

February 21, 2016

Genesis 4:9 ***“God’s Questions:
Where is Abel Your Brother?”***

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Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is Abel your brother?" He said, "I do not know; am I my brother's keeper (Genesis 4:9)?"

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

God asks many searching questions in the Bible. Last Sunday marked the beginning of our overall theme for the Sundays in Lent: **Questions That Take Us From Death To Life**. On the First Sunday in Lent the question was asked: *"Where are you (Gen. 3:9)?"* and we were confronted with the universal problem of sin, but also the fact that God has come looking for us in order to set us right with him through Jesus Christ.

This morning we are faced with another question. This question is asked of Cain, the oldest of two son's of Adam and Eve. After Cain had killed his brother Abel, the Lord asked him, **"Where is Abel your brother?"** God did not ask this question because he was searching for information. Rather, he was asking the question so that Cain might examine himself to realize the severity of what he had done. And, because all of this was written in the Bible, it is for our eyes to read, which means that the question is designed for us as well. We need to understand the principle: where we stand in regard to our "brother" is a true and genuine reflection of where we stand toward God. That really puts it into perspective doesn't it? So, the Lord asks you and me, **"Where is your brother?"**

It says in 1 John, "If anyone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother (1 John 4:20-21)." John's use of the term "brother" is significant. In this passage we are not simply talking about our neighbor, or those with whom we happen to come into contact with in everyday life. Rather, we are talking about those who are the children of God through faith in Jesus. We are talking about brothers and sisters in Christ.

Hatred comes from Satan the king of haters, who was a murderer from the beginning. Early on, in the Biblical record, we see Cain and Abel offering sacrifices together and thereby saying together "I love God." But Cain is a flagrant brother-hater who is not truly a lover of the one, true God. All of this is made clear when he kills his brother Abel and the Lord says, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground (Genesis 4:10)."

Sometimes we fool ourselves into thinking that we are right with God while we are hating our brothers and sisters in Christ. We may hate our brothers and sisters for a multitude of reasons, and maybe some of those reasons might seem to be justified. Nevertheless, hating our brothers and sisters indicates an irregular heart beat. It is a clear indicator that our hearts are not right with God. You might recall that when God asked Cain, **"Where is Abel your brother?"** Cain tried to completely avoid the whole thing by answering God with another question: "Am I my brother's keeper (Gen. 4:9)?" Perhaps another way of asking the question would be in this way: "Am I really responsible for my brother?" And the answer to that question is . . . "Yes!" In the love of Jesus Christ, we are to be keepers of one another as he has kept us in him!

That brings us to two very important issues. What does it mean to love our brothers and sisters in Christ? Secondly, HOW do we love our brothers and sisters? Let's take the first question. What does it mean to love? We need to grasp that love is way beyond the first blush of a prospective boyfriend or girlfriend. The only way you can define love is to begin with the love of God, and then move forward to understand what it means to love one another. The apostle John writes: "In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins (1 John 4:10)." The sacrifice of Jesus on the cross teaches what we need to know about love.

It says in Hebrews 12:22-24, "But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem . . . to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel." Abel's blood speaks of his faith and love toward God, and it also cries out to the wrong done to him by his brother Cain. It says, "By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts. And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks (Hebrews 11:4)." Jesus Christ was also murdered, but the life he lived he lived for all, and the death he died he died for all. Consequently, the blood of Jesus speaks of reconciliation for all and is not a cry for vengeance. Jesus' blood is a sprinkling that covers our sins. You will recall that Cain ends up a restless wanderer on the earth because he sheds the blood of Abel, but the blood of Jesus brings us to the city of the living God.

When we think of the Father giving his one and only Son, it is important to realize that he is giving us his everything from all eternity. Love is a giving with a purpose in mind. In this case, the giving of his Son to suffer and die for our sins has in view the covering or the forgiveness of our sins in order that we may reach the heavenly Jerusalem. God gives his Son - his everything - and orders all things down here in such a way that we might see God, be with him forever, and thereby possess all things.

Now, after John defines love as God giving his everything - sacrificing his Son to make atonement for our sins - he then goes on to say this: "Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us (1 John 4:11-12)." When we have been touched by the extraordinary love of God, it changes us from a self-love to a love for him and others. In this text we are to learn that we are to love one another. We are to learn that loving one another is a giving of the self. Consider this: if the love of God is the giving of his Son to declare and make us eternally holy, then that is the same love that we are to lavish on one another. Our love for brothers and sisters in Christ is to have in mind the same objective that God has for us. We desire to give our everything to keep brothers and sisters holy and on the path to the final destination of glory.

Secondly, HOW do we love our brothers and sisters? In other words, how does this love come to fruition in every day life? Perhaps the best way to begin understanding this is to listen to these words of Jesus:

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will place the sheep

on his right, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on his right, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me." Then the righteous will answer him, saying, "Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?" And the King will answer them, "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me (Matthew 25:31-40)."

So, what do you think after hearing these words of Jesus? Are we keepers of one another? What will we do about our responsibility to be there for one another; especially as we see the end approaching? The first thing is that we should repent of our frequent lack of love and concern. Then, in the forgiveness of Christ, we lift up our heads and give ourselves to one another as Christ has given himself to us. God is asking us this morning: **Where Is Your Brother?** May God touch us in such a way that we may answer, "Here he is, Lord! Right beside me! Worshiping and serving you through faith in Jesus!"

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott