

October 30, 2020 - "The Mark"

Genesis 4:13-16

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."

15 But the Lord said to him, "Not so anyone who kills Cain 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, (Nod means wandering) east of Eden.

A Tale of Two Brothers

Campfire Tales

THE TRUTH SHALL SET YOU FREE

The Mark

Genesis 4:13-16

Special Music:

Only Jesus

Casting Crowns

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VXIBP2BdYR8>

THE MARK OF GOD

The Mark of God

Does not imply

Weakness, meekness,

Or striving to dignify

Acts among mortals

Creating new portals

That lead to the land of Nod

No, the Mark

Is not for the faint of heart

As God takes stone in hand

Creating counterpart

As He conjoles

The human soul

To turn from stone to flesh

For the Mark

Cannot be placed on stone

Nor common steel

Nor wretched bone,

But only spawned

In flesh and brawn

Purchased by the blood of God

And once enjoined

By burnished brand

The Mark is known

**And never can
Be made obscure
Or turned impure,
Beyond the end of time.**

**The bond thus marked
And made complete
Bound to God
Beyond defeat
Wrapped by faith
Absolved of hate
A place secured in heaven's rest.**

**I am a child
Tattooed by God
Bound by faith
Though I be flawed
My heart made flesh
My soul enmeshed
By melded strands of grace and love.**

**I cannot hide
From human eyes
The stature
That The Mark implies
I am complete
Beyond conceit
By burnished brand, The Mark of God**

The art of tattooing is not bound by culture, tradition, age, time, religion, race, continents, countries, or any other ostensible barrier. Charles Darwin was the first one to write that there is no country in the world that does not practice tattooing or some other form of permanent body decoration. As of yet, no one has been able to disprove that statement. From ink being placed under the skin, to scars being created by knife, to tribes that intentionally put dirt under their battle wounds to magnify the scars, tattooing has been around for over 5000 years. The oldest tattoo actually found on a human body was in on a man from 3300 BC who was found encased in a glacier.

Tattoos can be reminiscent of battles, decorative enhancements, some extremely beautiful art, and even attempts to create an identity. Those who have tattoos wonder why those who don't have tattoos, won't get one. And those who do not have tattoos are always asking why anyone would do that to their bodies. Let's face it, as we grow older, tattoos shrink and lose their shape. The color starts to fade, especially on those that use an array of different hues. It's painful to get a tattoo and it isn't cheap. That is, unless you use an inexperienced tattoo artist and are willing to take the chance that you will survive to regret your decision.

Then, there's the problems of misspellings and artistic mistakes. Quotes and scripture are often misquoted or misspelled. Then there are horses that sometime have five legs or peoples hands with six fingers, or supposed art created by persons that couldn't draw a straight line with a ruler. Not to mention the problems that occur if you have the name of girlfriend or boyfriend that you have since broken up with tattooed on your body. Laser removal doesn't always work and is very expensive. Choosing to do a cover up, where a new image is placed over the old one can often cause issues as well. According to Advanced Dermatology, 3 out of 4 people suffer from "tattoo" regret, being unhappy with their tattoos for any of a number of reasons. Lifestyle changes. Relationship changes. Bad art. Most people are just not happy with the results of what they thought was an excellent idea at the time.

Let's face it, getting "Bonnie and Travis forever" in a tattoo that is clearly visible and then, two weeks later, Travis runs off with Melinda. Where's the sense in that? Or maybe getting a tattoo of a dragon on your back only to find out that your new girlfriend hates dragons. Not to mention how hard one's Christian testimony might be affected by having demons tattooed up and down your arms.

I am not against tattoos, but then, I don't have any. So, I'm not sure my opinion really counts. The only tattoo I have ever considered getting was one that would tell paramedics about my medical conditions and allergies. That does not mean decorative tattoos are bad. It just means that if someone is going to get ink permanently injected into their flesh, they might want to spend a great deal of time figuring out what they are trying to say, and make sure that it's spelled right. And pictures of real people are probably a bad idea since most tattoo artists are not Da Vinci equivalents. As much as someone may love their Aunt Mildred, twenty years from now, a tattoo of Aunt Mildred's may look a lot more like Sylvester Stallone. But I have known some couples that have their wedding rings tattooed on. That's kind of a cool idea. Unless, of course, you become widowed or divorced.

Some tattoos define relationships to groups. Gang tattoos are common. So are military tattoos. When someone sees and is familiar with these types of tattoos, they know something about you. It is a symbol that you belong to a greater collective, good or bad. Sometimes a tattoo can carry a message that is more profound than words. Such is the Mark of Cain.

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16 So Cain went out from the Lord's presence and lived in the land of Nod, east of Eden.

Let's look at each of these verses in context to better understand how this particular story in the old testament is resolved.

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."

Cain exemplifies an attitude common among people. This verse tells us so much through what Cane says, and even more by what Cane doesn't say. He is telling God, "This punishment that you are putting me under, I can't handle it. You may as well put just me out of my misery now. This is too much."

Here are three takeaways from these first two verses.

1. **"my punishment"** - Cain sees this as a punishment rather than a gift. He doesn't find the grace that God is offering him. God never calls it a punishment. God loves Cain in spite of what he has done. He wants him to learn from his mistakes. He can't learn anything if he is dead. God gifts Cain with a chance to start over, with the knowledge he has gained from his the lessons learned by his mistakes. Too often we see the opportunities that God gives us as punishments, even when we can't put our finger on what we have done. God may choose to redirect our lives and we should see those redirections as opportunities that better allow us to serve our Creator. It doesn't have anything to do with punishment. But if we don't like where we are having to go or doing what He asks us to do, we are going to call it "punishment" and ignore the grace.

2. **“more than I can bear.”** – We’ve all faced moments like this at some point. Some more than others. “I just can’t do this. I’m just not strong enough or smart enough. The pain is too great for me to handle. The mountain is too high. The river is too deep. I can’t go on.” Cain is standing in the presence of God complaining about something that hasn’t even happened yet. He really doesn’t know what he can handle and what he can’t. I am guessing here, he’s probably very afraid. He hasn’t had to deal with life without his parents and community. He’s never been truly alone. That would be scary for anyone. Not only that, he has no plan “B.” He can’t just go somewhere and start farming, which is the only thing he really knows how to do. Nothing is going to grow for him. The curse of the land is very real for him.

3. **“Today you are driving me from the land, and I will be hidden from your presence;”** – Here is a lesson that we still struggle with today. Adam and Eve learned this lesson. You would have thought that this lesson had been passed on to Cain. Although they were sent from the garden, God still walks and talks with Adam and Eve. He didn’t leave them. God may have banished them from the garden, but He never left their side. Cain and Abel seem to have this kind of relationship with God as well. They walk and talk with God. But Cain cannot seem to grasp the omnipresence of God. Cain doesn’t understand that God can remain with Adam and Eve and still go with him as he begins his wandering. Sometimes, we are much the same way. We want to confine God to this church, or to this nation, or to this denomination. We are more comfortable believing that. But God’s spirit is everywhere and He’s pretty good at multi-tasking.

When we come to accept that God is with us when we wake up, when we get dressed, when we eat breakfast, when we head off to work, when we come home, when we eat dinner, when we go to bed, and all the places in-between, we can appreciate that God's spirit is there to guide us wherever we are, to love us wherever we are, to bless us wherever we are. The building is not the church. The nation is not the church. The denomination is not the church. WE are the church and God dwells within us.

And if you believe that God hung Cain out to dry (whether we believe He should have or not), you would be wrong. Let me read you what verse 17 says. Verse 17 is not in our scripture today but tells us how wrong Cain was in his interaction with God and His understanding about what was about to happen.

“Cain made love to 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.”

This occurs after Cain is sent wandering. He has a wife. And no, the Bible does not tell us where she came from. To try and figure that one out will make our heads spin. He has a child that he names Enoch. He builds a city. That would never have happened if God had not sent Cain wandering. It would not have happened if God had not remained with him. He has children, and grandchildren, and great grandchildren, and great great grandchildren. God blesses him in a mighty way.

But from where he is standing, Cain can't see what's coming. So, he's scared. We are just like that. We get scared when we don't know what lies ahead. I know that it can be hard to believe at times, but God knows exactly what He is doing and what is best for each of us. We may not understand the plan or have a map, but we don't really need one if God is directly our lives.

If we continue on in our scripture for today, verse 14 tells us this:

“I will be a restless wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me.”

This part of verse 14 is troublesome for a lot of people. We start with the question, “If Adam and Eve had Cain and Abel, the first two children, and Cain kills Abel leaving only one child, and Cain is sent off wandering, and... and... and..., where did these people come from that Cain thinks are going to kill him if they find him? Why is he so afraid if there is no one else around?” There have been a great number of theologians over the years that have attempted to answer this. But the Bible doesn't really give us any information to explain this. The Bible doesn't even tell us how long Cain lived. Other ancient texts tell us that he lived to be 730-750 years old, but I don't really want to go down that rabbit hole because there is a great deal of information in those ancient texts that create a monumental amount of speculation. Still, if Cain did live to be over 700 years old,

it is certainly possible that with the growing population, he might at some point be killed by someone.

Eve went on to have another son, whom she named Seth. Then she had more sons and daughters. So, we see two separate communities forming here, one through Adam and Eve and one through Cain and his wife. But we will have to suffice it to say that both communities were growing and thriving and even though Cain didn't know what was going to happen, he was afraid he was going to run into someone at some point who was going to try to kill him.

And then we see that God addresses this very concern. He doesn't tell Cain that he is being paranoid. The fact that God continues to care enough about Cain to address his concerns should remind us that this whole matter isn't about vengeance. God continues in His steadfast love for Cain.

But the Lord said to him, "Not so, anyone who kills Cain will suffer vengeance seven times over." Then the Lord put a mark on Cain so that no one who found him would kill him.

Now, I want to ask you, who was that mark really for? Who benefitted from it? Here we have God channeling a tattoo artist and creating the very first, one of a kind, recognizable by all, tattoo. One that didn't change and didn't fade with age. One that says, "I, Cain, am protected by God. You had better not kill me or you will regret it." Sometimes, God will bring something into our lives to help us stay focused, remove our anxieties regarding His plan for us. Cain may have not moved from that spot without something to ease his stress. Sometimes, we need some reassurance that we are doing what we are supposed to be doing, that we

are resting in God's place, God's grace, and God's timing. And God provides something to remind us that He is with us, guiding us, equipping us for His purpose.

Do you remember that person who gave you your first Bible? Do you remember how you felt when you were baptized? Do you remember a time when a friend had your back in a tough situation? Do you remember a time when you joined an organization that brought you into a relationship of trust and fellowship with others? Do you remember the day you got married? All marks on our lives delivered by a loving and gracious God. God wants us to be able to rest into His purpose for us without worry and anxiety.

Verse 16 shows us what happens when God does this for us:

16 So Cain went out from the Lord's presence and lived in the land of Nod, east of Eden.

Cain leaves this discussion that he and God have been having, and he physically walks east into a period of wandering. Without God's assurances, without God's instructions, without God's comfort, Cain may never have taken that first step. If Cain had not believed that God would protect him, guide him, and care for him, Cain may have remained standing in that very spot that the conversation took place.

As Christians, that's us in a nutshell. We know what we are supposed to do. We know how to do it. We know that God will provide us the tools to do it. But we are a hesitant to move out of our comfort zone into a world where we may not be appreciated and might even be persecuted for our beliefs and our actions.

In J. R. R. Tolkien's "The Hobbit," Bilbo Baggins is comfortable in his home in the Shire. Adventure is not in his vocabulary. But when the opportunity arises for him to make a difference in the world, he leaves the comfort and warmth of his home and his friends, to make things right in the world. His friends and neighbors tell him that he is crazy, that Hobbit's are not curious creatures by nature. But he ignores them and sets out to change the world.

We want God to put a visible mark on our forehead before we venture forth, a sign that we are protected by God. But Jesus never promised us a life of comfort. As a matter of fact, he told us that we would be persecuted and possibly killed for sharing His story with the world. To help give us the courage, fortitude, and strength that we need to face down our demons and help change the world, God chose to turn our hearts of stone to hearts of flesh and then placed the mark of His spirit directly on our new hearts.

This week, I want us all to contemplate the story of Cain and Abel and realize that we, too, can overcome our pasts and step with confidence into our presents knowing that our God walks beside us with every step, that he has placed his spirit in our hearts, that he has given us the skills and resources to meet any challenge that we face. When people look at us, do they see the Mark of God upon us and know that we are His children? Do we reflect the light of Jesus in this world? That is what we are created for. That is why we bear the mark of Jesus Christ on our souls.

God bless you all,

AMEN

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