

CELESTIAL CHURCH OF CHRIST
AJIJOLA PARISH

SHEPHERD IN CHARGE: MOST SENIOR EVANGELIST HENRY OGUNFAYO
SERMON: SUNDAY 28th OF JULY 2024
Genesis 4: 1-8 & 2 Corinthians 9: 5-10

Sermon Title: From Cain to Corinth: The Power of Offering

Introduction

Today, we're going to journey through two pivotal moments in scripture, separated by millennia. The first, the tragic tale of Cain and Abel, paints a picture of a world consumed by jealousy and violence. The second, a message of hope and transformation from the Apostle Paul, offers a contrasting vision of a community united by generosity and love.

Cain and Abel: The Deadly Consequences of Envy

Genesis 4 introduces us to the firstborn sons of Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel. Their offerings to God reveal a stark contrast in their hearts. Abel, a shepherd, offers the firstborn of his flock, a sacrifice that pleases God. Cain, a farmer, offers the fruit of the ground, which is not accepted. This rejection ignites a fire of jealousy within Cain, leading to the tragic murder of his brother.

Cain's story is a stark reminder of the **destructive power of envy**. It's a tale of a heart consumed by comparison, a spirit that seeks to **diminish another to elevate oneself**. It's a cautionary tale about the dangers of allowing our focus to be on what others have rather than on our own relationship with God.

From Death to Life: The Transformative Power of Generosity

Fast forward to the New Testament, where Paul addresses the Corinthian church about the importance of giving. He speaks of a "cheerful giver," whose heart overflows with gratitude and abundance. This stands in stark contrast to the scarcity mentality that consumed Cain.

Paul's message is a beacon of hope, offering a path away from the darkness of envy. Generosity, when rooted in love and gratitude, has the power to transform lives and communities. It's about recognizing that our blessings are not solely for our benefit but are meant to be shared.

From Cain to Christ: A Call to Action

The journey from Cain to Corinth is a journey from death to life. It's a movement from a heart consumed by envy to a heart overflowing with gratitude.

Today, we are called to choose. Will we allow jealousy to take root in our hearts, leading to division and destruction? Or will we cultivate a spirit of generosity, becoming channels of God's love and grace in the world?

Let us strive to be like Abel, offering our hearts in worship to God. Let us embrace the spirit of the Corinthians, giving cheerfully and without expectation of reward. By doing so, we can overcome the destructive power of envy and experience the transforming joy of generosity.

Here are other prominent instances of jealousy in the Bible:

Joseph and His Brothers (Genesis 37-50)

- **Jealousy:** Joseph's brothers are envious of his favoured status and dreams of future leadership.
- **Impact:** This jealousy leads to the brothers plotting against Joseph, eventually selling him into slavery. The family is torn apart, and Joseph endures years of suffering.
- **Perpetrator:** The brothers experience guilt and remorse for their actions, but ultimately, through God's providence, they are reunited with Joseph and reconciled.

Saul and David (1 Samuel 16-31)

- **Jealousy:** King Saul becomes envious of David's popularity and military success.
- **Impact:** Saul's jealousy drives him to pursue David relentlessly, attempting to kill him on multiple occasions. This creates turmoil within the kingdom and ultimately leads to Saul's downfall.
- **Perpetrator:** Saul's jealousy consumes him, leading to his mental and spiritual decline.

Korah, Dathan, and Abiram (Numbers 16)

- **Jealousy:** These leaders of the Levites become envious of Moses and Aaron's authority.
- **Impact:** Their jealousy leads to rebellion against God and Moses, resulting in their deaths and the deaths of many others who followed them.
- **Perpetrator:** The rebels suffer immediate and severe consequences for their disobedience.

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INSPIRATION.



THE RICH FAMILY IN OUR CHURCH

I'll never forget Easter 1946. I was 14, my little sister Ocy 12, and my older sister Darlene 16. We lived at home with our mother, and the four of us knew what it was like to do without many things. My dad had died five years before, leaving Mom with seven school kids to raise and no money. By 1946, my older sisters were married, and my brothers had left home.

A month before Easter, the pastor of our church announced that a special Easter offering would be taken to help a poor family. He asked everyone to save and give sacrificially. When we got home, we talked about what we could do. We decided to buy 50 pounds of potatoes and live on them for a month. This would allow us to save \$20 of our grocery money for the offering. Then we thought that if we kept our electric lights turned out as much as possible and didn't listen to the radio, we'd save money on that month's electric bill. Darlene got as many house and yard cleaning jobs as possible, and both of us baby sat for everyone we could. For 15 cents, we could buy enough cotton loops to make three potholders to sell for \$1. We made \$20 on potholders.

That month was one of the best of our lives. Every day we counted the money to see how much we had saved. At night we'd sit in the dark and talk about how the poor family was going to enjoy having the money the church would give them. We had about 80 people in our church, so we figured that whatever amount of money we had to give, the offering would surely be 20 times that much. After all, every Sunday the Pastor had reminded everyone to save for the sacrificial offering.

The day before Easter, Ocy and I walked to the grocery store and got the manager to give us three crisp \$20 bills and one \$10 bill for all our change. We ran all the way home to show Mom and Darlene. We had never had so much money before. That night we were so excited we could hardly sleep. We didn't care that we wouldn't have new clothes for Easter; we had \$70 for the sacrificial offering. We could hardly wait to get to church! On Sunday morning, rain was pouring. We didn't own an umbrella, and the church was over a mile from our home, but it didn't seem to matter how wet we got.

Darlene had cardboard in her shoes to fill the holes. The cardboard came apart, and her feet got wet, but we sat in church proudly, despite how we looked. I heard some teenagers talking about the Smith girls having on their old dresses. I looked at them in their new clothes, and I felt so rich.

When the sacrificial offering was taken, we were sitting on the second row from the front. Mom put in the \$10 bill, and each of us girls put in a \$20. As we walked home after church, we sang all the way. At lunch, Mom had a surprise for us. She had bought a dozen eggs, and we had boiled Easter eggs with our fried potatoes!

Late that afternoon the minister drove up in his car. Mom went to the door, talked with him for a moment, and then came back with an envelope in her hand. We asked what it was, but she didn't say a word. She opened the envelope and out fell a bunch of money. There were three crisp \$20 bills, one \$10 bill, and seventeen \$1 bills. Mom put the money back in the envelope. We didn't talk, but instead, just sat and stared at the floor. We had gone from feeling like millionaires to feeling like poor white trash.

We kids had had such a happy life that we felt sorry for anyone who didn't have our mom and dad for parents and a house full of brothers and sisters and other kids visiting constantly. We thought it was fun to share silverware and see whether we got the fork or the spoon that night. We had two knives which we passed around to whoever needed them. I knew we didn't have a lot of things that other people had, but I'd never thought we were poor. That Easter Day I found out we were poor. The minister had brought us the money for the poor family, so we must be poor.

I didn't like being poor. I looked at my dress and worn-out shoes and felt so ashamed that I didn't want to go back to church. Everyone there probably already knew we were poor! I thought about school. I was in the ninth grade and at the top of my class of over 100 students. I wondered if the kids at school knew we were poor. I decided I could quit school since I had finished the eighth grade. That was all the law required at that time.

We sat in silence for a long time. Then it got dark, and we went to bed. All that week, we girls went to school and came home, and no one talked much. Finally on Saturday, Mom asked us what we wanted to do with the money. What did poor people do with money? We didn't know. We'd never known we were poor.

We didn't want to go to church on Sunday, but Mom said we had to. Although it was a sunny day, we didn't talk on the way. Mom started to sing, but no one joined in and she only sang one verse. At church we had a missionary speaker. He talked about how churches in Africa made buildings out of sun-dried bricks, but they need money to buy roofs. He said \$100 would put a roof on a church. The minister said, "Can't we all sacrifice to help these poor people?"

We looked at each other and smiled for the first time in a week. Mom reached into her purse and pulled out the envelope. She passed it to Darlene. Darlene gave it to me, and I handed it to Ocy. Ocy put it in the offering plate. When the offering was counted, the minister announced that it was a little over \$100. The missionary was excited. He hadn't expected such a large offering from our small church. He said, "You must have some rich people in this church."

Suddenly it struck us! We had given \$87 of that "little over \$100." We were the rich family in the church! Hadn't the missionary just said so?

From that day on I've never been poor again. I've always remembered how rich I am because I have Jesus!