

PP We Are Our Brother's Keeper

Text Proverbs 24:8-12

4/26-27/2014

Illus "In a world lacking social services, Christians were their brothers' keepers. At the end of the second century AD, Tertullian, a Christian Theologian, wrote that while pagan temples spend their donations *"on feasts and drinking bouts,"* Christians spent theirs *"to support and bury poor people, to supply the wants of boys and girls destitute of means and parents, and of old persons confined to the house."* These claims concerning Christian charity were confirmed by pagans as well. The pagan Emperor Julian complained, *"The impious Galileans (Christians) support not only their poor, but ours as well."* Christian History magazine, 1998, Rodney Stark

PP 1-Our world is full of evil people

***"Wisdom is too high for a fool; in the gate he does not open his mouth. Whoever plans to do evil will be called a schemer. The devising of folly is sin, and the scoffer is an abomination to mankind."* 24:7-9**

Wisdom comes down to us from on high, where God gives to those who ask

PP *"But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere."* James 3:17

So Solomon teaches his son, wisdom is above the ability of a fool to obtain, even if that fool has a seat on the gate

The gate of a city was the newspaper, it was the court, and it was the center of public life

It was the pulpit for preaching, and the place for begging

It was also the place where prominent leaders of a community sat, a tribunal to judge over the affairs of the people of the city even in issues like verse 6, deciding to go to war or not

A seat among the 'Elders of the gate' was a high honor, while 'oppression in the gates' was a phrase for a corrupt ruler or judge

PP Job was one such elder who sat in the gate and *'delivered the poor who cried for help, and the fatherless who had none to help him'* Job 29:12

PP From the gate he *'caused the widow's heart to sing for joy.'* 29:13

PP From there he was *'eyes to the blind and feet to the lame...father to the needy, and searched out the cause of him whom I did not know.'* 29:15-16

In other words, he investigated cases that he heard and deliberated at the gate

But the fool was corrupt, *'in the gate he does not open his mouth'*, refusing to speak up on behalf of the oppressed

Meetings at the gate were for the wise to speak wisely, on behalf of justice, but the fool has nothing to contribute to the welfare of those in need, so he remains silent

There are evil people on the gate who are schemers

***"Whoever plans to do evil will be called a schemer. The devising of folly is sin, and the scoffer is an abomination to mankind."* 24:8-9**

PP A 'schemer' has *"a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that make haste to run to evil"* Proverbs 6:18

Planning to do evil is sin, and it is done, verse 9, by the person who is a '*scoffer*', who holds God in contempt, who has no fear of God in his eyes

Scoffers see themselves as superior to God and to others, who bring nothing good to people, but instead are ***‘an abomination to mankind’*** (9b)
 Our world is full of evil people who mock God and His Word and bring evil to others
 It is into this darkness that the Christian is to shine the light of Christ

PP 2-Our responsibility is clear

Not too long ago, I told you that God is more and more clearly directing our church to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, to bring the hope and healing of the gospel
“More than one generation of children in the Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has never known a secure, peaceful childhood”. Since 1996, the nation has lost more than 5 million inhabitants due to war and conflict. Estimates are that of the 250,000 child soldiers worldwide, tens of thousands are active in Africa’s Great Lakes Region. The typical ways to recruit these children is to abduct them from their families, killing or maiming their fathers and raping their mothers and sisters and then teaching them to grow up and do the same. Reports are that between 1.69 million and 1.80 million women have been raped in the DRC, a weapon of war that *“is designed to destroy the very fabric of society”*.

We have 5 people riding bicycles down Florida this summer in the ‘She’s My Sister’ tour, raising monies and awareness to bring Christ-centered trauma counseling to these women
 Our responsibility is clear: When God shows us suffering, it is our responsibility to do what we can to relieve it

‘Rescue those who are being taken away to death, hold back those who are stumbling to the slaughter.’

‘Rescue’, or *deliver* those helplessly caught in the strength of evil

God is incredibly concerned with our commitment to justice!

It is demonstrated in many parts of the Old Testament, but let me show you one of them

To prevent murder among people, God Himself developed capital punishment, commanding it to be carried out in several cases

But look at God’s mercy against injustice, even in murder cases

He commanded that 6 cities of refuge be established allowing for a fair trial

The roads to these cities were maintained and the cities located so that no one was more than 30 miles from one

It was the victim’s next of kin who had to do the executing, not a dispassionate prison official

There had to be no less than two eye witnesses, circumstantial evidence was not accepted

The court was open all day in case fresh evidence of the innocence of the accused was obtained

On the day of execution, a man was sent through the city in advance of the condemned person, inviting any who had evidence of his innocence to step forward

At the courthouse was a man with a white cloth and within eye sight, was a man on horseback

If last second evidence of innocence came into the court, the man would wave the white cloth and the horse rider would gallop to the execution site and stop the execution

There was no limit to the appeal process if someone could advance further pleas of innocence

The premium was put on those who were witnesses, to speak up and rescue, maintain justice!

So, ***‘Rescue’***, ***‘hold back’*** those who are unjustly accused and convicted

But furthermore, **'Rescue', 'hold back'** those who suffer from circumstances they cannot change
like famine and disease

'Rescue', 'hold back' those who are genuinely poor or cannot work due to circumstances
beyond their control

'Rescue', 'hold back' those who are victims of cruel governments and dictatorships.

But most of all and more than anything, **'Rescue', 'hold back'** those caught in the strong grip of
sin and are on their way to hell!

Picture the horror that awaits them, be a witness that they can be declared innocent because
the Son of God took their place and died their death that they might live!

We must rise up and declare the good news that God through Christ offers them life

We who are witnesses to salvation, who have been saved ourselves, must speak!

But most of us instead, have made excuses that have lulled us into a false sense that we are not
responsible

Solomon anticipates this and shows us that...

PP 3-Our excuses are disastrous

PP a) We cannot claim weakness

We tend to see the scope of a problem, and say, *'There is nothing I can do, it's just too big.'*

*His whole family has struggled like this, since I've known them, they are never going to change,
so why get involved in their mess?*

So many who adopt go through such terrible struggles, so why risk it for my family?

Meanwhile, as I heard this past week, 150,000 children in the US alone are waiting for adoption

There are 1.2 million abortions in America each year

Nearly 300,000 children per year in the US are forced into the sex trade, each child generating
\$150,000-\$200,000 each year for his or her pimp, who has 4-6 girls on average

What will my little bit of volunteerism do in the face of this huge need?

Friends, biblical saints always faced problems too big for them alone to deal with

Gideon and his tiny group of 300 soldiers faced a horde of Midianites and Amalekites and all the

PP people of the East who ***'lay along the valley like locusts in abundance, and their camels
were without number, as the sand that is on the seashore in abundance.'*** Judges 7:12

And they were more than enough with the Lord, Who confounded the enemy's soldiers: ***'the***

PP ***Lord set every man's sword against his comrade and against all the army.'*** Judges 7:22

One little boy offered his meager lunch to help feed a crowd that numbered over 20,000

And it was more than enough because the Lord took it and multiplied it

When we ***'faint in the day of adversity'***, the problem is our faith in God is too small

God takes our meager, frail, seemingly insufficient offering and multiplies it for His purposes to
bring justice, and healing and hope to people around the world

Jesus took eleven untrained, raw, sinful men, trained them, and used them to change the world

He took a back-desert murderer and enabled him to free over 2 million Jews from slavery and
lead them to the Promised Land

"If you faint in the day of adversity, your strength is small."

Friends, if we give in before evil, doing nothing, we have no power, and wisdom would do something about it!

“A wise man is full of strength, and a man of knowledge enhances his might,” Proverbs 24:5

Wisdom is available to anyone, it calls out from the market, and it fills a person with strength

It is the power to live skillfully before the Lord and with each other

And for the Christian, wisdom is an earnest prayer away, a gift God is always willing to give

PP b) We cannot claim ignorance

“If you say, “Behold, we did not know this,” does not He who weighs the heart perceive it?”

‘I didn’t know there was a need’

In the Old Testament, people were primarily taught it was wrong to do wrong, but Christ expanded on the Law and taught that it was wrong not to do right

Recall the story of the Good Samaritan, when the Priest and the Levite, who saw the injured man and did nothing to help, were just as guilty as the ones who had robbed and beaten him

We often confess to God that we have done things we should not have done, but how often do we confess that we have not done that which we should have done?

And suddenly we remember the servant who did not use the money his master gave him to prosper his master, or those who didn’t give water to the thirsty, or visit prisoners

They did not do what they should have, rather than did what they shouldn’t have and Christ holds them up to judgment

Friends, we cannot ignore the evil all around us saying we are not responsible to help

We cannot shut our eyes against tyranny and oppression, even if it is on the other side of the world from us

When God shows us evil, we are to begin earnestly laboring for good, even if it is in prayer

What He reveals to us is what He calls us to labor in the gospel for!

PP c) We cannot claim an exemption

“Does not He who keeps watch over your soul know it, and will He not repay man according to His work?” 24:12b

The first in we see the concept of the responsibility of being a brother’s keeper is in the angry,

PP rebellious reply that Cain gave to God: ***“And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him. Then the LORD said to Cain, “Where is Abel your brother?” He said, “I do not know; am I my brother’s keeper?” Genesis 4:8-9***

Nearly all of the rest of the bible gives the answer to that question: YES!

But our flesh makes the excuse, *‘It’s not my responsibility, someone else will help’*

What does it mean to be a ‘brother’s keeper’?

I do not have time to give the fullest answer to this but start with the word responsibility

The ability to respond to the needs of another, whether those needs are physical or spiritual

I had someone recently come to me believing that his friend was being sexually impure, so I suggested he talk with his friend about it, lovingly, boldly and graciously

He did, it went well, he was living out his responsibility to be his brother’s keeper

Our world wants to lull us into a self-directed, self-insulating cocoon, *worry about yourself*
 The gospel opens our eyes and persuades us we do not belong to this world, but to the kingdom
 of God, and we are working in His kingdom on earth, laboring for justice, bringing hope
 to the shattered, strength to the weary, food for the hungry, holiness to the impure
 So has God given you finances, a spacious home, an extra car, a gift of mercy, abundant food?
 Or abilities to help others in need?
 They are to be held with open fists, allowing God to reach down and take from them and divert
 them wherever He chooses
 And friends, not one of us is exempt from this responsibility!

PP Even in exile in Babylon, God commanded His people, *“seek the welfare of the city where I
 have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will
 find your welfare.”* **Jeremiah 29:7**

The message is clear for us this side of the cross as the same divine command is for us
 This world is full of evil people, it is a place of injustice causing suffering everywhere
 People are exiles in this world, caught up in the strong grip of sin under the control of the
 scheming, evil devil

Pray, God’s people, pray and act!

PP *“Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce.”* **29:5**

Quit trying to escape the world, creating little Christian subcultures, living only in the walls of
 the church

Settle into the world, be in it, but don’t be of it!

PP *“Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your
 daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do
 not decrease.”* **29:6**

Witness, share the gospel, disciple many, build God’s family here on earth

Multiply *‘there’*, at your jobs, your schools, your dorms, your teams, your neighborhoods, your
 clubs, your gym, your carpooling, your bus ride to work

God is infinitely concerned with those who are suffering, and He has raised up the church to be
 Brother’s Keeper’s, fighting for justice, and offering all people hope and healing
 None of us are exempt from this kind of life!
 Wisdom would offer us the skill to be our brother’s and sister’s keepers

Amen??

Pray!