

Title: I am my brother's keeper  
Text: Luke 17.1-4  
Theme: The fellowship of the cross  
Series: Luke  
Prop Stmtnt: Our sin is more serious than the sins of others

Read Text:

This morning we are beginning the 17<sup>th</sup> chapter in Luke. The Triumphal Entry of Christ into Jerusalem is in chapter 19. We are getting closer to the final week of the life of Christ before his death, burial and resurrection and as such, we can feel the intensity growing. Forty days after his resurrection, Christ returns to heaven and the plan to reach people with the gospel from every tribe, every language and every nation is going to be left in the hands of 11 men. Verse 11 says "*On the way to Jerusalem...*" 18.35 starts by saying, *As he drew near to Jericho...*" Chapter 19 begins with Jesus in Jericho which happens just days before he enters Jerusalem. We are getting close to the cross and to the end of Christ's physical presence on the earth. Jesus has a limited amount of time with his disciples. He is entrusting to them the mission for which he created the world.

So, what would you expect Jesus to talk about? Organizational structures? Local, regional, international goals and strategies? Funding, budgets and hiring policies? Politics, marketing? Instead, Jesus talks about them as persons and addresses the fact that what they are and how they live is very important to Christ. The Pharisees and the powerful may think they can overlook the little and the needy, but not you. Jesus is a different king and his kingdom operates according to laws that are unnatural to us, yet, intriguing.

### 1. **Mercy and faithfulness** (17.1-2)

Jesus explained to his disciples at the beginning of chapter 16 that they were to use whatever wealth the Lord gave them to make eternal friends. How can I generously invest what the Lord has given me to help others be in Christ, grow in Christ, be members of God's forever family? In chapter 16 Jesus condemns an inward focus and commends an upward and outward one.

Have you ever seen or been on a swing carousel? In the center is the large wheel, from which swings hang. As the center wheel begins to spin, the swings move out. This is often referred to as centrifugal force, which has an effect of moving away from the center. The opposite of that is centripetal force, where things are forced into the center, such as a whirlpool. It is natural for people to live with a Centripetal force orientation, where everything is drawn in to the center. We naturally think of ourselves, protect ourselves, etc. But followers of Christ have a change of heart that looks like a change of physics. Instead of sucking attention in, hoarding our time, resources, abilities, we push generosity out. We have an orientation that looks out for others. The Pharisees ridiculed Jesus for teaching this, and yet how is the Law summarized? Love God and Love others. The 10 commandments can be explained by loving God and loving others. When you love God, you will love others. Why is that? Why does the result of loving God always

mean that you will love others? Because God is love. Our Trinitarian God loves and delights in himself. The Father loves the Son, the Son loves the Father, the Spirit loves and celebrates the love of the Father and the Son. Each member of the Godhead loves. In that regard, God is the ultimate centrifugal force. He is an outward focused, giving out, loving others, God. Being made in the image of God means that we were made to love and to enjoy love.

The tragic failure of the rich man in the previous text was not that he failed to give the poor man some food, but that he did not love God and therefore, he did not care about anyone but himself. Jesus is still on this subject, because it is so vitally important. So now, he turns to his disciples and explains how caring for others (mercy) is so tightly related to faithfulness.

#### **A. Pronouncement and warning (1)**

The pronouncement is, *Temptations to sin are sure to come.* Now, what would you expect Jesus to say next? Be careful. Be on your guard so that you don't succumb to the temptation, right? But that is not what he says. He gives his disciples a warning. To issue a woe is to warn someone of a dire consequence and Jesus says woe to the person through whom the temptation to sin comes. Jesus is warning his disciples to be on your guard so that what you teach, or what you do does not become a stumbling block or an occasion for someone to not believe.

Your life matters to others. Your life influences others. What you believe and what you do has a profound effect on those around you. The rich man in the previous account lived as if he could do whatever he wanted. Others did not matter. But Jesus says, that is fundamentally not true. Therefore, since your life influences others, then you need to be careful so that the influence you have on others is good and is not the occasion for someone to stumble. The word translated temptations has the idea of causing someone to trip. It can refer to teaching false things that causes someone to defect from the faith.

If you have a measure of insecurity and uncertainty then you aren't entirely sure of who you are, what you believe and how you are to live. If you had a father figure who was angry, absent, distant, disconnected, or hypocritical then you will likely find it more challenging to feel like you know how exactly you are to live your life. When someone comes along who is confident, bold and articulate, you are drawn to that. They have certainty, courage and direction. You like that because you feel like that is missing from your life. People like that attract a following and it is often made up of people who simply need direction or a sense of belonging. Gang leaders know how to use that influence to demand unquestionable loyalty and control that is easily manipulated for power. So do some political leaders, cult and religious leaders, bosses, even certain kids. But the way we live as followers of Christ is patterned after Christ, who lived with a genuine orientation that cares about the good and flourishing of others.

Again, we were made to love and be loved. Being made in the image of God means that we were made to belong to a community. We want that. But when we don't get that from the right place, we are tempted to get that from the wrong place. Jesus is warning his disciples not to use their influence for themselves. Be careful that you do not mislead a person by teaching them

something that is not true. Be careful not to allow someone to mislead you. They will cause you to stumble and your stumbling will be the occasion for others to stumble.

Another related aspect of causing someone to stumble is when how we live does not match what we say. Jesus is acknowledging and warning about the fact that temptations to sin are going to happen within the community of believers. They are sure to come. Sin should grieve us, but it should not surprise us. But the fact that it happens and it will happen, does not mean that we get used to it, or treat it casually. The words of Jesus in verse are strong.

## **B. Explanation (2)**

A millstone in a home could weigh between 25 and 50 pounds. A millstone that was driven by an animal could weigh between 1 and 2,000 pounds. To have one tied around your neck and to be tossed into the sea would be certain death and a terrifying one at that. Jesus says that it would be better for you to die like that than to cause one of his little ones to stumble. He loves his children so much that he will not overlook those who prey on them or mislead them. While little ones could literally be children, it can often refer to new believers.

Sin lies to us and we are all too willing to believe the lies. Sin tells us that our sin is just our private thing. Not true. Your little habit is not little because there is no such thing as a little sin. There is a ripple effect of our sin. Some of you struggle with anger, alcohol and meds or other drugs because of family patterns. You lived with the impact, and yet are you repeating it to your children? Humble yourself. Love the little ones in your life enough to do the hard thing and get help because there is help and there is hope. This is a warning for all of us. People in leadership can do sinful things. When they do, the little ones who are a bit more idealistic may never recover. The same thing is true on the other side of the coin. When people are sinful toward leadership then the children of the leaders are often the ones who become embittered and never recover. What we are about is sacred and demands humble protection.

Beloved, I want to give you a word of encouragement. There are so many children of the leaders of this congregation who follow Jesus in part because of the faithful testimony of you. As a dad, you loved my children well. They were not raised in a perfect church, any more than a perfect home, but they heard the gospel taught and they saw it displayed in your life. And now, I am overwhelmed with gratitude that I have grandsons being raised in this church. But this grace must be guarded.

Many of you know the sense of crisis or alarm that you felt when you discovered that someone you looked up to, or trusted, turned out to be a fraud. It is like your world collapsed. When this happens in a home, a church, in the military, the police, or the government where trust is so essential, the fallout is catastrophic. The stakes are high for us. The gospel we preach and believe has the power to save people forever from hell and save them forever to God. But when we live unfaithfully, that incredible capacity for good becomes an incredible capacity for despair. Think about the effect your life has on others. Think about how your life is either attracting

people to grace or causing people to fall away. God is merciful. Those who know him are merciful and care how they affect others.

Faithfulness in word and deed is our superpower. When we faithfully believe and teach God's Word and seek to live accordingly, we are displaying mercy to others. We are caring for their souls and for their entire persons. And yet, temptations to sin are sure to come. So, what do we do when they come? Now Jesus addresses how we are to respond to that.

## 2. **Mercy and humility** (17.3-4)

### **A. Warning**

The warning of Jesus is strong. Pay attention to yourself, but again, it has a bit of a surprise to it. Pay attention to yourself when your brother sins. Temptations to sin are sure to come. Problems in the community are going to arise. Jesus actually promises this. That should not be a surprise to us. However, we should be prepared to respond and our response is because we take sin seriously. When someone sins, we cannot ignore it. We are tempted to ignore it because we don't want to get involved. But that is not mercy. Again, how did God respond to our sin? He got involved! He got so involved that he sent Christ to this earth who would live the life that we could not live so that he could offer up his perfect life as the full and final sacrifice for our sins that paid our debt in full. God was that merciful to us. So, when a brother (or sister) sins, look at yourself and put yourself on guard because you are tempted to ignore it by pretending that it is not a big deal or you are tempted to pretend that the brother or sister are beyond hope. Both are wrong, so pay attention that you don't believe that and do what Jesus commands.

### **B. Command**

The command has two parts that will have to be repeated over and over. 1) Rebuke the sinner. 2) Forgive him when he repents. If it happens again, repeat. If it happens again, repeat. If it happens again, repeat. If it happens again, repeat. If it happens again, repeat. If it happens again, repeat. You guessed it. I just said that seven times. That sounds crazy, which is probably why the disciples said (v.5) "Increase our faith." Let's define some terms. What does it mean to rebuke? Point out the wrong. Do it with humility, considering that you may not have the facts correct, you may misunderstand the situation, but if your brother sins against you, go to him and show him his fault between the two of you (Matthew 18). He may not know what he has done because we all have blind spots. If he repents, that is, if he sees it and confesses it and asks forgiveness, then forgive him.

Parents, here is a great opportunity to help your children grasp this. When you are teaching your kids how to resolve conflict, teach them the importance of confessing specific sins and the equal importance of forgiving them. E.g. I am sorry for taking your tablet. I was wrong, will you forgive me? The other child should learn to respond by saying, I forgive you. It is not helpful to say, "it's okay." Because our sin is not okay. Our sin has to be addressed and it is ultimately addressed by Christ on the cross. And when we forgive, we are making a promise not to bring

this up again to hurt the person with it. To do this seven times in a day, seems exhausting, except we sin way more than that before God in a day, so it really is not that big of a number.

But when you put all of this together Jesus is giving us a realistic, merciful, personal description and prescription for the church. He is telling his disciples how his community is to function. We know how the Pharisees functioned. They were image-conscious, money-loving, people-using, performance-driven and shame-based. That is NOT what the community of Christ is to be like.

What should we see that is easy to overlook? The church is a community of defined people who gather and who are involved in each other's lives. It is interesting to study the trends of church history and to see how the architecture of church buildings reflect the theology and practices of churches. In the early 1900's protestant churches began to be designed more by the up-front experience than the congregational gathering. It was then, when the rooms for the service were called auditoriums, because the word auditory means to hear. The congregant came to hear, to watch, and observe the action that was going on up there. The emphasis of the church was on the event of the service and the results that could be generated by the preacher in getting people to make professions and get baptized. It was very results oriented. As a result, the actual life of the community was often neglected. Fast forward to our day, when it is common to emphasize the upfront experience and minimize congregational life. What is missing is what Jesus is describing here. Jesus describes his people as ones who know and are known. They are in relationships with one another that are marked by honesty, humility and grace.

Honesty: Jesus says, temptations to sin are sure to come. He says this to his disciples because we are not a perfect bunch and won't be until we are in glory. Let's not pretend that we have it all together because Jesus knows that we don't so let's not be shocked by it. At the same time, be humble and realize that we all can fall and we can all be the occasion for others stumbling. So, we need to look out for one another and let others look out for us. When you see a brother or sister sinning, you need to help your brother and sister because if they don't address this, their sin will own them and they will cause others to stumble and be disillusioned and believe that the gospel is a joke. When you help your brother or sister, do so with humility because you are not perfect either and you have some things you need to grow in as well. And when there is repentance, be generous with forgiveness. God has been incredibly generous with you.

What is the good and merciful culture that Jesus wants in his church? He wants us to have personal relationships forged by the gospel and greased by grace where we help one another become more like Christ, where we talk about meaningful things and aren't afraid to address the hard stuff because we know that we are people who know how to repent, how to forgive, how to be forgiven and how to live in that forgiveness received and given.