

Title: "Called To Be A Watchman"

Text: Ezekiel 33:1-20; Matthew 28:16-20

In this last phase of our sermon series on "Living Faith in 3D"
-we are spending some time with the people of Israel at the
lowest point of their life as an ancient nation: the period
of the Babylonian Exile.

It was a terrible time for the nation as their cities and towns
were attacked and destroyed,
-their people were carted off into exile,
-and they had to live for 70 years as strangers and aliens in
a foreign country among the very people who had
destroyed their homeland.

We are wrestling with how God's people can grasp how wide
and long and high and deep the love of God is,
-when their world falls apart, and everything is stripped
away from them.

Last week we saw through the Prophet Ezekiel, that it is in
those very times that God shows up for people,
-and comes alongside them and becomes a sanctuary for
them...a place of safety and a haven of rest.

Today God speaks through Ezekiel to his exiled people with
another message,
-a message about how to live faithfully while in exile, or no
matter where they are.
-Listen to Ezekiel chapter 33:1-20.

*"Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of
Israel, so hear the word I speak and given them warning
from me."*

In ancient Israel, watchmen were stationed on the highest
parts of the city walls to guard and stand watch.
-They were to keep their eyes out for messengers who
might be approaching the city with news;
-or for enemies who might be approaching with swords,
-or for weather events that might be on the horizon.

If they saw something that needed to be reported, they would call out and pass the word down below.

The Prophets of Israel, like we see here with Ezekiel,
-were called to be “spiritual watchmen” for Israel.

They were to keep their eyes and ears out for messages from God,
-and were to relay those messages to the people.

They were to warn people of coming judgment.
They were to call people to prepare for such coming danger through repentance and confession.
They were to pass on to the people the messages of how to live a faithful life that they had received from God.

They were to be like spiritual watchmen for the people.

1. And in this case, Ezekiel was called by God to pass on to the people the message that each person is responsible for their own sin.

Now that may not sound like big news to any of us.
-But the Israelites who had been carted off into exile in Babylon had been blaming their current situation on anyone and everyone except themselves.

They had been blaming their parents’ generation.
-They were quoting an old Jewish proverb that said, “The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge.”

You see, “That generation ate the sour grapes, but we are the ones who are getting the sour taste in our mouths.
-We are the ones paying the price for their sins and errors.”

Others were blaming the previous King of Israel and his court;
-or the Babylonian bums who had defeated them.
-and some were blaming God Himself.

But here in verse 10, an amazing thing takes place.
-God hears some of his people actually taking responsibility

for their current plight by confessing their own sins.

They say, "OUR offenses and sins weigh us down, and we are wasting away because of them."

My friends, that is actually a miracle.

-It's a miracle whenever a person or a group of people actually confesses their own sin.

-We humans, all the way back to Adam and Eve, are all so good at blaming everyone and everything else for the messes we find ourselves in.

It really is amazing whenever one or more of us look in the mirror and say, "The problem is me. I need to make a change."

And so when God hears his people in exile begin to confess their own sin,

-He is quick to answer them through Ezekiel.

He says, *"Son of man, say to the house of Israel, 'As surely as I live, says the Sovereign Lord, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. So turn! Turn from our evil ways! Why will you die, O house of Israel?'"*

You see, God does not take any pleasure from punishing sin.

-There is no joy in Him over the death of the wicked.

In fact, God grieves over the death of the wicked.

-And as we have seen again and again in the Bible, God goes to great lengths to atone for our sin and wickedness,

-so we will not have to die as a punishment for our sins.

-He goes so far as to take the punishment on Himself!

But we still have to receive this amazing gift of life He has for us.

-As long as we continue to reject His gift, and reject the Giver, and live as though we don't need Him,

-we are then continuing to live in our sin and rebellion.

And that is what comes naturally to all of us.

-So I say again, it is a downright miracle whenever someone

acknowledges their own sin, and confesses it, and repents of it and asks for help.

And when the Israelites here in verse 10 confess their sin,
-and cry out asking, "How then can we live?"
-God speaks to them through His watchman Ezekiel.

And he speaks to them about righteousness, about living "rightly."

When you first read verse 12-16 here, the wording can sound kind of convoluted and confusing.

-But in essence God is saying a very simple thing to his people:

-He says, "If you want to know how then to live, there's two things to keep in mind.

1. You can't trust in your own righteousness, because everyone on earth is apt to fall into sin every day.
2. But secondly, you don't have to despair of your unrighteousness, because you can quickly repent and be forgiven.

So seemingly righteous people can lose their righteousness "just like that" and be found guilty.

And seemingly unrighteous people can repent of their sin and be declared innocent "just like that."

The key is not your own righteousness.

-The key, God says, is your repentance and faith.

-That is what unlocks the doors to life, now and forever.

"So turn, O house of Israel," the Lord says.

"Take your current dismay over your own sin, and confess it,

-repent of it,

-turn the key in the lock and open the door to my grace and mercy and forgiveness."

This is what God invites everyone of us to do, in every generation.

-He calls us to live a repentant lifestyle.

It's not a life of trying harder and harder and harder to be righteous.

- It's a life of trusting more and more and more in the forgiveness of God for all of our unrighteousness.
- Our trust and our hope for life are in Him, not in ourselves.
- So give up trying so hard, and practice trusting more.
- It's our trust in God's forgiveness that enables us to be quick to repent whenever we uncover a new level of our sin.

Instead of being surprised by our sin, we learn to accept that we are sinners.

And instead of trying to cover up our sin, or blame it on someone else,

- we learn to confess it, name it honestly, and repent of it.

Then we learn to receive the forgiveness that is already there for us and trust in it.

- This produces in us a constantly renewed attitude of gratitude.

This is what a life of faith in 3D looks like: then and now and always.

2. But there's one more aspect to this as well.

Just as Ezekiel was commissioned by God to be a watchman and to bring this news to God's people and to the wider world even of Babylon,

- so you and I are also commissioned in a way to be watchmen for each other and for the world around us.

In the great commission we read earlier from Matthew 28,

-Jesus says to his disciples, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore into all the world and make disciples, baptizing them in the name of the Father and Son and Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you."

Now you may never have thought about it this way, but that is essentially a call to be a watchman like Ezekiel.

It's not that we are all "capital P Prophets," but we are all commissioned by Jesus

-to go into the world with a message that needs to be heard.

And it is a message that is both a warning and an invitation.

-It is a "watchman's message" that there is a coming day of accountability,
-when God's justice and mercy will be displayed for all the world to see.

-It will be a day when God's justice will be meted out on all who have continued to live in sin, trusting in their own wits and wisdom,
-and rejecting or ignoring the gift of salvation that God has offered us all in Christ.

-At the same time it will be a day of mercy for all those who have trusted in the cross of Christ for their salvation.
-They will see that God's justice on their sin was already meted out on Jesus at the cross.
-And they will be welcomed into God's presence full of joy and thanksgiving and love.

This is the message of the Bible that has been entrusted to all of us who hope in Christ.

-We are meant to relay that message to each other and to the wider world,
-just like a watchman relays important messages to the people of the city over which he stands guard.

We do not have to be obnoxious about the way we relay the message,

-but there should be a sense of urgency about the importance of the message.
-It is a message that really matters.
-It's a matter of life and death.
-Eternal life and eternal death.

And we have the awesome privilege to be able to inform people that God takes no pleasure in the death of anyone.

We get to tell people that they really can't rely on their own righteousness,
-but they don't have to despair of their own unrighteousness.

Instead, they can simply confess their sin and repent of it to God and be forgiven.

- In fact, we have the amazing good news that in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ:
 - all their sins have already been forgiven:
 - sins past, present, and future,
 - sins they are aware of and sins they are unaware of.
 - In Christ, they are all forgiven, if they will simply repent and believe the good news.

This is an amazing message of hope and of life,
-and our lives are meant to be witnesses of the truth of that message,
-even as our mouths are meant to be re-layers of that message.

This is what it means to obey the Great Commission.
-We get to be “watchmen” in the world around us.

God says that if those around us do not receive the message or act on it, then the consequences are on their own head.
-They are responsible for their own sin.

But if we don't share the message of life we have been given,
-and we don't give witness to the justice and mercy of God we have come to grasp,
-then there is a responsibility which we bear for that.
-We will have been watchmen who were not faithful to their task.

This isn't to cause you to despair if you have failed at times to share the message with someone around you.
-We have all failed to do that many times I am sure.

But there is a constant invitation to all of us to turn and find more grace from God.
-If we have been lacking in any way, even at being a watchman,
-we simply confess it and ask for more grace, and more forgiveness.

-And in receiving more grace, we become more thankful.

And it is out of a grateful heart that we become more eager
and more apt to share a message of hope with others.

You see, don't even go away from this message committed to
trying harder to be a better evangelist.

- Go away from this message trusting God all the more to be
gracious to you,
- and be so delighted that He takes no pleasure in death,
-but rejoices to give people life,
- that you can't wait to pass along the good news to
others.

Be a watchman who loves God, and loves his/her neighbors,
-and so you will fulfill all the laws and all the
commandments.

Let's pray.