

**“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. 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. 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. “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?” ’ 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?’**

Dear Friends in Christ,

Last Sunday Pastor Clemons explained that human wisdom is different from God’s wisdom. There is a difference between what the world *thinks* is right and what God says is right. He gave us some excellent examples of answers and actions that the world—and sometimes we—offer to people as solutions to their sinful situations, but which are not godly advice: an abortion for the young, single girl who is pregnant, an avoidance of the subject of God to unchurched friends and family so as not to make them uncomfortable, an unwillingness to speak about sexual sins like living together and homosexuality. The world speaks in a very different way than God does was last week’s message.

Today, God speaks to us about our authority and responsibility to speak for him and to declare his truth. All the Scripture lessons today speak about that, but we’re going to look more closely at the words of God to Ezekiel in chapter 33 and we’ll find that the expectations the Lord had for his prophet are expectations he has for us today. From these words primarily, but with the backdrop of those other lessons from Scripture, this message comes through loud and clear:

### **YOUR PASTOR IS A WATCHMAN...AND SO ARE YOU!**

The Lord’s name for Ezekiel was “Son of Man.” He called him that 93 times in this Old Testament book. Everything we know about Ezekiel is contained in the book’s 48 chapters, and we do find a few important and interesting things. Ezekiel was from a priestly family, a family that ministered in the Temple in Jerusalem. They would have cared for the temple and its furnishings, received offerings, done the sacrifices, kept watch on the Temple grounds, and more. He was also a prophet, a person called by God to proclaim his message, to preach to the people. Prophets didn’t always tell about events to come, but often did. This was part of Ezekiel’s job as the Lord’s prophet. He started serving in this role in 593 B.C. and his message was a difficult one: *Your country will be overtaken, your Temple will be destroyed, your people will be taken into captivity.* Judgment was on its way.

For 7 years, Ezekiel preached this message of judgment and urged the people of Judah to repent of their sin, their rejection of God and his ways. But they did not repent. They did not change. They did not listen. And the Lord brought the hammer of judgment down upon them in the form of the Babylonians. In 586 B.C., this world superpower did to Judah all that Ezekiel had foretold. Ezekiel continued to speak as God’s prophet during the captivity in Babylon. He continued to urge them to repent, to listen to God AND to prepare for the day when the Lord would deliver them from captivity and restore them, their land and their worship life in Jerusalem’s Temple.

As one of God’s messengers today—a pastor—I would imagine that Ezekiel may have felt awfully down about preaching all those years and seeing the people not listen to him and God. I would imagine it was difficult to be the preacher during the darkest days of Judah’s history—the time when

the lost their country, watched their temple get ransacked and God's people led away in a long procession to Babylon. Isn't it hard to imagine things being any worse than that?

As a pastor today—and I think this is generally true of pastors, even yours—there are days when I wonder whether it's worth it. I'm saying what needs to be said. I'm doing what God says to do. But people don't listen. People who are supposedly God's people don't want to hear that what they are doing is wrong, that it separates them from God, that God will send judgment for their rejection of him, that they need to repent. It's frustrating and deflating and can seem so pointless.

And so that you don't get the wrong idea, let me assure you that it's not because I—or your other pastors—feel that we are better than other people or that we don't need to repent. No, we are mindful of our sin and that we need God's forgiveness. It's pretty difficult to preach the law of God and not have it pound on your own heart first. We know we need to repent and change too—just as Ezekiel must have been reminded every time God called him “Son of Man” in comparison to the holy God.

The Lord answered any such feelings of dejection from his prophet by telling him: **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.**

Things weren't looking so good, but there was one thing that had not changed: Ezekiel was God's voice to the people. God gave him this authority. How comforting it must have been for the man whose name meant “*Strengthened by God*” to have the Lord support and encourage him this way!

But with authority comes responsibility. How is this for a burden of responsibility?: **“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. 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. 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.**

Things don't sound like they were too optional for Ezekiel, do they? God had an expectation that his prophet be a watchman who warned the people about the danger of their sin.

The watchman was the guy who stood atop the fortified city wall, watching for danger—like the approaching enemy army. But he was never to just look out across the land; his job was also to warn. Most people lived or worked outside the city walls. They tended flocks and vineyards and orchards. They worked in the fields nearby. They operated small, local businesses. When the watchman saw danger approaching, he would sound the trumpet (like the watchman on the front of the worship folder). The people would stream through the city gates and once they were in, the doors would be shut and locked. Then all would prepare to resist the enemy and repel the danger.

If someone heard the warning of the watchman but ignored it, then the suffering, the captivity or their death at the hands of the enemy would be their own fault because they did not listen. BUT if the watchman saw the danger and did not warn the people, HE was held accountable for the lives of those who were led away or who perished.

Do you get it? Do you understand what the Lord was saying about his prophet? Ezekiel know full well what a watchman was. He was to be the spiritual watchman for the people of God. He was to point out sin and warn that it leads away from God and toward eternal death. If he did not do the job of a spiritual watchman, the almighty God and Judge would hold him accountable for the lives that were lost to death in hell. If he did point out sin and warn people, he would have been faithful to God. Those who lost their eternal lives would have no one to blame but themselves.

The same is true for the men who hold this position today—pastors. **YOUR PASTOR IS A WATCHMAN!** Your pastors have been called by God—through you—to do the same job as Ezekiel. We are to watch and to say what God says. We are to point out sin and error and warn that a lack of repentance and change leads to eternal death. It's not easy to have someone say things like that to you or someone you love, but would you rather have us not say it? That would be dumb; you extended a Divine Call to each of us to serve you for your spiritual benefit. This is what you asked us to do!

You should expect that we're going to say sex outside of marriage is sin. You should expect that we're going to say that a person is not to despise God's Word and the Sacrament of Holy Communion by staying away from church—that is sinful. You should expect that we're going to say that gossiping to others is sin and that God instructs you to stop and instead go talk to whoever you have the problem with. You should expect that we're going to say that smoking pot is illegal in AZ, so it is sin. Getting drunk is sinful. Holding a grudge, refusing to forgive someone is sin. Talking disrespectfully to your parents is sinful. Bullying other kids at school is sinful. Not bringing your children up to know the Lord is sin. Disrespecting your spouse is sin. There are so many ways we sin against God and every single one of them is important because sin separates us from God. And that separation will happen eternally if we refuse to acknowledge our sin, repent and change our ways.

Love for Jesus, who offered a perfect life on the cross to pay for all these sins is really disregarded by us if we refuse to admit our sins, ask that the cross-earned forgiveness be applied to us, and make every effort to change our ways. Do you really want your pastors not to say anything about your sin or someone else's?

Remember that Ezekiel's job was to warn against sin. But the hope was that people would actually listen to what God said through him and repent!

When the people of Judah responded **"Our offenses and sins weigh us down, and we are wasting away because of them. How then can we live?"** they were probably considering that they were suffering their captivity because of their parents sins and rejection of God for many years before—in addition to their own sins. And what message was the watchman to share? **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?'** You hear God pleading, don't you? His desire was not to punish, but to show love.

God wanted to extend forgiveness and life and he did so to the believing child of his who lived a life of repentance and reliance on God's grace and mercy. Ezekiel proclaimed God's *love* for sinners too. He had a message of restoration and hope. Once again, I'm sure you see the similarities between the watchman Ezekiel and your pastors. As watchmen, we have no other agenda than to have people see the need for Jesus' forgiveness and to know that they have it as they repent and listen to his Word. Because when that happens, restoration with God is assured, and there is hope and there is eternal life.

## **YOUR PASTOR IS A WATCHMAN...BUT SO ARE YOU!**

A pastor is called to do this work out of love and service to God and others, but you heard in the Gospel today that Jesus asks his followers to do the same. What did Jesus say? **"If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault..."** And then he lays out the loving steps to take in order to lead a sinner to repentance.

We see the will of God and the instruction of Jesus put into practice in a real-life example in the reading from Galatians today. Paul said, **When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he was clearly in the wrong.** He goes on to tell what the sin was and how it was not only wrong, it led others to sin. Just think for a minute about sins today that lead others to sin—especially when no one has the love or courage to say that it is wrong. A Christian young man moves in with his girlfriend and others, including his younger sister, naturally think that must be okay. A Christian badmouths and disrespects the government, their parents or their pastors and people go away thinking that there's no problem with that.

You are also God's watchmen (watchwomen?!). This is not just the work of the pastors or the work of the elders in a church, who are also charged to do some of this on behalf of the congregation. This is the work of every Christian. Read again the words of Psalm 51 in your worship folder and be reminded that you are not to serve as a watchman because you've got it all right, that you are without sin. No, we know clearly what sin looks like because God tells us in his Word and, unfortunately, we see it in our own lives. But we repent of our sins. We look to God for forgiveness. We trust that we have been restored to God and have eternal life. We are then prepared to function as the watchmen God needs and wants for his people.

You heard me describe how difficult this work of a watchman can be for a pastor and it is no different for you. It can be tough, frustrating, scary, unappreciated. But it is important for the soul of the one you speak to. And let us not forget that the Holy Spirit works through the Word you share and he will lead some to repentance and faith! That's what God wants! That's what you want! That's the point of God having watchmen and the point of you and I serving as such.

So, what the world says is right is different from the truth of God is was what Pastor Clemons told us last week. Today I shared with you that God says that his people are all watchmen, with the authority and responsibility to faithfully proclaim God's truth about sin. Next week Pastor Kassulke will share with us the next thought when it comes to confronting sin: we are to forgive as God forgives. Through the instruction God gives us during these weeks, may he strengthen us to know and do his will for the salvation of others and for our spiritual good as well. Amen.

**Now the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.**