

JUST A LITTLE GIFT **Genesis 4:1-13**

If you attend with us on a regular basis, you will be aware that I plan my sermons for a year at a time. I am working on sermon topics, texts and titles for 2010 right now. The theme for 2010 is "Fit for Life" and I plan for us to develop the disciplines that will lead to spiritual fitness. We will look at our motivation for spiritual fitness. We will look at a proper spiritual diet and healthy spiritual exercise. We will also look at the lifestyle changes that we all need to make to get spiritually fit and to stay spiritually fit.

But that is for 2010. Our theme for 2009 is "Little Is Much" and we've considered how God can use the little we have to offer to accomplish much for His Kingdom.

But that is only a part of the truth about "Little Is Much". Little changes can yield big rewards. But little mistakes can sometimes lead to serious consequences.

Mistakes, by definition, are "decisions made from a false perception or misunderstanding; decisions that prove to be wrong; a blunder; decisions made when emotionally unstable or decisions made in haste."

Sometimes a little mistake can lead to bad results. When you are giving directions and you say "east" when you meant "west", that can cause problems. Being one button off will result in dialing the wrong number. There is only one letter of difference between Ireland and Iceland – one letter and about 1000 miles!

Peter Pham had recently bought a boat and decided to take his family water skiing on Lake Nacogdoches on Sunday, August 9th. After skiing, Pham lit some charcoal to start barbecuing in the west side park area when, in the blink of an eye, his wife and son lay beneath a pile of shattered concrete. Pham's wife and son had been sitting at a concrete picnic table one moment and the next, they were buried beneath concrete and a car. It seems that the driver of the vehicle, which had a standard transmission, had parked in the parking lot up the hill, got out of the car and went to swim. But the driver made one little mistake: she failed to engage the parking brake and the car, left in neutral, rolled down the hill and hit Pham's wife and son.

The Phams own a small business and have no health insurance. They won't be able to run the business while Mrs. Pham is in the hospital so they won't have any income. The medical bills will pile up as will the costs of getting to and from the hospital so Mr. Pham can be with his wife and his son. Is he bitter? No, not really. But he did say, "*Just one little mistake ... messed us up like that.*"

Sometimes we are the victims of other people's little mistakes. Often we suffer because of our own.

For the month of September, we are going to look in the Bible and consider some little mistakes that led to disastrous consequences. My hope is that, in the process, we will learn the importance of watching even the little choices and little decisions we make.

The account of the first little mistake that we are going to consider is found in Genesis 4:1-13. This is found on page 4 of the pew Bible in the rack in front of you. Please follow along:

***4**¹ Adam lay with his wife Eve, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Cain. She said, "With the help of the LORD I have brought forth a man."² Later she gave birth to his brother Abel.*

Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil.³ In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the LORD.⁴ But Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The LORD looked with favor on Abel and his offering,⁵ but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast.

⁶ Then the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast?⁷ If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it."

⁸ Now Cain said to his brother Abel, "Let's go out to the field." And while they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him.

⁹ Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?" "I don't know," he replied. "Am I my brother's keeper?"

¹⁰ The LORD said, "What have you done? Listen! Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground.¹¹ Now you are under a curse and driven from the ground, which opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand.¹² When you work the ground, it will no longer yield its crops for you. You will be a restless wanderer on the earth."

¹³ Cain said to the LORD, "My punishment is more than I can bear.

I don't know that I can tell you for sure why Abel's sacrifice was acceptable and Cain's was not. There are a few different theories.

- Maybe the problem was that Abel brought an animal sacrifice and Cain brought a grain sacrifice. We do not know that God had specified that He wanted an animal sacrifice but we do not know that He did not. Perhaps that was the problem.
- Maybe the problem was that Abel brought the fat portions of some of the firstborn from his flock and Cain simply brought some of the fruit of his fields.

That is, Abel brought the best of some of his best and Cain merely brought some fruit (not necessarily the first and the best).

- Perhaps God was not pleased with the fact that Cain had decided to settle down and be a grain farmer when mankind had been told to fill the earth and subdue it. Abel could be nomadic and keep flocks but Cain could not be nomadic and till the soil. Cain, like his crops, would put down roots and that may not have been acceptable to God.
- We do not know and cannot say for sure but it may be that Abel sacrificed joyfully and Cain gave grudgingly.

The Bible does not tell us so we can't be sure. But what the Bible does tell us very clearly is that God accepted Abel's offering and rejected Cain's. I don't know how Cain knew that God was not pleased with his offering. Maybe there was some sign from heaven that let him know. Maybe God said so. Maybe he just sensed it in his spirit. But somehow, Cain knew that his brother's sacrifice was acceptable and that his offering was not.

Cain was hurt. He felt that God had been unjust and unfair to him. I get that. Absent more details to shed better light on this matter, I find myself in sympathy with Cain. Cain was hurt and I hurt for him.

Hurt, left untreated, can soon turn to anger and in Cain's case that is exactly what happened. The more he thought about how his offering was rejected, the more angry he became...until he seethed with anger; boiled with rage; fumed with hatred.

Roiling rage cannot be repressed forever. It will find a way to express itself and in Cain's case, his wrath found expression in premeditated murder. Cain invited Abel to join him in the field. Away from their home. Away from their parents. Away from the place of worship where they had made their burnt offerings.

In the field. Not in the pasture where Abel would feel at home but on Cain's turf: in the field. Perhaps hidden by the stalks. In the field where the soil has been tilled and is softer so a grave can be dug more easily and concealed more effectively.

Cain invited Abel to join him in the field and there Cain murdered his brother. The Bible records: "*And while they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him.*" Did he choke his brother? Bludgeon him? Stab him? Does it matter? By a deliberate mean, with premeditation and criminal intent, Cain murdered his brother. And why? Because he was angry.

And why was he angry? Because he had chosen to bring God an offering that proved to be unacceptable to God.

The root of Cain's anger was a mistake he made...just a little mistake...about a little gift. As events unfold, it becomes clear that the problem wasn't the mistake that Cain made: the problem was the way Cain dealt with learning that he had made a mistake.

Instead of submitting to the Lord and confessing his fault, he became angry. He could have confessed his sin, apologized and resolved to correct his error. He might have made a new offering. He might have made a new offering but he didn't. Instead, he stewed, he fumed, he brooded and obsessed. He plotted, schemed and conspired until he came up with a plan: a conspiracy to kill his brother. Not that this would solve anything but this is where his anger led him. Submission would have brought him back to God. Anger drove him from God...far from God.

Cain chose anger over submission and he chose retaliation instead of investigation. I wonder what Cain might have learned if he had the humility to ask Abel why his sacrifice was acceptable where Cain's was not. It is quite conceivable that Cain could have grown in his understanding because of this incident.

It is also quite conceivable that Cain could have grown in his relationship with his brother. He could have used this as an opportunity to support Abel, to praise him, to encourage him, to lift him up and help him along in his walk with God.

But Cain missed all of those opportunities because he made the mistake of choosing retaliation instead of investigation and support. He wanted to get back at Abel for offering a better sacrifice. Someone has said that he who tries to get even never gets ahead. And Cain illustrates that truth.

Cain made a little mistake with his gift to God. Then he made a bigger mistake with his emotional response of anger. He made an even bigger mistake with his decision to retaliate. This series of mistakes that began with just a little gift eventuated in very serious consequences.

Hear again what the Bible says about the consequences of Cain's mistakes.

¹⁰ *The LORD said, "What have you done? Listen! Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground. ¹¹ Now you are under a curse and driven from the ground, which opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. ¹² When you work the ground, it will no longer yield its crops for you. You will be a restless wanderer on the earth."*

¹³ *Cain said to the LORD, "My punishment is more than I can bear."*

Cain received a curse because of his choices. He seems to have forfeited his green thumb: his ability to raise crops and reap a harvest. Now he was going to have to be a restless wanderer, a nomad, an itinerant, a drifter.

Doesn't seem like too bad a curse? Think again. No place would ever be home to Cain. No people would ever be his friends and neighbors. No land would be his possession and his bequest. Cain was forced to live and doomed to die under a wandering star.

If that doesn't seem like such a dire consequence to you, know this: it seemed dire to Cain. He replied, "My punishment is more than I can bear." Cain grasped the seriousness of his sentence. And it all tumbled out of one small mistake: the mistake regarding his gift to God.

What little mistakes have you been making? What errors, blunder and sins have you been living with and still have not confessed? What are the sins from which you have not yet turned? Please understand that they will not go unpunished.

CONCLUSION:

God warned Cain that sin was crouching at his door and wanted to own him. That is true for each of us...not just Cain but each of us.

Sin is crouching at your door and Jesus is knocking at your door. To whom will you open the door? It is your choice. But know this: that there are consequences to your choice.

In John Steinbeck's book, *East of Eden*, the author traces the story of two families from the Civil War to World War I. At one point, Steinbeck explains, "*Humans are caught – in their lives, in their thoughts, in their hungers and ambitions, in their avarice and cruelty, and in their kindness and generosity, too – in a net of good and evil. ... We have only one story.*"

If all you knew were the story between the Garden of Eden and the Garden of Gethsemane, you, too, would deduce that man is caught in a web and he cannot get out. But there is another story. And with the other story comes another choice: you can choose to be like Cain or like Christ. You have a choice. What do you choose?

INVITATION: #685 – "*Footsteps of Jesus*"