

DON'T SLEEP ON YOUR WATCH! – EZEKIEL 33:7-11

PASTOR COLIN RIEKE ~ SEPTEMBER 28, 2014

⁷ “Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; so hear the word I speak and give them warning from me. ⁸ When I say to the wicked, ‘O wicked man, you will surely die,’ and you do not speak out to dissuade him from his ways, that wicked man will die for his sin, and I will hold you accountable for his blood. ⁹ But if you do warn the wicked man to turn from his ways and he does not do so, he will die for his sin, but you will have saved yourself. ¹⁰ “Son of man, say to the house of Israel, ‘This is what you are saying: “Our offenses and sins weigh us down, and we are wasting away because of them. How then can we live?” ’ ¹¹ Say to them, ‘As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, O house of Israel?’



This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it,

Once there was a night watchman who had been caught sleeping several times on the job. The boss issued one final warning, “If I catch you sleeping again, I’ll fire you!” The next night, the boss came in and caught the night watchman with his head down and elbows on the desk. “Aha, I’ve caught you again,” the boss shouted. The watchman’s eyes popped open, but being a quick thinking man, he uttered one word before raising his head. This one word caused the boss to apologize profusely and go home. Can you guess what that one word was? The word he spoke was “Amen.”

Now, I’m certainly not encouraging the deceptive behavior of the watchman in the story, because the duty of a watchman is very important. The duty of a watchman is to keep what’s meant to be out, out, and to keep what’s meant to be in, in. Especially in the olden days of moats, castles and city walls, the task of a watchman was very important. He could see impending danger a long ways off and his duty was to warn of the coming danger so that everyone would be protected.

This morning we see in the book of Ezekiel, the prophet Ezekiel being called to be a watchman for the house of Israel. He was to give the warning from God of the spiritual danger that was surrounding his people, a very important task, and a task that he shouldn’t fall asleep on. But it is more than just the prophet Ezekiel who was called to be a watchman; it was all of us, as we saw in our gospel for this morning. And God’s Word gives a wonderful reminder and reason you DON’T SLEEP ON YOUR WATCH!

1. A warning from God
2. An encouragement to live

(1)

The book of Ezekiel is one of those Old Testament books that doesn’t get a lot of attention. It’s difficult to read, it’s filled with visions and pictures, and especially for us in the 21st century, the names and places are completely foreign. And yet, like the rest of God’s Word, it does tell us the story of sin and grace. A common phrase which is repeated often in the book is, “**You shall know that I am the Lord.**”

“You shall know that I am the Lord” when I took you out of Israel and Judah for rejecting me, **“you shall know that I am the Lord,”** when I will punish the heathen nations around you in Babylon, and **“you shall know that I am the Lord,”** when I show you the extent of my love.

Even here in this chapter of Ezekiel, God shows that he is the Lord – the God of free and faithful grace. This chapter is a transition chapter in the book of Ezekiel; God’s people will be restored again. How would this come to be? It would be through God’s prophet Ezekiel, who would be a watchman for the house of Israel. We talked a little bit about who watchmen are and what they do, but Ezekiel would be called to be a spiritual watchman. And in a way, Ezekiel had a pretty straightforward job. He didn’t need to scan the horizons for danger; God would tell him the danger. God says, **“Hear the word I speak, and give them warning from me.”** Ezekiel would not arbitrarily decide what was dangerous or not, he would be a watchman told by God.

Ezekiel was to say to the wicked a warning from God, **“You will surely die!”** These words should be familiar to you, they were the same words that God warned Adam and Eve with in the Garden of Eden, **“Do not eat the fruit from the tree...or you will surely die!”** It was a straightforward job: tell people what God wanted to say. But God provided a warning for Ezekiel also, if **“you do not speak out to dissuade him from his ways, that wicked man will die for his sin, and I will hold you accountable for his blood.”** It’s a harsh penalty, but a just one. On the other hand, **“if you do warn the wicked man to turn from his ways and he does not do so, he will die for his sin, but you will have saved yourself.”**

This is one thing Ezekiel was to do as a watchman for the Lord – speak words of warning to the wicked man. In this section of Ezekiel we do not have what qualifies someone as wicked. But if we draw from the all of Scripture, we come to a pretty clear picture of what wickedness is. Wickedness is any sin before God. The apostle Paul in the New Testament is very clear what wickedness equals, **“Do you not know that the *wicked* will not inherit the kingdom of God? Neither will the sexually immoral, nor adulterers, nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.”**

But it is not only Ezekiel that has been called to be a watchman, and it’s not just your pastors and elders either, it’s you – all Christians. This is not something that is an optional part of a Christian life either, it goes right along with our gospel this morning, **“Go, show your brother his fault.”** It goes along the great commission, **“Go into all the world and make disciples, baptizing them...and teaching them to obey *everything* I have commanded you.”** We have been called to be watchmen not only for our brothers and sisters in Christ, but for the world. We have been called not only to preach the good news that Christ died for all, we have also been called to warn people with the message of the law. We each have been called to be a watchman, and God doesn’t want us to FALL ASLEEP ON OUR WATCH.

(2)

The reason God gives us to give warning to our brothers, isn’t just because this is what God wants. It is far more than that. It is for our own benefit, our own well-being. We see that brought out in the second half of Ezekiel’s words for this morning. **“Our offenses and sins weigh us down, and we are wasting away because of them.”** Let’s think about those words for a moment.

How is sin described? It is described as something “weighing us down,” as something that causes us to “waste away.” Sin is detrimental; sin is destructive to our own selves, to our own bodies. But how often do we really see it that way? The world portrays sin as something fun, something liberating, and something good. It is a lie that has been repeated enough times that we may start to believe some of it. We can start to feel restricted by our godly living – giving up our time, our money, our freedom to God. The slithering serpent has won a great victory when he has twisted good into something evil, and mixed just enough truth with evil to make it seem good.

But this is the very definition of sin. The definition of sin comes across as “twisted.” Sin makes everything twisted. It twists evil to make it seem good, and it twists good to make it seem evil, and how good Satan is at that. Satan wants us to continue to walk a path apart from God, because the more we walk that path, the less likely we are to turn from it. The less likely we are to “**turn from our evil ways.**”

There’s more here than just the fact that we are all sinners and deserving of an eternity of pain away from God. It’s the fact that we are sinners who have become comfortable in our sin, living in our sin, walking in our sin, dwelling in our sin. This is the importance of a watchman. The watchman doesn’t make you perfect; the watchman alerts you and shines a light on the destructive path you are walking. The watchman gives encouragement to turn from your evil ways and live!

Sometimes people get the idea that God takes a sort of pleasure in condemning us sinners. Kind of like we might take pleasure in that person speeding on the road finally getting caught by the cops. But nothing is further from the truth. In fact, the very opposite is true. The Sovereign Lord says, “**I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live.**” A job that we have as watchman is to encourage turning and living; turning away from that which is destroying us, to that which is restoring us.

In our postmodern culture this is not the answer that people want to hear. They want to hear what they’re doing is fine. They want to believe that every path is just as good as another. But that attitude just starts sliding down the slippery slope, and you’re left to wonder if there is any absolute truth. Really the problem lies in the way the world looks at God and his Word. People interpret the Bible through the lens of their sinful behavior rather than interpreting their sinful behavior through the lens of the Bible.

And this at times can be difficult, even for Christians. Because there are certain things in the Bible that don’t make a whole lot of sense to us – logically or otherwise. We don’t pick it up from these verses in Ezekiel, but we gather it from the rest of Scripture, even the turning that God encourages us to do, we can only do because of God. Because God through the power of his Word causes that transformation in us. And yet, those who reject God’s call have no one to blame but themselves. It was CS Lewis who wrote, “There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, ‘Thy will be done,’ and those to whom God says, in the end, ‘Thy will be done.’ All that are in hell, choose it.”

But it is not out of fear that we are encouraged to live, but joy. A joy in the life we have before us. Think about that for a moment. It is a privilege we have as Christians to give warnings. Many times, waking our neighbor up at 6am is not a very nice thing to do, until you say his house was burning down, then waking our neighbor up becomes a very good thing to do. If we would warn our neighbor to protect

his physical property because we care about him, wouldn't we even more warn our neighbor against something even more dangerous? We are giving them encouragement to live.

I can remember a story my dad told of when we were back in Africa. We had just moved to our new house in Malawi, and we were getting home late one night. When we approached the gate to our house, my dad honked the horn, hoping to arouse the attention of our night watchman. Nobody answered the honk. So my dad got out looking for the night watchman, and he found him lying on the grass sleeping. Despite my dad's attempts to get him up, the watchman kept sleeping. Finally my dad had to take a garden hose and spray water on him to get him up. Was that a loving thing to do, wake a man from his slumber? When you consider that was his job, then yes it was the loving thing to do. Our job as Christians is to be a watchman, not only for our brothers and sisters in Christ, but also for those who do not yet know him. **DON'T SLEEP ON YOUR WATCH**, be a watchman. Amen.