

October 9, 2022 - "Rejection"

**Genesis 4:3-7**

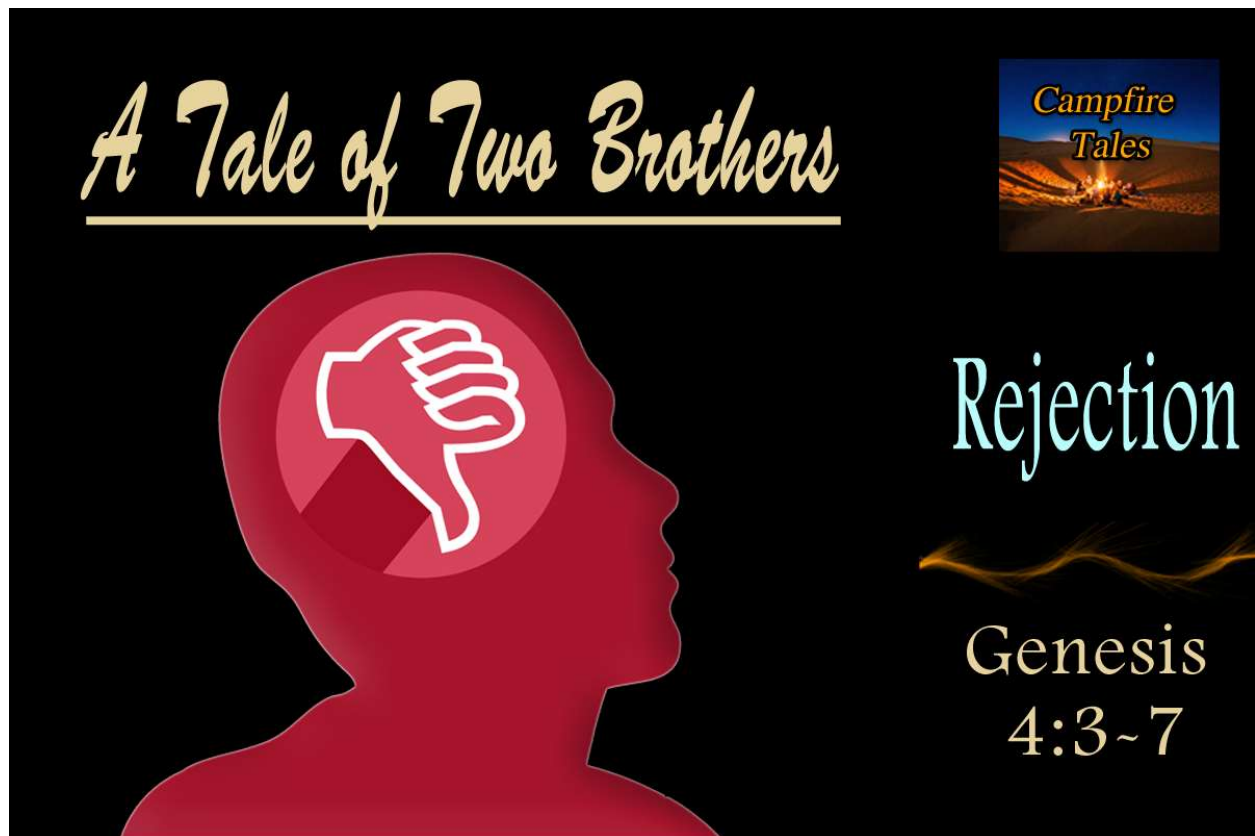
**3** In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the Lord.

**4** And Abel also brought an offering—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.

**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 rule over it."



Special Music: Echo

Elevation Worship

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sbszE00\\_K5w](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sbszE00_K5w)

## **REJECTION**

**Last pick of the bunch,  
The runt, the squirt.  
Less than a human  
Less than the dirt  
But you'll have to do.  
Your simply too small  
Might have been better  
If you weren't here at all.**

**Never the head  
And always the tail  
Forever the one  
Who is chosen to fail  
Expectations are low  
You have the sense of a doll  
Might have been better  
If you weren't here at all.**

**The harder you work  
The shorter you fall  
Your best is not good enough  
You can't have the ball.  
We know you will drop it.  
You certainly have gall  
Might have been better  
If you weren't here at all.**

**Whatever you touch  
Is doomed from the start  
You don't have the brains  
You don't have the heart  
You don't have what it takes  
You are dense as a wall  
Might have been better  
If you weren't here at all.**

**Perhaps if you learned  
To give all you've got  
Let go of excuses  
And change out the plot  
Bring the best that you can  
Get up from the fall  
Make yourself better  
In the midst of it all**

**Don't try to be perfect  
Don't give less than you are  
Bring the best that you have  
Hitched to God's star  
Lay your best on the alter  
Let God make the call  
Let Him mold you and make you  
So that you can serve all.**

Growing up, I wasn't the best athlete. I was skinny and I had no stamina. I worked hard to build up my muscles. I worked hard to run faster. I worked hard on my coordination. It wasn't that I was a bad athlete. I just couldn't keep up with my peers. No matter how hard I tried, I always fell short. I was always picked last.

I tried out for the relay team in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade. There was going to be an all-city track meet. I made the team, but only as a substitute. On the day of the meet, I put on my gym clothes and my mom took me to Farrington Field in Fort Worth even though there was little hope of me competing. Someone would have to not show up for me to come off the bench. I sat with my teammates, but they preferred each other's company to mine. I got it. I was only the substitute. They didn't particularly want me there. For me to be a real part of the team, someone that they preferred over me was going to have to be absent. I was an unwanted redundancy.

I should mention that at the tryouts, more than fifty students had tried out. I had worked hard and pushed myself. I had earned my spot, even if it was as a substitute. I had given my all and it had taken a lot out of me. I may not have been the fastest runner, but I was faster than everyone that didn't make the team. I truly had nothing to be ashamed about.

Instead, I preferred to think of myself as a necessary part of what was happening, whether the team chose to see that that way or not. If we wound up short a person, we wouldn't have to forfeit. My presence insured that was not

going to happen. I had a purpose. I was not the expendable, unnecessary, member of the team that they believed I was.

And then, the unexpected happened. The call came in that Mike, our teammate, was sick and couldn't make it. My other teammates let out a groan and I heard one of them say, "That means we're stuck with Walter." Everyone on the team had that look on their face of "Why did this have to happen to us? We are doomed." It occurred to me that if I didn't greatly exceed everybody's expectations, then they might as well shoot me, right then and there.

When our time for first relay came, we went down and took our places. Mike's position had been 5<sup>th</sup> so that is where I would be running. The starting gun fired and the 1<sup>st</sup> position racers took off. By the time they reach 4<sup>th</sup> position, our team was already way behind. I readied myself as the other racers passed me and I started my stride and took the baton. Running as hard as I could, ignoring the other racers, I approached the 6<sup>th</sup> position and made a good handoff. Only then did I check where we stood in the race.

This is not a David and Goliath, miraculous comeback, crowd wildly cheering, hail Mary story. I wish that it were. I don't want you to get your hopes up for scrawny Walt reaching for Olympic gold. You will be sorely disappointed if you do.

To my chagrin, I had actually made up quite a bit of distance against our opponents. But in the end, we came in dead last. We didn't even do well enough to run again. As we gathered around the coach, I heard the whispers. "If only

Mike had been here.” “It’s Walter’s fault that we lost.” “Walter caused us to be humiliated.” Even the parents were upset. After all, I had cost their child an opportunity to stand on the dais and be recognized for their superiority. I had let the entire team down. Even the coach believed it was my fault. If only Mike had been there, everything would have been different. I truly got the feeling that they would have preferred to forfeit that be humiliated by me.

The story is true. As long ago as it was, I remember that day. But I will also admit that maybe I was a little too hard on myself and maybe I read some things into the moment that weren’t there. Maybe the animosity wasn’t quite as bad as remember it to be. Maybe being a scrawny kid who was always the last to be chosen, magnified the hurt. Maybe I expected some compassion in a situation where I found little. Maybe I wanted my coach or my mother to say they were proud of me. I can’t really fill in those blanks. But I do remember not wanting to go to school on Monday. I felt horribly ashamed of my failure and that I had let my teammates down by not being the fastest human alive. I just wanted someone, anyone to acknowledge how hard I had worked. Not getting that acknowledgement just ground me down more.

I’m sure all of us have some kind of story like that. Stories of someone who didn’t think we were pretty enough, handsome enough, smart enough, strong enough, fast enough, or daring enough. That first time someone rejects us when we ask them out on a date. That time when someone tells us how ugly our clothes or hair are. That time when someone we thought was our best friend turns their back on us. It can be horrific moment and leave us speechless. It can

leave us dumbfounded and feeling... rejected. It is those moments that leave scars on our souls.

This next stage in the story of Cain and Abel makes many people uncomfortable. Let me read it again:

**3 In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the Lord.**

**4 And Abel also brought an offering—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.**

**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 rule over it.”**

The story of Cain and Abel is full of firsts. That is part of the process of defining who we are, defining the essence of our culture and who God is. It was a different time, a different place, and it is chockful of first-time experiences. It is in this story that we hear of the first sacrifice mentioned in the Bible. That does not mean that there weren't other sacrifices before this. This idea of sacrifice to God may have been going on for some time. We simply don't know. Still, this isn't the

kind of sacrifice that we read about later on in the Old Testament. There is no mention of an altar or a priest. But it does reflect the nature and intent of sacrifice. We don't even hear God telling anyone that this is necessary. A very important part of this story is the presence of God. He walks with Cain and Abel just like He walks with Adam and Eve.

I think we have a tendency to believe that God walked off the stage after he removed Adam and Eve from the garden. After all, this was a punishment, right? But if we do our due diligence in studying Genesis, we see that just isn't true. They may not be in the Garden of Eden, but God is still very much a part of their lives, walking beside them, giving them counsel, teaching them about life. He did not hide himself away. It would take a long time for us to hear Paul's words that said, "Nothing can separate us from the love of God," but that doesn't change that truth, even at the beginning of Genesis. That's true of Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel as well.

The sacrifices brought by Cain and Abel seem to be in appreciation to God for the success of each of their activities, Cain for his harvest and Abel for his success as a shepherd. They are grateful to God for His provisions and want to show their appreciation. This act comes from the heart. They know, without a doubt, that God is taking care of them. We don't know how much they gave, but we do know they didn't sit down and measure everything, 90% for me and 10% for God.

We often accept that 10% as a reference for tithing, a rule of thumb, a limitation set by God. But looking at it in that way can seriously get in the way of



**our generosity and blind us to the joy of giving. “Look at me, I give 10% to God (as if God needs 10% of what He has provided to us). Too many of us look at that as an upper limit, meeting a minimum requirement. And it is not. Please note that both Cain and Abel gave what they felt was appropriate, and it could well have been far more than 10%. We need to give to God out of the generous spirit that He has given to us. Many of the early Christians gave everything they had. When we see tithing as a 10% limit, we are suggesting that we are still living under the old covenant, and we throw generosity right out the window. We find ourselves giving to meet our own needs thinking this is some kind of requirement for our salvation, rather than embracing the spirit of generosity that God has given to each of us as Christians. That spirit allows us to reach out and meet the needs of the people that God places in our path.**

**For thousands of years, theologians have argued over the question regarding what made Abel’s sacrifice as acceptable and Cain’s unacceptable. Most of those theologians have found common ground in the belief that Abel gave the best that he had through the sacrifice of the first born of his lambs, first fruit as it were. He gave to God the first and the best that he had to offer. On the other hand, Cain just grabbed up some of his produce and used that as a sacrifice, that there was nothing special about what he offered. It was just a portion of what God had blessed him with. It wasn’t that he held back the best for himself. He just didn’t choose the best to give to God. His sacrifice was half-hearted and more out of obligation than thankfulness. There is a whole sermon in that. But that is not the point of this particular message about rejection.**

When it comes to rejection, the why is not really all that important. What matters is the sand in our shoe, the coarseness in our soul, the despair that wraps itself around us like a blanket when we feel the full blunt trauma that we have failed to live up to someone's else's expectations, justified or not. In other words, God did not reject Cain's offering because He was mad at him. It was simply a matter of learning about what was acceptable to God. God presents a learning situation and Cain misunderstands. God did not reject Cain. He rejected Cain's offering. They are not the same thing. This is a correctable situation. God brings Cain's intent into question and Cain totally misunderstands and thinks that he himself is being rejected.

**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 rule over it."**

God's point is that Cain should reflect on his offering, see how he went wrong, and then return with the best that he had to offer. But Cain doesn't see it that way, which is a most common human response when we offer something to someone and have it rejected, thinking we are doing a good thing but finding that someone else doesn't appreciate it. The onus here is not on the receiver, but the giver.

**It's like having someone invite us for dinner. We put on our best clothes and come hungry, knowing that there will be lots to eat. And then we are offered a slice of bread and a glass of water. There is nothing wrong with being offered a slice of bread and a cup of water, but it is demeaning for anyone to expect us to enjoy that slice of bread while they eat roast beef, potatoes, and apple pie. Of course we are going to feel rejected and neglected. Especially if these are friends that have invited us to their meal.**

**How do we deal with these situations what we perceive of them as rejection? We want to blame the person that made us feel that way. Cain was angry with God. He made It clear. But he didn't take it out on God. Instead, he allowed His brain to enter the land of stinkin' thinkin'. He thought to himself, "God is comparing me to my brother, so the easiest solution is to get rid of my brother so that God won't be able to compare me to him." He did not stop to consider that God weighed each of the sacrifices individually. One did not have anything to do with the other. Cain ignores the words God speaks when he says, **"But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door;"** And sure enough, sin was waiting for Cain to open the door so it could pounce. The minute that Cain stopped looking at what he had done wrong, the rest of the world became a source for his problems.**

**That is the hidden nature of rejection. We feel that it is someone else's fault. We let the world tell us what is acceptable and what is not. We let the voices of people drown out the voice of God. We put a focus on our tormenters rather that focus on being the best Child of God that we can. We give power and**

authority over our lives over to people rather than allowing Jesus Christ to be our authority.

Cain's sacrifice was never going to be good enough if he didn't change the way he thought. I was never going to be a decent athlete as long as I let the people around me determine my path. We can struggle and fight to try and make our sacrifices right with God, but what we need to be doing instead, is listening to the voice of God as he tells us what we need to be doing. No middle of the road existence is an acceptable sacrifice before God. When we determine where God wants us, He expects us to rise to the challenge and with His help, we will succeed where the world told us we would fail.

Nothing can separate us from the love of God. But if we want to secure His blessings in our lives, we have to keep our ears open and listen to what He is telling us, rather than assuming that we know what he is going to say and then tuning Him out. He, alone, gives His children purpose.

I never ran track again after that day in the sixth grade. I failed at football. I struggled with basketball. I was a decent baseball player until I got injured. I only hurt myself and my pride when I tried wrestling. The teachers and the administrators at the school told me that I had to keep trying out for things in order to get my PT credits. I truly felt hopeless trying and failing time after time after time. Not matter what I did, my body just wasn't what they considered to be athletic. The laughter hurt. But you know something, at one point I learned to play tennis, and I excelled at it enough that I played in major high school tournaments. I even eventually lettered in Tennis. Even then, there were people

telling me that I didn't belong there and that someone else deserved my spot on the team.

But I had learned that it really didn't matter. God was pleased with my efforts and my tenacity. He was the only reason I could play at all. Throughout my life, I found that when I focused on God's purpose for me, taking care of people and serving their needs, I was the most successful. When I tried to do it all on my own, I often failed. There is a much greater satisfaction being in the will of God than trying to go it without Him.

This week, I'd like for us all to look at the sacrifices that we have brought before God. Are we giving Him our best? If He doesn't like what we are bringing, are we willing to examine our offerings and adjust in order to bring that which is satisfactory before him? Are we willing to lay all that we are at the foot of the cross? When we find that the world rejects us, do we get angry with the world, or do we keep our eyes on our Heavenly Father, knowing that it is His path that we are following and not the path that the world is trying to put us on? Who sets us straight? Who is our authority?

**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 rule over it."**

Think about that verse this week and ponder it.

God bless you all,

**AMEN**

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