

Thus Saith God's Word

by Rev. Ted Brooks

"After these things the Lord appointed other seventy also, and sent them two and two before his face into every city and place, whether he himself would come. Therefore said he unto them, the harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth laborers into his harvest. Go your way; behold, I send you forth as lambs among wolves. Carry neither purse, nor scrip, nor shoes; and salute no man by the way." (St. Luke 10:1-4)

"I know not. Am I my brother's keeper?" (Genesis 4:9) The question has been asked many times, what is religion? In our complex society there are evidences of religion everywhere: there are religious holidays of particular groups, Christmas, Hanukkah, Mardi Gras, Ash Wednesday, Pass-Over, Good Friday, Easter, National Holidays- Thanksgiving, Fourth of July, Memorial Day, church buildings and synagogues and even political issues such as those concerning abortionists, Equal Rights Amendment and Capital Punishment. Officials of religious denominations often take part in public ceremonies, such as Presidential inauguration and officials of organizations advocating separation of church and state protest such participation.

Today there seems to be a new awareness of religious pluralism and an increasing diversity of religious groups. There seems to be a traditional religious practice of an interest in some who want to find one's roots, a new individualism in religion- the individual wants to be his or her own kind of Methodist or Catholic or Jew. Just about everyone has had some experience of religion, past experience, acquired belief, to one religion maybe of good feeling.

But religion is defined as any person's reliance upon a pivotal value in which that person finds essential wholeness as an individual and as a person in community: for that person all other values are subordinate to this central value. Though it may not be meaningful to others but to you it is authentic. The pivotal value may be shared by others. For a person's professed religious commitment to be authentic, the person's life must be governed by the religion pivotal value. When one becomes aware of his dependence upon the universe, he is immediately aware of his relationship with his fellow man, who are bound or likewise bound to the source of their being.

When Cain was confronted by God himself, Cain had a religion but it was not authentic. Oh, he brought the fruit of his labor to God, but the scripture tells us God did not accept it and Cain was wroth because his religion was not real. Cain's reliance was not based upon a pivotal value which did not include trust. As a person, Cain had not as a person found essential wholeness, as an individual and as a person in the community.

God said to Cain, "If thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door." When a person is doing religious things and God is not pleased, sin lieth at the door. Cain cared more about the things he wanted to do. He had forgotten that he had a brother till God showed up and said, "Where is Abel thy brother?" And he said "I know not; am I my brother's keeper?" (Genesis 4:1-9)

Often you will hear folks say "It is not what a man believes, it is what he does that is important. This my friend is half truth, but like all half truths, it is dangerous. It is half true because from the Christian view, theological thinking is not an end in itself. Jesus pointed this out when he said pray that the Lord of the harvest that he would send forth laborers into his harvest." (St. Luke 10:1-4)

Jesus pointed out to us that Christianity is to be lived. It is to issue in action and long as it remains merely thought, it is unchristian and futile and sin lieth at the door.

Cain became wroth. What he had been doing was a sin and his countenance had fallen and he went to the field. Cain rose up and killed his brother Abel. When God asked about his brother whom he had killed, he lied and said: "I know not where Abel is." The Lord replied, "The voice of thy brother's blood cries unto me from the ground." (Genesis 4:9-10)

My friend, Cain found out that God is that pivotal value which is deemed worthy of being the goal and purpose of life. It is self evident that no man can live without God. No one can live without the theology of God. There are those who have made great attempts to make this world a better place. They pass out clothes, food, even offer shelter, but it is the theology of God which we need. Education, science, and technology could they believe solve all of our problems. But this nation has failed to heed to the theology of God. Where is thy brother? When they are ignored, they will rise in perverted and distorted form to mock you.

So, what was Cain's relationship with God? Was it not his offering of his fruit and God did not accept his labor?

Cain did not know what God was like. Cain's life was of one half truth and it was dangerous. Cain killed his own brother. You see, Cain's half truth was revealed. His half truth depended upon what he thought and what he holds of ultimate value. Cain was a practical man who was faced with the problem of deciding how to act in a given situation. Cain ought to have some implicit ideas of what end he wishes to obtain. Cain had no idea of what value he would gain from the solution. In the end Cain would till the ground. It shall not henceforth yield unto thee her strength; a fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth." Cain cried. My punishment is greater than I can bear." (Genesis 4:9-10, 12-14)

Why Cain? Because of half truths. It is not what a man thinks but what he does that counts. Seemed plausible as long as the great majority of men in our culture had a Christian scale of values. But we live in a world where precisely that scale of value is threatened and questioned.

The moral ideas that seemed self evident truth to our fathers have become problems for our day. There are those who recognize this and know there is no simple distinction between what a man believes and what he does. As a result, they put great emphasis upon propaganda, the concerted attempt to change what men think. They know that if they could change the thought of men about the ultimate nature of things and ultimate values, they could change the action of men.

Christian theology is nothing more nor less than the attempt to change the thinking of men so that they will act as Christians. Because we live in a time when the ultimate meaning of life is in question, Cain, where is thy brother? I know not. Am I my brother's keeper?

Sometime back I heard a pastor, a minister of the gospel say he did not see anything wrong with a woman or young girl having an abortion, that it was her own body to do as she pleased. My friend, these bodies do not belong to you or I. You don't live holy enough nor will you ever be pure enough to take or give life. "For by him were all things created that are in heaven and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones or dominions or principalities, or powers; all things were created by him and for him." (Colossians 1:16)

So the harvest is great. He sent them two and two, to help each other in test, loneliness and discouragement. (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12) To lift up when one falls and to be a balance in success, to strengthen in weakness when burdened. (Psalm 15:1-5; Galatians 6:2) For unity in prayer. (Matthew 18:19) For protection in attack. (Ecclesiastes 4:12) Go your way, behold I send you forth as lambs among wolves. (Matthew 10:16)

"Carry neither purse nor scrip nor shoes and salute no man by the way." (St. Luke 12:33)

My friend, our soul is akin to God. Why has it been placed in the body? If heaven is our home why are we here? In other words, what is the purpose of human life? Religion gives a clear answer to this question. We have been placed on this earth in order to enable ourselves by seeking after goodness, to subject our will to the will of our father in heaven, that will which is so wise and good. This is our life's great business. All other aims, however worthy, are subsidiary to it. If they do not promote it, they are worthless. To be rich or famous or clever, there are ambitions which may or may not be good, but their goodness can only be determined by one test whether they help or thwart the supreme purpose of life, whether they help or hinder us in our endeavor after perfection, to be true to the best is our vocation here on earth, its fulfillment is the only real success. Its neglect the only real failure.

And to be true to the best is necessarily to discard all lower self seeking. The true life is the self denying life which ministers to the higher welfare of him who lives it and to the happiness of the race. Jesus had in his plan for us to enter his vineyard with a conscious aim to help in the accomplishment of God's plan to be co partners with him and his creative work which is the privilege of noble souls. Jesus called upon us to pray the Lord to send laborers to enter not to hinder. Why? Because laborers are so few.

When a person is called to enter there is this submission, a merging of self in the universal scheme. This is our one supreme duty. This is life. This call is above every call. It is the highest call to enter, for one not to exercise this privilege they waste away like Cain, one will cease to be man. Like Cain called a vagabond, a fugitive on the run from God. Like Cain who did not find that essential wholeness as an individual and as a person in community. Cain placed his values above God's theology; His values should have been subordinate to this co partnership with God. Cain placed his own interests higher than all the duties of solidarity and the idea of the development of the species, the nearer is the species to the end of its vital career. While on the one hand, the more individuals there are in a nation who have an instinct within them, compelling them to deeds of heroism, self abnegation and sacrifice for the community, the more potent are the vital energies of the race.

Jesus saw this world filled with the likes of Cain. Jesus saw a nation of Cains, murderers, fornicators, adulterers, liars, thieves, person who would commit

fraud and who dared to kill and take life. Truly the harvest is plenteous but the laborers are few. Are you a Cain? Are you wroth? The Bible tells us for man not to take care of his family first is worse than Satan himself. Listen to these words. "But if any provide not for his own and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith and is worse than an infidel." (1 Timothy 5:8)

Before you leave to cross the street as a witness, your family ought to be saved. Before you confront and feed another, your family ought to be first. Before you send .05 cents to another state, town or city, you ought to first see that your sons and daughters have an education.

Before you tell any one about any organization or make a pledge or vows your home ought to be a witness of your caring. If you have Jesus in your heart, your family ought to be the first to be won over to Christ as a believer.

Your pivotal point ought to be Christ that old blessed song we sang. "On Christ the solid rock I stand. All other ground is sinking sand. When all others give way, my anchors hold within." Cain went in another direction. His pivotal values were his self. Probably a member of many clubs and religious groups that shows a tradition had a frame work. A law was given to Cain. Jesus gave us a commandment to pray to the Lord of the harvest to send laborers. A duty was given, duty is the law open being. Duty necessarily means freedom. A law can be given only to those who have power to obey it.

The fetters of obligation are an meaningful except to bind those who are free. Only he who has power to choose the evil can be commanded to choose the good. You see freedom is the postulate of morality. That is to say there can be no such things as duty without it. I ought implies I can. This my friend, is called freedom of will. It is that inner voice that urges us to cling to goodness. We'd have no intelligible message for us. Did it not assure us that we are free agents that we can obey it if we choose. And when that inner voice speaks to us in the sadder tones of remorse, it proclaims our freedom once more. Thou shouldst have refrained from this evil deed it says. When God approached Cain God said, if thou doest well shalt thou not be accepted and thou shalt rule over him. (Verse 7). It was Cain's choice to do good or evil.

Our moral destinies are in our own hands. We can first be our children's keepers or we can run across this country trying to win others when Jesus said, "Lift up your eyes and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest." (St. John 4:35)

Do you not have children who are lost? Do you not see all the bloodshed around here at home? What are you doing to win those here at home? As God said to Cain, "But thou shalt rule over it. The power came with your birthright." We are never forced to do wrong. Again I say, our moral destinies are in our hands.

Listen again to these words: "See I have set before thee this day life and good and death and evil, choose then life." (Deuteronomy 30:15-19)

You see God has implanted in us a sense of duty, but prevented us from being true to it, if he has filled us with a love of goodness, but denied us the power of reaching it, then is he cruel indeed, then is he no God. My friend, the foundation of religions are broken up as soon as we regard ourselves as mere machines driven by an intangible fate as leaves blown about aimlessly here and there of the wind of circumstances.

The reason there are so many religions today that consist of killing, and murdering is that man has departed from the conviction of freedom. Whatever will be is not freedom, it is a choice. When men believe that their moral lives are not in their keeping, they will throw down their arms and refuse to fight temptation any longer.

Why then should they struggle when this issue of the conflict is already decided? Cain made his choice to kill. You and I have a choice, we can win our family to God or listen to the sound of crying from this earth and be called as Cain, a vagabond and a fugitive.

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Dr. Kristi Woods has joined the medical staff of SRMC. She is associated in private practice with Pembroke Pediatrics and the Lumberton Children's Clinic.

A native of Pembroke, Dr. Woods earned a bachelor of science degree in biology at Duke University in 1994. She attended medical school at UNC-Chapel Hill where she received her degree in 1998. In June of this year, Dr. Woods completed a three-year residency training program in pediatrics at the Medical University of South Carolina in Charleston.

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