

St. Augustine's Sermons

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The Text: Genesis 4: 4:16-26

East of Eden and the City of Beginning

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17 Cain knew his wife, and she conceived and bore Enoch. When he built a city, he called the name of the city after the name of his son, Enoch. 18 To Enoch was born Irad, and Irad fathered Mehujael, and Mehujael fathered Methushael, and Methushael fathered Lamech. 19 And Lamech took two wives. The name of the one was Adah, and the name of the other Zillah. 20 Adah bore Jabal; he was the father of those who dwell in tents and have livestock. 21 His brother's name was Jubal; he was the father of all those who play the lyre and pipe. 22 Zillah also bore Tubal-cain; he was the forger of all instruments of bronze and iron. The sister of Tubal-cain was Naamah.

23 Lamech said to his wives:

"Adah and Zillah, hear my voice;
 you wives of Lamech, listen to what I say:
 I have killed a man for wounding me,
 a young man for striking me.
 24 ^(Q) If Cain's revenge is sevenfold,
 then Lamech's is seventy-sevenfold."

25 And Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and called his name Seth, for she said, "God has appointed ^[a] for me

another offspring instead of Abel, for Cain killed him." 26 To^(R) Seth also a son was born, and he called his name^(S) Enosh. At that time people began^(T) to call upon the name of the LORD.

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Radio personality Paul Harvey tells the story of how the Inuit killed wolves in days now long past. The account is grisly, yet it offers fresh insight into the consuming, self-destructive nature of sin. "First, the Inuit coats his knife blade with animal blood and allows it to freeze. Then he adds another layer of blood, and another, until the blade is completely concealed by frozen blood. "Next, the hunter fixes his knife in the ground with the blade up. When a wolf follows his sensitive nose to the source of the scent and discovers the bait, he licks it, tasting the fresh frozen blood. He begins to lick faster, more and more vigorously, lapping the blade until the keen edge is bare. Feverishly now, harder and harder the wolf licks the blade in the arctic night.

So great becomes his craving for blood that the wolf does not notice the razor-sharp sting of the naked blade on his own tongue, nor does he recognize the instant at which his insatiable thirst is being satisfied by his OWN warm blood. His carnivorous appetite just craves more--until the dawn finds him dead in the snow!"

As we continue in our study of Genesis four we see Sin's all consuming control on the life of Cain and his offspring. It is like the wolf and the knife blade. At the same time we discover that God's grace is operative even when Sin's power seems all consuming. You will recall that last week we heard the story of Cain and Abel. In the first sixteen verses of Genesis 4 we learned that because he murdered Abel and rebelled against God, Cain came under God's judgment. In Genesis 4:16 we are told "Then Cain went away from the presence of the LORD and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden." The noun "Nod" means "Land of Wandering." This is such an apt name for the place Cain journeyed to. It reminds me of the story of the Prodigal Son in Luke 16. The younger son went away from the presence of his father to a distant land where he

wasted his life in wild and dissolute living. Throughout the Bible we are given examples of what happens to us when we choose to walk away from the presence of the Lord. We find ourselves in the Land of Wandering, in Nod. We become vagabonds, those who wander from place to place. If we don't do this literally we at least do it figuratively.

And yet even in the land of Nod, East of Eden, the Bible tells us that God provides opportunities for new beginnings. As we turn to verse 17 we are told Cain and his wife conceived and gave birth to a son, whose name was Enoch. We are then told that as this family grew Cain established a city, which he also named Enoch.

Do you know what the name Enoch means? It means "initiation" or "beginning".

That's why I have entitled this sermon: "East of Eden and The City of Beginning." Here we find Cain, East of Eden, now separated from God and from God's Saving Grace. It is important for us to grasp what this teaches us about God's character. Here again, rather than passing the sentence of immediate death upon Cain, God provides him with a wife and offspring. He is also given a land where they may be wanderers yes, but it is also a place where they can settle and have a new beginning.

In this town of new beginnings, we see lived out the kind of life that is still so evident today. Although God does pass judgment, he is also the God who extends his common grace to all. (I will say something more about common grace in a few minutes.) Life begins, and it is allowed to flourish in the City of Enoch. And yet, it is life that is marked by the consequences of the Fall, and the disobedience that marks those who have turned their backs on God and closed their hearts to his Word. It is life marked by rebellion and grace, sin and forgiveness, apostasy and worship. For here we discover three things about cities, east of Eden. Cities like Enoch and Calgary, Edmonton and Toronto, New York and London. The three things are

1. They are societies that are organized against God.
2. But in his mercy God gives his Common Grace to all
3. Saving grace is available to all but it needs to be actively received.

Let us now consider each of these points in turn:

They are societies that are organized against God.

At verses 17 and 18 we read:

17 Cain knew his wife, and she conceived and bore Enoch. When he built a city, he called the name of the city after the name of his son, Enoch. 18 To Enoch was born Irad, and Irad fathered Mehujael, and Mehujael fathered Methushael, and Methushael fathered Lamech.

Here is a genealogy that quickly progress through six generations and then stops at Lamech. The meaning of the names listed here tells us a great deal about the city of Encoh. Irad means "the city of witness," i.e., in this context, "witness to the glory of people." Already the idea of the exaltation of people is coming in and it will culminate soon in the tower of Babel, erected to the glory of humans. In Genesis 11:4 this witness is put in these words: "Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves".

Mehujael means "smitten of God," which is suggestive, perhaps, of a rather defiant attitude: "God has smitten us, yes, but we're going to make a success of this anyway," is Mehujael's attitude. Methushael is most contemporary; it means either "who is of God" or "the death of God". Lamech means "strong" or "powerful," and again reflects clearly the boasting of human beings in their fallen state.

With each of the successive generation listed here the licking of the knife blade intensifies. As we arrive at the name Methushael and his son Lamech, the rhetorical

question, found in Methushael's name "Who is for God" is answered with "Surely no one here" For Lamech shows us the heart of someone who has said, "lets be done with God", celebrating God's death and human strength.

This is illustrated in two ways as we look at Lamech's life: He is the first polygamist and he is one who revels in the love of vengeance and violence.

Someone has said that polygamy has its own punishment -- it means more than one mother-in-law! It occurred to me that perhaps he was simply trying to do research into the nature and character of womanhood, studying it from A to Z, from Adah to Zillah!

If you will forgive me that, we'll come back to the text and note that, whatever this is, it marks the unfailing accompaniment of civilization -- a sexual excess coming in which is openly tolerated. If murder is the first vice that proceeds from disobedience towards God, sexual impropriety is the second. Back in chapter two of Genesis we have clearly laid out for us God's will for marriage. One man and one woman, who cling to one another as if joined together by glue. But when society is organized against God, the home becomes a primary place where sexual perversions mark the relationship, not only between men and women, but also between adults and children. They are all distortions of God's original intention, just as Lamech marrying Adah and Zillah represents.

But not only does Lamech organize his intimate life contrary to God's will, the second element present in this story is one of the oldest songs in the world. Notice that these verses about Lamech are put into poetic form. They represent an early song, a kind of taunt on Lamech's part, in which he is justifying his violence. He boasts to his wives, "I have killed a man for wounding me, a young man for striking me." Evidently, a young man had assaulted him and, in self-defense, he says, "I killed him." He boasts of this to his wives and justifies it, saying that if God avenged Cain sevenfold for taking the life of his brother without any justification whatever, then, surely, "I will be avenged seventy-seven fold for having acted in self-defense."

Here we have the first clear instance of a pattern that has repeated itself a thousand times over in human history -- the justifying of violence on the ground of protection of rights. Now here is the picture of a society that is organized against God.

This picture is still sadly seen all around us today. We see in these chapters from Genesis how a godly society, as depicted in Genesis 2 dissolved into a godless society. The moral fabric of our society is indicative of this same decline. During the last week, in studying for this sermon, I did some channel-surfing. Because I have basic cable and limited time, I confined my study to NBC and ABC between the hours of 10:00 to 11:00 PM Pacific Time. The shows I viewed were: "Boston Legal" and "Sex and Dirty Money" on ABC, "Life" and "ER" on NBC. Although I did not keep a tally of how frequently the themes of sexual impropriety and vengeance were expressed, they were the dominant ideas portrayed in four hours television. (Note, I only watched a few minutes of Boston Legal, Sex and Dirty Money, and ER. But that was all I needed in order to get a flavour for how closely these shows paralleled what is written for us in Genesis 4).

So here is a text that was written thousand of years before the writers of ABC and NBC keyed their stories into their word processors, and yet there is a stark similarity of themes. This is because we are a people who in our unredeemed state can never get enough of these kinds of stories. We reflect them in our imaginations and in the very fabric of our lives.¹

Yes when we live East of Eden in the city of New Beginnings the society to which we belong will be organized against God.

And yet, even in Enoch God is gracious and extends to all people his Common Grace.

20 Adah bore Jabal; he was the father of those who dwell in tents and have livestock. 21 His brother's name was Jubal; he was the father of all those who play the lyre and pipe. 22 Zillah also bore

¹ As one who is in the process of being sanctified, I had to combat the urge of watching these shows in their entirety.

Tubal-cain; he was the forger of all instruments of bronze and iron. The sister of Tubal-cain was Naamah.

Jabal means "traveler;" Jubal, "trumpeter;" and Tubalcain, "metalworker" -- especially with regard to jewelry and ornamentation.

Now that is most remarkable. We have here all the ingredients of modern life -- travel, music and the arts, the use of metals, the organized political life, and the domestication of animals. All of this is admirable and progressive. Here we see a clear sign of God's common grace. He imparts to these people skill and expertise, allowing for the enrichment of life through food production, music and craftsmanship. The evidence of God's common grace is further illustrated in the meaning of the name Naamah, which is loveliness.

Even here in the Land of Nod, in the City of Enoch there is much beauty because although sin abounds in human souls, God's grace, both common and saving abounds even more.

Each and every day I hope that you can have an awareness of God's Common Grace. It may be experienced in the sharing of a meal with a friend, in the listening to a Mozart Symphony or praise song by Robin Mark. It may be an appreciation for a pair of earrings that you are putting on or in the enjoyment of a book that takes you into another world. The world is infused with evidence of God's common grace that allows us to see Naamah's presence in the daily experiences of life.

But caution is again sounded. For when enjoyed as ends in themselves the channels of God's Common Grace become yet another means by which we reject god in replace him with the idols of material things.

God's common grace is not enough. The German Theologian Helmut Thilicke has astutely observed:

The strange thing is that the closer we come the more clearly we see the red thread that runs like a pulsing, bloody artery through the myriad figures of the world. This motherly earth, on which even the greatest of men walked, on which they erected cities and cathedrals and monuments, has drunk the blood of Abel. And this blood of the murdered and abused appears in stains and rivulets everywhere, including the greatest figures. Cain, the "great brother" and progenitor of mankind, betrays his mysterious presence.

*Somewhere in every symphony the tone-figure of death is traceable. Somewhere on every Doric column this mark is to be found. And in every tragedy the lament over injustice and violence rings out.*²

It is because of the lament over injustice and violence rings out that God's Common Grace is not enough. What is also needed is his saving grace. Please look to verse 25:

And Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and called his name Seth, for she said, "God has appointed for me another offspring instead of Abel, for Cain killed him." ²⁶ To Seth also a son was born, and he called his name Enosh. At that time people began to call upon the name of the LORD.

The name "Seth" means "compensation", and the name "Enosh" means "Man" or "Mortal" Here we see God compensating for the loss of Abel. And yet it means so much more than this for those who are followers of Jesus Christ. I alluded to a verse in Romans 5 a minute ago. Let me now quote it verbatim: "where sin increased, grace abounded all the more."³ That is what we see at work at the end of Genesis 4. Throughout chapters three and four we have witnessed how sin increased from the Garden of Eden to the City of Enoch. And yet at the very end of the chapter we see the note of God's saving grace being sounded.

Here is suggested very clearly the idea that in the midst of this Cainite civilization, with its proud refusal to recognize the canker eating away at the heart of humanity, and its desire to achieve the luxuries and comforts that God designs, but on a false basis, there were yet those who recognized their mortality, and, thus, their dependence upon God.

With the birth of Compensation we anticipate the birth of another whose name while not "Enosh" is the one we call Jesus. Of Jesus you will remember Pilate at the Lord's trial said: "Behold the Man".⁴ The man who chose to take unto himself the limitations of our mortality, so that by him, we could taste the fruit of the Tree of Life. Do you see it?

² Ray Stedman "Too much, too Soon", (A sermon on Genesis 4:16-26)
<http://www.raystedman.org/genesis/0323.html>

³ Romans 5:20

⁴ John 19:5

Right here at the end of Genesis four the theme of Enosh's need for a Saviour is conceived.

For you see my beloved in a world like this where we live, not in the Garden of Eden, but in the cities of Enoch common grace is not enough. We need to know the saving grace of God. A grace when received enters into our souls allowing us to know the wonder splendor of the Saviour.

In the movie "Amazing Grace" there is a wonderfully moving scene where John Newton, the author of the hymn "Amazing Grace" is in conversation with William Wilberforce. William Wilberforce was the British Parliamentarian who made it his life's work to see Great Britain abolish the slave trade. In this one scene John Newton, who as a young man had been the Captain of a Slave Ship, is now old, frail and blind. (After his conversion he was ordained an Anglican Priest)

As this scene begins he has been dictating his confession of his life as one invested heavily in the slave trade. Now as an old man he is able to look back on the horror of what he had done and reflects with these words.

*"When the slaves are flogged on the wharf, their arms are tied top a hook on a crane and weights of 56 pounds applied to their feet. The crane is raised so there feet barely touch the ground. The slaves are then whipped with ebony bushes to let out the congealing blood...."*⁵

At this point Wilberforce enters the room and introduces his presence to Newton. The secretary leaves and Newton and Wilberforce than begin talking. After comments on Wilberforce's new wife and his health the conversation goes as follows:

Feeling for the papers on which the secretary had been recording Newton's dictation, he clutches them and says:

*"This is my confession. You must use it. Names, ship's records, ports, people. Everything I remember is in here. Although my memory is fading there are two things I remember very clearly, I am a great sinner, and Christ is a great Saviour."*⁶

⁵ Michael Apted: Amazing Grace (Alliance Films) Scene 19

⁶ Ibid

John Newton was one who had been enmeshed in the city of Enoch with all of the vice that resulted from being shaped by such a godless city. And yet it was in his late twenties that he came to know the saving love of Jesus and came to be amazed by his grace.

It says at the very end of Genesis four that at this time people began to call on the name of the LORD. You will remember from a previous sermon in this series that I said the name "LORD" is the Hebrew word Yahweh. It is the name of God that speaks to us of his desire to be in relationship with us through this covenantal love. It speaks of the God who is the LORD of promise. And so in a chapter where so many names express life lived devoid of God, the chapter ends not with any human name, but with the name Yahweh, LORD.

When we come into that place where it is the name Jesus, whose name is above every name, with John Newton we know what it means to say "I am a great sinner and Christ is a great Saviour."

This story at the end of Genesis four is the story of the Scriptures from beginning to end. All the way through, the Scriptures have been at pains to point out to us that there are only two ways to live. Jesus said so. There is the broad way, which many are taking, which looks so logical but which leads to destruction; and there is the narrow way, which begins at the point where an individual stands alone before God and must make a decision, the narrow way that leads unto life, as God intended life to be lived. For while God's common grace is given to all, God's saving grace is only given to those who call on the name of the LORD (Matthew 7:13-14).

Which way are you taking?

Let God heal the sickness of the human heart with its hunger for self-centeredness, self-exaltation, its desire always to be in the center of attention; let God heal that through the working of the gospel, through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the way God intended for us to live. It is the way that leads to life.

Yes, beloved, there is no escaping this world, this city of Enoch, where society is organized against God. And yet even here God's Common Grace, and most importantly God's saving grace, allow us to join in this song which displaces the song of Lamech with the Song of the Redeemed.

Amazing grace! How sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found;
Was blind, but now I see.

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
And grace my fears relieved;
How precious did that grace appear
The hour I first believed!

Through many dangers, toils and snares,
I have already come;
'Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far,
And grace will lead me home.

The Lord has promised good to me,
His Word my hope secures;
He will my Shield and Portion be,
As long as life endures.

Yea, when this flesh and heart shall fail,
And mortal life shall cease,
I shall possess, within the veil,
A life of joy and peace.

When we've been there ten thousand years,
Bright shining as the sun,
We've no less days to sing God's praise
Than when we'd first begun.

