

Brothers Keeper  
Genesis 4:1-16  
6-1-2025

We live in the midst of a tug of war between two competing and diametrically opposed worldviews.

One says in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.  
The other says there is no God so in the beginning creation just kind of happened on its own.

Chance verses design

One places God at the center of creation while the other puts man and self there.

One says since there is a God who created us and is involved with his creation, what we do and how we live matters. Life does have meaning and purpose.  
The other says since it is all by chance, what difference does anything really make.

One says there is a higher authority we will all answer to.  
The other says since we are here by accident, we don't have to answer to anything.

If there is no ultimate reality beyond ourselves, then why not do whatever makes us happy and feel good even if it's at the expense of others.  
"Eat, drink, and be merry for tomorrow we die."

Why not me first?

- Why not forget about the golden rule to do to others as we would have them do to us, like Jesus told us to do in Luke 6:31
- Why not ignore loving our neighbor as ourself, as he commands us in Matthew 22:39
- Why not take care of us and ours first.

Then maybe if there is anything left over, we will think about caring for the starving and suffering and traumatized in other parts of the world.

If there is no, "in the beginning God," then there is no true basis for things like morality, right and wrong, good and bad.  
They are all merely constructs of man and society.

Any acts of compassion, benevolence, and charity must have ulterior motives and are done out of self-interest to make us feel good about ourself, to get credit and a name for ourself, or put you in our debt.

Even, as some believe, having and caring for children is simply to ensure the survival of our genes.

Everything becomes transactional, what I can get out of it.

**there was a popular 4-week business ethics course several years ago. On the very last day of class, the instructor summed up the entire course for the students by saying, “What it all boils down to is this. Don’t do anything that will get your name in the paper. It’s bad for business.”**

In other words, it’s okay to cheat or steal or lie or cut corners or even hurt others so long as you don’t get caught.

The greatest sin is getting caught, which is exactly what so many seem to believe as increasingly we excuse and hardly even notice behavior and attitudes once considered intolerable.

As Hosea 8:7 puts it, **“We have sown the wind and are now reaping the whirlwind.**

Once God is removed from the picture, what else is left?

**In the words of the Russian novelist Dostoyevsky, Can man be good without God?**

The serpents promise in Genesis 3:5 was that if they ate of the fruit, their eyes would be opened and they would become like God.

mankind has been trying to replace, or at least ignore, God ever since.

God created the heavens and the earth and declared them very good.

God placed mankind in the garden, gave us everything we needed to flourish and thrive, to be fruitful and multiply.

To fill the earth, work it and care for it.

Yet it is still our Fathers’ world and what have we done to it?

- in mankind’s greed and unending desire for more, we pollute and destroy our environment.
- Instead of loving our neighbor and even our enemies, as Jesus told us to do, too many choose to hate their neighbors who may be a different color or religion or political party.
- Out of nationalistic pride and fervor, nations make war on other nations, and as we see too clearly, women and children and the elderly often pay the heaviest price

All in a world God created and declared very good

**As Paul writes in Romans 8:19-22, as a result of our sin, creation itself has been subjected to frustration and has become subject to bondage and decay, and has been groaning under the weight of it all.**

And it all began when Adam and Eve tried to push God aside and replace him with themselves, putting their own desires above his

- They had plenty of food, yet Genesis 3:6 says when Eve saw the forbidden fruit was good for food, all she already had wasn't enough, she wanted more.
- They were surrounded by the beauty of creation yet it wasn't good enough when she saw that forbidden fruit was pleasing to the eye and she wanted it for herself.
- God had provided for all their needs, it wasn't enough, they were missing something and wanted more, she wanted that fruit which was desirable for gaining wisdom.

So she took some and ate it, then gave it to Adam and their eyes were opened.

And the immediate result, Genesis 3, says was alienation  
alienation from each other when they saw their differences seen in the phrase "they realized they were naked," they tried to cover them up.

And alienation from God seen when He came calling, they tried to hide from him.

The consequences of their sin was the ground they were to care for became a place of toil and hardship.

The command to be fruitful and multiply would become the source of pain in childbirth.

And the beauty of the garden, would become a distant memory as they were driven from it.

As we turn to Genesis 4 this morning, we see the downward spiral of sin continue as mankind became increasingly alienated from each other, from God, and from creation itself which now leads to the murder of Abel by his brother Cain. Genesis 4 begins,

***"Adam made love to his wife Eve, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Cain. She said, 'With the help of the LORD I have brought forth a man.' Later she gave birth to his brother Abel. Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil. In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the LORD. And Abel also brought an offering—fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The LORD looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not look***

*with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast. Then the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it." Now Cain said to his brother Abel, "Let's go out to the field." While they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him. Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?" "I don't know," he replied. "Am I my brother's keeper?" The LORD said, "What have you done? Listen! Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground. Now you are under a curse and driven from the ground, which opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. When you work the ground, it will no longer yield its crops for you. You will be a restless wanderer on the earth." Cain said to the LORD, "My punishment is more than I can bear. Today you are driving me from the land, and I will be hidden from your presence; I will be a restless wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me." But the LORD said to him, "Not so; anyone who kills Cain will suffer vengeance seven times over." Then the LORD put a mark on Cain so that no one who found him would kill him. So Cain went out from the LORD's presence and lived in the land of Nod, east of Eden." (Genesis 4:1–16)*

It doesn't say why Abel's offering was more pleasing than Cain's, though Hebrews 11 says it was because Abel's was given out of faith, Cain's wasn't, for without faith, it says, it is impossible to please God.

This should lead us to ask about our own acts of worship.

Are they done as an expression of our faith in the one who saves us, or out of duty and merely going through the motions

Our hearts not just our deeds are most important to the Lord

If our singing and praying and giving and attending and serving are a mere formality and not done from our heart, how are we really acting any differently than Cain?

God's answer to Cain is simply do what is right.

what is right is done in faith for as Romans 14:23 tells us that anything that does not come from faith is sin.

Without faith and doing what is right, God warns Cain, **sin is crouching at the door it desires to have you.**

This is likely an illusion to an ancient belief that there were demons that hung around doorways waiting for their victims to cross the threshold so they could pounce on them

The belief that if you become careless with sin and refuse to deal with it or deny it, it will only make you susceptible to evil

**Peter issued a similar warning when he wrote, “Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.” (1 Peter 5:8)**

While we may may try to justify our sin and laxness in faith as Cain did, thinking they’re not all that bad.

But trying to excuse ourselves only opens up for sin to pounce

Adam and Eve had opened the door and it spread, as Cains jealousy towards his brother grew and ends in Abel’s premeditated murder

**It has often been said that the real problem with sin, is that I in the middle.**

**I, me, mine!**

Sin is inevitably the result of our self-centeredness

Of pushing God away because we want to do things our way which is just what Cain did

one of the most disturbing aspects of the whole account, is that throughout the entire story, Cain never displays any regret or remorse for what he did to his brother. His thoughts were only for himself

So he complains that his punishment was unfair, it was more than he could bear.

**When God confronted him with his sin, he even tried to brush it off saying, Am I my brothers keeper**

The word keeper is the Hebrew word Samar which relates to the idea of responsibility, being responsible for something or someone more than yourself.

It was used in Gen 2:15 when it says God placed man in the garden and work and care, be responsible for creation

It was used again in 3:24 when it says God placed the Cherubim on the east side of the garden to keep or guard, to be responsible for the way to the tree of life.

Cains question was am I supposed to watch over, be responsible for my brother

Do I have a responsibility for others or just myself?

Me first or do I need to think about the needs of others as well?

We may be tempted to say each of us are responsible only for ourselves  
If they can't get their own act together why should we care about the humanitarian crisis in Sudan, or the wars in Ukraine and Gaza or the suffering of the poor in faraway lands

It's not just here with Cain, but found throughout scripture, God says yes we are to be responsible for caring for others in their need  
I would go so far as to say that it is a denial of scripture to say otherwise for

**In Isaiah 1:17, God told the people of Israel, *"Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow."***

***"Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world."* (James 1:27)**

Whether it's the golden rule or the greatest commandment, the parable of the sheep and the goats or the story of the good Samaritan who went out of his way to aid someone for whom there was a strong ethnic animosity towards, or any one of far too many scriptural examples to mention, God tells us very clearly that yes, we are to be our brother's keeper  
We are to be aware and concerned and responsible for more than ourselves

**William Barclay said real religion draws strength from God in order to give it to others. Real religion involves both meeting God in the secret place AND men in the marketplace.**

The famous 19<sup>th</sup> century preacher Charles Spurgeon said,

**A church which does not exist to do good in the slums...of the city is a church that has no reason to justify its longer existence...Not for yourself, O Church, do you exist Any more than Christ existed for himself. His glory was that he laid aside his glory, and the glory of the church is when she lays aside her respectability and her dignity and counts it to be her glory to gather together the outcasts, and her highest honor to seek amid the foulest mire, the priceless jewels for which Jesus shed his blood.**

**So Paul tells the Galatians we are to carry one another's burdens, for in this way we will be fulfilling the law of Christ**

And what of our Lord himself and his example for us.

He who left heaven to get his hands dirty, to have his wrists and feet pierced, his blood shed out of love for us

Am I my brother's keeper?

If yes then we have to get past ourselves to the needs of others

Beyond seeing our faith as purely personal, only concerned with our own salvation and growth and acts of religious devotion.

More than just me and mine

We do have a responsibility to others just as our Lord said he came to give his life for others!

**Oswald Chambers stated that to be a disciple means that we will deliberately identify ourselves with Gods interest in other people**

***“Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter— when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood? Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard. Then you will call, and the LORD will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I. “If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk, and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday.” (Isaiah 58:6–10)***

that sounds an awful lot like God telling us that we are our brothers' keeper

and how our world and society which is so divided, desperately needs Gods people to have the courage and faithfulness to live these words out rather than withdraw into ourselves

ever since God blessed Abraham with the promise that he would be a blessing to all nations, God has blessed his people with the desire for us to bless others

I want to close with the words of a well-known Christian leader who said,

**I walked down Chesnut Street in Philadelphia. There was a filthy bum, covered with soot from head to toe. He had a huge beard. I'll never forget that beard. It was a gigantic beard with rotted food stuck in it. He held a cup of McDonalds coffee and**

mumbled as he walked along the street. He spotted me and said, Hey Mister, you want some of my coffee?

I knew I should take some to be nice, and I did. I gave it back to him and said, “You’re being pretty generous giving away your coffee this morning. What’s gotten into you that you’re giving away your coffee all of a sudden?”

He said, Well, the coffee was especially delicious this morning, and I figured if God gives you something good, you ought to share it with people.

I figured this is the perfect setup. I said, Is there anything I can give you in return? I was sure he was going to hit me up for five dollars.

He said, Yeah, you can give me a hug.

I was hoping for the five dollars.

He put his arms around me. I put my arms around him. And I realized something. He wasn’t going to let me go. He was holding onto me. Here I am an establishment guy, and this bum is hanging on me. He’s hugging me. He’s not going to let me go. People are passing by on the street. They’re staring at me. I’m embarrassed. But little by little my embarrassment turned to awe.

I heard a voice echoing down the corridors of time saying, I was hungry. Did you feed me? I was naked. Did you clothe me? I was sick. Did you care for me? I was a bum you met on Chesnutt Street. Did you hug me? For if you did it unto the least of these, my brothers and sisters, you did it to me. And if you failed to do it unto the least of these, my brothers and sisters, you failed to do it unto me.

Sound pretty clear that Gods answer to Cain, and to us, is that we are responsible to care not just for me, mine, and ours, but also for others.

We are to be our brother’s keeper it?