

Title: Worship and Anger, an Unlikely Duo  
Date: June 4, 2017  
Subject: Worship and anger  
Scripture: 1 John 3:11-18; Genesis 4:2-16

Where would Don Quixote's road trip have taken him without Sancho Panza by his side? Or Lewis have gone without Clark? Yes, that wasn't technically a road trip, but a water trip, but it wouldn't have been the same without Clark. Or Dorothy without The Tin Man, Cowardly Lion and Scarecrow? On our summer road trip through the Old Testament we'll also be joining fellow travelers who usually were on the road of life in a two person team. Last week was Adam AND Eve. The second segment of our road trip is from Genesis but actually starts in a New Testament passage that provides insight into the events of today's duo. 1 John 3:11-18.

Last week we saw how Satan infiltrates human relationships beginning with the most intimate – husband and wife – to initiate spouse rivalry. This morning we see him sink his claws deeper into humanity as he invades sibling relationships -- Cain and Abel. Aspects of sibling rivalry are visible in many of our next stops.

Sometimes it's difficult to come up with a title for the message. This week lots of potential ones popped into my head – Raising Cain, First Kids, Brother Act, Let Brotherly Love Begin, How to Kill Your Brother (With Kindness). Settled on Worship and Anger, An Unlikely Duo. We'll see why as we proceed.

READ 1 John 3:11-18.

“Don't be surprised if the world hates you.” Don't be surprised if they don't like the kinds of things you stand for, if they mock you for your beliefs, if they persecute you for being good, if they make fun of you for going to church and mentioning the Bible. We should expect that treatment from a system opposed to God.

Another matter completely is a fellow believer hating you. We are to love our brothers and sisters, including in practical and tangible ways. John writes extensively about love for other followers of Christ. He illustrates by reaching way back to the first son who was ever born – Cain – for an example of what we aren't to be like. He is unflatteringly known for two very infamous reasons. He belonged to the evil one and he murdered his brother. The first gives a clue as to his allegiance. The second designates the action out of that worldview. Now we can check out the story in Genesis.

READ Genesis 4:2-7.

Cain's sacrifice wasn't acceptable to the Lord. There's all sorts of debate about why. Most come down to him not bringing an animal sacrifice. He was supposed get an animal to be sacrificed from Abel by giving him some produce. However, later the Jews were to bring sacrifices from the first fruits of the fields and other

grain offerings. Some say that since the ground was cursed Cain wasn't to bring something grown in the ground. But animals eat what is grown in the ground so wouldn't that make them unacceptable also?

While we can't emphatically state what the offering was to be, we can unequivocally say that Cain knew what the offering was to be. The Lord told him that if he did what was right, he would be accepted.

Did you notice that something else wasn't acceptable to the Lord? The Lord didn't look with favor on Cain. There was something about him. Another New Testament verse informs us "By faith Abel brought God a better offering than Cain did. By faith he was commended as righteous, when God spoke well of his offerings" (Hebrews 11:4). Abel's offering was tied to faith. The implication is that Cain's wasn't.

Combine this with what we saw in 1 John about Cain belonging to the evil one. He wasn't in a right relationship with God and couldn't truly worship the Lord from a spiritual standing as he had an unbelieving heart. No matter what he did, it wouldn't be acceptable. He needed to take care of first things first, get into a right relationship. The real problem for Cain was a worship problem, who he worshipped.

There are times when we as followers of Christ who are in a right relationship with the Lord can be like Cain. Our worship, both public and private worship, isn't accepted by the Lord. The approach is more a matter of ritual, routine, a formality to mark off the old "to do list." "Got 'er done." There isn't thought or care put into what we're doing.

The Butterball Company has a Thanksgiving hotline to answer questions about cooking turkeys. One woman called to see if she could use a turkey that had been in the bottom of her freezer for 23 years. The Butterball expert told her it would probably be safe if the freezer had been below zero the entire time. But she warned her that even if the turkey was safe to eat, the flavor would likely have deteriorated and wouldn't be worth eating. The woman said, "That's what I thought. We'll give the turkey to our church" (*Why Serious Preachers Use Humor*, LeadershipJournal.net: 1/10/05.).

That giving which is an act of worship doesn't even rise to the level of leftovers. At least fresh leftovers usually taste good. Thoughtless worship can be worship that doesn't cost much. King David wanted to build an altar so he could sacrifice to the Lord (1 Samuel 24:24). The landowner out of the kindness of his heart wanted to provide the land, animals and equipment and even spoke a blessing on the King. He refused the offer because he refused to give to the Lord that which cost him nothing. If David had agreed the man would have gotten all the credit. He still got some for his generous heart, but so did David for his act of worship.

Worship doesn't count if we do the right thing for the wrong reason. A man was riding in a New York City taxi when he noticed the driver slowed down to avoid hitting a pedestrian. He complimented the driver's action, "I noticed you slowed down for that guy." The driver responded, "Yeah, if you hit them, you have got

to fill out a report.” Lesson number one -- watch out for New York City cab drivers. Another lesson is that sometimes people do the right thing but it isn't motivated by the heart. No reward in it.

There are other interferences to true worship. If we're aware that someone has something against us, we are to be reconciled to that person and then we can freely worship the Lord (Matthew 5:23, 24). Prayers can be hindered when husbands don't treat wives with respect and as co-heirs of the gracious gift of life (1 Peter 3:7).

Here's what happens after the worship. Cain's initial reactions to the Lord not accepting his sacrifice is that he got angry, very angry, became possessed by “furious wrath” and became downcast.

The Lord graciously intervened and showed Cain the right way. He questioned the man to make him think about how he was responding. He told Cain he could be accepted if he truly repented. He warned that sin was crouching at the door just like the pagans envisioned demons at the outside of their house doors. The Lord appealed to the heart, mind and will. It's like the New Testament command: “In your anger do not sin: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry and do not give the devil a foothold” (Ephesians 4:26, 27). Similar to James: “Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires” (James 1:19, 20). Add this from Proverbs – “He who is slow to anger has great understanding, But he who is quick-tempered exalts folly...He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit, than he who captures a city” (Proverbs 14:29, 16:32).

Cain did the exact opposite. He brooded over the rejection. He allowed the stew of his wounded pride and envy to brew until it boiled over into a plot of vengeance. He invited his brother out to the field where he killed him. The result of Cain belonging to the evil one was that he premeditatedly murdered Abel because his brother was righteous.

Who was the real person with whom Cain was angry? The Lord. Cain misplaced his anger and took it out on Abel. Some think it's okay to be angry at the Lord because he has big shoulders and can handle it. I suppose it depends as to what causes the anger. It may be okay if we don't understand why things happen or are hurting. But if it's because we've sinned, what right have we to be angry about how the Lord treats us or what he allows to happen so he can be the Good Shepherd who brings his wandering sheep back?

People often misplace their anger. Something happens at work. The boss doesn't like the job performance and lashes into the worker. The worker wants to blow his top but his job is on the line so he holds back. He goes back to work with the anger is fuming inside. Later he sees a co-worker and unloads on him. Or more often, the worker will unleash his anger when he gets home.

Do we ever get angry or downcast when the Lord doesn't accept our worship? Probably don't think about it one way or the other very much. Too often we just punch in the clock and then punch out without much concern whether we are truly worshipping from the heart during private and public worship. It would help if we don't think of it as singing some songs or reading from some book, but that we're in the presence of the one who gave his life to save us and we're sitting at the feet of Jesus to hear him speak.

Cain is again confronted by the Lord after he killed Abel. READ Genesis 4:9-16. Cain continues on the downward path. He insolently lies when he says quite indifferently that he doesn't know where Abel is. The slain brother was right where the murderer left him or buried him. He defiantly asks if he is supposed to be his brother's keeper. It could be understood, "Am I supposed to shepherd the shepherd?"

It seems like the Lord's question is asked with an air of incredulity at Cain's nonchalant attitude – "What have you DONE?" The Lord proceeds to announce the punishment. The farmer would lose his green thumb. The land would no longer produce for him. He would become a nomad and wander the earth.

There might be a slight twinge of remorse and repentance when Cain says that he will be hidden from the Lord's presence. Most Bible students think he wasn't truly sorry but remained self-centered and full of self-pity with no sign of remorse or godly sorrow in his words or actions.

Yet the Lord acted with grace. He put a mark on Cain. We aren't told what it was and there is wide speculation about it. Suffice it to say that the mark would be a warning sign to protect him from those who might want to kill him. Cain wanders off to a harsher world.

Ray Stedman counsels us that Satan waits "like a roaring lion, crouching at the door, ready to spring on you if you give him an opportunity. What is the opportunity? Allowing your wrath to last beyond the setting of the sun, to carry it over into another day, to form a grudge, a permanent dislike for an individual. When you do that then the door is wide open and nothing can stop Satan from seizing you, gripping you, and beginning to poison your life and destroy you, either suddenly or secretly. In the light of this story, how much of the evil of our day springs out of these seeds of dislike for one another and of refusal to repent when the grace of God warns us of the power we are dealing with? How about you, here in this place? Are you angry with someone? Do you harbor a grudge in your heart? Are you holding resentment against another individual? Are you seething with hurt feelings because of something someone has said -- perhaps weeks ago, or even years ago? What about it? If you do well, if you bring the offering that God has provided, if you offer the forgiveness (to the other person) which he makes possible, you will be accepted. Peace will flow again into your heart and life, and with it, health and strength. But if you allow it to fester, to lie there unsettled, it will master you" (Ray Stedman, sermon Why do Men Hate?).