

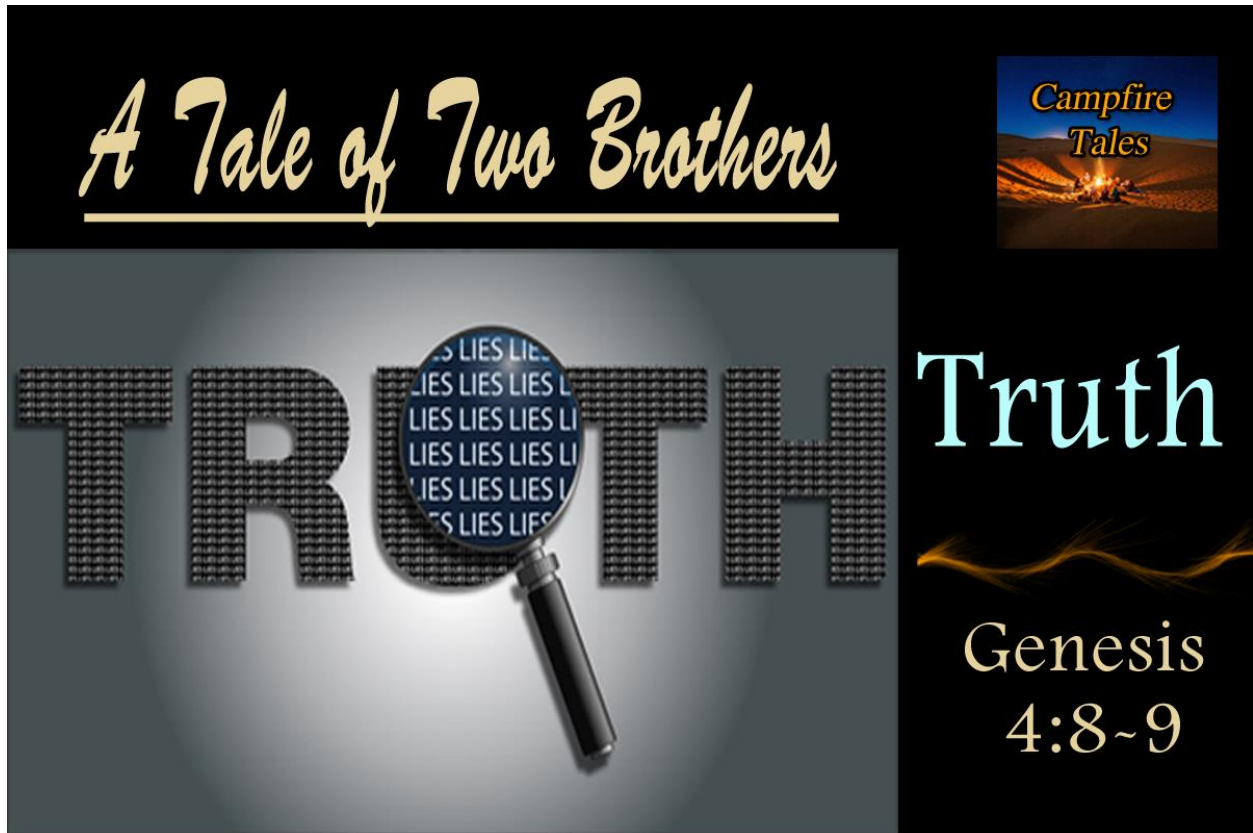
October 16, 2020 - "Truth"

Genesis 4:8-9

8 Now Cain said to his brother Abel, "Let's go out to the field." While they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him.

9 Then the Lord said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?"

"I don't know," he replied. "Am I my brother's keeper?"



Special Music:

A Love for Truth

Dylan Woodward

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F_IZZJd_Cmg

TRUTH

Truth is truth

Lies are lies

And lies are most often

Given as alibis

In most alibis

There lays a smidge of the truth

A dapple of reason

And just enough proof

To make one believe

In the grays of blurred shadows

Rather than seek out the light

Which everyone knows

Will expose every weakness

And bring from the dark

The foundation of God's words

And remove all the bark

To uncover the truth

Naked and raw

And allow us to face

The facts without flaw.

The Creator of all things

Knows only truth

Hides nothing in shadow
And provides all the proof

That we need to have
To examine our souls
And align with our God
And relinquish control

What people place in the shadows
What we cover with blight
What we hide in the darkness
God brings to the light

We think we are clever
Hiding our truth from our God
Never realizing our truth
Is only just fraud

Created in darkness
Ashamed as we are
But God knows our truth
And who we actually are.

Still he loves us beyond measure
And speaks to our souls
Conditioning our hearts
Bringing truth to our roles

As God's children

No matter who we are, truth can be a hard pill to swallow. There is a very human part of our souls that likes for our edges to be a little fuzzy rather than hard. If we are honest with ourselves, our truth is seldom God's truth. I'm not trying to pick on anyone here. It's just as true of me as everyone else. Even those people that love standing in the spotlight prefer to keep part of themselves in the shadow. There are simply some things we would rather people did not know about us. Every last one of us has some dark truth that we have put behind us and would like for it to stay obscured and buried. It is the reason that most of us will never be politicians. We know that someone will go digging for those dark truths the moment we run for office.

Sometimes, these are things that we have absolutely no control over. Perhaps we have a history of being sexually abused. Or we may have spent some time in a facility to deal with depression or rehabilitation. We might have been the victim of violence or spent time in jail. Maybe we have been divorced or lost a child. Events in our lives that required us to overcome serious issues and we feel are no one else's business. We have covered them up and put them in the shadows for a reason. We know they are there, but we would prefer that no one else know they are there. We do not like to admit that very early in our lives, we installed in our souls a closet for our skeletons, a closet that has only one key and no one else knows where to find that key. In order to make sure those skeletons stay hidden we invent plausible untruths to keep hidden in the shadows behind locked doors. We tell ourselves that we do that so that we can

protect the people around us, but in truth, we are embarrassed and don't want the truth paraded around.

Did you ever get fired and tell everyone that you were laid off? Did you ever embellish a resume' telling yourself that you had to do that in order to get the job for the sake of your family? Did you ever call in sick when you just wanted to take the day off? Did you ever tell someone that you thought her dress was beautiful when you actually thought it looked hideous? I do find it interesting that we have such a hard time telling people the truth in those situations. We don't want to hurt people's feelings and we don't want people to think less about us. We certainly don't want to get fired or lose friendships.

In every 12-step program, there is a point where a person has to accept responsibility for their actions and ask for forgiveness from those they have hurt. Asking forgiveness is not really a hard thing to do. It's telling our friends and family that we are alcoholics, drug-addicts, or struggling with mental difficulties that is so difficult. One of the problems that I have with insurance companies is that they often expect you to lie by omission, not telling what you know to be true. They do not want you to fault even when you know that it was your own negligence that caused the problem. Insurance companies often feel we give them the right to control the narrative because they were kind enough to cover us. If they control the narrative, they control the perceived truth.

Truth is hard. Truth can also be very expensive, both monetarily and to one's reputation. Truth forces us to look at the moral obligations and contradictions that we constantly face. We ask ourselves, "Will people think

better of me if I just don't bring the matter up, or if I tell the truth?" It is almost like we treat truth as a leveraging point in our lives, rather than just taking it for what it is. Truth. As much as we try, we can never hide from our own truth, and as much as we pray that it will never be discovered, truth always has a way of finding its way back into the light, even if it is after we are dead and gone and the only ones embarrassed by it are our children.

Avoiding the truth has its roots in the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve trying to hide what they had done, hoping that if they just didn't let God know, He would never find out. But God is truth. He will always know. He will know before we twist the truth into something ugly and fractured, in an attempt to keep Him from knowing. Nothing that we do will change truth. Truth is not something that we throw on a potter's wheel and create. No matter how we warp it, color it, twist it, shape it, stomp on it, or burn it, in the end we will discover that we have only been trying to manipulate the shadow of truth, the blanket that we wrap it in to hide it. Because the truth is immutable, just as God is immutable. God is truth.

We could spend hours talking about how Cain killed Abel. The Bible does not tell us that Cain used a rock. It is the Book of Jubilees, a lesser-known ancient Jewish text, that tells us that Cain uses a rock. But the Bible itself just says that Cain killed Abel. I am not one to say that the Book of Jubilees is wrong, just that the book is not canonized and not considered a book of the Bible. We could talk about this even being the first murder. If we want to get technical, this is the first death of any kind that we read about in the Bible. We do not know what Cain did with the body. We don't know how everyone reacted. Did Adam,

Eve and any other of their children that might have been around, understand the significance of death? Even today, we struggle with death when it touches our lives. Did it touch Adam and Eve the same way? What did death even mean to them? I don't ask these questions to be hard on Adam, Eve, and their children, but to give us some perspective into the questions that they must have been asking themselves. They didn't have comforting words, funerals, burial experience, or any of the other things that provide help and relief for us in the grieving process. We don't even know if Cain understood that what he did was wrong, until God approached him about it. But he must have had some understanding that there was something inappropriate with what he had done.

9 Then the Lord said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?"

"I don't know," he replied. "Am I my brother's keeper?"

If he did not believe that he had done something wrong, then why did he hide it. He knew exactly where his brother was, and he lies to God about it. And then he tries a little transference on God. **"Am I my brother's keeper?"** Who made me responsible for my little brother? Not me! Someone else should have been looking out for him. Maybe mom and dad can answer your questions. Last time I checked, he was their child.

If God was the kind of God that went around zapping people, this would certainly have been Cain's moment. The sheer insolence and cavalier attitude that he presents to God is beyond contempt. It's almost as if he is so familiar with God that he has forgotten that he is in the presence of the Creator of the Universe.

"Where is your brother Abel?"

"I don't know," he replied. "Am I my brother's keeper?"

If we have siblings, this is a conversation that we have all had with our parents and other responsible adults. “Where is your sister?” “Gee, I don’t know. Aren’t you supposed to be watching her? It’s not my problem that you seem to have lost her. Nobody left me in charge. I’m just a kid.”

Maybe if Cain just pretends he doesn’t know anything, then God will just go away and leave him alone. But before we start throwing stones at Cain for his attitude and for his sin of omission, let’s stop and think about how we react. Let’s take a moment and examine our lives with brute honesty. I would have to say that most of us are guilty of telling small white lies on a regular basis to spare people’s feelings. “But pastor! Cain killed a man, his brother, and then lied about it! That is so much worse. He was trying to get away with a horrible sin.”

And there we are trying to yoke Cain with things he can’t understand. “Thou shall not kill” is not a commandment yet. Do you remember the first time you crossed the street and didn’t tell your mom. Do you remember how angry she got? “I didn’t tell you that you could cross the street. Don’t you ever cross the street without telling me first. You might have been hurt.” “But mom, you didn’t tell me I couldn’t cross the street!” “That’s beside the point, you shouldn’t have done it anyway.” God understands this problem and I am pretty sure that He didn’t think He should have to tell Cain that it was wrong to kill his brother. Cain knew that it was wrong, just like we knew we shouldn’t cross the street. We found a loophole and took advantage of it, thinking that it would make it okay since no one told us not to, that we aren’t really responsible for making our own decisions, poor choices or not.

But I will tell you that from reading the story of Cain and Abel, I can’t tell if Cain’s intention was to kill his brother or hurt his brother. I can tell you that Cain was angry with God and that he was jealous of God relationship with Abel. I do not know if Cain felt

that killing his brother was a sin against God. I can't even be sure if death or murder had been defined at that moment. But I do know that a lesson had already been taught to Adam and Eve that it was wrong to hide things from God. And rather than tell God about what he had done, Cain intentionally chose to hide this horrendous act. God always knows the truth, even when we throw a tarp over it and hide it in the shadows or lock it away in a closet.

The human race has always been confused about truth. We seem to think that truth is relative to our own observations. "Truth says the world is flat." "But, wait a minute, we must have been wrong because the world is round." "But wait, none of that was really the truth even though we punished people who didn't believe it. We now know the world is pear shaped so everyone get on board." We can't see everything that is hidden in the shadows or outside of our perceptions. Only God can. The truth that we cling to, often has blurred lines. The only way that we can firm up the edges is to make sure that God is speaking into us regarding the truth. All too often people try to make history blurry because we are ashamed of it. We pull down statues thinking that truth will disappear. We teach students altered versions of history that make some people seem better than they were and others were far worse than they actually were. We conveniently leave out the facts that speak of the horrors that have occurred, of the events where people were brutalized for the color of their skin or the nature of their beliefs. We create a white-washed truth with a whole lot of ugly underneath.

"Am I my brother's keeper?"

"Who made me responsible for the people around me? What is wrong with turning my eyes away and just pretending that I didn't see anything, that it isn't my responsibility, that I had nothing to do with it? Why does God think that He can hold me accountable for truth that I had nothing to do with? Come on, God! I didn't have

anything to do with the war in Korea, Vietnam, or the Middle East! I had nothing to do with blowing up the World Trade Center! I didn't tell Putin to go to war over Ukraine! I had nothing to do with the death camps in WWII! I had nothing to do with the Japanese internment camps here in the US, or the mistreatment of Native Americans! It is better if all those truths just go away so that we can forget! Having those truths around makes it look like we are running a garbage dump."

"Am I my brother's keeper?"

It is so easy for us to close our eyes and pray that the past will bury itself; to edit history in such a way as we don't look like bad people. That the problems of the past are always someone else's fault. "You know, God, if Abel had just taken the easy way out and grab any old hunk of meat to offer you, like I did with my fruit and grain, none of this would have happened. It's really his fault. Can't you see that?" We do not want to be our brother's keeper. We are just ordinary, regular people and it should be someone else's responsibility.

But here is what we all need to understand and is so easy to forget. We call ourselves children of God. We call ourselves children of the Creator of the Universe. We claim our redemption through Jesus Christ. We claim to be new creatures, given to God's purpose. Given to God's truth rather than our own. Given to truth that isn't afraid to stand in the light and be examined. We understand that it wasn't the Jewish leaders who hung our Lord on a Cross. It was us. He died for us. He took our place. He removed our sin, and He showed Truth the way God sees it, where nothing is hidden. Jesus came with a purpose, a purpose that was set before the Creation of the Universe. While we see the Sanhedrin and Rome nailing Christ to the cross in such a way that we call out and blame them for it. That's not truth. That is perception. The Sanhedrin and the Romans were just the tools that were used to carry out a much grander plan. It is we

who are truly responsible for this glorious moment in time when God redeems us. This moment had to be in order for us to renew our relationship with our Creator.

It is not difficult for me to see how we often become confused by truth. We try to make truth fit into our personal philosophical and shifting boxes of morality. When something doesn't fit into those boxes, we often point to the Bible proclaiming it as the ultimate truth. Please don't misunderstand what I am saying here, because I love the Bible. It is the inspired word of God that He uses to reveal Himself to us. It is His love letter to us. The Bible is the tool that God uses to inspire us to be greater than we are because of His love for us. But the Bible is not ultimate truth. We worship God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. And it is through our relationship with God that we find truth. If we decide that the Bible holds all truth, then we leave God out of the equation and we limit His input into our lives. God is Truth and He will reveal that Truth to us through His Son and His Spirit. In that sense the Bible becomes a tool of revelation for us, but that does not overshadow our relationship with God and His direct input into our lives. The Bible is not a sword that we use to destroy others, it is a scalpel that God uses to transform our hearts.

What will the future say of us? Will we be seen as generations that just let things happen, where we refuse to hold ourselves accountable? Will we hide our sins in the dark knowing full well that God can see those sins clearly and will hold us accountable for both our actions and inactions? When we stand before our maker, will we be able to say, we did our best to spread God's Truth to the people around us? That ultimate Truth being that He loves us so very much that He came to earth to die for us. Or will we find ourselves claiming alibis and excuses as we hem and haw before the Creator of the Universe and end by saying,

"I don't know. Am I my brother's keeper?"

Truly, I know how harsh that sounds. But we live in a harsh world. A world that God created and placed in our hands. And please know that I struggle with this myself. Who can I help today? Will I be able to see the world as Jesus sees it today? Am I willing to subject myself to God's Truth and do my very best to let Him use me to bring light into the darkness around me? Do I truly believe that God's Truth is not a reflection of human truth, but the foundation for all that is, complete and unblemished from falsehoods, inuendo, and embellishments?

This week, I want for all of us to set our own understanding of truth to the side and see if we can embrace God's Truth instead. It won't be easy. We tell ourselves that our own warped sense of truth is okay. Everyone does it. And just because we say things over and over until we believe them, it doesn't mean that they are God's Truth. Let each of us open our eyes and understand what Christ taught us.

"Yes! Yes, we are our brother's keeper."

And that's the honest to God Truth.

God bless you all!

AMEN

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