

Old Testament Survey - Part 7

by Dick Woodward

This sermon explores the themes of communication, conflict, and redemption in the Book of Genesis, emphasizing the importance of self-awareness and God's guidance in our lives.

Duration: 26:10

Scripture: Matthew 7:3

Topics: "Genesis Study", "Conflict Resolution"

Description

This sermon delves into the Book of Genesis, focusing on Chapter 4 and the themes of conflict, communication with God, and consequences of the fall. It emphasizes understanding anger, resolving conflict, and the importance of being acceptable before God. The sermon also highlights the significance of prayer initiation by man, historical continuity, and the catastrophic flood story revealing both the corrupt nature of man and the emotional capacity of God.

Transcript

In this session we are going to continue our survey of the Book of Genesis. We began surveying the Book of Genesis two lessons ago with an overview of the Book of Genesis. Last week we looked at just some of the first things that are mentioned in the Book of Genesis.

Tonight we will come to Chapter 4 in the Book of Genesis. I would like to just mention again something about the purpose for which the Book of Genesis was written. Please never lose this perspective.

The Book of Genesis, which means beginnings, is telling it like it was, not because God feels that he owes us an explanation, but because God wants to tell it like it is. There are many things in the Book of Genesis which will be described to us in this way. God wants us to understand marriage like it is.

That's why he tells us about marriage like it was. God wants to tell us, as he did in Chapter 3, about the crisis of sin like it is. So in Chapter 3 he describes that crisis like it was.

In the second half of Genesis 3, where we were in our last session, we are also told about communication between God and man like it is and like it was. Just as soon as man falls, God is described as seeking after man and communicating with man, asking him those questions like, where are you and who told you? As we see this in the second half of Genesis 3, we should realize that this is describing something very important like it is. God does seek us out today.

He does communicate with us today. If we understood this, we would understand a great many of the experiences we have, especially what we call tragic or crisis experiences. So many of these tragic or crisis experiences are really a matter of God seeking us out, trying to get our attention, trying to communicate with us, trying to get us to think about where we are.

I had a man who was the skipper for a squadron of jet planes in our Navy. Years ago this man told me about a compass that he taught all of his pilots. They flew off carriers when they were out on Mediterranean cruises.

Often these men who flew the jet planes from the decks of these carriers and came back and landed them would get lost while they were out there. So their skipper taught them this five-point compass. He said, anytime you suspect that you're lost, think of this five-point compass, and you can say this to yourself by counting the fingers on your left hand.

The first finger on the compass or the first point on the compass, he said, is confess. Confess that you're lost because as fast as they fly in these jets today, if they don't acknowledge or confess the fact that they're lost, they're going to be a whole lot more lost very quickly. So the first point on the compass, he said, is confess.

The second point is climb. I thought this was because they'd have further to fall if they ran out of fuel, but he almost fell off his seat when I said that. He said they are taught to climb because they don't burn as much fuel once they get up there, and communications are better when they get altitude.

So the second point on the compass is climb. The third point on the compass is conserve. When you're lost, you shouldn't burn a lot of fuel.

He said one man radioed in to the carrier and said, I'm lost somewhere over the southwest Pacific, but I'm making excellent time. Well, that's no time to make excellent time. So the third point on the compass is, once you get the altitude, pull back on that throttle and conserve.

The last two points on the compass are the most important ones. The fourth point on the compass is communicate. Get in touch with that carrier, which will look like a postage stamp when you finally see it.

Communicate with that carrier. And then the fifth point on the compass was comply. Comply with that communication.

Confess, climb, conserve, communicate, comply. That's the compass that is taught to the jet pilot that will help him get back to his carrier if he implements it. In the third chapter of Genesis and the second half of the chapter, that's the kind of thing God is describing like it is and like it was.

He wants us to have a spiritual compass. And when we're lost, as Adam and Eve were lost, he wants us to confess that we're lost. He wants us to climb or move in his direction.

And when we do that, we'll discover he's already moving in our direction. We should be conservative when we've lost our way. Don't make big decisions when you feel that you've lost your way.

But the most important point on this compass by way of application is communicate with God. God wants to communicate with you. That's the message of the second half of Genesis 3. And when God communicates with you, always comply with that communication.

The mother of Jesus said, Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it. That's always a rule of thumb. Always comply when you feel God is communicating with you.

Now, in the third chapter of Genesis, you read after the fall about positive consequences like God seeking us out, trying to save us, trying to rescue us. And you read about positive consequences. For instance, in verse 15 of Genesis 3, you have the first Messianic prophecy.

We don't have to wait until we get to Genesis 12 and the story of Abraham to begin to hear about God's great plan of salvation or redemption. In Genesis 3, in verse 15, God tells us about his great plan when he says this. He's speaking to the serpent and he says, I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your seed and her seed.

He shall bruise you on the head and you shall bruise him on the heel. Now, if you understand what this verse is talking about, this is a Messianic prophecy. It's the first hint in the scripture that God is going to bring someone into this world who is going to set things right.

That's a beautiful Messianic prophecy, and that's one of the positive consequences of the fall there in Genesis 3. There are many negative consequences, of course, for the woman and for the man and for the man and the woman. The most serious of these negative consequences we learn about at the end of the chapter is what we call the divorce with God. They are divorced from God.

They are evicted from the garden. The application to this is awesome. I believe it's possible that the application to this could be God's message to man like it is, described there like it was, could be something like this.

If you don't learn to put my word first and interpret all your needs in the light of my word, if you don't discover that you live by every word that I've given you, you're going to be evicted from the planet. I think that's very possible, even in our time. At the end of the chapter, we're told that a flaming sword guards the way back to the tree of life.

God and man are separated, and the only way man can get back to the tree of life is by way of a flaming sword. Many feel that that flaming sword is a picture of Jesus Christ, the living word, because he's the only way back. When he comes, he says, I am the way, and there isn't any other way.

And that flaming sword could also be a picture of the word of God, because faith comes through hearing the word of God. So in a very real sense, the word of God is the only way back to the tree of life. In chapter 4, we read about another consequence of the fall.

I believe in chapter 4 we have God's description of conflict like it was, because God wants us to understand conflict like it is. Conflict is one of our big problems. We're in conflict with ourselves.

We're in conflict with our partners as husbands and wives. We're in conflict with our children, with our parents. We're in conflict between labor and management.

Everybody's constantly going on strike. And, of course, we have the international conflict, the conflict between nations. Our conflict is one of our big problems.

In Genesis 4, I believe God is giving us some of the key factors that cause conflict and some of the solutions that can resolve conflict. He gives us this truth in the form of a story about two brothers. These

brothers are very familiar to us.

They're named Cain and Abel. It says that it was Cain's idea to bring an offering to God. So Cain brings an offering to God.

Since he is a tiller of the ground, he's a farmer, he works in produce, he brings that kind of an offering to God. His brother Abel is a pastoral man. He is a shepherd.

So he brings an animal offering. They both bring an offering to God. If you read the story very carefully, it says, God was not pleased with Cain as a man.

Cain was not acceptable to God. Therefore, God would not accept the offering of Cain. Notice that very carefully.

Then it says, God was pleased with Abel. Abel was an acceptable man to God. Therefore, the offering of Abel was acceptable.

Many people say here as they read this story, the problem with Cain was he didn't bring an animal sacrifice, and that was what he was clearly instructed to do. Frankly, that isn't in the text. We have two words that we would like to introduce to you at this point.

These are Greek words. The first one is exegesis, E-X-E-G-E-S-I-S. That's a beautiful word that means to bring out of a verse of Scripture everything that's in that verse of Scripture.

If you study Greek, if you go to seminary and study Greek because you're going to be a Bible scholar or a minister, the first year you study the Greek language, Greek grammar, and then if you take four years of Greek, the next two or three years will be exegesis, which means you'll just study the Scripture and you will interpret the Scripture. But when you come to a verse of Scripture in the Greek language and you want to bring out of that verse everything those Greek words say, they call that exegesis, E-X means to come out of. So exegesis means to bring out of that verse everything that's there.

In the Greek language there is a word that's the opposite of exegesis. It's eisegesis, E-I-S-E-G-E-S-I-S. The Greek word eis is the opposite of ex.

Eis means into. So eisegesis means you're coming to a verse of Scripture and you're reading into that verse of Scripture something that isn't there, and that is a no-no. As you learn the rules for Bible study, that's a real no-no.

Don't ever read into a verse of Scripture something that isn't there. We've already seen examples of that in the creation account in Genesis where people say there was a catastrophe between verse 1 and verse 2. It just isn't there, in my opinion, and that's reading into the Scripture something that isn't there. When you come to the story of Cain and Abel, it's easy to read in something that isn't there.

Cain was not instructed to bring an animal sacrifice. In the book of Leviticus, these people were instructed to bring grain offerings and produce, if that's what they dealt with. So this is not the important thing in this story.

Obviously the important issue here is not the offerings, it's the man. In chapter 11 of the book of Hebrews, there's a commentary upon this story, and it says that Abel, through his offering, bore witness that he himself was righteous. You see, God's a whole lot more concerned with the men than he is with the

offerings.

The story here is this. Cain is Mr. Unacceptable. I don't believe we're told why he was unacceptable.

He just was, and of course God knew that. Abel is Mr. Acceptable. Mr. Unacceptable and Mr. Acceptable bring an offering to God, and God rejects the offering of Mr. Unacceptable.

Mr. Unacceptable, it says, is angry and he's depressed. In the King James, it says he's wroth and his countenance fell. That's what those words mean, if you look at this story in another translation.

He was angry and depressed. Martin Luther said, sins are mostly twins. I think therapists will tell you that these two sins come together as twins, anger and depression.

The angry man is usually the depressed man. Cain is very angry and he's very depressed. Then the story says, Mr. Acceptable walks by, and Mr. Unacceptable attacks him and kills him.

Then God moves into this situation and God asks questions again, just like he did in Genesis 3. He comes to this angry Mr. Unacceptable and he asks him these questions. Why are you angry? Why are you depressed? Where is your brother? What have you done? Then especially this question in verse 7. If you do what's right, will you not be acceptable? And if you do not do what's right, sin is crouching at the door of your heart. Its intention is to destroy you.

You must master it. Now what is this story telling us? I believe it's giving us a very dynamic message. Are you the angry man? Are you the depressed man? Do you get angry? Do you get depressed? Anytime you're angry, this is a very good question that you ought to be asked.

Why are you angry? What is the source of your anger and what is the true, real object of your anger? Very often the person who catches it, like Abel, is not the real object of the anger, he just happens to walk by. I remember hearing a Christian psychologist ask a woman, there was a large discussion group, a kind of a seminar for homemakers, and this woman was sharing her problem. Her problem was, she said, My little children just make me so mad.

And the doctor said, Well, how old are your children? She said, three and five. And he said, My, that's a tremendous responsibility to put on little preschool children. She said, What responsibility? He said, The responsibility for your emotional climate.

I mean, you're going to be happy or sad or angry. It all depends upon them. They make you angry.

He said, Let me ask you a question. Do those children bring that anger out of you or do they put that anger in you? It didn't take long for her to realize they weren't putting the anger in her, they were bringing the anger out of her. The truth was, she was probably angry with her husband, but she couldn't vent the anger on him, so the poor little children, someone should have read them their rights when they got out of bed that morning, because she was going to be angry, it didn't matter what they did.

What is the object of your anger? What is the real source of your anger? Anger is a very interesting emotion. God asked this question, I believe, to help Cain get the answer and to help us get the answer, because we're supposed to see anger like it is and like it was, because anger is at the root of so much conflict. He asked this question, Where is your brother? Notice in Genesis 3 the question is, Where are you? In Genesis 4 the question is, Where is your brother? I believe what God was trying to get Cain to

realize was this, there isn't anything wrong with your brother, there's nothing wrong with Abel.

Where is your brother? He's a solid citizen, he's Mr. Acceptable, he's a good man. Well then why are you angry with Abel? And why did you kill Abel? What have you really done here? What are the dynamics of what has taken place here? I believe verse 7 is the key to this whole story, because it's the great solution to the problem of conflict. At the bottom of conflict you'll find the angry man, and you'll find these dynamics of his anger, but the solution is not just paralysis of analysis, it's not just analyzing the anger until you understand why you're angry, and then you're still angry.

What you really want is a solution to the anger, and here's the solution. If you do what's right, will you not become Mr. Acceptable? If you do what's right, you'll be acceptable to God, you'll be acceptable to yourself, and you won't have to go through life beating Abel to death, attacking Abel. Jesus said the same thing in the 5th chapter of the gospel of Matthew.

I'm constantly referring to the New Testament, because in the New Testament we very often find a corollary or that which gives unity to the Bible. I believe Jesus was talking about the very same thing in Matthew 7 when he said this, "...Do not judge lest you be judged, for in the way you judge you will be judged, and by your standard for giving it will be given to you." Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? For how can you say to your brother, let me take the speck out of your eye, and behold, a log is in your eye? First take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye. Many people take this passage, the first five verses of Matthew 7 in the Sermon on the Mount, and they say, what Jesus was really saying was judge not, period.

That isn't what he said. He was really raising this question, why are you judgmental? Why are you hypercritical? Why are you always going around looking as if God has called you to be a speck inspector? Your whole ministry is to find this speck of sawdust in your brother's eye, and it's so ridiculous because you've got a log jammed in yours. One translation says you have a one by six sticking out of your head.

And with this plank stuck in your eye, you're going around saying my ministry is to help people find the specks of sawdust in their eyes. Isn't that ridiculous? Now Jesus says, of course, this is ridiculous. He asks two questions.

First he asks this question, why are you doing that? And then he asks this question, how can you hope to be effective with that log jam in your eye? But then his solution is this, get that log out of your eye, solve your own problem, and then you will see clearly to help the brother with his speck. See, he isn't really saying judge not, he's saying judge. But before you judge that brother, judge yourself.

Solve your problem first, and then you won't be so hypercritical of other people. See, that's the same thing that God says to Cain back there in Genesis chapter four. If you will just do what's right, you'll become an acceptable person.

And really that's the heart of the problem. Psychologists call what Cain was doing transference or projection. With whom was he really angry? Probably with Cain.

He was unacceptable, and he was mad about it. Now he had two choices. He could either get right, or he could just go through life transferring that anger to other people, projecting his anger for himself into Abel's, and then beating them to death.

He had that choice. We all have that choice. And of course what God is pointing out to Cain is this, get the log out of your eye.

Be acceptable yourself, then you won't have to be judgmental or hypercritical. I heard a story about two psychiatrists who had their offices in the same building, in a building in Chicago. They rode the subway together, and so it just happened they came in the building together every day and got on the elevator together, and one always got off the elevator on the sixth floor, and the other one always went up to the tenth floor.

And so this happened day after day. One morning as they were going up in the elevator, the doors opened on the sixth floor, and before this one psychiatrist got off he turned around and spit on the other one. And then the elevator's going up to the tenth floor, and this other one just wipes himself off and never says a word, goes down the hall of his office, and there's an elevator boy running the elevator.

Well the next morning it happens again. It happens four mornings in a row. The fourth morning as they're going up to the tenth floor and he's just wiping himself off, the elevator boy, his eyes are real big, he says, aren't you going to do something about this? And the psychiatrist said, that's his problem.

He's got a problem. He spits on people. But that's not my problem, see? You know, I may have a lot of problems, but one of them is not spitting on people.

Now see, what this is teaching us about conflict is this. If you were right and acceptable, you could be so secure that if somebody spit on you, you could just say, friend, you need a checkup from the neck up. I mean, you really need it.

You know, you've got a lot of problems. You really ought to get some help with this problem. And you would focus upon the fact that it's his problem.

I don't know how many times in counseling sessions as a pastor I've shared that story with women, because men are geniuses at making women feel that it's all their fault. Have you ever noticed that? When there's a problem in the marriage, you know, it doesn't matter what it is. If the man's impotent, for instance, this is one of the favorite ones, he blames it on the wife.

Well, if you were just more sexy, I mean, if you just had more sex appeal, and if you were just, you know, then I wouldn't be impotent. And it's amazing how women believe that. And so in a counseling session, time after time, I'd share that little story with women.

And I'd say, have you ever thought about the fact that it might be his problem? And sometimes through their tears, they'd say, you know, maybe it is his problem. I never thought about that. Maybe it is his problem.

It never even occurred to them that it might be his problem. Very often, the problem is with the other person. And sometimes we have, you know, so much, we're so paranoid or so neurotic, we always believe it when they say, if you were just right, then I wouldn't have this problem.

The point is, be secure before God. Walk before God and be secure. And then you won't have to go through life being hypercritical, transferring anger, and your critical judgmental attitude to other people.

I don't know how much you've dealt with conflict, but if you deal with conflict at all, I think you'll discover that in the 4th chapter of Genesis, you have a tremendous commentary on this problem, which again was a result, a consequence of the fall of man. Now, in the book of Genesis, there are some other consequences of the fall. For instance, at the end of chapter 4, there's communion with God that's being initiated by man, or in other words, prayer.

The first time you have prayer in the Bible is Genesis 4.26. Up until now, the communication has been initiated by God. It's coming from God to man. But at the end of chapter 4, it says, man begins to call upon the name of God.

That's prayer like it was, so we can understand prayer like it is. In Genesis chapters 5 and 10, you have what we call the continuity. There is historical perspective in the scripture.

In order to give us the historical context in which our salvation and our Savior came, God does give us a beautiful historical continuity. That's why you'll find those genealogies and this historical continuity in the scripture. When you get to Genesis 6-9, you have what I have called the catastrophe.

Here you learn something about the character of man and something about the character of God. The character of man, as a consequence of the fall, becomes absolutely corrupt. Great wickedness, only evil continuously, all flesh has corrupted his way, the earth is filled with violence.

These are the words you read about the character of man. You also learn something in Genesis 6-9, the story of the flood, about the character of God. Ask yourself these questions about the character of God.

Ask yourself first of all, is God personal? Then ask yourself this question, is God emotional? Does God feel anything? We all believe that God is love, and we like that, because if he's love and nothing else, we come off pretty well. But really, we should ask ourselves questions like this. Is the character of God a composite of attributes? Is it like the colors of a rainbow? Is it not just one attribute, but many attributes? If God has the capacity to love, does he have the capacity for wrath? I remember hearing about a man who was a loving, gentle father, and a very sick man destroyed his little girl, a little seven-year-old girl.

This little girl was this man's love object. When they brought the man into the police station who had raped and destroyed this little girl, it took every policeman in that police station to restrain that father to keep him from getting at that man. Because this man was a loving, gentle father, he had the capacity to show wrath toward that which destroyed his love object.

In that story of the flood, that's what you see in the character of God. God loves man. As he looks down, he sees sin and the forces of evil destroying his love objects and destroying his great plan for man.

So God is capable of expressing wrath. The wrath of God is simply this, the annihilating reaction of a loving God toward that which is destroying his love objects. That's the message of the catastrophe there in Genesis 6-9.

As you move through the book of Genesis, remember, look for this. Like it is, like it was. That's what God's telling us about in the book of Genesis.

He's telling us about so many of these things as they were, because he wants us to understand these things as they are.

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