dead on the spot. If someone messes with me again, I will pay him back worse than God promised to pay back anyone who messed with Cain.” Lamech is just like his forefather Cain. He's a self-made man who's determined to live life on his terms and run over anyone who gets in his way.

In his little taunt song, Lamech shows no regard for human life. Where God sees every human being as valuable and made in His image, Lamech does not see other human beings as sacred. If anyone gets in Lamech's way, watch out. Any culture that lives apart from God, becomes a violent culture where the weakest and most vulnerable – the unborn, women, the elderly, the handicapped – are seen as expendable. The natural consequence of an evolutionary, survival-of-the-fittest worldview is violence. I read just this week that road rage incidents have spiked this past year. If you cut me off or try to pass me, I'm going to pull a gun out and shoot you. We wonder where all the violence we're seeing on the streets of cities comes from, and it comes from a culture that devalues life. It's the spirit of Lamech.

In the midst of this godless, sensual, violent culture we see another culture arise in verses 25-27... 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.” Seth also had a son, and he named him Enosh. At that time people began to call on the name of the Lord.

The biggest difference between Cain's family and Seth's family is God – God is nowhere mentioned in Cain's family history, but it marks Seth's family. Seth's line is characterized by three things. First, **it is a hopeful culture**. The birth of Seth must have been a happy day for Adam and Eve. They had lost two sons – they lost Abel who was murdered by Cain – and they lost Cain who was became estranged from the family. But now they have Seth, and the hope of an offspring – promised back in 3:15 – who will crush the head of the serpent is renewed.

Eve says, "Cain killed my Abel, but God has granted me another child in his place." She sees in Seth the start of a new humanity – a righteous line who will bring the deliverer. This takes on great significance when we come to the book of Luke, chapter 3, where Jesus' genealogy is traced back to Adam and then Seth. Jesus, the savior of the world, will come through the line of Seth, and the only ones to survive the flood were descendants of Seth. Cain's family will make great advances in culture, but it is Seth's family who will bring salvation and redemption to the world through Christ.

Second, in Seth's culture we also see a **humble culture**. In verse 26 Seth goes on to have a son he names Enosh, which means "weak" or "mortal" one. Instead of boasting about his own strength like Lamech does, Seth acknowledges, in naming his son, his weakness and need for God. He knows that because of his father's sin, he will return to the dust of the ground. He acknowledges that life is short and temporary, and that he needs a savior.

Third, through Seth we see a **godly culture**. Verse 27 says, "At that time people became to call on the name of the Lord." Where the family of Cain builds a culture completely apart from God, Seth's family recognizes the darkness and moral rot of the culture that surrounds them and cry out, "We need God. Lord, we call out to you – help us." Rather than depend on their own might and power and ingenuity, they declare as Psalm 20:7 does, "Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God."

To call on the name of the Lord also means that they publicly identified themselves as followers of the true God. In the midst of a dark culture they openly said, "We belong to the Lord – we're on his team - we pray – we go to church – we live by His values – we serve Him and are not ashamed to call on His name."

If we take all that is found in this passage and superimpose it on our culture today, it's practically identical. The culture of Cain – with its godlessness and permissiveness and sensuality and violence – is prospering. Wickedness is winning the day. But God will not be mocked. A culture built apart from Him will never last. God sent a flood to judge the Cainites, and one day Jesus will return to earth to judge all those who rebel against Him. The culture of the world is alluring, it's progressive and impressive, but it will not last.

You want to be part of Seth's culture – a culture that calls on the name of the Lord – that humbly recognizes your need for a Savior –to put your trust in Christ – and be willing to live a counter-cultural life – shining the hope of Christ in a dark world.