

My Brother's Keeper, Part 1

Luke 17:1-2

We are in the third major section of Luke's Gospel. Three major sections that we've gone through so far. This is the third. In the first major section, that was Luke 1:1 to 4:13; beginning chapters of Luke's Gospel. Luke recorded there Jesus' preparation for ministry. So, we've got the infancy narratives of John the Baptist and Jesus Christ. We've got John's ministry as a preacher of repentance, the forerunner of the Messiah. And then we have Jesus' genealogy, baptism, his testing in the wilderness. And all that is in the first major section of Luke's gospel.

In the second major section, Luke 4:14 through 9:50, chapter 9, verse 50. That's Jesus ministry in Galilee. So that's the second major section. The, the, section starts in Jesus' hometown of Nazareth. Nazareth, where he is summarily rejected by his own people and so, he moves a headquarters of his ministry to Capernaum. And it's from there that he travels

throughout Galilee on an itinerant preaching ministry. Preaching about the kingdom of God. Preaching repentance and faith in himself, to enter into the kingdom.

So, it's in Luke 9:22, that Jesus tells his men, "The Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised." And that leads directly into a third major section. That's the section we're in right now, and it starts in Luke 9:51, where it says this, "When the days drew near for him to be taken up." That's a reference to, not just the resurrection, it's the reference to the ascension into heaven. "So when the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem."

So, this is called, what, what, commentators refer to as the travel section. So, Luke 9:51 all the way through 19:44, and that's where we're heading. Where is this? Right where we are. Right smack in the middle of it, toward the end, in Luke 17. Jesus, in the section, has left Galilee. He is moving in and around Judea and Perea, but he's always got his eye fixed on Jerusalem. And what will happen there? So much prophecy to be

fulfilled. Suffering to be endured. "And yet on the other side he endured the cross, despising the shame that he might sit down at the right hand of the throne of God." So, he's always looking beyond the cross. Not only to the resurrection, but to the ascension to be with his father, again.

The section ends, this third major section ends at the triumphal entry. That's a block in Luke 19, from verses 28 to 44, the triumphal entry, as he enters into Jerusalem a final time. He's been kind of going in and out of Jerusalem, but he's going to enter in a final time to meet his appointment with the cross. To come there as the sin bearer, to die for the sins of his people.

Now, it's a characteristic feature of this third section. It's the interplay between Jesus and the Pharisees, prominent men; the Pharisees, in society, many of them accomplished businessmen; many of them community leaders. The Pharisees, we've seen them, right? They're always there, hovering around. They're always coming out of the shadows to speak a word of criticism. They mix in among the disciples of Jesus Christ, ready to criticize. Always looking for a chance to discredit

him. Turn the people against him. Try to make him look foolish. Try to catch him in a lie. Catch him in a contradiction. Their hearts are full of doubt, not belief.

Their motives are driven by greed, not generosity. Their true face is hidden behind a mask of hypocrisy. They spend a whole lot of time and effort trying to look good on the outside, trying to keep up appearances, trying to flatter with their tongues, but inside they are full of sin. They are enslaved to the love of money, and that means they are never truly free.

So, as we've been seeing, in this, throughout this travel section, Jesus keeps turning back and forth in his teaching. He teaches his disciples on the one hand, and then he answers the objections of the scribes and the Pharisees, that keep cropping up on the other hand. And all of that then becomes instructive as we watch our lord loving his friends and also loving his enemies.

And his disciples, who are there in the moment, they're watching him love them and teach them the truth. But, also, as

the enemies reject and oppose and try to discourage others, Jesus loves them too. He deals straightforwardly with their criticisms and objections. He takes them up and addresses them, telling them parables and teaching them all along. All this is so instructive. And it's instructive to you and me, as we read the account and read our Lord in his majestic glory, dealing with sinners like us, sinners like you and me, and also sinners like these Pharisees.

Our text for today, Luke 17:1 to 10. This section concludes a series of interactions that really began back in chapter 15. Some commentators will take this all the way back to chapter 13. I think it's a good to take it back to chapter 15. And it says there, at the beginning of chapter 15, "Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him, and the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, this man receives sinners and eats with them."

They're not applauding that, by the way. They're not saying, wow, look how gracious he is, that this man receives sinners and eats with them. They're criticizing him. Their criticisms are intended to discredit Jesus among the people, to

cast aspersions on his ministry, because he's mixing with bad company. He doesn't seem to know the kinds of people that are coming to him.

I mean, look at that ministry. Look what, look what kind of people it's attracting. Just the dregs. Just the, just the worst of the worst in society. He operates with loose morals, low standards, defiles himself among them, because he's got no discernment, or if he has discernment, well, he just doesn't really care about the character of his ministry. No, not at all, says Jesus. You got this all wrong. He is no more defiled by going after lost sinners than a shepherd is in retrieving his lost sheep.

He's no more defiled, going after lost sinners, than a woman is sweeping the dirt of her floor to find her lost coin, and picking it up, and dusting it off. He's no more defiled by going after lost sinners, than a father who runs to embrace his lost son. A young man, who is covered in pig filth, coming out of the pig sty. And the father embraces him, and brings him home, and puts his own robe on him, and a new ring on his finger, and says kill the fatted calf. My son, who is lost is

now found. He's come home. Jesus says, you got it all wrong. These Pharisees, they are like the older brother in the parable. They're filled with pride. They're seething with anger, jealousy. They're angry at the father. They're jealous over the, their brother. They're angry over the father's magnanimous grace.

And as Jesus continues into Luke 16. We see him teaching his disciples, there, about the principles of stewardship. He's telling them, now that you're captured from your lost condition, saved, brought back into the household, guess what, you're my son, and I'm going to lavish all of heaven's wealth upon you that you might be a steward for me. That you might go spend what is not yours, but what I've given you; spend it lavishly, give it away generously.

And so, Jesus is teaching in Luke 16, about the principles, principles of stewardship to his disciples. Telling them about the joy and the great privilege of stewardship. That what's given to you isn't for you to spend on yourself. It's not about you and your vacations. It's not about you and your stuff, all

stuff that's gonna burn, no, spend all that stuff to make friends for heaven later on.

The Pharisees, though, they're there, they're listening. They just step out of the shadows. They are lovers of money. Oh, they don't like this teaching on stewardship at all. What are you saying about my vacation? What are you saying about my clothes? My stuff? And lovers of money, they ridicule him. They start spreading the word about him among the crowd.

This time, as Jesus addresses their objections, before he gives them a lesson that we never forget, in the form of this parable, at the end of Luke 16. Jesus responds, this time more sternly. He rebukes them, Luke 16:14 to 18. That section there rebukes them for justifying themselves before men. He rebukes them for exalting, and loving, and admiring, and esteeming, what God abhors and hates.

It's abominable to God, for violating the covenant. For violating the covenant with God and the primary relationship with their wife, the wife of your youth. Divorcing their wives.

Running off with other women. As physical adulterers. As spiritual adulterers. Unrepentant, steeled in their pride, these Pharisees have nothing to look forward to, but the judgment of torment, which Jesus portrays graphically, vividly, horrifically, in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus.

And after delivering the warnings to the Pharisees, and after illustrating the consequences in that parable, Jesus doesn't leave it there. He's not done at the end of Luke 16. He's got more to say, and he concludes the section by addressing his disciples, starting in Luke 17, verse 1.

Look what it says there, "And he," Jesus said, to his disciples," this immediately after, right on the heels of delivering this parable, he says to his disciples. Look, "temptations to sin are sure to come, but woe to the one through whom they come! It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were cast into the sea, than that he should cause one of these little ones to sin.

"Pay attention to yourselves! If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him, and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, saying, 'I repent', you must forgive him. The apostles said to the Lord," Ohh, "'increase our faith!' And the Lord said, 'if you had faith like a grain of mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, 'be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it would obey you."

"Will any one of you who has a servant plowing or keeping sheep say to him when he's come in from the field, 'Come at once and recline at the table?' Now will you not rather say to him, 'prepare supper for me, and dress properly and serve me while I eat and drink, and afterward you will eat and drink?' Does he thank the servant because he did what was commanded? So you also, when you've done all that you were commanded, you will say, 'We are unworthy servants; we've only done what was our duty.'"

Now if you followed that section as I read, reading along, you may feel maybe a tad bit lost. Like, okay, wait a minute. Okay, I get the sin part, but how do we go from sin and danger

of sin, millstones cast into the sea, to mustard seeds and mulberry trees, then to unworthy servants doing their duty. How does this all connect?

Luke stated in his purpose for writing Luke, chapter 1, verse 3. He said he, he, wrote to give Theophilus, what; an orderly account. That's what we've seen this entire time, isn't it? An orderly account. As Luke has moved pericope by pericope, section by section, chapter by chapter, verse by verse, we see everything ties together. Everything builds on the previous and is connected to what comes next.

We've seen an orderly account. We've seen precision. We've seen accuracy. We're really supposed to think that Luke set aside his purpose in writing, here? That he breaks from his purpose in writing and breaks from that clear, consistent pattern. Does it make sense, that here, that this would be really the only place in this entire gospel, that Luke decided to abandon his plan and stitch together just a few fragments of Jesus' teaching. No connection to the context, before or after. No connection internally to one another. Just some random proverbial sayings related to discipleship.

I hope you can tell by the scorn in my voice that I disagree wholeheartedly with that. It's not just a negative reason, in comparing it with this purpose, that I believe this, but it's also, there's a positive reason for seeing that all of this is connected. That it's connected to the context before and after, and it's also connected internally. Recognize here, as we've come to expect from Luke.

So, we've come to expect by the spirit, there is an order and a purpose in this account. We see the flow of the context, when we see that, when we see the internal consistency and how Jesus, it's Jesus, he's recording here; how Jesus develops his argument, we get to see what Jesus wanted his disciples to see, at the time.

We get to learn what the Spirit intends for us to learn, and understand, and practice together, as Christians in this church. So, what is that? Simply this, the normal, regular practice, of Christianity, is to deal with sin; straightforwardly, directly, compassionately, gently, but to

deal with sin, with one another, as a way of loving one another. That's what the teaching of the passage is.

That's the main point from start to finish. Normal, regular practice of our Christianity. The normal regular practice of our faith, in living out our faith, is to deal with sin. To do it straightforwardly, to do it directly, to not mince any words, but to be compassionate, gentle, kind, forgiving in our attitudes toward each other. This, as we work this out with each other, this is how we love one another as Christians. This is Jesus' main point in Luke 17:1 through 10.

There's a motto that was adopted by one of the BUDS classes, many years ago. BUDS stands, is an acronym, Military acronym, stands for Basic Underwater Demolition, slash Seal. Buds is the 26-week basic course to get into the Seal teams. And one of its BUDS classes, its training classes, adopted the motto, and had printed on T-shirt, that they wore around, it had a really cool picture of a frog man coming out of the water with a wet suit on, I know, and like an MP5 in his hand and swim fins hanging off of his belt. He's ready to do some damage. He comes

out of the water and it says underneath, my brother's keeper.
Love that idea.

Making my brother's well-being a matter of my personal duty, my personal responsibility. I love that idea. Watching out for one another, the camaraderie. Watching each other's six. Making sure that there's no danger, coming to a brother. Making sure one another's gear is squared away. Weapons are loaded. Every, you know, everything, body armors on right. Making sure the parachutes' attached correctly. Making sure we're safe and secure, looking out for one another's well-being. It's what it is to be my brother's keeper.

And that saying, my brother's keeper, of course, comes from Genesis 4:9. Remember after Cain had killed his brother Abel, out of jealousy, because Abel offered a better, more acceptable sacrifice to God. And the Lord came to Cain and said to him, where is Abel your brother? Cain's answer to the Lord was this. "I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?"

I've often reflected on that from Cain. If you knew nothing else about the story, but just that verse, nothing else from the context before or after, you could discern from Cain's response, to the Lord's question about his brother's whereabouts, you could discern a cold indifference for his brother.

It's a form of hatred, that he expresses in this flippant rhetorical statement: Am I my brother's keeper? Do I have any business in my brother's personal life? We flip that around and many people will say it this way, you have no business in my personal life. What's going on in my heart and in my home is really between me, and my heart, and my home. Nothing to do with you. Listen for every Christian, the opposite of that is true, isn't it?

I am my brother's keeper. And my brother is my keeper. We are our brother's keeper. We take personal responsibility for one another's; safety, and security, and well-being. This is especially true when it comes to matters of temptation and matters of sin. Grave, grave dangers lurking in the blind spots of our lives.

Look at the command at the beginning of verse three, Luke 17:3. What does Jesus say there? Pay attention to yourselves. That's the command in this section that drives all the action, and the key verse that helps us interpret this section. Pay attention. Be watchful. Be on your guard.

And the command, by the way, is not an individualistic command. It's not to each, ind, individual disciple, as an individual, even though it has implications for the individual, obviously. But the command is a plural command, and it's joined together with a plural reflexive pronoun that word, yourselves.

So, this command has a corporate application meaning this: We practice obedience to this command with one another. This is a one another command. Jesus is calling us to love our brothers and sisters. This is a call to be our brother's keeper. Not to privatize your religion, not to individualize, not to isolate. This is a call to be in one another's lives.

So, what's the flow here, in verses 1 to 10? How is this all connected together? How does it all make the same point? Well, in verses 1 and 2, Jesus identifies the danger, doesn't he? He identifies it by connecting it to the rich man in hell. In verses 3 and 4, he tells us what we're to do with this teaching. In verse 5, the apostles respond intelligently, asking for an increase of faith, because they recognize the difficulty of what Jesus is calling them to do. In verse 6, Jesus assures them that the quality of faith they possess already is enough for the job. In verses 7 to 10, Jesus uses an illustration from common life, just to emphasize that obedience to what he's commanding them, is nothing extraordinary, but rather, this is routine stuff for believers. My brother's keeper, this is just normal Christian living.

And listen, my friend, if you are a member of this church, or if you are not a member of this church, but you are isolated from this body, I gotta tell you, and I tell you this, with love in my heart, you're wrong. You need to get on board with what Jesus' teaching here. You are your brother's keeper and you need to get into other people's lives, so that you know them well enough to identify the blind spots and help them. You need to

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get close enough, so people can get into your life and expose your heart, so that people can correct you with your blind spots.

We need to help one another. None of us is too good for this. And by the way, none of us is too bad for this either. All of us are under that cross. All of, und, of us are under this shed blood. All of us have had this body broken for us. None of us who's squeaky clean. So, let's get over ourselves. And get into each other's lives. We are our brother's keeper.