

Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost September 28, 2014
Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church

Pastor Charles Heup

Ezekiel 33:7-11 (ESV)

"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. 8) 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.

9) 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. 10) "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?'

11) 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 way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways, for why will you die, O house of Israel?

Dear friends in Christ:

We are used to the warnings which the weather service regularly issues. This past week there were some dense fog advisories. Soon there will be frost advisories. Each season has its own set of advisories, watches and warnings issued by the National weather service which are intended to help protect us from danger and to keep us safe. The weatherman doesn't just tell us what the weather is going to be he serves as a watchman to help us avoid weather related problems and difficulties.

In our text for today the Lord speaks to his prophet Ezekiel and informs him that he had been selected to be a watchman for the nation of Israel and to share his warnings with them.

The Lord called Ezekiel, Son of Man. With that title, the Lord was reminding Ezekiel of the weakness of his human nature in contrast with the power and glory of God. The Lord addressed Ezekiel this way over 90 times in this book! Jesus used this name over 80 times in the Gospels to describe himself as the one who became one of us to save us from sin and eternal punishment. As our great High Priest Jesus offered himself on the cross as the perfect payment for our sins and he continues to speak to God on our behalf.

Jesus – THE Son of Man – is also the ultimate prophet. Jesus was anointed to preach good news to the poor as Isaiah the prophet foretold. During the days of his earthly ministry Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God and sharing the words of eternal life. (cf. Luke 8:1 & John 6:68). After his return to heaven Jesus – the exalted Son of Man – continues to serve us as the ultimate prophet and King keeping us safe.

Theme: The Lord Provides Watchmen for His Church

1. Watchmen who are to hear the word of the Lord
2. Watchmen who are to proclaim the Law
3. Watchmen who are to proclaim the Gospel

Perhaps when we think of an OT watchman our mind pictures someone scanning the horizon watching for danger from an observation post on the wall of a city. Ezekiel's first job was not to watch but to listen to the

voice of the Lord who had seen the actions of his people and who knew the thoughts of their hearts and minds. Based on what he heard from the Lord the prophet Ezekiel was to faithfully sound a warning to God's people.

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. (ESV)

Now that Jesus – The Son of Man – the Son of Man is seated at the right hand of the Father one of the ways that he carries out his office as a prophet is by giving God's people servants who are responsible for watching over the souls of his people.

(Ephesians 4:10-11 NIV) ... **the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens ... gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers,**

The pastors the Lord gives us are numbered among the leaders mentioned in Hebrews 13 whom the Lord had placed in the position of being watchmen. (Hebrews 13:17 NIV) **Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.**

The commission that the Lord gave to Ezekiel to hear the word of the Lord and to warn the wicked to turn from their sins is included in the list of responsibilities which describe the work of which Paul addressed to Timothy: (2 Timothy 4:2 NIV) **Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage--with great patience and careful instruction.**

The Lord warned Ezekiel that he would be held accountable if he failed to warn a wicked person to turn from his sins. **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.** It is not always easy to proclaim the Law – to rebuke sinners because many times those who are in need of the rebuke are not willing to listen to what the Lord has to say. That is why the writer to the Hebrews encourages Christians to be willing to obey the leaders the Lord has given them.

It makes it easier to accept the preaching of the Law when we understand that the Lord's motive in proclaiming his Law to us is to warn us and to dissuade us from our sinful ways so that we do not die for our sins.

It is clear that the Lord requires pastors to speak out against sin and warn sinners because the Son of Man has appointed them to their position and charged them to keep watch over those entrusted to their care just as the Good Shepherd cares for his flock.

The Lord Provides Watchmen for His Church. Today's Gospel lesson reminds us that as brothers and sisters in Christ each of us has the privilege of watching over our fellow members in Christ's family. There we hear Jesus outline for us the actions that we as individuals are to take when a brother sins against us. It all starts with individuals lovingly approaching the one who has sinned with the goal of calling him to turn away from sin and to live in keeping with the Lord's ways.

It's much easier for us to simply look the other way when we become aware of the sins of others – but that's not pleasing to our Lord and it's not helpful to those who are sinning against the Lord. So what is it that accounts for our failures to warn others of their sins? There are two possible explanations.

One is that we don't take God seriously when he tells us that the wages of sin is death. The devil likes to deceive us into thinking that sin isn't really all that bad. If we have a ho-hum attitude toward sin we've become guilty of listening to the Devil's lies. We are in need of a call to repentance.

Another possible explanation for our failures to speak out against sin is that we are afraid of how the sinner might react to our message. We're afraid of losing a friend – but that fear isn't really taking into

consideration what is at stake. If you saw someone about to step in front of a speeding car – you'd do just about anything to stop them. You'd shout and scream, you'd run as fast as you could to pull them away from danger. We'd react the same way to any kind of physical dangers that might threaten someone. It's possible of course that the person might misunderstand our actions and wonder why we treated them that way. But once they understood the danger they would be most thankful.

Why wouldn't we do the same for someone who was heading straight down a path which would lead him into a spiritual disaster? Yes, it's true our message may not be respected but there is no other way to spare someone from the consequences of their sins than to call that person to repent of their sins. A part of that call is warning them of the consequences of their actions.

Our text makes it clear that such warnings are in keep with God's will. **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.**

The Lord Provides Watchmen for His Church. May we thank the Lord for those who reach out to us in love and warn us of our sins and may we gladly listen to the word as it calls us to serve each other as watchmen.

The Lord provides a message for the watchmen to share. In our text we are reminded that the Lord's Watchmen are to proclaim the Law. This is essentially the same message that the Lord entrusted to Ezekiel when he said, **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?'**

We can see just how serious the Lord was about not wanting the wicked to die when we call to mind the Son of Man's willingness to offer up his life for sinners. Jesus proclaimed; "The Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mark 10:45 NIV) **For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."**

It is important for us not only to hear the Law which rebukes sins but also to hear the Gospel which empowers us to turn away from sin and to believe in the Lord – trusting in his life and death to keep us safe from the punishment we deserve because of our sins. That's why the Lord also gives us watchmen who are to proclaim the Gospel. The Lord's call to repentance includes that wonderful Gospel invitation to turn to him as we turn away from sins and to live.

Sadly I wonder if at times we fail to take this call to heart. Do we understand what the Lord desires when he calls us to repent? Biblical repentance is a change of mind about one sins. Instead of looking at sins as something that brings us pleasure we are lead to see sin for what it really is – something that grieves the Lord and separates us from God's blessings. This new way of looking at sin fills our hearts with sorrow and the desire to stop sinning. Repentance will also include faith in the forgiveness of sins which is offered to us in Christ.

What wonderful news it is for us to hear that the blood of Jesus purifies us from all sin! What wonderful news we have to share with others. We have a message of law and Gospel that we can use to dissuade sinners from their sinful ways and to comfort them with the wonderful assurance of life and forgiveness.

Through his watchmen the Lord calls upon us to repent of our sins and to turn to him for forgiveness, life and salvation. May the Lord keep us safe as he leads us to head this call. And may he use us to lovingly sound that call to others. Amen.