

My Brother's Keeper, Part 1

Luke 17:1-2

August 21, 2022

It's been a while since we've been in the Gospel of Luke, and I think it would be a good idea to take a few minutes just to orient ourselves with where we are in this blessed narrative.

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.

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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.

We see in that longer section, that second major section, Jesus' power and authority over disease and death. He has power and authority over forces, natural and supernatural. We see him calming a storm on the Sea of Galilee. We see him casting out demons. We see miracles of compassion, especially his power, oriented toward compassion and lifting burdens for people. He heals people. He feeds people. He raises the dead. He restores the widow's son, at Nain, to, back to the widow.

We hear his teaching. We hear the Sermon on the Mount, the parables of the kingdom. We watch as he selects, and trains, and

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sends, his twelve apostles. His Galilean ministry comes to its zenith near the city of Caesarea Philippi, up north of the Sea of Galilee. And it's with Peter's great confession, there, that Jesus is not just some great prophet. He's not Elijah, come back. He's not a resurrected John the Baptist. He is none other than the Christ of God.

And Peter makes that great confession, because the Spirit has taught him and informed him. Jesus comes bearing divine glory, which several of them are able to see. Peter, James, and John see on the Mount of Transfiguration, but as Jesus says, That glory will be revealed through suffering. 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; many of them very influential in their local synagogues. Early on, the Pharisees, they were intrigued by Jesus. They liked what they saw from a distance, early on, as they were hearing about Jesus. They watched his rise to prominence and they wondered if he might be the Messiah.

Nicodemus, in John chapter 3, expressed those early sentiments of favor toward Jesus. He says, We have been watching, seeing the miracles you do, and no one can do that unless he's been sent by God, unless he comes from God.

So, they're favorable to him at the beginning. And you need to understand that the Pharisees, they're not some pointy nose, pointy eared, fanged bad guys, that are in kind of scary

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novels and that kind of thing. These guys, they really would be acceptable in an evangelical church, in our own day. It's really helpful if we see them that way. That these are well taught, though unsaved, but well taught Bible believing evangelicals. That's what these guys are. They believe the Bible. They weren't like the Sadducees, who rejected all the Old Testament, except for the first five books.

The Sadducees, who were the liberals of the day. They rejected the supernatural. They rejected miracles. The Pharisees are believers. They're Bible people. They believe in the law and the prophets. And as they look at Jesus early on, they like the fact that Jesus didn't come from among the elites. He didn't come from the upper crust of society. He wasn't a member of the corrupt priesthood. He's not in league with Rome. He's not vying for political power. He's a Galilean.

But he's not a zealot Galilean like so many of them are. Seemed to be rather well taught, like not, like the rest of those rubes and hicks up in Galilee, but he's actually well taught. He doesn't isolate himself like the Essene esthetics;

the, the, guys who are like monks or squirreled away in some caves studying arcane references. He is out there among the people and he's teaching, and he's doing, and he's traveling.

They like this guy. They're inclined to like him. Doesn't take long, though, as we've seen in our narrative, for the Pharisees to realize Jesus is no respecter of persons. He doesn't show favoritism. He's not there to affirm their status. He's not there to affirm and leave them comfortable in their social standing. He's not there to kowtow to their wealth. He doesn't need it. He's not impressed with their scribes; these experts in the law that backed them up, the lawyers. These great exegetes that they have in their back pocket.

In fact, the law of Moses that they tried to hide behind, the law of Moses that these Pharisees and scribes used as a weapon, he took it out of their hands and used it on them. Jesus showed them the true intent of the law. How it revealed the true holiness of God. What we just confessed in the London Baptist Confession of Faith; these great confessions are all based on Scripture.

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What we learn not just from the New Testament, but go back to the Old Testament and see the Shema Yisrael and what it confesses about God. It's that, that we just confessed on the screens. These guys understood the law. Jesus takes them deeper. He wants them to see the true holiness of God and the holiness of God will not tolerate their sin. The holiness of God will not compromise with their sin, just because they're children of Abraham. Just because their descendants of Abraham. God will not favor them, when they sin.

The law exposes the deep sinfulness of men. Shows them their need for a savior. It shows them through the history of the law, and the prophets, and, and, all the rest. It shows them all the men that have failed. Whether it's King David, a man after God's own heart. He failed big time. Whether it's the prophets like Moses himself, who instead of speaking to the rock, he disobeyed and struck the rock. He's not their savior. Showed him Elijah and Elisha, men themselves, who also failed and stumbled. The priesthood, Aaron and his sons, they're no saviors either.

The law exposes the deep sinfulness of men, reveals their need for a savior, and it points ahead to a savior, who has yet to come. And here's Jesus, Luke chapter four, in his own hometown synagogue of Nazareth, saying, I of whom Isaiah prophecies am here." Jesus comes. He's not going to give them a pass, these Pharisees. He insults their pride, just by being himself. Just by speaking righteously. Telling the truth, he insults their pride.

He rejected their traditions, because he doesn't need the word of God layered over with traditions of men, that hamper and hinder people from getting to the truth. So, he rejects the traditions. He's not impressed with their money. He's not impressed with their achievements. He doesn't care what, they've done, they say they've done for God in the past. Building tombs and all the rest for the prophets.

He wants them to see themselves, as they really are. He wants to hold up a mirror of God's law and let them see themselves, for how they really are. So, they can, just get a,

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just a slight glimpse of how God sees them, in order that they might bow the knee and repent, and find salvation, in Christ.

He wants them to know God as he really is. He wants them to know the true joy of what it is to have a relationship with God. To truly love the lord your God with all your heart, and soul, and mind, and strength. And out of that love for God, and a love that's received from God, loving your neighbor as yourself.

Jesus, in love, wants all the best for them and they hated him for it. They hated him for it. Why? Because when the truth of God comes to a sinful world, a sinner will either bow the knee in repentance, or will brace for impact, and fight tooth and nail to reject the truth. And these Pharisees, rather than receive Jesus as their king, rather than confess him as the Christ of God, as Peter had, the Pharisees turned on him.

All through this travel section, 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

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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."

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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

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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.

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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,

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"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?

If you're asking that question and you're a bit puzzled, listen, you're not alone. Most commentators share your same perplexity with this section of Scripture. They actually suggest, many of them, most of them I would say, they suggest that Luke has inserted some random teachings into the text here. That this section from Luke 17:1 through 10. This section, right here, has no real connection to the prior parable or the prior context, or the, the, coming context.

And even individually, like you have verses 1 and 2, 3 and 4, 5 and 6, and then 7 through 10, that those four elements,

they say that those are not connected with each other either. They're really just some sayings that Luke has gathered together. Fragments of Jesus teaching, that he's like, man, this is too good to be lost. Let me shove it in here. Many people feel that way. One of them says, this chapter gives the impression of being a group of fragments with little connection in place, time, or topic.

Another says, most hold that these four unrelated teachings, Luke has brought together. And then he goes on to say that these are just four proverbial sayings related to discipleship. They are related to discipleship, but are they unrelated? Even some of the conservative faithful commentators, ones I regard, respect, they can tend to take the same approach. My appeal to them, and my appeal to you, now, is that we don't write Luke off, so quickly.

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

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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.

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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.

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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

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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 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

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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.

That's my introduction. Way too long, you say. Okay. Guilty as charged. Let's get into the outline. We're starting here with the first four verses, and I'm gonna give you actually the outline up front. Two points. But I'm only going to cover the first one in detail today. I'll mention the second one, but we'll really get into that next week. Okay, so here's the outline, starting with the first four verses.

Outline, is this, two points. 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.

Literally, a *skandalon* is kind of the bait stick that triggers a trap, so you can, pic, picture on those little box traps kids sets up to catch a little animal. There's a stick,

and there's a string, and there's bait inside, and when the animal goes in, he pulls on the stick, and the stick is the *skandalon*. So, he pulls that *skandalon* out and snares; springs the snare and traps the prey.

Skandalon is the noun form. The verb form used, at the end of verse 2, is *scandalizo*. ESV translate it, translates that, the end of verse 2, caused to sin. Caused to sin. That's the end result. But a better translation for *scandalizo*, is caused to stumble, caused to fall. So, it's, it's, to stumble. It's to fall, because of a stumbling block. It's to see the bait stick triggered. It's to be ensnared. It's to fall helplessly into the trap.

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:

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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

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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.

Turn back couple chapters and take a look. Go back to Luke 10, chapter 10 in verse 25 and following and we can see the stumbling block coming in the person of a lawyer. A lawyer, who's a scribe, who's an expert in the law, and he spoke to Jesus out of this deep-seated pride, that's not only loveless, but he's self-justifying in his indifference toward people. Jesus confronts, corrects the lawyer in the parable, the Good Samaritan. Listen, these guys are a conduit of pride, of loveless indifference toward people, and they justify themselves with Bible verses to do it.

In Luke 11, verse 14, and following, flip ahead a chapter, you can see the Pharisees, they can't accept Jesus' good work of casting out demons at face value. Instead, they insinuate that Jesus is really in league with the devil. They attribute all of his good works to Satan. So, what are they a conduit of there? Doubt, suspicion, assuming evil motives, refusing to believe.

Verse 37 of chapter 11 and following, all the way to the end of the chapter, Jesus condemns the scribes and the Pharisees for their pride, because they exalt external appearance at the expense of internal piety. They try to look good on the outside and when, when, in reality they're corrupt and they are filled with sin.

Rather than separate from Jesus, or better even, bow the knee to Jesus, they continue to hang around with their unregenerate selves. And look at verses 11, chapter 11, verse 53, Jesus went away from there. The scribes and the Pharisees began to press him hard and to provoke him to speak about many things, and they're lying-in wait for him. Catch him, in something he might say.

They're Relentless. They're personal. It's relational, and they are perennial thorns in his side, ever present, always there to oppose him. Mixed into the crowds of disciples, always there to influence them, always there to lead astray. That's why Jesus is constantly warning his disciples about them.

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.

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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.

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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

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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

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Greeley

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

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Greeley

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

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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.

So, because stumbling blocks are inevitable, because they're personal, come through people. Because they're

perennial, lethal, cruel, Jesus says to his disciples in verse 3, "Pay attention to yourselves." Pay attention. How do they do that? How do we pay attention to ourselves? We come to that second point and I'm just gonna mention this briefly. Number 2, sin is insidious. It's deceptive. It's sneaky. It's tricky. It insinuates itself. Sin is insidious. So, practice biblical confrontation.

Practice biblical confrontation. The Pharisee's spirit is always insinuating itself into the fellowship. So, as Jesus says, in verses 3 to 4, "Pay attention to yourselves! If your brother sins, rebuke him. 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." And Jesus says, "If your brother sins, rebuke him."

It's making a clear allusion to an Old Testament teaching, when Moses said this in Leviticus 19:17, "You must not harbor hatred against your brother. Rebuke your brother directly. Rebuke your neighbor directly, and you will not incur guilt because of him." There's the principle. And it's the same thing

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Greeley

in the household of faith now. Love requires biblical confrontation; direct, straightforward, gentle, kind, loving.

But it is the epitome of love to care for somebody by addressing their sin. Proverbs 27:5 says, "Better is open rebuke than hidden love." Hidden love is not love at all. It's a sham. It's a sappy, sentimental counterfeit, that costs nothing, and means nothing. True love is gonna risk the friendship. As the next verse says, "Faithful are the wounds of a friend; profuse are the kisses of the enemy."

On the one hand, Pharisees, they said, I'm not my brother's keeper. Those tax collectors and sinners, they're not my neighbor. Lazarus at the gate, he's not my neighbor. He's a squatter. He came there. He has no right to be there. I don't have any responsibility. They refused to confront and rebuke sin. They refused to get involved, refused to get their hands dirty, they refuse to endure the discomfort.

Now on the other hand, when they saw sin, they refused to forgive it, especially sin against themselves. Their posture

GRACE CHURCH

Greeley

toward sinners, where there's the prodigal son, tax collector, sinners, Lazarus; their attitude is one of arrogant condescension. Their stance is aloof. Their hearts are cold and indifferent. Their words are critical and censorious. By an arrogant condescension and with words of scorn, they discouraged all the penitent from coming to Jesus. By social pressure, by censure, by ostracizing, they intimidated believers, true believers, from receiving the penitent.

The way we, as Christians, will avoid that sin is by paying attention to ourselves, by pay attention to this fellowship of believers, by getting in each other's lives, putting this to practice, here in our own local church. And you need to say this to yourself often, I am my brother's keeper. You are beloved. Don't be indifferent to me. Don't be indifferent to one another. We need to love one another by confronting each other.

And I gotta say, just as a word of testimony to this church, I've watched the members of this church, over the years, practice biblical confrontation. Not all equally and not all

GRACE CHURCH

Greeley

equally well. But I've watched people practice biblical confrontation, out of loving concern for each other, for the good of the one in sin, because they love them. They don't want him to continue in soul destructive sin. And I've been so thankful to see those who've taken the risk with each other, even years, many years of friendship. And they'll cross that uncomfortable barrier to say, brother, I think there's something in your life we need to pay attention to.

Let's keep doing that with each other, and let's make it easy for those who are taking the risk to confront each other and be receptive to confrontation. Can we have humble hearts and just say, look, I'm not, not, all that? I've not arrived. The Apostle Paul himself can say, I don't consider myself as having arrived there, yet. You think the rest of us could say the same? Let's keep it up because we are our brother's keeper. Amen.

Father, thank you for these clear, clear words of Jesus Christ. To help us see that we are our brother's keeper. Help us see that this confrontation is not only necessary, but it is truly loving. To get into each other's lives and help each other

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Greeley

to see, recognize sin, repent of it, to be corrected, and to walk in the way of righteousness. Pray, father, that you would help us to live this out. By your spirit, for your glory, in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.