

**My Brothers Keeper
Growing up ... again**

Part 2 – Foundation (Truth and relationships)

Last week James introduced us to the current series called My Brothers Keeper and looked at the Scripture where God spoke to Cain.

Gen 4v9

⁹Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?"
"I don't know," he replied. "**Am I my brother's keeper?**"

And of course the answer is yes.

Cain got it wrong.

He asked the right question too late.

He should have asked the questions when the negative feelings started swirling around.

Because bearing God's image into the world does mean

keeping each other

And there is a question he didn't ask but is just as relevant

"Do I need to be kept."

Have you ever watched a small child, aged around 2-3 years old.

They move around and basically do whatever pops into their head.

Lets eat dirt, great idea.

Oh look dog food, wonder what that tastes like.

Ah big brother, let's smack him with this toy I happen to be holding.

Lunch time, which hole does this stuff fit in again?

Wow it does make pretty patterns and colours when you rub it on the wall.

This food is green, must keep mouth closed, wow look at mom pull funny faces to make me eat it, must do this more often.

Love the sound of the stone scraping against dad's car, I can do this all afternoon

And so on.

Why do young children operate like this.

Because that what they feel like doing.

It's a completely feeling based reactive existence, that is how they test boundaries.

Constantly curious and that's good.

Continually turning to the next thing that grabs your attention because there is so much to learn.

Now

Project that forward 20 years.

What does that look like?

Would you call the same behaviour acceptable?

Of course not.

Why?

Because it is our job as parents to take a curious and reactive child and convert them into a fully functional mindful and self aware member of the local community

As parents we teach them to put a filter between feelings and action.

E.g. I feel like smacking my sister.

No, hang on, that didn't work out well the last ten times I did that.

Oh yes, it's painful both for me and her,

I need to love her and protect because she is my sister and just because I feel like doing it does not make it right,

so let me modify my behaviour because I'm starting to understand why ...

And whatever we don't teach them, life will.

And whatever life doesn't or can't, will get them into trouble.

Welcome to today's lesson on My Brother's Keeper, part 2

Growing up ... again

Growing up

(God is calling us to maturity)

I think we all understand that there is a conversion process that needs to take place somewhere between birth and adulthood and that the parents are mainly in charge of that process.

Sorry parents.

The truth is however that at the point where someone becomes a Christian.

A second birth takes place.

Ever wondered why it's called a second birth.

Couldn't we just call it an affirmation or something.

We could but that would not be the truth.

In John 3v4 Jesus said we need to be born again

The truth is, it is a second birth because a baby is produced, according to Paul.

Listen to this passage that he writes to the Corinthian church.

1 Cor 3v1-4

*Brothers and sisters, I could not address you as people who live by the Spirit but as people who are still worldly--**mere infants in Christ**. ²I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. ³You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting **like mere humans**? ⁴For when one says, "I follow Paul," and another, "I follow Apollos," are you not **mere human beings**?*

The context is the behaviour of the Corinthians.

They were arguing about who was following who.

The point Paul was making that they should be following Christ and not a human being.

However the section I want to point out is that Paul called these adults, "infants in Christ"

Babies in Christ who had just been born again.

Why was this necessary?

Because it appeared as if they had not grown beyond the infant stage.

They were still, "*acting like mere humans*".

I had never considered that as an insult before, but there it is.

They were still worldly Paul says because they were still arguing and quarreling about some very basic Christian facts that they should have grown out of a long time ago.

So why am I discussing this?

Because there is a principle in play here.

It's called Christian growth and the first stage is a baby Christian who needs to learn the Christian way, because at their baptism the Corinthians proclaimed that Jesus was Lord and this behaviour did not reflect that proclamation.

What does the end point look like?

Let's look at two passages.

The first one is from Jesus Himself when He was explaining the parable of the four soils to His disciples.

I don't want to read the whole thing but let's join at the end.

Luk 8v14-15

*The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life's worries, riches and pleasures, and **they do not mature.** ¹⁵But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who **hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop.***

Again what is the principle here.

There is a moment in time which can be called 'immature' and something can get in the way of the maturation process.

The maturation process is not optional nor automatic.

Jesus says that we are starting to mature when we, "*hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop*".

We become mature.

Paul kind of sums it up in Eph 4v11

And he breaks it up into stages.

He says Christ gave us a whole bunch of people (evangelists, pastors, teachers) to equip us
So

That we, the congregation can become mature (again implying we all start immature, no exceptions)

Then

We will stop being messed around by the world and its people (the 'mere human' way)

Eph 4v15

¹⁵Instead,

speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ.

Instead

The process is, "*speaking the truth in love*" and it will result in growth
"*In every respect*" we will become a mature body of Christ.

To sum it up we can say

The point of conversion,
when rebirth happens,

as we become a Christian **everyone** starts off their Christian life as an immature infant.
(It has nothing to do with your biological age, your worldly status, your gender or your culture)

And because I am My Brother's Keeper.

A maturing process has to be applied to my brother/sister

And as the brother/sister I should expect it to happen to me

And the process is '*speaking the truth in love*' to each other

Basically it's a process called the 'mere human' to mature Christian converter.

Keeping my feelings

(that can get in the way of our growth)

That's on the one hand, on the side where I am charged to be my brothers keeper

On the other hand I am also the one to be kept (spiritually mature).

Everyone wants to be a keeper

No-one wants to be kept.

Unfortunately that is not an option,

I need a keeper else I am not going to mature.

So, God expects growth in our relationships, but there is a problem.

There is a barrier to growth that we have to recognise and overcome.

What was the driving force behind a small child's actions?

His feelings, it did what it felt like doing.

We then have to teach the child to understand that the world will not tolerate a reactive, feelings driven adult and that we have to approach life responsibly.

We need to be taught to manage our feelings.

I can't do what I want, I have to do what a responsible adult will do.

There is a interesting paragraph in a book called 10 laws of boundaries by Cloud and Townsend, and I quote:

It is crucial for the two-year-old to throw the peas at Mommy, but to continue that until forty-three is too much. A reactive stage is a stage, not an identity. Do not stay there.

But parental teaching can only take us so far
because

the world is quite tolerant when it comes to feelings and allows 'mere humans' to do what they feel like doing until it affects society badly and then they lock you up, if they can catch you.

And so when we become disciples of Jesus ... we have to start again

As spiritual infants

Drinking spiritual milk

To learn the way of God's family.

There is a passage in Mat 18 that I have read many times and I'm still wrestling it.

Mat 18v1-5

At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who, then, is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"

*²He called a little child to him, and placed the child among them. ³And he said: "Truly I tell you, **unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.***

*⁴Therefore, whoever takes the **lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.***

⁵And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.

That, "*unless you change and become like little children*" bit is a puzzle.

What attributes of a little child do I need to accept?

But then Jesus adds, "*whoever takes the lowly position of this child*"

And it becomes clearer

I need to be ready to be taught again.

Like an infant that needs milk.

So there is a barrier to learning.

I need to accept that I need to learn from scratch.

Not behave like a 'mere human', reactive and controlled by their feelings.

We cannot do away with feelings

(Bean bag and what they look like)

We can however overcome their whispers once we recognise how important it is to do so.

What whispers?

(Exercise story - enough reasons not to exercise)

You're tired, don't go to ...

You've been enough times, don't go ...

There are enough people there so I don't have to ...

I don't need to grow (even though Jesus calls us to) because ...

I don't need help, when I do I'll call someone.

And so on and so on.

Whispers.

And sometimes we give in to them

Some positive, some negative

Infants listen to all of them

As spiritual adults, we need to recognise the negative ones.

Paul fought a similar battle.

Sometimes we think that Paul just sailed through his life just being this awesome evangelist, but that is not quite right.

Rom 7v14-25

¹⁴ *We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin.*

¹⁵ *I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.*

...

*For I have the desire to do what is good, **but I cannot carry it out.***

¹⁹ *For I do not **do the good I want to do**, but the evil I do not want to do--this I keep on doing.*

²⁰ *Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.*

Paul is wrestling.

Mightily

On the one hand he knows he is an un-spiritual sinner.

On the other he knows the law is spiritual

and it's what he wants to do,

he has a desire to do it,

he wants to do good

... But he keeps on doing evil

He is wrestling

And that happens within all of us.

So I'm called to mature and grow as a Christian

But I am hampered because I am not discerning when it comes to what I'm feeling

Help.

Within God's Word

(Because we are dealing with God's own children)

So on the one hand I need to be my brothers keeper.

On the other, I need to be kept,

I have my own struggles about dealing with feelings when someone helps me.

What am I missing?

A huge element of the relationship puzzle.

Who grew up with more than one sibling in the home?

I was an only child so I had find people to fight with.

I did however have two children.

And I was a witness to my wife's family of five children so I have some experience.

One of the characteristics of families is that they often fight tooth and nail with each other. Within the family boundaries.

However, when someone from the outside messes with your brother or sister, then suddenly everyone bands together and you defend that family.

Especially if you're the parent.

Don't let anyone say anything against your child.

(Story - Joan dealing with Nadia)

Because even if they have a point, THEY HAVE NO RIGHT TO MESS WITH YOUR KID...

Family is a tightly knit entity.

Why am I saying this?

Gal 3v26

²⁶So in Christ Jesus **you are all children of God** through faith,

²⁷for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.

²⁸There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

²⁹If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and **heirs** according to the promise.

So here's the thing

We are not dealing with the world and its ways anymore.

We have been born again, by our own choice, into a new family

With God as the Father

So we are now directly dealing with ... God's ... own ... children.

And John then takes it a step further.

1 Joh 3v10

*This is how we know who **the children of God** are and who the children of the devil are:*

Anyone who does not do what is right is not God's child,

nor is anyone who does not love their brother and sister.

And what distinguishes these children, is how they treat each other.

Either with love

Or not doing what is right

That's how God knows His children.

This one is my favourite though.

In Acts 9 Saul is persecuting Christians with great zeal.

He undertakes a journey to Damascus as we pick up the story.

Act 9v3

As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him.

⁴*He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him,*

*"Saul, Saul, why do you persecute **me**?"*

Persecute who Lord?

"Me", God Himself.

When you don't love God's children.

You don't love God.

To quote from Michael Burn's book, Life as God's Family (pg 66)

To be a Christian is to be part of God's Family ...
The way we treat God's Family is the way we treat Him.

Simply put, Christians are called to be a community of brothers and sisters who love one another as **evidence** of our love for God

That elevates our relationships and their importance to another level.
Now suddenly managing my feelings becomes critical.

(Mortar)

Last week James went through a number of Scriptures that spoke about how we need to relate to one another.

In summary, this is the growing up process that must be part of our lives.

Stop, "grumbling, slandering, gossiping, passing judgment, biting and devouring, provoking and envying" each other.

Through, "teaching, instructing, admonishing, spurring on, encouraging, confessing"

To, "be at peace, devoted, living in harmony, accepting, bearing with, serving and submitting"

Basically, "Love one another"

We all start off in the 'mere human' condition
The way we were before we were called by God
Reactive to everything like an infant.
A mere human
But that ends in the waters of baptism.
Born again
Convicted of the Truth
Filled with feelings, surrounded by the solid Word of God
A child of God my Father
Surrounded by His Children
Called to be my Brother's and my Sister's Keeper.
Loving them as a measurement of my love for God.
As I have been loved by Him

Amen

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