**Part A**

Now I think many of you remember the September 11th attacks in 2001, although some of you were quite young at the time. And I hope most of you know the name Osama Bin Laden. And if you don’t understand that you have to understand the Bible to understand what he did, then I hope you’ll come away from this morning with a renewed appreciation of the importance of the Bible, and I hope you’ll resolve to come back and hear more. Because it was totally shocking, what he organized and others carried out. They took over planes filled with innocent people and flew them into other buildings filled with innocent people. Why on earth would you do something like that?

And the speculation began. I remember it. Some people thought that the reason they do it was poverty and lack of education. But that falls apart. Osama Bin Laden wasn’t just raised by millionaires, but billionaires, and most of the hijackers were from middle class families and completed some college. Well perhaps it was American policy in the Middle East. But few of the hijackers were personally affected by the Iraq War or other Wars. Many of the hijackers had lived in the West for years and had good lives. Unlike what you’ll see in popular movies, they didn’t generally lose family members in bombings, but many of them enjoyed pleasant lives in the West for years.

So what leads a person to slaughter an innocent fellow-human being, and not only to do such an evil thing, but to be convinced that they are actually doing a great, thing. To believe they are totally in the right in doing this act of evil? Well, some people point to Islam itself. And to some extent, that is true. The Koran and many versions of Islam today preach jihad. But that cannot be the whole picture. Not all Muslims act that way. Or more importantly, how do we explain all the mass shootings in our own, formerly Christian country?

The shooters are often educated and enjoy what seem like good lives. Take the Las Vegas shooter. After a year of investigation, they concluded that we’re probably never going to know what motivated him. The FBI studied and studied his life to figure out, what could make a person do this, and they came up with no explanation.

But God has an explanation. It’s pretty simple to grasp. But it’s pretty hard to accept. They gave in to their nature. They had a choice between good and evil, and picked evil, because that is just something humans are prone to do. Because we’re messed up. That’s it. We all have a part of us capable of unspeakable evil, and our lives are a constant struggle against the pull towards evil and destruction.

To review for our guests, in the last three weeks we looked closely at God’s creation of this world. Man and woman was certainly not created with an evil nature. They were created in God’s image to live in an original paradise that God first made. But they were created with free will, and they chose to throw it away. They were not content to serve God in bliss, they were not content to reflect God’s image, they wanted to usurp God’s authority. They chose to disobey God, and they changed from being holy, good creatures to corrupted, self-centered creatures, and they introduced death into the world.

And today we see how this world continues to unravel. The first human who was ever born, Cain, shows us what this self-centered, arrogant part of our nature is capable of when the first man born becomes the first terrorist.

**Adam lay with his wife Eve, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Cain. She said, “With the help of the LORD I have brought forth a man.” 2 Later she gave birth to his brother Abel.**

Of course there are a lot of questions we could ask here, and we asked a few in Bible class, but God only gives us the most basic details we need to understand the essence of the story. Adam and Eve started having children. And as they grew, they followed God’s directives for ruling over the earth, tending to the soil, and watching over the animals, just as God had told Adam and Eve to do:

**Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil.**

Now, here is the origin of violence. See if you can catch it:

**3 In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the LORD. 4 But Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The LORD looked with favor on Abel and his offering, 5 but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast.**

We were created to be in harmony with God. We were designed to experience his constant approval and enjoy serving him with all our heart. We are still designed this way. Today, most people do not even know this. And Cain experienced a lack of God’s approval, and it made him furious.

When we sense that we lack God’s approval, we all have a sinking feeling that there is something wrong. But we are torn. We sense something wrong, but we cannot bear to think there is something wrong with us. Look at Cain. His offering was deficient. He did not do what he should have done. Instead of bringing the best portion, he just brought whatever was convenient for him. And God was not pleased with this half-hearted, incomplete effort.

So what is the logical response? Admit you were wrong, say you are sorry, turn to God for forgiveness, and vow to correct your actions. This is what Christians call repentance. But that is not how Cain responds, is it? It’s too painful to admit that I am the one in the wrong. Instead, he’s angry. His face is downcast.

A lot of us today are afflicted with anger, and we can name all sorts of reasons why. But if you are consumed with anger or you know someone who is, I can tell you right now what is at the bottom of the issue, whatever else may be piled on top. It mean’s you’re not right with God. Either you have some sin you are afraid to confess, or perhaps you do not understand the power of God’s forgiveness, that he accepts you and forgives you not because you are good enough, not because you meet some standard, but simply through the work of Jesus who took our sin upon himself. But Cain, instead of running to God’s mercy, retreated within himself and let his anger burn.

**6 Then the LORD said to Cain, “Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? 7 If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it.”**

This is where we all stand. If Cain wants God to accept him, then do what is right. Admit your wrong. Believe God’s forgiveness. Offer an appropriate offering. But instead, see how destructive his anger became. Sin is just waiting to pounce. The longer we stew, the more disfigured we get. Osama bin Laden. School shooters. This is where it started. You can’t find a deeper reason. The fact is there is no accounting for evil other than it is simply evil. It’s a temptation each of us faces every day. And it starts small.

As we turn to our first hymn verses, I’d invite you to reflect on anger in your own life. Are there people you just can’t stand? Are there grudges you just can’t let go? How much of this anger with others is really, in the end, just about you? You might blame others when really you’re just not close with God like you know you should be. You’re running from the peace he promises to give. We ask God to give us insight, because that is the first step to confession, repentance, and forgiveness.

**Part B**

Now we see the evil fruit of Cain’s anger, and often of ours.

**8 Now Cain said to his brother Abel, “Let’s go out to the field.” And while they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him.**

His own brother. His brother had done nothing wrong at all. In fact, Abel had done everything right. And he sneakily killed him when he was not expecting it. That’s why I say, Cain was not just the first murderer, he was the first terrorist. The only difference with Osama Bin Laden is the number of victims.

**9 Then the LORD said to Cain, “Where is your brother Abel?” “I don’t know,” he replied. “Am I my brother’s keeper?”**

Look what a liar he is, and look what a good lawyer he is. He’s good at dissembling. But God sees through it. Really, Cain is just being defiant. He’s really saying, NO ONE HAS THE RIGHT TO HOLD ME ACCOUNTABLE FOR ANYTHING. You hear that angry voice? That’s the voice inside us when we are confronted with our own sin. It is amazing how good we are at justifying our own actions. We can see it in Cain because it is so egregious, but can we see it in ourselves? Do we ever ignore the effects of our anger against other? Are we ever defiant when confronted?

**10 The LORD said, “What have you done? Listen! Your brother’s blood cries out to me from the ground. 11 Now you are under a curse and driven from the ground, which opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand. 12 When you work the ground, it will no longer yield its crops for you. You will be a restless wanderer on the earth.”**

This is incredibly kind of the Lord. He could have struck down Cain. But he gives him a chance to repent. But to protect society, he has Cain go out and live as a vagabond. Cain should be thankful for this unprompted display of kindness from the Lord. But instead, he has the nerve to complain:

**13 Cain said to the LORD, “My punishment is more than I can bear. 14 Today you are driving me from the land, and I will be hidden from your presence; I will be a restless wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me.”**

Is Cain not a disgusting figure. He is the one who killed his innocent brother in cold blood, due to his own insecurities and unwillingness to confront his sin. He had no pity for his brother, but he has so much pity for himself. It’s disgusting. And what is he afraid of? Of being killed. Why? I think that deep down, he knew this is what he deserved.

**15 But the LORD said to him, “Not so; if anyone kills Cain, he will suffer vengeance seven times over.” Then the LORD put a mark on Cain so that no one who found him would kill him. 16 So Cain went out from the LORD’s presence and lived in the land of Nod, east of Eden.**

The Lord’s mercy is amazing here. He even helps overcome Cain’s worry by protecting him. He gave him some mark, presumably some sort of tattoo, that would ease Cain’s worry. Why do this? Well, why did God spare Adam and Eve, or why does he spare us or anyone? God is patient, and he desires all people to be saved and come to knowledge of the truth. He is giving Cain a chance to repent. But instead, Cain perpetuates his own arrogant wickeness, and things spiral out of control in the following generations:

**17 Cain lay with 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. 18 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.**

Our last reading looks at the society that Cain’s new attitude towards God created. We will see how bad things got in our next reading. But for now, think about someone you know who struggles with anger, violence, or extreme arrogant self-centeredness. Think how kind and patient God was with Cain. How can you, without excusing or condoning their behavior, reflect God’s kindness and patience to them?

**Part C**

Usually people don’t read this far after the Cain and Abel story, but this is what you get when you ask an Old Testament professor to be your pastor. It’s too good to skip. I think it’s important to see where a society filled with this kind of arrogant, defiant, dishonest, violent hatred leads:

**19 Lamech married two women, one named Adah and the other Zillah. 20 Adah gave birth to Jabal; he was the father of those who live in tents and raise livestock. 21 His brother’s name was Jubal; he was the father of all who play the harp and flute. 22 Zillah also had a son, Tubal-Cain, who forged all kinds of tools out of bronze and iron. Tubal-Cain’s sister was Naamah.**

Cain’s descendants were innovators. They invented music, technology, and efficiencies in the economy. It was also wicked to the core. You know, the Nazis loved fine wine and Classical music. Those things say nothing about a society’s morality. The first evidence for how wicked things were back then is that they invented polygamy. The Bible is clear that marriage was designed by God as being between one man and one woman. Taking more than one wife was totally excluded. And Moses makes it extra clear for us that taking multiple wives is wicked, because he goes out of his way to point out, this innovation comes from Lamech. From the wicked offspring of Cain who brought his hypocritical self-righteousness to a new level. If you don’t think he’s a terrible guy, just listen to his song. I have heard this song described as the first gangster rap in the Bible:

**23 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. 24 If Cain is avenged seven times, then Lamech seventy-seven times.”**

He is proud of having two women. It’s a sign of his greatness. He is bragging about his violence. Some dude messed with him, so what did he do? He killed him. Even some young dude injured him, so what did he do? He put him in the ground. He is tough. He doesn’t take anything from anybody. He gets revenge 77 times worse that what they do to him. A wicked society that will end up getting so bad that the only way it can reform is for God to wipe it out with a great flood and start over.

Don’t tell me this story is just a fairly tale. The picture it paints of the dark side of humanity that speaks to us very powerfully now, just as it has in every generation for thousands and thousands of years. This is deep truth God has revealed to us about ourselves. We used to live in a Christian society. People used to read the Bible in schools and understand this basic tendency to violence in human nature. But today, we’re rapidly losing that Christian worldview. And so we are making the mistake so many other cultures have made. We are moving to a might-makes-right society. Look at how we no longer engage in civil debate with each other. People’s goal is often to drown out the voices of those they disagree with, or intimidate them into silence. But it’s not just in the public sphere. Look at our own lives. How often does insecurity or jealously lead to anger and resentment. Anger and resentment leads to harm. And rather than face our own wrongs, we build up a shell. And that is a very dangerous place to be. What is the answer? Well Moses closes with this:

**25 Adam lay with 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.” 26 Seth also had a son, and he named him Enosh. At that time men began to call on the name of the LORD.**

Life went on. God gave Adam and Eve more children, and we will see that some of them remained faithful to God. They resisted the pull of the wicked world around them. This will be the subject of our sermon next week. But for now I want to focus on the last line. At that time people began to call on the name of the Lord. Before that, humankind was one big family and they just related to God. They evidently made sacrifices together. But that unity of humankind was shattered. From this point on, mankind would be divided into those who were faithful to the Lord, and did battle with their sinful inclinations, and those who gave in and went the arrogant, defiant, self-absorbed, route of Cain. Those who stayed faithful began to gather and call on God’s name. In Hebrew this means both that they proclaimed his name and they called upon his name for help.

We cannot overcome this sinful nature on our own. We will not all become murderers if left to our own devices, but we will all become turned inward towards ourselves. We all grow defiant towards God, blind to our own faults, and callous towards the suffering of others without God’s continued working in our lives through his Word. That is why we will see next week that believers are said to walk with God. They rely on him all the time everywhere they go and everything they do.

The kids are singing a song: How good and how pleasant to live in unity and peace. I totally agree. I think anyone on earth would agree this is the ideal. But how to accomplish it? The next line: How good and how pleasant to live together in one Lord. It is only God who can unite six billion people with a tendency to look out for number one at the expense of number two. Before we can fix our problems with our neighbor, we have to get right with God. And that is why Jesus came. He came to deal with violence. Jesus subjected himself to terrible, ugly violence in its rawest form. Jesus was like Abel: totally innocent, but killed in a cruel and violent way because of the rage of those who felt threatened by his innocence and goodness. Yet Jesus was not a simple victim. Jesus was God in the flesh. That same God who spoke to Cain and pleaded with him not to sin, and then had mercy and compassion on that hardened sinner, he was born of the virgin Mary so that he could give his life instead of Cain’s. And instead of Adam and Eve’s. And instead of yours and mine. He suffered the death we deserve to reconcile us to God. It is only through this forgiveness that we have peace with God. We can’t overcome our natures. But Jesus has overcome our sin. God looks on you with great favor, despite your sin, because of Jesus. He doesn’t ask you to earn it, he just asks you to believe it, and to live a life of repentance and faith.

And when we have peace with God, it brings peace with others. When we confront, accept, and repent of the darkness that lives in us, we are able to apply the mercy, patience, and forgiveness we receive to other people who are struggling with their own corrupt nature. That is the only way we can truly live in unity and peace.

This morning I hope you can take away two things. First, do not estimate how dark human nature can be. Extreme evil does not need some extraordinary event to set it off. It is always there, waiting, for a wounded heart to give in to anger and if unchecked, set off a downward spiral. When you see a tragedy, be grieved and sad, but don’t be shocked. When you see these tendencies in your own heart, turn to God in repentance. And once we realize this, there is another conclusion that naturally follows. Being close to Jesus is the most important thing you can do in life. And you are close to him when you hear him speaking to you through his words. It’s important for kids. It’s important for adults. We live in a busy society. We have a long list of activities to choose from when we organize our life. Learning the Bible, which means going to church are not just two more activities on that list. This is only path to overcoming the evil within our nature. They are the path to peace with God and unity among the human race. If you value the peace that God gives, and if you desire for you and your family to over the constant temptations we face from sin crouching at our door, then don’t put anything ahead of God’s Word. If you find that you struggle with anger, don’t get caught up in side issues. Treat the source. Put God’s Word first, because this is where we find truth, forgiveness, repentance, and peace. Amen.