

My Brother's Keeper, Part 2

Luke 17:1-2

Number one: sin is gravely serious, so pay careful attention. Sin is gravely serious, so pay careful attention. Point number two: Sin is insidious so, practice biblical confrontation. Sin is insidious, so practice biblical confrontation. We'll spend most of our time on the first point today. Okay, so here it is.

First point again. Sin is gravely serious, so pay careful attention. Look at verses one and two, again. Jesus says to his disciples, the spirit is saying to us, through this section of scripture, "Temptations to sin are sure to come, but woe to the ones through whom they come! It'd be better for him, if a millstone were hung around his neck and," were cast, "he were cast into the sea than he should cause one of these little ones to sin."

That's why Jesus warns us in verse 3, pay attention to yourselves. The danger is real. The danger is hidden. Because the consequences are dire. The consequences are grave. They're permanent. They're eternal. So, pay very, very careful attention here. The ESV translates this, temptations to sin. That's really a single word in the Greek. It's the word *skandalon*. And *skandalon*, really, if we translate it literally, it means stumbling block.

And Jesus wants to give us several reasons why we should pay careful attention to stumbling blocks. For the sake of your note taking, I'm going to identify these as letter A.B.C. and so on, Okay? So, letter A: Watch out because stumbling blocks are inevitable. All my points are going to sound like that. Watch out because stumbling blocks, first one, stumbling blocks are inevitable, inevitable. In the Greek it sounds like this: Impossible for stumbling blocks not to come. Basically, we just say that, by saying inevitable.

They're inevitable. They're going to come. He uses the word, here, that refers to, what's incapable of being admitted for consideration, and it's incapable of being admitted for

consideration because, such a thing is outside the realm of possibility. So impossible. In other words, stumbling blocks are unavoidable. They are inevitable. They are a, they are part and parcel, woven into this fallen world. That's what he's saying.

It's out of the question that they're not going to come. They're always going to be there. So, get used to it. Better get ready to deal with it. Why is it impossible for them not to come? Because the devil's real. Right? Always prowling about like a roaring lion, seeking whom, aim, whom he may devour. Sin is an ever-present reality in this fallen world. It's always there. Always lurking. Always active to enslave sinners. Always there to keep them enslaved. Always there to deceive through enticement. Always there to influence sinners to resist God. Why is that?

We know this from James, chapter 1, because the cause of stumbling is within each, within each one of us. Whenever anybody is tempted, you should never say, I'm being tempted by God. God isn't tempted by evil, and he himself tempts no one. Right? Where, where does the temptation come from? Within ourselves. Right?

James 1:14 says, "Each one is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire." It's a fishing metaphor, there, so lured, "enticed by his own desire. Desire, when it's conceived, gives birth to sin, and then sin, when it is fully grown, brings forth death." So, what do we see? The cause of stumbling is within. It's in our sinful flesh. It's there. So stumbling blocks are inevitable. That's the first point.

Letter B: Watch out, because stumbling blocks are not only inevitable, but they are personal. Stumbling blocks are personal. Jesus says, not just woe to the stumbling blocks, he says, woe to the one through whom they come. It's a personal thing. Also, in verse 2, "It'd be better for him if the millstone were fastened to his neck." And so on.

Stumbling blocks, they're not just there, static fixtures on their own, like pitfalls that you avoid. They come through people. The stumbling blocks, causes for sin, and, and, and, solicitations for temptation, come through people. Which means,

being watchful involves being discerning with people, discerning in relationships.

Might wanna, also, jot that down, next to this one; that this is a relational warning. It's a warning about relationships. That's the nature of it. We gotta stay watchful in our relationships, when it comes to what people say or don't say. What people think. How they think. What they believe. What they don't believe. How they live. Especially how they influence you. How they influence others around them.

Stumbling blocks are inevitable. They're unavoidable, because you don't need to go looking for them. They will come to you in the form of people. People, are, become the conduit through their relationship with you. They become a, a, conduit of a cause of stumbling.

So stumbling blocks are inevitable, personal letr, personal, letter C: Watch out, because stumbling blocks, letter C, are perennial. Perennial. What do I mean by that? I mean constant. Because stumbling blocks come through people. Because

this is a matter of personal, relational, this is a constant.
Isn't it? This is a perennial problem.

Stumbling blocks are inevitable, because of the presence of sin. They're personal, because of that sin nature in each one of us, and they are, therefore, perennial because God has not yet eradicated the presence of sin from the earth. Until God casts the devil into the lake of fire. Until he abolishes sin and death. Until that day, stumbling blocks are inevitable reality of this fallen world.

You got to think of it like crime. You got to think of it like terrorism. You may wish all that didn't exist. But they do. And the criminals, and the terrorists, and the wars, and it's all coming to you, like it or not. The question is, are you going to be prepared or you gonna stick your head in the sand, like a proverbial ostrich?

We all have to reckon with threats, don't we? We all have to learn to mitigate threats, fight against them, because they are coming for you. Now consider all this in context, at this

point. They're inevitable. They're perennial. They're relational. The immediate reference to those through whom the stumbling blocks come, in this context, who are they? They are the Pharisees, right? They are the religious leaders. They are the, we might say in our day, they are the unsaved evangelicals, who pretend to be saved evangelicals.

The Pharisees are the ones who've been opposing Jesus' ministry. They've been putting obstacles in the way of anyone who comes to listen to Jesus, anyone who comes to Jesus for salvation. The Pharisees, along with the scribes, the lawyers, they, they, are like, consider them like a freight train coming down the track. They're carrying freight on the freight cars, full of all kinds of stumbling blocks to throw before would-be followers of Jesus Christ. Let me show you that.

Look at chapter 12 verse 1, "Beware, of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy." They wear the mask of sincerity, but they're false. They use the language of friendship, but there's nothing more to that than deceptive words of flattery. All of it is just a mask of a heart of greed and unbelief.

Skip ahead to Luke 14:1, One Sabbath, it says there on Luke 14:1, "When he went to dine in the house of a ruler of the Pharisees. They're watching him carefully." And what does this say? "There they planted a man who had dropsy." They planted a man who's suffering in his midst, just to see if Jesus is going to heal on the Sabbath, breaking their tradition, which he did.

Once again, Jesus confronted their sin. He deals with it directly, straightforwardly, lovingly. He observes how they behave at dinner, choosing places of honor for themselves, and he speaks again very straightforwardly, even on making them uncomfortable at dinner. Impolite, you say? Jesus says it's loving. He confronts their sin.

We mentioned Luke 15, Pharisees criticizing Jesus because he received tax collectors and sinners. We mentioned Luke 16:14, the Pharisees ridiculing Jesus on stewardship, because they loved money. They are just a freight train, aren't they? Filled with obstacles and stumbling blocks on their cars of freight, bringing that in to the fellowship of the disciples.

They reject those who come to faith in Christ. They criticize those who, ru, wish to receive those whom Christ receives. They criticize those who would welcome the ones of Christ welcomed. They're always present, always there, always influencing. They're trying to capture souls and drag them down to the bottom with them in hell.

Keep in mind. There was a sizable contingent of Pharisees, former Pharisees who professed faith in Christ, became influential in the early church. They were a minority, in the early church, but they were a vocal minority. Vocal enough to, bold enough, to criticize the disciples.

We see in Acts chapter 16, that the Jerusalem Council was convened to address the challenges raised by these kinds of people. They were known, then, as the circumcision party. Remember back in Acts 10 and 11, when Peter preached to the household of Cornelius, many Gentiles came to faith. They were baptized in the spirit. They spoke with other tongues. Peter reported what happened, to the elders of the Jerusalem Church.

It says in Acts 11 verse 2, those of the circumcision party, criticized him saying, "you went to uncircumcised men and ate with them." Who's that sound, what, like? Pharisees speaking and making the same accusation against Jesus? No wonder Jesus has to warn them. They're always there. They're always showing up. It's not like the Pharisee spirit died when Jesus died. It didn't die in the early church. They're like weeds in the garden. They're always there, always growing, always in our midst and they are here as well, beloved.

Stumbling blocks are impossible to eradicate. So why not just let them be? Why not just let the tares grow with the wheat and just let it, let the Lord, the angels pull them all up at the end and sort it all out. We can just keep quiet. Be friendly with each other.

Why the warning to be watchful? Why the warning to pay attention? Because these stumbling blocks, which are inevitable, personal, perennial, they are, also, letter D: They are lethal. Lethal, watch out, letter D, because stumbling blocks are

lethal. Remember, Jesus is making this application to his disciples, and he speaks to them immediately on the heels of this parable about the rich man and Lazarus, right after he illustrated this terrifying picture of conscious torment. What does he say? Stumbling blocks are inevitable, woe to the one through whom they come, be better millstone attached to his neck, thrown to the bottom of the sea, than that he should cause one of these little ones to stumble.

We understand what millstones are, they were large stones, cut in a circle, set horizontally, parallel to one another, and they're used for grinding grain into flour to be used in the baking of bread. This whole system is set up with a lower stone called the bed stone. It provides this immovable base. Then there's an upper stone fixed on a vertical axle, through the two and the, the grain is, is placed between the two and then the stone turns on its axis, pulled by a donkey.

Usually, a beast of burden like a donkey or an ox, because these stones, these upper mill stones weighed anywhere from hundreds to even a few thousand pounds. Very heavy. Heavy millstone like that fastened to the neck, cast into the sea. I

guarantee the victim does not die of drowning. That millstones weight drags the victim to the bottom so quickly, too quickly for drowning.

The descent is so fast, that victim is unable to equalize the air pressure in the eardrums and the sinuses, and so the sinuses burst. And the lower the body descends into the water, the greater the weight of the water above, and that water pressure crushes lungs and body cavities. This is an extremely excruciating form of death pictured here; it's proverbial saying. But it paints the picture, doesn't it?

Notice Jesus doesn't pronounce the woe upon the one who goes swimming wearing a millstone for a necklace. That's not the woe. That's how one escapes the woe. It would be better for him, Jesus says, to die a death of excruciating pain, than to be a conduit of stumbling for one, just one, of these little ones. Why? What's the alternative to the excruciatingly painful death at the bottom of the sea with a millstone attached around you? Eternity in hell.

This is parallel, to what Jesus taught back in Matthew 18. Your right hand, right foot, causes you to stumble, cut it off, throw it away. Right eye, gouge it out, throw it away. Better to go into life maimed with their whole body, and then with your whole body intact and spending eternity in hell. Same thing here. All those outcomes.

Whether it's in Matthew 18, here in Luke 17, all those outcomes are better than putting a stumbling block before a believer. Or said another way, better to have that, than die an excruciatingly painful death. Cutting off body parts you're fond of and all the rest, that's better, than taking up the role of a Pharisee. Think about that.

The rich man, Luke 16. That rich man, in that parable, suffering that torment, and that flame, where just one drop of water is all he's asking for to relieve his suffering for a moment. And he wishes, he would've opted for the millstone. What justifies such powerful, vivid language here? Why such severity toward these Pharisees?

Cause not only are stumbling blocks inevitable, personal, perennial, eternally lethal, they merit eternal death in hell, because letter E: They are so very cruel. Watch out, because letter E, stumbling blocks are cruel. There's a cruelty to being the cause of stumbling for one of these little ones. That's what he's saying. There's a cruelty to this. Sadly, regretfully, we're reminded all too often these days of acts of cruelty toward other people.

We can't turn on the news anymore without seeing some horrendous act of cruelty toward from one human being to another. And most despicable of all, has to be cruelty perpetrated upon children. Makes my heart sick every time. It has to be a sign of judgment upon our nation, when we see that, now even, in the medical community of all places, the motto, Do No Harm, no longer applies, now, to children who are; they call them gender dysphoric. Confused about what they are, male or female.

Now it's the chemical alteration of children. It's the surgical mutilation of teenagers. This is now considered acceptable in the medical community. Someone recently sent me an

article, about the Boston Children's Hospital recently making headlines, for its Center for Gender Surgery, Children's Hospital, gender surgery. First pediatric center in the United States to offer gender affirming surgeries for teens. Folks, this is predatory. This is cruelty itself. This is child abuse at a systemic level.

But even in these evil days, normal people like us, who aren't as educated in the Ivy League, we still find these acts of deviancy and depravity, that are perpetrated upon the weak, and the young, and the naive, the vulnerable, to be intolerable acts of cruelty and utterly abhorrent. Don't we?

People who lead children astray. People who deceive children, in order, to perpetrate harm upon them, listen, it's only the doctrine of hell that proves God is just. Only God can exact that just payment from them. Nothing a man can do, nothing human beings can do, no court of human humanity, none of that will provide the justice that they actually deserve. Only God can do that.

But listen. This is how Jesus sees the influence of these scribes and Pharisees; as deviant, and abhorrent, and destructive, as any predatory act upon a child. This is his view of them, because for the sake of their greed, and for the sake of their pride, and in pursuit of selfish gain, they are willing to make merchandise of those whom Jesus calls, these little ones.

Those in elevated positions of leadership, wealth with education, like these Pharisees, these scribes, they had to know better. But they're like ravenous wolves that slaughter his people like sheep, his God says, through the prophet Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, and others, as well. He indicts Israel's shepherds for praying upon the sheep. "You eat the fat, clothe yourselves with the wool, and you slaughter the fat ones."

God says, "They're wolves in sheep' clothing." They devour precious sheep and if they're not devouring precious sheep, they're trying to prevent them from going to their shepherd for refuge and healing. Matthew 23:13, "Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for you shut the Kingdom of heaven in people's faces. You can neither enter yourselves, nor allow

those who would go to enter in." But the promise of Christ still abides over his little ones. The promise of Christ always remains, that every single one of these little ones, will enter in, despite these false shepherds.

John 6:37, "All that the father gives to me will come to me. Whoever comes to me, I will never cast out." Little ones in verse 2. Who are they? They're believers. True believers. Jesus calls them little ones, which in the broadest sense refers to all believers. And if you look at that expression, Matthew 10, Matthew 18, you see they're described as believers. They're on par with the prophets and the believers of the Old Testament. Matthew 18, these little ones are those who believe in me, verse 6. They're watched over by the Angels in heaven, in verse 10. The father guarantees they'll never perish, verse 14.

So, in the broadest sense, little ones, it's an expression, refers to all believers. In this context, these little ones, refers more specifically, to those who've been targeted by the Pharisees. They are the, the, the, people who are marginalized, ignored, ostracized, pushed to the side, criticized, rejected. They're the tax collectors, the sinners,

the prostitutes, the dregs. They're the Lazaruses. They're the poor, the crippled, the blind, the lame. They're the younger son, the prodigal, who leaves his father's home and really gets what he deserves, doesn't he?

There's a sense in which we can say from Jesus' perspective, these little ones, as Jesus thinks about them, refers to all believers. Because all believers are, no matter what their state of maturity, are they on par with Jesus? No. So all of them are kind of below him in maturity and below him in understanding, below him in obedience and faithfulness. So, he looks down upon all of them, as his little ones, as he should.

For us, we could say that these little ones, in practical terms, are those who may be less mature than we are. So, anybody that we consider less mature than us, maybe weaker in the faith, they are the little ones. So, man, watch out. Watch your life and doctrine closely, that you don't lead one of those, less mature than you, weaker in the faith than you, you don't lead them to stumble.

The error of the scribes and the Pharisees wasn't that they saw sin in the prodigal. It wasn't that they saw, that the tax collectors, and prostitutes, and thugs, were sinners. They really were sinners. They were vile. They were thugs. They, were, had vile lifestyles. The problem is not in the fact that they notice the sin. The problem is in the fact that they despised them.

They failed to perceive, how they themselves are sinners, too. That they are before God, before a holy God. All ground is level at the cross. Failed to see their own sin in the light of God's holiness. So, the problem is their pride. Problem is their arrogance. The problem is in their critical spirited condescension, this censorious spirit.

You know, what little ones are like? They're poor in spirit. They realize they have nothing to offer to God. They mourn over their sin. They recognize it. They admitted it. They confess it. They mourn over it. They're meek souled, because they know they have nothing to commend themselves before God. They have an accurate self-perception. They realize they have nothing to lord it over anybody else. They and they only are

counted among Christ' little ones, and all their sins have been placed on Christ and forgiven in him. They have no righteousness in and of themselves, and they know that. They take refuge in the credited righteousness of Christ to them.