
If You Have A Little, You Have It All (Genesis 4:1-16)
5/21/2017 Sermon by Pastor Jason Liebenow



I thought I only had a little, but it turned out I had it all. I was moving and had a bunch of friends helping me get the heavy stuff outside. I lived in an upper flat down in Milwaukee. The challenge before us: a heavy couch with the added weight of a pullout bed inside. I wasn't too worried about the weight though. I had five other people helping me carry it. I knew I only had to carry a little of the weight.

As we neared the stairs, however, things began to change. The stairway was pretty small. Soon our group of six people holding the couch turned into only two, one person at the top of the steps and one person on the bottom. The person at the top of the steps really didn't have a lot of leverage to help hold the weight much at all. When I found myself on the bottom end going down the stairs, I realized that I did not have only a little of the weight, I had it all!

Today, we are focusing on Genesis, chapter 4. In the previous chapters of Genesis, we see how God created the world and mankind. We see how Adam and Eve very quickly fell into sin by disobeying God. It's easy for us to think that they only had a little sin at that point. I mean, all they had done was disobey one thing God told them to do, right? It's not like they killed anyone! They just ate some fruit!

As we read from Genesis, chapter 4, however, we see that where there is a little sin, there is all of sin. The attitudes and actions of their very first son, Cain, show a heart that is totally corrupted by sin and is capable of the deepest depravity of sin. And yet, even in the face of Cain's corruption, we find our God reaching out to him in grace. We see clearly that if we have a little of God's grace, we have it all too.

Our Old Testament history lesson starts by telling us about Cain. Adam and Eve had just brought sin into the world, but God had promised that a child of the woman would destroy the devil's work. So, in faith, Adam and Eve start having kids. The first child is Cain.

The first big event we read about in Cain's life is an offering that he and Abel gave to God. Cain, as a farmer, gave some of the fruits from his soil. But we see a huge distinction in Abel's offering. Abel, a shepherd, gave the firstborn of his flocks and he gave the best of those firstborn sheep.

Notice God's reaction as well. God looks with favor on Abel and his offering, but God does not look with favor on Cain and his offering. The fact that Abel and Cain are both mentioned before their offerings is significant. The important thing to God was not the offering. It was the man who gave the offering.

Abel gave his offering out of love and thankfulness. And how could he not? God had given him so much! God had created an entire world full of discovery and wonder for Abel to live in.

God had given Abel a family with whom he could share that world. Moreover, when Abel's parents had disobeyed God and brought sin into the world, God had forgiven them and promised to send a Savior to fix that problem of sin! Abel knew his own sin, but he knew that God would forgive every one of his sins because of that promise of the Savior. Finally, Abel recognized that all his flocks ultimately belonged to God anyway. Abel was overjoyed with these blessings and he was eager to say, "Thank you," to God even in this small, simple way: by giving his best to God.

Cain gave his offering too, but he did not give for the same reasons. Cain gave because he knew he was supposed to. Cain gave because he felt he *had* to. Cain gave because he figured that God would then owe him something in return. Cain gave because he wanted to twist God's arm into giving more blessings. Cain wanted to keep the best for himself, after all, he was only giving to get something from God anyway, so no use giving the best to God. So Cain only gave some of his produce, rather than the best.

How is your financial walk with God? The way we use our money is often one of the clearest indicators of what is in our heart. What do your finances say about what is most important in your heart? In your offerings, do you give just some of the money God has blessed you with or do you give the best? When you budget, do you first decide how much you are going to give to God and to the spread of his gospel, or does that come after the "important" things are figured out?

But the most important question is not "what are you giving?" or "how much are you giving?" The question is: "why are you giving?" Or in some cases, "why are you not giving?" Do you see your offerings as a way to simply say, "Thank you," to your God who has blessed you with every good thing you have? Or do you see your offerings as something you *have* to do? Do you see your offerings as a way to force God to give you more? I would encourage you to think about how you use the money God has given you this week. Ask yourself: What do your finances say about you?

Back in Genesis, when Cain sees that God did not look favorably on him and his offering. He gets mad. And wouldn't you? How do you feel when people don't appreciate something you've done for them? Cain didn't like it one bit! What's more, his goody-two-shoes brother is commended! That can be infuriating!

But that's when God comes to Cain with some really searching questions and an earnest warning. First, the searching question: Why are you angry? Think about that for a moment. What reason did Cain actually have for being angry at Abel? Abel hadn't done anything wrong to Cain. What reason did Cain have for being angry at God? God hadn't done anything unfair to Cain. The real honest person at fault here was Cain. If he took time to think about that, he might have realized it. He might have seen that he did not give his offering as a sincere gift of thanksgiving to God. He might have realized all the blessings for which he had previously been ungrateful! Instead, he just gave into his blind and stupid anger.

Next time you get angry, ask yourself that question, “Why are you angry?” How often do we get angry and frustrated because things aren’t going our way? It can seem like everything is going against us. But if we stop and think about it, often we are angry because we are the ones at fault. Often our anger comes from our selfishness. Often anger comes from our childish demands that life match our fairytale picture in our heads. Sometimes, our anger just means that you and I need to grow up and start living in reality. Next time you get angry, ask yourself, “Why?”

Second, the earnest warning: God tells Cain, “Sin is crouching at your door.” In Cain’s self-righteous anger, he saw himself as being in the right. He saw everyone else as being at fault. His anger led him to reject God’s gift of salvation. It made him fail to appreciate any of the gifts God had showered on him. And it made him hate people like his brother who did humbly accept God’s free blessings.

Cain thought that he was the one who had only a little sin. He thought that he wasn’t the problem at all. He thought it was God’s fault. He thought Abel was the problem. God graciously reached out to Cain to show him the truth: Cain had all of sin and, if he didn’t watch out, sin would completely overtake him. That sin threatened to dominate and destroy Cain, and as long as Cain held to his foolish anger, childish demands, and self-righteous attitude, sin would be ready to pounce! Only through penitent faith in God’s grace could Cain find the strength to master that sin, to see things clearly, and to have a right and thankful attitude.

Do you ever find yourself feeling like Cain? Do you find yourself blaming everyone else for your problems? Do you find yourself angry at people who are trying to live a godly life? Maybe the problem is that you think you only have a little sin. Maybe the problem is you have the same foolish anger, childish demands, and self-righteous attitude that Cain did. If so, watch out! Sin is crouching at your door too, and it desires to have you!

Unfortunately, we know how the story ends for Cain. Cain does not heed God’s warning. Instead, he gives his anger free reign and he kills his brother for no reason at all! Cain thought he only had a little sin. He thought everyone else was the problem. It made him angry. It made him ungrateful for all the blessings he had. The truth was Cain had all of sin. Cain was the problem, not everyone else. And it let him to reject, not only God’s warning about his sin, but also to reject God’s grace!

More than that, Cain’s life of sin and hatred rubbed off on his family. As we keep reading through Genesis, we find that Cain’s descendants followed in his murderous and sinful ways, walking farther and farther from God.

If we think that we only have a little sin, it will lead us to the same end. It will make us angry when things don’t go right because we think we deserve better! It will make us jealous and angry at people who are living godly lives. It will make us ignore the blessings God showers on us and leave us selfish, bitter, and hateful. And if we choose to reject God and to walk away from him, we will influence others to do the same, just like Cain did.

But you know what the real tragedy of Cain's life was? It wasn't that he couldn't see reasons to be thankful right in front of his nose. It wasn't that he hated the people who should have been closest to him. It wasn't even the punishments he received for what he had done. The real tragedy was that God was reaching out to Cain the entire time giving him every chance to repent, giving him every chance to do what was right and be accepted!

God could have avenged Abel right after Cain killed him. God could have put Cain to death immediately. Cain deserved nothing less. In fact, God could have put Cain to death for giving such a pitiful insult to God and calling it an "offering!" But God didn't.

Instead what does God do? He reaches out to Cain, again and again. God tries to get Cain to actually think about what he's doing, rather than just letting him dig himself deeper into the pit. God warns Cain of the seriousness of where his lifestyle is leading him—that sin was ready to pounce on him! God gives Cain the chance to simply confess to murdering his brother. God brings the full enormity of what Cain had done down on his head so that Cain might finally see himself as the problem and God as the solution. God gives Cain a punishment that would make the rest of his life an opportunity to repent of his sins and again turn back to God in joyful thanksgiving for God's forgiveness. God even assures Cain that no one else would kill him. God showed Cain that even his life stained with murder was still precious to God.

Dear friends, if *we* have little of God's grace, we have it all. I don't know what your finances say is most important to you. I don't know if you give your offerings cheerfully or grudgingly. I don't know if you live a life that is characterized by gratitude or if you live in foolish anger, childish demands, and self-righteous attitudes. But I do know that sin is crouching at your door. I know that sin desires to have you. You must master it.

Maybe that sounds impossible. But what is impossible for us is possible for God. Just as God continued to reach out to Cain with his grace, God is reaching out to you too. Jesus' resurrection from the grave is proof for the whole world that there is victory over sin and death—victory that comes through Jesus Christ alone.

Turn away from yourselves. Turn toward Jesus. Turn toward him in gratitude for the way he provides for you day after day. Turn toward Jesus in thankfulness for taking away all your sin and making you perfect in his sight. Turn toward Jesus in joy for the continual grace he shows to you as he daily calls you to repentance and assures you of forgiveness.

Let that gratitude, thankfulness, and joy impact your whole life. Let your finances show your gratitude. Let your relationship with others show your thankfulness. Let your whole life as you walk with God show that joy.

If we have a little sin, we have it all. But if we have a little of God's grace, a little of his forgiveness, a little bit of salvation in Jesus, we have absolutely it all too. Amen.