

Rossville Church of Christ Doorpost Devo



September 2022



Encouragement from God's Word

Genesis: Cain, Lamech, and God's Surprising Mercy

As we look around at the world today, many of us are concerned about rampant violence and the terrors caused by human evil. Some days it feels as if humanity is descending further and further into a spiral of wickedness as we grapple with the realities of shootings, war, and many other atrocities that are seemingly so prevalent in modern life. Yet, this is not a recent development in human history. From the very beginning, the story of humanity has been one of violence, vengeance, and evil. This is evident in Scripture as early as Genesis 4, when Cain is driven by jealousy to brutally murder his own brother Abel. The cruelty of the human heart is on full display. All of this leaves us as readers with a bleak image of humanity's trajectory. **Cont. on Pg. 3**

Scripture Plan: Read

Sermon on the Mount

Mon, Tues, Wed.:

Matt. 5:1-12 Each Night

Thurs., Fri., Sat.:

Matt. 5:13-20 Each Night

Devo Plan

1. Mon.--Read and Pray Together
2. Tues.--Read, Pray, Ask Questions, and Discuss
3. Wed.--Read, Pray, and Think about how to Apply
4. Thurs.-Sat.--Repeat steps 1-3 with New Passage
5. Sunday--Pray and Reflect on What was Learned in Worship and Class



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Discussion Questions

Matthew 5:1-12

Discussion Question #1:

What does it mean to be blessed by God? What kinds of blessings are most important?

Discussion #2:

What kind of people does God want us to be? What characteristics and qualities describe a blessed person? Which one do I need to work on the most?

Discussion #3: What are some things that Jesus promises in this passage? How do those promises make you feel?

Matthew 5:13-20

Discussion #1: What are the purposes of salt and light? How are they helpful? How can my character and actions be "salt" and "light"?

Discussion #2:

What is the purpose of doing good? What are some good motivations for doing the right thing? What are some bad motivations for doing good deeds?

Discussion #3: How did Jesus live out what he teaches here? What are some ways we can follow his example?

Apply and Obey

To obey what Jesus says in Matt. 5:1-20, this upcoming week I will...

I will share what I learned with...

Prayer Points

- Lord, Thank You--For unexpected blessings
- Lord, We Praise You--For being the source of all blessings
- Lord, Help Us--See opportunities you have given for us to be salt and light in the world for your glory

In just the first few pages of the Bible, humans have rebelled against the Creator, corrupted God's good world, and turned on one another. Indeed, the story of humanity is one of violence. But even so, this is not the end of the story. In the book of Genesis, we see the immense damage caused by sin and human evil, but we also see a majestic display of God's surprising mercy over and over again. Whenever and wherever humans fail, God seems to respond with startling grace. Consider, for instance, God's interaction with Cain following his monstrous act of sin:

"And the Lord said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground. And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. When you work the ground, it shall no longer yield to you its strength. You shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth." Cain said to the Lord, "My punishment is greater than I can bear. Behold, you have driven me today away from the ground, and from your face I shall be hidden. I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me." Then the Lord said to him, "Not so! If anyone kills Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold." And the Lord put a mark on Cain, lest any who found him should attack him. Then Cain went away from the presence of the Lord and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden." (Genesis 4:10-16)

Because of his holy and righteous character, the Lord responds to Cain in punishment and justice, sentencing him to live as an exile. But even as he does this, the Lord overflows with surprising mercy. In fact, throughout the entire story God is continually showing up to bless Cain and protect him, even as Cain feels as if he is being neglected in favor of his brother. He lovingly warns Cain about the dangers and destruction of sin crouching at the door, and he firmly instructs him on the path of blessing (4:5-7). This is a gracious second chance for Cain after he offered a sacrifice that was not pleasing to God. Instead of responding with repentance and humility, he turns in anger and jealousy to kill his brother. Even then, God is merciful in his punishment of Cain. When Cain acknowledges that his punishment is too great to bear, the Lord promises to protect him and provide seven-fold vengeance on anyone who harms him. Cain is afforded a second chance, a new life.

As observers of the story, this might appear unfair to us. Where was Abel's seven-fold vengeance? Why does Cain deserve a second chance? Certainly, what Cain deserves is death, but throughout the Genesis account we are continually reminded that God alone is the ultimate judge. He rules the world with goodness and wisdom, and he is trustworthy and faithful in how he deals with sinful human beings. Vengeance belongs to him. Both his mercy and his justice transcend our human assumptions and expectations. He is holier than we comprehend, but also more forgiving and gracious than we can fathom. His holiness and his grace are constantly on display in Genesis. Adam and Eve are punished but spared from immediate death after their sin. God brings justice in the flood but preserves Noah and his family. The Lord blesses and works through deceitful Jacob, sometimes foolish Abraham, and many other flawed people. In this way, God's mercy is surprising and beautiful.

Cont. on Pg. 4

"Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the *doorposts* of your house and on your gates." --Deuteronomy 6:4-9

We often call loudly for vengeance or for justice, at least until we are the ones who deserve it. We are sometimes blinded by our own sin and corrupted hearts in such a way that prevents us from being truly just or merciful. Jonah could hardly fathom why God would or should forgive Nineveh, but at the same time God had graciously given him a second chance that he did not deserve when he disobeyed God's will. A prime example of humanity's tendency for distorted justice comes in the very same chapter in Genesis following Cain's murder of his brother:

"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. If Cain's revenge is sevenfold, then Lamech's is seventy-sevenfold" (Genesis 4:23-24)

Lamech exemplifies the human tendency to take the Lord's prerogative of vengeance into our own hands. And when we do that, we amplify and multiply violence far beyond what is necessary. Whereas the Lord had promised seven-fold protection for Cain, Lamech pridefully asserts that he himself will enact much greater vengeance on those who wrong him, up to seventy-seven times. Rather than dealing justly, Lamech responds with the escalation of brutality and violence. Whereas the Lord responds to human evil with judgment and surprising mercy, humans often respond to wrongdoing with misguided retribution and intensifying hostility.

Jesus brings God's way of surprising mercy into even greater focus. When Peter asks Jesus how often he should forgive someone who has wronged him, Jesus replies with a startling answer: "I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times" (Matthew 18:22). Some commentators suggest that Jesus' response here is a callback to and radical reversal of Lamech's declaration of vengeance to the seventy-seventh degree. The contrast between Lamech and Jesus is striking. While Lamech's response extends far beyond what seems sensible for punishment, Jesus' shocking call to forgiveness extends far beyond our typical capacity for grace and mercy. Jesus is the ultimate anti-Lamech. While humans lean toward the escalation of harm and violence, Jesus encourages the escalation of radical mercy and forgiveness to those who wrong us. What would make anyone act in such a way, to forgive even seventy-seven times? Jesus roots the logic of this command in the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant, a story that powerfully reminds us of God's abundant mercy toward us despite our massive debt of sin. Only when we have experienced God's surprising, undeserved gift of grace are we truly motivated and empowered to extend mercy to others. But through the incredible example of Jesus on the cross, who was calling for forgiveness even for his murderers in the moment of his torture, we can be shaped into a people who reject the cycle of violence and vengeance in favor of God-glorifying mercy and grace. The heart of Jesus can shine through us when we meet evil with love, righteousness, and forgiveness. And through our surprising mercy, the world will see a glimpse of the much greater mercy and forgiveness flowing out from the very heart of God.

"Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the *doorposts* of your house and on your gates." --Deuteronomy 6:4-9