

THE DUTY OF A WATCHMAN

33:1-6 *“And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, “Son of man, speak to the sons of your people and say to them, ‘If I bring a sword upon a land, and the people of the land take one man from among them and make him their watchman, and he sees the sword coming upon the land and blows on the trumpet and warns the people, then he who hears the sound of the trumpet and does not take warning, and a sword comes and takes him away, his blood will be on his own head. He heard the sound of the trumpet but did not take warning; his blood will be on himself. But had he taken warning, he would have delivered his life. But if the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet and the people are not warned, and a sword comes and takes a person from them, he is taken away in his iniquity; but his blood I will require from the watchman’s hand.””*



Until this point in Ezekiel pronouncements of judgement upon Israel and the nations have been the constant warning from God through the prophet. God had Ezekiel employ a multitude of ways to get the attention of Israel, specifically the exiles, to understand that when the warnings of judgement became a reality, God was just in carrying them out. Ezekiel was additionally forbidden to speak to any inquirers from chapter 24 till the time of the actual siege of Jerusalem. The focus of judgement then became the nations.

Chapter 33 is an interlude between pronouncements of judgement and the promises of future restoration and hope. In it God gives Ezekiel the recap of what a watchman’s duty is as well as the responsibility of those to whom the watchman delivers the warnings of judgement. It is also a fresh call to repentance for Israel in light of the future.

The role of the watchman is clearly established throughout the Old Testament (2Sam18; 2Ki 9; Jer 4:5-6; Hos 8:1; Amos 3:6; Hab 2:1. The responsibility of the watchman and those

warned is laid out the way it was in chapter 18. Clearly the Lord requires of the watchman to proclaim what God has given him to proclaim. His only guilt is in not doing so. The responsibility for the warning is listened to is clearly placed on those who have been warned. This same principle is in effect today in the age of grace. Jesus told his disciples that any house or city not receiving their witness is not worthy and that in protest they should shake off the dust of their feet (Mat 10:14; Lk 9:5; 10:11; Mk 6:11).

Jesus left every believer with the great commission to tell all nations about the good news seeking to make disciples of them and baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Mat 28:19). Paul being faithful to his calling, makes claim to this same watchman principle given here in Ezekiel when giving his parting farewell to the church in Ephesus. He declared *“Therefore, I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God.”* (Act 20:26, 27). A child of Christ

is not under condemnation, but if the converts as a result of our witness become our “crown” as Paul puts it to the Philippians (4:1), then what the believer who fails to witness faces is loss of reward at the judgement seat of Christ. Every believer has been given the gospel to proclaim as given in the Word of God, it is not just reserved for those who have been called to be a preacher, teacher or missionary. Ezekiel was told to lament those who would perish due to their unbelief. Believers know of the constant warning of a future judgement to come to all who are not in Christ, yet how much burden does it really bring to bare on professing believers. Are we faithful in presenting the full gospel clearly?

33:7-9 *“Now as for you, son of man, I have appointed you a watchman for the house of Israel; so you will hear a message from My mouth and give them warning from Me. When I say to the wicked, ‘O wicked man, you will surely die,’ and you do not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but his blood I will require from your hand. But if you on your part warn a wicked man to turn from his way and he does not turn from his way, he will die in his iniquity, but you have delivered your life.”*

Here we see that Ezekiel’s commission is specific to the house of Israel. While not every believer has the same geographical areas of influence, we are to be faithful in witnessing to those around us. Ezekiel was faithful to do all that the Lord had required of him as opposed to the false prophets that sought to lead Israel astray and give them a false sense of security. Ezekiel is here reminded again of His obligation to be a watchman. Since chapter 24, God has not allowed him to speak to Israel, but word of Jerusalem’s fall will come shortly and the Lord is reminding Ezekiel of his call when his mouth is again opened before Israel.

33:10-11 *“Now as for you, son of man, say to the house of Israel, ‘Thus you have spoken, saying, “Surely our transgressions and our sins are upon us, and we are rotting away in them; how then can we survive?”’ Say to them, ‘As I live!’ declares the Lord GOD, ‘I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn back, turn back from your evil ways! Why then will you die, O house of Israel?’”*

To those in exile, the reality of not only their sin, but the certainty of the total destruction of Jerusalem, and thus their homeland, meant that all was hopeless for Israel’s future as they said “how can we then survive?” Judgement and death are real in both an individualistic sense and a national sense. The ultimate “death” is the second death (Rev 2:11; 20:6, 14; 21:8) which is the eternal death experienced by those who depart from this life without Christ. God says that He takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked because while the punishment may be deserved, when the wicked die in their sin, eternal death is permanent.

Peter speaks of this aspect of the heart of God toward the wicked (2Pe 3:9) when explaining why the Lord is slow to anger. Israel at this point is already facing the judgement of God, yet God is still declaring to them that they do not have to die a national death if they repent. Notice that the question is given to national Israel and that question will bring about the revealing of the plan of the future as God has determined it. All judgement that the Lord has brought to pass and will continue to bring to pass upon Israel will bring about the eventual repentance of Israel and Israel shall live.

It would seem that punishing the wicked would be simple thing for a holy God who cannot tolerate sin, yet God declares that He takes no pleasure in it. God calls His necessary judgement of the wicked “strange work” in Isaiah 28. The Lord is the author of life and while His glory is displayed in His wrath and judgement, He clearly doesn’t regard it as an enjoyable task.

33:12-16 *“And you, son of man, say to your fellow citizens, ‘The righteousness of a righteous man will not deliver him in the day of his transgression, and as for the wickedness of the wicked, he will not stumble because of it in the day when he turns from his wickedness; whereas a righteous man will not be able to live by his righteousness on the day when he commits sin. When I say to the righteous he will surely live, and he so trusts in his righteousness that he commits iniquity, none of his righteous deeds will be remembered; but in that same iniquity of his which he has committed he will die. But when I say to the wicked, ‘You will surely die,’ and he turns from his sin and practices justice and righteousness, if a wicked man restores a pledge, pays back what he has taken by robbery, walks by the statutes which ensure life without committing iniquity, he shall surely live; he shall not die. None of his sins that he has committed will be remembered against him. He has practiced justice and righteousness; he shall surely live.”*

Verses 12- 20 are dealing strictly with judgement of conduct in this life and not the eternal estate of an individual. There are consequences to an individual’s conduct regardless of whether they belong to the Lord or not. The righteousness of a righteous man is talking about an individual who has generally been living in a righteous way that has come to trust in a position of moral favor and begins to believe that they cannot commit sin that God will actually judge. While Moses may have not been this flippant toward God, his transgression of anger and misrepresenting God before His people cost him entrance into the promise land.

David’s sin with Bathsheba cost him the life of the first child he conceived of with her. There are more examples of the sickness and death of believers in the New Testament due to sinful behavior (1Cor 11:28-31; 1Jn 5:16,17). On the contrary, in the event that an individual or nation that is practicing wicked behavior, turns from wickedness in obedience to the warning, physical judgement may be avoided. God sent Jonah to Nineveh, a nation living in outright wickedness before the Lord and yet when confronted with the warning of certain judgement, the whole nation repented in sackcloth and ashes and God spared them at that time.

33:17-20 *“Yet your fellow citizens say, ‘The way of the Lord is not right,’ when it is their own way that is not right. When the righteous turns from his righteousness and commits iniquity, then he shall die in it. But when the wicked turns from his wickedness and practices justice and righteousness, he will live by them. Yet you say, ‘The way of the Lord is not right.’ O house of Israel, I will judge each of you according to his ways.”*

So often is the cry heard “God is not fair” or “why does God allow bad things to happen?” God is not mocked, whatever a man sows, he will also reap according to Gal 6:7. Man’s presumption is that he is innocent and doesn’t deserve judgement or that someone who is a “bad person” shouldn’t be forgiven. God is blameless in the exercise of His justice and mercy. The Lord resists the proud and shows mercy to the repentant sinner.

33:21-22 *“Now in the twelfth year of our exile, on the fifth of the tenth month, the refugees from Jerusalem came to me, saying, ‘The city has been taken.’ Now the hand of the LORD had been upon me in the evening, before the refugees came. And He opened my mouth at the time they came to me in the morning; so my mouth was opened and I was no longer speechless.”*

In Chapter 24 (v.16-24) Ezekiel’s wife died and he was told to not mourn for her as a sign to the people of what they would experience when Jerusalem’s fall would come and he was told that on the day that the news of Jerusalem’s fall had arrived, that God would lift his silence concerning Israel. He was made silent concerning the judgement Israel in chapter 3 (v.26,27) being allowed only intermittently to speak, but mostly to act out the things which God have given to him. But once the actual siege of Jerusalem had begun, he was only given speech concerning the judgement of the nations (chap 25-32).

When Jerusalem did finally fall (July 18, 586 BC. - Jer 39:1,2; 52:5-7), news from the eyewitnesses had actually reached the exiles almost 6 months after the fact in January of 585 BC. The Lord opened Ezekiel’s mouth in the evening prior to the witnesses arriving showing that the Lord is sovereign in all the details as He knew that the news would arrive the very next day.

33:23-26 *“Then the word of the LORD came to me saying, ‘Son of man, they who live in these waste places in the land of Israel are saying, ‘Abraham was only one, yet he possessed the land; so to us who are many the land has been given as a possession.’ Therefore say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD, ‘You eat meat with the blood in it, lift up your eyes to your idols as you shed blood. Should you then possess the land? You rely on your sword, you commit abominations and each of you defiles his neighbor’s wife. Should you then possess the land?’””*

From this verse through chapter 39:29, there are no dates assigned to the prophecies. The first message that Ezekiel was given to relate to Israel, specifically those few who actually remained in Judah after Jerusalem’s fall, was the rebuke of their carnal confidence. Their reasoning was that if the Lord would protect Abraham and secure him in the promised land while he was only one, then how much more would they be secure since they are his physical descendants and are more than one. But Abraham was a righteous man before the Lord because he believed Him.

He behaved righteously because of his faith. In contrast, those who actually survived the Babylonian siege that now inhabited the waste land that was left, were trusting in their fleshly link to Abraham and the promises given to him. They were acting in accord to the reality of their dead faith and their carnal appetites. Their claim to a fleshly tie to Abraham would not deliver them.

33:27-29 *“Thus you shall say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD, ‘As I live, surely those who are in the waste places will fall by the sword, and whoever is in the open field I will give to the beasts to be devoured, and those who are in the strongholds and in the caves will die of pestilence. I will make the land a desolation and a waste, and the pride of her power will cease; and the mountains of Israel will be desolate so that no one will pass through. Then they will know that I am the LORD, when I make the land a desolation and a waste because of all their abominations which they have committed.’”*

EZEKIEL

“Strengthened by God”

Session 24 - Ezekiel 33- 34:10

These warnings held true all the way through the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD and every subsequent defeat afterward until the land was indeed turned into a total waste to the point described in verses 27-29.

33:30-33 *“But as for you, son of man, your fellow citizens who talk about you by the walls and in the doorways of the houses, speak to one another, each to his brother, saying, ‘Come now and hear what the message is which comes forth from the LORD.’ They come to you as people come, and sit before you as My people and hear your words, but they do not do them, for they do the lustful desires expressed by their mouth, and their heart goes after their gain. Behold, you are to them like a sensual song by one who has a beautiful voice and plays well on an instrument; for they hear your words but they do not practice them. So when it comes to pass—as surely it will—then they will know that a prophet has been in their midst.”*”

The desperation of the moment causes a veneer of respect for God’s word to come from the exiles, but history will prove that it is only a veneer. While the nation of Israel did not again practice outward idolatry and all of the sinful practices that were tied to such sin, their hearts remained hardened toward the Lord, not believing in His Word. They instead were still relying on their fleshly tie to the promises rather than truly believing God. Listen to the warning that John the Baptist gives:

“But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, “You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bear fruit in keeping with repentance; and do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham for our father’; for I say to you that from these stones God is able to raise up children to Abraham. The axe is already laid at the root of the trees; therefore every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clear His threshing floor; and He will gather His wheat into the barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.” Mat 3:7-12 (NASB)

God is not obligated to extend promises to physical descendants of Abraham for that reason alone. John declares that the promises will be fulfilled because God is faithful and able, not because living Jews have physical claims to Abraham. God is savior, not Abraham and the promises are given to Abraham’s true descendants; those who are of faith that bear fruit in keeping with repentance. James talks about this in regards to those who claim to be Christians

“What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,” and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself. But someone may well say, “You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works.” You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder. But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar? You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected; and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, “AND ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS,” and he was called the friend of God. You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone. In the same way, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.” James 2:14-26 (NASB)

PROPHECY AGAINST THE SHEPHERDS OF ISRAEL

34:1-6 *“Then the word of the LORD came to me saying, “Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel. Prophesy and say to those shepherds, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD, “Woe, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flock? You eat the fat and clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat sheep without feeding the flock. Those who are sickly you have not strengthened, the diseased you have not healed, the broken you have not bound up, the scattered you have not brought back, nor have you sought for the lost; but with force and with severity you have dominated them. They were scattered for lack of a shepherd, and they became food for every beast of the field and were scattered. My flock wandered through all the mountains and on every high hill; My flock was scattered over all the surface of the earth, and there was no one to search or seek for them.”””*

The shepherds of Israel included all of her leadership from the king and his administration to the religious leaders of the time. However the primary responsibility is on those who stand in office as the representatives of the Lord. The priests and prophets (so - called) speak and lead with great claims to be doing so as commissioned by God. But as God declares they have done just the opposite of what a shepherd is called to do. They have only always been concerned about their own appetites and provision. Notice the totality of this rebuke. It includes the result of the whole history of the failure of Israel’s shepherds who have caused the flock to be scattered over all the mountains of the earth, and there was “no one to search or to seek for them”.

When Jesus began His ministry in Nazareth He read from Isaiah ““THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS UPON ME, BECAUSE HE ANOINTED ME TO PREACH THE GOSPEL TO THE POOR. HE HAS SENT ME TO PROCLAIM RELEASE TO THE CAPTIVES, AND RECOVERY OF SIGHT TO THE BLIND, TO SET FREE THOSE WHO ARE OPPRESSED, TO PROCLAIM THE FAVORABLE YEAR OF THE LORD.” Jesus rebukes the false teachers of Israel and reveals the true shepherding heart of God:

“Woe to the world because of its stumbling blocks! For it is inevitable that stumbling blocks come; but woe to that man through whom the stumbling block comes! If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; it is better for you to enter life crippled or lame, than to have two hands or two feet and be cast into the eternal fire. If your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out and throw it from you. It is better for you to enter life with one eye, than to have two eyes and be cast into the fiery hell. See that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that their angels in heaven continually see the face of My Father who is in heaven. [“For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost.] What do you think? If any man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go and search for the one that is straying? If it turns out that he finds it, truly I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine which have not gone astray. So it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones perish.” Mat 18:7-14 (NASB)

Many of the seeker - driven “shepherds” of our day have compared those in the body of Christ who would desire strong and accurate biblical teaching to an overgrown baby in the midst of the congregation. Recently “pastor” David Hughes in a speech he gave at Church by the Glades in Florida, went even further in the smear to compare those who would leave a church due to it’s repeated mishandling (or non - handling) of God’s Word to the

excrement of the body of Christ! The Lord is the true shepherd who tenderly cares about all of His sheep. Remember what He told Peter when asking Peter if he loved Him:

*“So when they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?” He said to Him, “Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.” He said to him, “Tend My lambs.” He said to him again a second time, “Simon, son of John, do you love Me?” He said to Him, “Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.” He said to him, “Shepherd My sheep.” He said to him the third time, “Simon, son of John, do you love Me?” Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, “Do you love Me?” And he said to Him, “Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You.” Jesus *said to him, “Tend My sheep.” Jhn 21:15-17(NASB)*

True shepherds in the body of Christ will lay down their lives for the sheep. They will not be consumed with their own fame and fortune, their own notoriety and significance, rather they will desire to preach Christ and Him crucified for the forgiveness of sins. They would be grieved at the wandering of even one sheep and would seek to restore such a one. In humility they will seek the repentance of even the lowliest of the sheep. But God will ultimately judge such ones who are false shepherds and in the case of Israel the true shepherd will pluck her from the mouth of the false shepherds when He comes to reign on the earth.

34:7-10 *“Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: “As I live,” declares the Lord GOD, “surely because My flock has become a prey, My flock has even become food for all the beasts of the field for lack of a shepherd, and My shepherds did not search for My flock, but rather the shepherds fed themselves and did not feed My flock; therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: ‘Thus says the Lord GOD, “Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will demand My sheep from them and make them cease from feeding sheep. So the shepherds will not feed themselves anymore, but I will deliver My flock from their mouth, so that they will not be food for them.”’”*