

Keepers and Tillers

by Anton Bosch

The sermon explores the biblical distinction between keepers and tillers, emphasizing the importance of stewardship and responsibility in our relationship with God and others.

Duration: 39:03

Scripture: Genesis 4:1-15

Topics: "Christian Life"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker focuses on the story of Cain and Abel from Genesis chapter 4. The passage begins with the birth of Cain and Abel, with Cain being the older brother. The speaker emphasizes the significance of the specific roles that Cain and Abel had - Cain was a tiller of the ground, while Abel was a keeper of sheep. The sermon highlights the importance of the offerings that Cain and Abel brought to the Lord, with Abel's offering being respected by God, but Cain's being rejected. This rejection leads to Cain's anger and ultimately to him killing his brother Abel. The sermon concludes with God's punishment for Cain, making him a fugitive and a vagabond on the earth.

Transcript

I want to go back to Genesis chapter 4. Genesis chapter 4, and last week we spoke about Cain and Abel and their sacrifices, and I've just been reading Genesis 4 and found many things that have been a blessing to me in that passage, and I want to share them, another aspect with you this morning, and so let's read together from Genesis chapter 4 verses 1 through 15. Genesis 4 verses 1 through 15. Now Adam knew Evie's wife, and she conceived and bore Cain and said, I have acquired a man from the Lord.

Then she bore again this time his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. And in the process of time it came to pass that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the Lord.

Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. And the Lord respected Abel and his offering, but he did not respect Cain and his offering. And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell.

And so the Lord said to Cain, why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door and its desire is for you, but you shall rule over it. Now Cain talked with Abel, his brother, and it came to pass when they were in the field that Cain rose up against Abel, his brother, and killed him. Then the Lord said to Cain, where is Abel your

brother? And he said, I do not know.

Am I my brother's keeper? And he said, what have you done? The voice of your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground. So now you are cursed from the earth, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. When you till the ground, it shall no longer yield its strength to you.

A fugitive and a vagabond, you shall be on the earth. And Cain said to the Lord, my punishment is greater than I can bear. Surely you have driven me out this day from the face of the ground.

I shall be hidden from your face. I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond on the earth. And it will happen that anyone who finds me will kill me.

And the Lord said to him, therefore, whoever kills Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold. And the Lord set a mark on Cain, lest anyone finding him should kill him. And I want to speak with you from verse two of chapter four.

She bore again this time his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep and Cain was a tiller of the ground. Just those little words seem to be unimportant.

And yet we know that no words in the scripture are unimportant. Every word has importance. Every word has meaning.

And so why does it tell us what these young men did? And you'll see something else about this that is strange, because who was the older of the two boys? Cain was the older, Abel was the younger. And they were very particular those days to always make sure that you spoke about the oldest one first. And so you would always speak about Cain and Abel.

Cain was the older, Abel was the younger. And you'll notice here that it changes the order because it says Abel first, he was a keeper of sheep and Cain was a tiller of the ground. And that's interesting that it changed the order.

And so the fact that it mentions their occupation and the fact that it mentions their names in the reverse order tells us that there is something significant and important in that little verse, which most of us and most people will probably just read past and say, well, it's just some useless information. But there is no useless information. This is important information.

So what is a keeper of the sheep? Well, we know that's easy. It's a shepherd. It's someone who looks after, who takes care of, who pastures and who shepherds sheep and maybe goats in this case also.

A tiller of the ground, that word is maybe a little bit old today. We don't use that word much anymore. But a tiller is somebody who digs the ground, somebody who digs the earth and who tills the earth, breaks it open so that the weeds can be killed and so that seed can be planted and a crop can be reaped.

And so the one was a horticulturist and the other one looked after animals. He was a husbandman. And so what importance does that have? Well, it does have importance because there are two very, very different jobs.

And you remember the sacrifice that the two brought were two very different sacrifices. Cain brought from the fruit of his labor. He produced some kind of vegetables or grain or whatever it was that he had produced out of the ground.

And he presented that to God. God did not accept it because it had no blood. It was a bloodless sacrifice.

And because it was the labor of his hands. Abel, on the other hand, produced that brought the sheep that had produced. And of course, he did nothing to make the sheep produce.

All he did was he looked after what God had given him and the sheep multiplied automatically. And he just brought that. And so it wasn't something he had produced.

It was something God had produced. And it was it cost the shedding of blood in order for that sacrifice to be made. And of course, that points to our relationship with God, that many people come to God with the things that they have done, their religious works, their good deeds.

And they expect God to accept that when God says, no, the only sacrifice that I accept is the sacrifice of blood, the sacrifice of my son, Jesus Christ. And so there is an importance in what these guys were doing. But there is something more important about that.

And I want to take you right back to the very beginning when God puts man and puts Adam into the garden. And if you go to chapter two of Genesis and verse four, Genesis chapter two, verse four. And this is the history of the heavens and the earth when they were created in the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens before any plant of the field was in the earth and before any herb of the field was grown for the Lord God had not caused rain on the earth.

And there was no man to till the ground. There's that little word again. There was no man to till the ground.

So before God created plants, there was no one to till the ground. So it just mentions that. But that's important because now Adam comes on the scene and we find in verse 15 of chapter two, the Lord God took man and put him in the garden of Eden to do what? To tend and keep it.

There's that other word. Remember Abel was a keeper of the sheep. Adam is put into the garden to keep the garden.

Adam was not put into the garden to till the garden. He was just put there to keep it. There is a difference between those who till and those who keep.

Those who till labor with their own hands to produce something for themselves. Those who keep simply keep in trust, look after that which God has given them. And so Adam was made a keeper of the garden.

God had created everything. God had done everything. There was nothing more that Adam needed to do.

All Adam had to do was to take care of what God had given him. But then you remember what happened. Adam sinned.

And then things changed. And God brings the curse upon Adam and the curse upon Eve. And in chapter three, verse 16, we have the details of the curse on Eve and on woman.

And then in verse 17 of chapter three, to Adam he said, because you have heeded the voice of your wife and have eaten from the tree which I commanded you saying, you shall not eat of it. Cursed is the ground for your sake. In toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life.

Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you. And you shall eat the herb of the field in the sweat of your face. You shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken.

For dust you are, and to dust you shall return. Can you see that there's a change? Now Adam, instead of being a keeper, now needs to toil in the ground. He needs to work with the soil.

And in verse 23 of the same chapter, therefore the Lord God sent him out of the garden of Eden to till the ground from which he was taken. So in Adam's, and you need to stay with me this morning because this is a little bit, not complicated, but you need to follow the argument. God put Adam in the garden to keep the garden.

But when Adam sinned, he becomes a tiller of the soil. There's a big difference. The one is just keeping that which has been given into his trust and into his care.

The other one has to labor in order to produce something. And in laboring to produce that, what was it producing? Thorns and briars. That was the unfortunate thing.

It wasn't producing fruit as it should. Of course there was some fruit, but all the time there was thorns and briars. That's just one of the natural realities.

When you walk out in the wild, you find that where the soil has never been disturbed, the grass and the natural things just grow. But wherever man has interfered with it, you find that what happens is weeds grow up. The moment you disturb the soil, it produces weeds and the natural vegetation disappears.

And you can see that all over the world. And so here the same thing happens. And so first of all, Adam was a keeper of the garden.

Now he becomes a tiller of the soil and he produces two sons. And the first one was Cain and he is a tiller of the soil. And then Cain was angry with his brother.

And it says that when they were out in the field together, he rose up and he killed his brother. I wonder how he did that. I wonder what implement he would have used.

45 magnum? No. Probably the hoe or the implement that he was using to till the soil. That is the most likely.

It doesn't tell us. I'm only guessing. But most likely what he used was the implement that was in his hand.

The thing with which he tilled the soil. And now instead of tilling the soil, he is tilling his brother. And then what happens? He has to hide the evidence.

And what is he doing? He's tilling the soil again. He's digging a hole to put his brother in and to hide the evidence. And of course, you remember the passage tells us that even though he had hidden the evidence, his brother's blood was crying to God for vengeance from the soil.

So you can see the difference. The one was a keeper. The other one was a tiller.

And then God confronts him. And we touched on this passage last week. And he says to him, where's your brother? What is his response? Chapter four and verse nine.

What is his response? Am I my brother's keeper? You think those words are important? Of course, they're important. They appear over and over in this passage. Am I my brother's keeper? No, he was a tiller.

That was all. And I struggle to try and find some modern equivalent for that word. But maybe the best way I can describe that word and the best word we would use today is we would say that he was a user.

Somebody who just used the soil in order to produce something. He used his brother to get out of his brother. And when his brother didn't, he just set him aside.

He was a consumer. And that may be a more modern version. And maybe if I had to translate it into modern English, I would call him a consumer.

But he wasn't a keeper. He says, I'm not my brother's keeper. I have no responsibility for him.

And it's interesting that he uses those words. That he doesn't just say, I don't know where he is. But those words have become famous.

And even unbelievers use that word. Even non-Christians use that little phrase. Am I my brother's keeper? In other words, I'm not responsible for him.

And of course, the very fact that he said those words declared that he knew that he was responsible for his brother. Remember, he was the older of the two. And so he had a responsibility to look out for his brother.

But instead of looking out for his brother, instead of keeping his brother, he tilled him and he killed him. And yet it goes on and we come to Noah. And this is interesting.

When I began to look at this, when my eye caught that and I began to look at this and I said, well, Noah was a keeper. Go to Genesis chapter six and verse 19. And we're going to stay mainly in Genesis this morning.

Genesis chapter six and verse 19. And Noah's building the ark. The ark is now ready.

And God says, and every, Genesis 6, 19, and every living thing of all flesh, you shall bring two of every sort into the ark to keep them alive with you. They shall be male and female. And so Noah is a keeper.

His responsibility was to keep alive all of the animals in the ark. Now, I don't know what Noah did before that. The scripture doesn't tell us what his trade or his occupation was until God called him to, to build the ark and to preach for a hundred years.

But during the time of the flood, he becomes a keeper, the one who was the custodian and the trustee of all of the species of the world. And they're all kept together. And then the flood subsides and Noah comes out of the ark.

And Genesis chapter nine, verse 20, we find these very interesting words. And Noah began to be a farmer and he planted a vineyard. Can you see the same picture? Adam was a keeper of the garden.

He failed. And God says, you'll become a tiller. Noah kept the animals, but then he changed from being a husbandman, from being a keeper to being a farmer, a tiller, doing the same kind of work that his ancestor Cain did.

And what did his, what did his tilling or his farming produce? He produced wine and he got drunk. And you remember that as a result of that incident, one of his sons is cursed. Doesn't that sound very much like what happened to Cain and Abel? Cain becomes cursed and he has this mark and he's a fugitive and a vagabond.

And here the whole pattern is reversed. And you can see the, the implication and the, and the message that he is giving us. And I admit that it's not there on the surface.

You have to read it a little bit to, to, to see it, but it's there. If Adam had remained a keeper, Cain would never have become what he did become. Cain would never have killed his brother.

Sin would not have entered into the world, but Adam did not keep what was entrusted to him. And he becomes a tiller and his sons are divided into two groups, the keepers and the tillers. And then the whole story begins all over again with Noah because the whole earth is destroyed and there's only Noah and his three sons.

And of course, Noah's wife and the three sons' wives, eight people. And of his three sons, the whole picture begins again. The one becomes a fugitive and a vagabond and the other two continue the line.

And so not only as parents, do we have a responsibility in terms of what we pass on to the next generation, but spiritually we have a responsibility because what we do, whether we keep or whether we till will not just affect our position and our relationship and the product of our lives, but will affect everyone else around us. And so are we keepers or are we tillers? And then, interesting, if you go to Genesis chapter 46, and at this point, Joseph is in Egypt and his father Jacob and his brothers are brought to Egypt now. You remember, it was the time of these huge famines and Joseph is a prime minister in Egypt, second after Pharaoh.

And Genesis chapter 46 and verse 34. And as Joseph's family now come, the question is, where are they going to live in the land? And he instructs his father and he says to him and to his brothers, he says, verse 34, that you shall say, your servant's occupation has been with livestock from our youth even till now. But we and also our fathers, that you may dwell in the land of Goshen, for every shepherd is an abomination to the Egyptians.

That's interesting. What did the Egyptians do? What was their farming practice? They were tillers. You remember, they would till the flood plains of the River Nile.

Every year the flood would come down and produce all the silt and all the fertile soil. And they were agriculturists. They were tillers.

And they despised shepherds, probably because shepherds were nomads at that time. But again, you see this difference. Egypt always represents the world.

And Jacob obviously was Israel, the people of God. The people of God are shepherds. The world are agriculturists.

Now, obviously we're not making a statement against anyone who farms vegetables. This is not the point. But there's a spiritual lesson for us.

The people of God are keepers. The world are those who till, who sweat by their brow and produce whatever it is they choose to produce. You see the same picture.

Now, when we go to God, we say, well, what is God? How is God represented? You know, one of the things that God is represented as over and over is as a keeper. Behold, David says, he who keeps Israel, neither slumbers nor sleeps. God is a keeper.

Paul says, he says, that which I have committed unto him, he is able to keep, even against the day. And so God is able to keep. God is one who can be trusted to keep things in trust, even our souls.

And remember Jesus, even as he lived on the earth, and in John chapter 17, he prays his prayer. And he says, Father, those that you've given to me, I have kept them. I have kept them.

Now, this mindset obviously is something which comes right from the beginning, which is in the heart of God, and which is contrary to our modern way of thinking. Our modern way of thinking is to always be looking for something new and to despise the things that we have. Who wants to keep old things? Now, I know many people are good.

John's very good at keeping things. Sometimes I'm not even sure if those things are worth keeping, but to John, they're important. Some people are keepers, and other people are users.

Some people keep, and I'm just speaking materially now, some people look after the things that they have, even though they may not have much, and even though they may be old things, they keep those things. But unfortunately, the spirit of our age is one of consumerism, of using, of tilling all the time, digging up new things all the time, and throwing away the old stuff. But in the heart of God, the wonderful thing that we, in our relationship with him, is that he keeps, that he holds us.

He says, I will hold you in the hollow of my hand. That God is not digging up stuff all the time. That God is not looking for new things all the time, but God is simply keeping, and that we can trust him to hold that which we have given him, and which we have committed to him.

Now, the question obviously is, what are we? What are we? I'm speaking spiritually now, never mind pack rats and those sorts of things. Spiritually, are we trying to labor in spiritual things to try and produce something new all the time? Or are we simply keeping what has been entrusted to us? And you know, when you look throughout the Scriptures, you find that what God is actually wanting us to do is simply to keep. Remember, going back to the garden, God did everything.

He made the garden, he built it, or he created it, spoke it into being. And all Adam had to do was to keep what God had done. And remember, he was made, Adam was created on the sixth day.

The work was all finished. Adam came on the scene when it was all done. And Adam's first day is the seventh day, which is the day of rest.

And that's the pattern you find right through Scriptures. God does the work. And as far as our salvation is concerned, God does the work.

He did it all at Calvary. Jesus paid the full price, and he said, it is finished. So what do I need to do? I just need to keep what he has done.

I just need to hold on to what he has already finished and completed. And yet sometimes we say, well, you know, what do I want to look after these things that God has given? Let me do something for myself. Let me do it my way.

And that's the spirit of Cain. Never mind the sheep. I'm going to do it my way.

Never mind keeping. I'm going to till. And you find this interesting because, and I don't want to get too complex, but you go right forward to Esau and Jacob.

Remember the two boys who were, again, so very different. Here was Cain and Abel, very different. And Esau and Jacob, very different.

What was Jacob's hallmark? What was it that made him different? He was a keeper at home. He lived in tents. What was Esau? He was a hunter.

Now the picture is slightly different, but you can see the same spirit. Esau's out there, sweating, hunting, tracking, killing. But Jacob is just keeping the flocks.

And over and over you see Jacob as the shepherd. And of course, David was a shepherd and many other wonderful examples of shepherds. And then Esau's name has changed.

Remember his name was changed to Edom. Edom. Who was the first man? Adam.

Can you hear that there's a similarity between those two names? Adam and Edom. Adam and Edom in the Hebrew. Because they come from the same root.

They have to do with the ground. And so Esau becomes a man of the ground. And God rejected him.

Why did God reject Esau? If you can remember back to that study. Because he said, I will do it my way. I don't need God's blessing in my life.

I don't need the inheritance. I can do it for myself. I can do it my way.

And that's the same spirit that came from Cain. Who wants to look after the sheep that are already there? I can till the ground and I can produce something for myself. The same spirit.

But in fact, what God was looking for was the spirit of Abel. He said, let me just keep what God has given to me. The spirit of Jacob, who is just keeping the sheep and kept together what God had given to him.

So God has done everything. Just as Adam came on the scene when everything had been created, you and I come onto the scene when Jesus has done everything for us at the cross of Calvary. Has given us everything that we need for life and for godliness.

Jesus has done it all. And so what is my role? Simply to keep. Simply to keep what he has given and what he's already entrusted to me.

And right back from the book of Exodus, chapter 20, verse 6, right through to the book of Revelation, there's this emphasis on keeping. Now, what are the things that we keep? The first thing that we do is we need to keep his commandments. And that doesn't mean that we just hide them, but we look after them.

We obey them. We do them. We keep his commandments.

And then in 1 Timothy, chapter 6, Paul writes to Timothy and he says, keep what has been committed to your trust. Keep what has been committed to your trust. You know, that's a broad field.

What is it that has been committed to your trust? Now, if you were a father, you have children that have been committed to your trust. If you're a husband or a wife, you have a spouse that has been committed into your care. If you have a motor car, if you have a house, if you have material things, those have been put in your trust, in your care.

You need to keep those things. If you have spiritual blessings, if you have salvation, if you have God's word, if you have faith, and we can go on and on and on. Things that God has given to us, we are to be keepers of those things.

We need to protect them. We need to care for them. We need to manage them.

We need to keep them in trust. But you see, the spirit is, and the problem is that we're saying, well, you know, I'm always looking for something new. I'm always looking for something on the other side of the fence.

And I think, you know, and just as I was waiting on the Lord, the thing that really was impressed on me is, is what is it that God has given us? And so many times we're not satisfied with what God has given to us, whether that be in material things, whether it be in relationships, or whether it be in spiritual things. And we always want something different. Instead of recognizing, Lord, by your grace, you've given me what you've given me.

You've given me the family I have. You've given me the church that I have. You've given me your word.

You've given me your spirit. You've given me salvation. You've given me so many things.

Now, help me just to care for those things that you've given me. Help me to be a keeper and not a tiller. And the spirit of the sages I've said is that of being a tiller.

But you know, the good news is that we can change. We don't have to say, well, that's the way I am. And I'm going to go back to Genesis chapter four, because there's an interesting little story there.

And just another little detail that fills in the picture for us, Genesis chapter four. And from verse 16, we now have the family of Cain. And it says in verse 16, Then Cain went out from the presence of the Lord and dwelt in the land of Nod on the east of Eden.

And Cain knew his wife, and she conceived and bore Enoch, and he built a city. Now, that's a very important little sentence there. He built a city.

But I'm not going to go down that road right now. And he called the name of the city after the name of his son Enoch. And to Enoch was born Erad, and Erad begot Mahawel, and Mahawel begot Methushael, and Methushael begot Lamech.

Then Lamech took for himself two wives. The name of one was Ada, and the name of the second was Zillah. And Ada bore Jabal, and he was the father of those who dwell in tents and have livestock.

Now, remember, his family was that of Cain, who were tillers. And in fact, one of these built a city. But in that line is one born, and he becomes a father of those who dwell in tents and keep livestock.

Now, remember, I told you, you have to stay with me this morning. What was Jacob known for? He was a mild man, and he dwelt in tents. He dwelt in tents.

And so here you have a man who comes out of the line of the tillers, but he changes, and he becomes a keeper of livestock, and a man who dwells in tents. So you can change. You don't have to say, well, you know, that's not my nature.

I'm not a keeper. I'm a tiller. I don't know how that translates to modern psychological types, but maybe you have type A and type B, and you say, well, you know, type Bs are the keepers, and type A are the tillers.

I don't know. But I'm not that way. But you know, you can change.

And out of this line, who were all tillers, come one family, and he becomes the father of those. In other words, all of his descendants were dwellers in tents and keepers of livestock. And so the question is very simple this morning.

Are you like Cain, or are you like Abel? Are you a tiller, or are you a keeper? Are you like Jacob, or are you like Esau? Are you one who says, I'm going to just hold God's blessing? Remember, even before Jacob was born, he was holding on to his brother's heel, because he said, I want that blessing, and I want to hold on to it with all of my might. Sometimes we forget about the goodness of God. Sometimes we forget how many things He has given to us, and we're always digging for something more, for something different.

Instead of saying, you know, God has been gracious to me. He's given so much to me. Let me just keep what He's given to me.

And maybe we look at our church, and we say, you know, we don't have that many people, but my God and my desire is to be able to stand before Him on that day and say, Lord, I've kept what you've given to me. That's only going to be the question. And so can we be keepers? Can we be our brother's keeper and say, I have a responsibility for my brother? And of course, we know that that means our spiritual brother and sister, because we are our brother's keeper.

But you know, Cain, instead of keeping his brother, tills his brother and tills the soil and buries him. May God give us grace then that we may be those who are keepers, that we may keep one another, that we may keep what God has entrusted to us, that we may keep our families, that we may keep our material things in a way that honors and brings glory to God. Father, thank you for your word.

And Lord, sometimes there are just these little hints at something, and yet we know that they contain important and valuable lessons for us. And Lord, we want to be people who please you. We want people whose sacrifice will be acceptable before you.

And so Lord, we want to be like Abel. And even though he had to pay for his obedience to you with his life, was a keeper. And Lord, we don't want to be like Adam, who lost his privilege of keeping and had to become a tiller.

We don't want to be like the Egyptians. But Lord, we want to be like Jacob, who kept the blessing, who kept the inheritance, who kept the name and who kept the family. And so Lord, we pray that you would do this in our hearts, Lord.

And if that's not in our nature, we pray that you would change our natures and make us to be like Jesus, who was a shepherd, who kept what had been committed to him. Thank you, Lord, that you are faithful and that you are able to keep what we have committed to you even against that day. And so Lord, we would again commit ourselves to you.

Even as we part from one another, we commit ourselves to you. And we know that you can keep us, Lord, not just until we meet again this evening or next week, but you can keep us even until the coming of the Lord Jesus. And so Lord, we pray make these things clear in our hearts and our minds that above all help us to be doers.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

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