

Sermon: Great Expectations – Cain & Abel

Pastor Ed Blonski | December 11, 2022

Being First Isn't Always Best

In this series on great expectations, we're exploring different people's expectations of God and faith – people like Noah, John the Baptist and Hannah, the mother of Samuel.

Today we're going to look at the first brothers in history – Cain and Abel.

It is a sad truth that being first isn't always the best.

We usually try to be first, most of the time.



First Place

When Derek races his motorcycle, he tries to be the first to cross the finish line.

When I spent the night at the ticketmaster window back in 1983 for tickets to my favorite band, I tried to get their early enough to be first in line. (I was, by the way, but still ended up getting seats in the 50th row – I wasn't first in line at the at the right ticketmaster, I guess.)

Then there are siblings.

Being the first-born usually has some perks to it. In the ancient world, it got you the lion's share of an inheritance.

And if you're royalty, it gets you an automatic ticket to the throne – eventually. We should ask how good that was for Charles III who waited 73 years to become king!

But in the case of the first brothers in history, there wasn't a lot of good, as we're going to explore today.

But God Can Make It Best

However, the good news is that God can always make the best of any situation – whether you are first or not!

This will also be something we explore in this message in the series Great Expectations.

The Expectations of Being First - Not Always Met

When we have the possibility to be first at something, we usually have expectations about it.

But as we have been seeing in this series, expectations are not always met, and this is especially true of the expectations of being first.

The Expectations of Brothers

When a second child is born and you now have a brother or sister, there are usually expectations that go along with the sibling.

a. The First Born Will Look Out for the Younger Ones

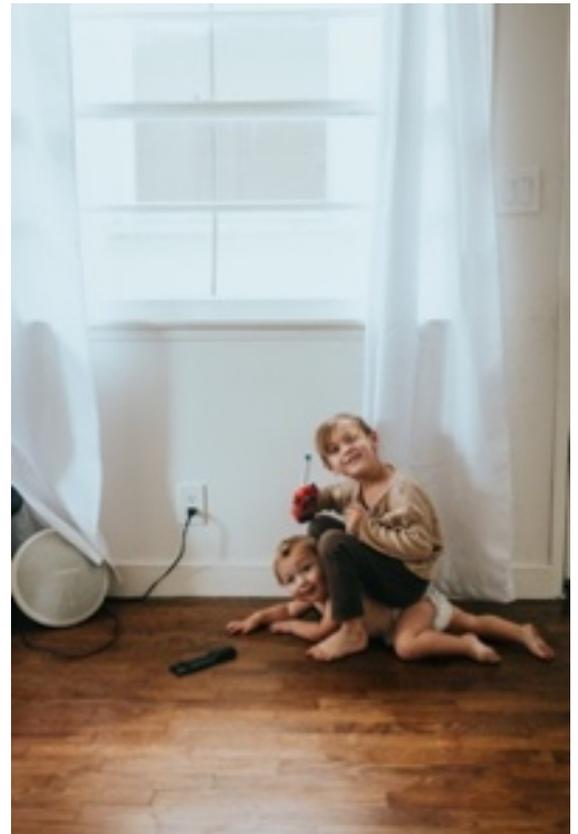
Parents usually have the expectation that the first born will look out for their younger siblings.

And that usually happens.

I like the line from the movie Cheaper by the Dozen: There are times when I want to kill [my sister]... but I'd kill for her all the time.”

b. Brothers – by Nature – are expected to love each other

Brothers and sisters are – by nature – expected to love each other. That's the expectation of any and all families.



c. **Brothers – by Sinful Human Nature – don't always have their expectations met**

But because of our sinful human nature, that expectation is not always met. And that's why Satan uses it as one of his favorite tactics!

Satan's Favorite Tactic

a. **To Divide Brothers**

Satan loves to divide people. Look at our present culture – division in politics and even in race. But Satan's high-priority tactic is to exploit the division between brothers and sisters.

b. **Cain & Abel are a Good Example of How That Works**

It happened with the first set of brothers in human history.

After Adam and Eve were banned from the Garden of Eden, they set up a home and started a family.

The first child born was Cain. And you want to talk about expectations?

I once heard a preacher speculate that Eve actually thought she had given birth to the one just promised in Genesis 3:15 – the Messiah!

Now, I don't know about that, but not long after Cain was born, his brother Abel was born.

Cain was now the older brother and anyone who has younger brothers and sisters knows the expectations that carries!

We don't get all the details about Cain and Abel, but we do have one story that shows the deadly and devastating results of Adam & Eve's fall into sin.

The brothers both brought offerings in the worship of God.

Cain – a farmer – brought *“an offering of the fruit of the ground.”* The text is specific in describing it as an offering.

Abel – a shepherd – brought *“of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions.”*

From the way the text reads – and how the story ends – Cain was bringing something akin to leftovers, and mostly likely begrudgingly.



Abel was bringing the best of what he had, a true sacrifice from his flock.

It wasn't the specific offering that was the issue, it was the heart of the one bringing the offering.

God accepted Abel's offering because it came from a heart of love and faith in God.

God warns Cain to check himself. Give from the heart, He tells him. He warns him that "*sin is crouching at the door*" – that Satan wants to divide him from his brother, his family, and his God.

Spoiler alert!

Cain doesn't check himself. And he ends up wrecking himself.

The first brothers bring the first offerings in the first worship of God.

Abel brings the first fruits of his flock.

And Cain brings the first murder to the world.

c. Warning to Us Today

How often do we fall into the same trap of sin and tactics of Satan?

You begrudgingly come to worship. You don't want to be here. Not all the time, at least.

The big game is on.

The fish are biting!

You've had to be up early every day since last Monday and this is the first day in six that you could sleep in – if only you didn't have to go to church!

Or maybe this sounds familiar.

Your mom asked you and your brother to clean up your rooms – really clean them. Put all the clothes away or in the laundry. Make your bed. Dust the furniture. Vacuum the floor. Clean the windows.

You both get busy.

But you clean your room half-heartedly. Your brother goes all out! Mom has to practically put on sunglasses when she goes to inspect his room.

And you have some not-so-nice thoughts about your brother. Oh, you don't say them out loud, but you think them pretty loud!

What was it that Jesus said?

"Everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire."

I imagine Jesus even had Cain in mind when He warned His disciples about anger and how Satan will use it against us!

Still – God Can Make Good out of the worst situations

That's some pretty bleak stuff! And it happens to all of us! No one is immune to this! So, what hope is there for us!

The good news is that God can make good out of even the worst situations!

As God says through St. Paul, *“we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.”* (Romans 8:28)

All things – even what comes from the hatred in our hearts that divide brothers!

a. Through Jesus!

And God makes this good through Jesus' death and resurrection!

As He further says through St. Paul, *“He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?”* (Romans 8:32)

And when God gives graciously, He gives good!

Satan tries to divide us all – even siblings!

But God loves you and me so much that He promises that nothing *“in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”* (Romans 8:39)



A huge difference between the first-born and being the only child

But does this apply to you who do not have siblings?

I know that there is a huge difference between being an only child and being the first-born.

Being an only child – like my friend growing up Mike – has a different dynamic than having brothers and sisters.

Not necessarily better or worse, just different that comes with its different blessings and temptations.

I grew up with a little brother. My boys have two other brothers. And you know families that have 4, 5, 6, or even more siblings.

Again, not necessarily better or worse, just different that comes with its different blessings and temptations.

But a Follower of Jesus is never an only child!

If you are an only-child – and especially if you are an older only child, like an adult kind of older – then your expectation is probably that situation isn't going to change and this message has kind of missed the mark with you.

But if you think this, here's a truth you just might be missing!

As a follower of Jesus, you are never an only child!

As a follower of Jesus, you will always have a big brother!

Once again, God speaking through St. Paul, says that He made us “conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he [meaning Jesus] might be the firstborn among many brothers.” (Romans 8:39)

Jesus is and always will be your brother who loves you and will always look out for you!

That's an expectation you can take to the bank!

Notice your brother(s) (and sisters)



And with that expectation, you are now empowered to notice others, tell others about Jesus, and see them become your brothers and sisters.

Notice them, see them, love them!

You may just find that they are looking at you as the older sibling to take care of them – meaning, to tell them about Jesus!

So, notice your brothers and sisters – even if they are from a different mother.

My Example with my younger brother – my great disappointment

It wasn't until I was a middle-aged adult that I realized – to my great disappointment – that my younger brother looked up to me.

I'm four years older. And while I would let him hang out with me and my friends when I was in school, and even took him to several concerts when I was in high school, I didn't really notice him.

After all, he was four years younger than me. He kind of just blended into the background as far as I was concerned in high school.

We talked about this recently, and I was able to reconcile with him after taking him for granted for so long!

Jesus is the brother we always expected but never had before

That's what Jesus does for us. His love for us helps us understand that He is our brother that we always expected – somehow – but never realized we had before.

We can then be the brother others expected

And because Jesus will always be there for us, we can – in turn – be a brother or sister to others.

That's a great expectation!