

**“I have appointed you a watchman”
(Eze. 3:17)**

Intro: It is clear that our world is becoming increasingly dangerous. Another foiled terrorist plot in London reminds us that those who protect our country must be vigilant and persistent in watching for the enemy. We count on them to sound the warning when danger is lurking. We surely should appreciate such people even though their warnings may be at times disturbing or inconvenient.

In our Bible reading this week we saw that God commissioned Ezekiel the prophet to a similar role:

Son of man, I have appointed you a watchman to the house of Israel; whenever you hear a word from My mouth, warn them from Me. (Ezekiel 3:17)

Ezekiel was God’s early warning device to a people living in idolatry and immorality. His job was to make them understand the danger that awaited them if they did not repent. We can learn some valuable lessons from his charge that affect the way we react to those around us.

Ezekiel’s role as watchmen

The importance of his watch—to warn the people!

Watchmen were the early warning devices of the ancient world. Their function was quite simple; but profoundly important. They stationed themselves at the top of a lofty tower with the best view of the surrounding countryside and gazed across the horizon for an approaching enemy. When anything was sighted, his duty was to fill the air with the loud sounds of a trumpet blast or the loudest voice of impending danger. The usual response would be for the city to close its gates and for the soldiers to man the walls with their weapons in anticipation of attack.

Ezekiel’s role as watchman was to announce to the people of Israel the words of God and the impending destruction of Jerusalem which would occur in 586 BC. It was not a popular or pleasant message; but it was an important one.

The responsibility of his watch—to tell the truth!

Ezekiel was to tell the truth.

“When you heard a word from my mouth...”

Ezekiel was to tell the truth to both the wicked and the righteous.

The consequences of his watch—to save lives!

When I say to the wicked, ‘You shall surely die’; and you do not warn him or speak out to warn the wicked from his wicked way that he may live, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand. Yet if you have warned the wicked, and he does not turn from his wickedness or from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but you have delivered yourself.

Again, when a righteous man turns away from his righteousness and commits iniquity, and I place an obstacle before him, he shall die; since you have not warned him, he shall die in his sin, and his righteous deeds which he has done shall not be remembered; but his blood I will require at your hand. However, if you have warned the righteous man that the righteous should not sin, and he does not sin, he shall surely live because he took warning; and you have delivered yourself.” (Ezekiel 3:18-21)

If Ezekiel did not warn the sinner, then their blood would be on his hands. It would be as if he was charged with their deaths. If Ezekiel did warn, he himself would be delivered while those around him perished.

Finally we should remember the words of a similar passage later in the book.

“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?’ (Ezekiel 33:11)

Our role as watchmen!

Our role as teachers of God’s word makes us first of all bearers of good news! Yet, a part of our duty as a teacher is also to be a watchman to warn of the consequences of sin.

and that no man transgress and defraud his brother in the matter because the Lord is the avenger in all these things, just as we also told you before and solemnly warned you. (1 Thessalonians 4:6)

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. (Acts 20:26-27)

If we read the NT carefully we’ll see numerous warnings from God that we need to heed ourselves and pass along.

Warnings to those who live in sin

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. (Romans 1:18-19)

Paul follows with a description of people who did not honor God or give thanks but turned instead to idolatry and immorality, committing sins “worthy of death”. After listing those sins he issues further warning:

But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will render to every man according to his deeds: (Romans 2:5-6)

Warning to those who follow the multitude

Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide, and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and many are those who enter by it. For the gate is small, and the way is narrow that leads to life, and few are those who find it. (Matthew 7:13-14)

Warning to those who listen to false prophets

Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. (Matthew 7:15-16)

Warning to those who pretend to be disciples while living in disobedience

Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.' (Matthew 7:21-23)

Warning to those who allow fear to keep them from doing right

But I will warn you whom to fear: fear the One who after He has killed has authority to cast into hell; yes, I tell you, fear Him! (Luke 12:5)

Warning to those who reject the message of the gospel

He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned. (Mark 16:16)

Warnings to the faithful who turn back into unbelief

Take care, brethren, lest there should be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart, in falling away from the living God. (Hebrews 3:12)

Warning to the faithful about conflict among themselves

But if you bite and devour one another, take care lest you be consumed by one another. (Galatians 5:15)

The same principles that governed Ezekiel govern us in our role as watchmen.

If we are silent, then the blood of others will be our hands.

If we speak up, then we will have saved ourselves, even if those warned do not heed the warning and repent.

Conclusion: The purpose of my lesson is not to urge people to indiscriminately go out telling people they're going to hell; but it is an appeal to realize that what people don't know will kill them! God has entrusted to us His truth to lovingly share with others, and yes, to warn them of the consequences of their actions.

And let us all remember that when God warns we must listen carefully and humbly to His warning:

See to it that you do not refuse Him who is speaking. For if those did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less shall we escape who turn away from Him who warns from heaven. (Hebrews 12:25)