

Watchmen

Lent 3

Pastor Josh Frazee

Ezekiel 33: 7-20

Grace, peace, and mercy be to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Spring is officially here. This is the season for flowers, rain, and, yes, thunderstorms. Unfortunately, with the coming of storms and rain which are needed for the freshly planted seeds to grow into crops also comes the threat of tornadoes.

Living in “Tornado Alley” we know what tornadoes are—the damage that can result from them. So we have men and women who have dedicated their lives to meteorology, the study of the weather, who do their best to warn us when danger is coming.

Like the story of the Boy Who Cried Wolf, it can become all too easy to ignore sirens and warnings on the television and radio, choosing to look out the windows to see if something’s coming rather than to take shelter. In my experience I have heard many of these alerts and sirens and, after taking shelter, I have come out finding that the tornado or bad weather didn’t damage the area near me. Yet I still pay them heed as I know that weather is challenging to predict, and those men and women do their best to alert us when danger is on the way.

But like the Boy Who Cried Wolf or road construction signs put up miles before you get to the work is actually being done, when the wolf does attack and the road workers are around the next curve, will you be prepared, or will the wolf get the best of you? Will you hit that road worker?

There is a reason we have watchmen, even if they are not perfect. Unlike the Boy Crying Wolf, weathermen and women and those putting up signs for road crews are not doing it for jokes. There is danger. Beware!

Today we heard about another kind of watchman: the prophet Ezekiel, who would be sent to proclaim God’s Word of warning to the Israelites. Yet are the Israelites the only ones to whom God sent a watchman? Or has God sent watchmen even in our time? To what kind of danger do they alert us? What would happen if they should fail to alert us? These are the questions we’ll explore as we hear from the book of the prophet Ezekiel—while also bearing in mind that Ezekiel was a sinful human being called to do this work, and if he was a sinful human being called to this work, what about those other possible watchmen?

Verse 1

God said to Ezekiel: “So you, son of man, I have made a watchman for the house of Israel. Whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me. If I say to the wicked, O wicked one, you shall surely die, and you do not speak to warn the wicked to turn from his way, that wicked person shall die in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand. But if you warn the wicked to turn from his way, and he does not turn from his way, that person shall die in his iniquity, but you will have delivered your soul.”

That was God’s call for Ezekiel to be His watchman; but are there watchmen today? Yes, today pastors are called to be the watchmen. Like Ezekiel, they are called to warn you if you are heading in a dangerous direction. If the pastor does not warn you, your sin will be added to his own against him. But if the pastor warns you and you do not listen, you will be judged, but the pastor will have done the task that God had set before him.

“And you, son of man, say to the house of Israel, Thus have you said: “Surely our transgressions and our sins are upon us, and we rot away because of them. How then can we live?” Say to them, As I live, declares the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his evil way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways, for why will you die, O house of Israel?”

God said that He takes no pleasure from the death of the wicked—not that He would not let them die in their sin. There is no forgiveness for impenitence. That is why God encouraged the Israelites through His watchman Ezekiel to “turn back, turn back from (their) evil ways.” So, you, too, Augsburg, “turn back, turn back from your evil ways, for why will you die...?” God does not desire that you die eternally, but that you repent and believe, so that you might live with Him forever. That is why God sent His Son: so that you might have a Savior from your sin. And God sent His Son so that you might receive His Spirit to turn you from your sin, so that you might believe, and so that you would live forever.

Now that you have come to faith in Jesus, the Holy Spirit moves you to repent and turn from your wicked ways and to live in Godly, God-pleasing ways. But if you fall into sin, beware! Be warned! There is no forgiveness for impenitence.

Verse 2

“And you, son of man, say to your people, The righteousness of the righteous shall not deliver him when he transgresses, and as for the wickedness of the wicked, he shall not fall by it when he turns from his wickedness, and the righteous shall not be able to live by his righteousness when he sins. Though I say to the righteous that he shall surely live, yet if he trusts in his righteousness and does injustice, none of his righteous deeds shall be remembered, but in his injustice that he has done he shall die. Again, though I say to the wicked, “You shall surely die,” yet if he turns from his sin and does what is just and right, if the wicked restores the pledge, gives back what he has taken by robbery, and walks in the statutes of life, not doing injustice, he shall surely live; he shall not die. None of the sins that he has committed shall be remembered against him. He has done what is just and right; he shall surely live.”

All this Ezekiel was to proclaim to the people of Israel as God’s watchman. The people of Israel: God’s chosen people, *not* the Gentiles. So when one of the Israelites, one of God’s chosen people, considered himself righteous and fell into sin, none of his righteousness would save him. Only by turning from the evil would he be saved. Likewise, if one of the Israelites was wicked, that is, having sinned, but turned from the sin, he would be saved. This is not to say that the act of turning would save or does save someone; it is by faith that we are saved.

Faith is more than just historical knowledge of Jesus as a person who walked on the earth. It is believing in Him. With faith in Jesus comes new life, a life of repentance—a life of turning away from sin, time and time again. That turning will not stop until we are made completely new at Jesus’ return.

As we heard earlier, Ezekiel is not the only watchman. Every pastor is one. God has made me a pastor, one of His watchmen; you have now heard what this text means. I have done what I have been called to do.

Verse 3

“Yet your people say, “The way of the Lord is not just,” when it is their own way that is not just. When the righteous turns from his righteousness and does injustice, he shall die for it. And when the wicked turns from his wickedness and does what is just and right, he shall live by this. Yet you say, “The way of the Lord is not just.” O house of Israel, I will judge each of you according to his ways.”

God will indeed judge each of us according to our ways. He will judge whether we have come to faith in His Son as our Savior from sin. But He will require more of the watchmen, whom He has put over the others. He holds them to a higher standard because they are charged with speaking His Word to the world: all of it, not just the easy parts. If the pastors see danger and do not warn you, it will not go well for you if you do

not repent, but it will also not go well for them for having said nothing. But, if the pastors see danger and warn you, they have fulfilled the duty of watchmen to which God has called them.

There is none of us who is righteous. We only become righteous by believing that God sent His Son into the world to save each of us, that you believe He died for you. As the Holy Spirit gives you the power to believe that truth, the Spirit also works in you to turn from your evil ways and to live the holy, just ways of God. Living justly will not be perfect in this life, but it will be made perfect in the next, when we get to meet and be with our Savior, Jesus, the God-man, who has paid for your sins and mine on the cross of Calvary, the very cross we follow Him toward this season of Lent. In Jesus' Name. Amen.