

“Be a Watchman”
Ezekiel 3:16–21; 33:7–9
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Let’s begin by looking at these two passages in Ezekiel. Ezekiel 3:16–21 says [16] And at the end of seven days, the word of the LORD came to me: [17] *“Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel. Whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me. [18] If I say to the wicked, ‘You shall surely die,’ and you give him no warning, nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way, in order to save his life, that wicked person shall die for his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand. [19] But if you warn the wicked, and he does not turn from his wickedness, or from his wicked way, he shall die for his iniquity, but you will have delivered your soul. [20] Again, if a righteous person turns from his righteousness and commits injustice, and I lay a stumbling block before him, he shall die. Because you have not warned him, he shall die for his sin, and his righteous deeds that he has done shall not be remembered, but his blood I will require at your hand. [21] But if you warn the righteous person not to sin, and he does not sin, he shall surely live, because he took warning, and you will have delivered your soul.”*

Ezekiel 33:7–9 says [7] *“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.”*

Prayer:

Father, thank You for Your Word that is true, inerrant, and our only rule for faith and practice. Lord, help us to hear Your Word, do Your Word and be pleasing to You. May You use the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart to be acceptable in Your sight O Lord, my Redeemer, in Jesus’ Name, Amen.

I think all of us want to live a life of purpose. No one goes into adulthood or starts making decisions thinking I want to live a mediocre life where I just want to kind of get by. I don’t think anyone really thinks that way. In Ezekiel, as well as in the Major Prophets and Minor Prophets He commissions them to be a spokesman for Him. He wants them to share what God has said to them. I believe it is referring to us as well that we need to be a watchman for Christ. With that said I have three points I want to share with you about this. My three points in this study are one a watchman hears from the Lord, two a watchman says what God says even if people are not listening and thirdly, a watchman points to Christ.

In Isaiah 6:1, 8–10 says [1] *In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple.*

[8] *And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” Then I said, “Here I am! Send me.” [9] And he said, “Go, and say to this people: “Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive.’ [10] Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and blind their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed.”*

For Isaiah something had to happen for him to hear the Lord. Uzziah had to die. Uzziah was one of the eight good kings of Judah. Israel had none and it was good times although the people still didn't follow the Lord. The people rebelled and worshipped foreign gods. They didn't follow the Lord as explicitly as God had told them to. In fact, God tells Isaiah to go to these people and they will not listen. They will not really hear what you have to say or turn from their ways. That is a great commission, isn't it? That was Isaiah's commission. I might have thought twice about that if it were me and thought maybe the Lord needs to send someone else but Isaiah went.

In order to speak the words of God Isaiah had to remove some distractions. A big distraction was Uzziah. I have lived over six decades and one would think I would learn that I need to hear from the Lord constantly and that I would know automatically that even though I have a quiet time daily, seek to be led by the Spirit and pray that my default button would always be to go to the Lord first. I still try to work things out in my own power and fix things if I can. I still want to do things in my own strength. Scripture is clear that I need to hear from God.

Psalm 23:1–3 says *[1] The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. [2] He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. [3] He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.* I need to be restored every day. I need to have a different perspective every day. In Mark 3:14–15, Jesus said *[14] And he appointed twelve (whom he also named apostles) so that they might be with him and he might send them out to preach [15] and have authority to cast out demons.* The first thing Jesus calls us to do is to be with Him. God wants our fellowship.

I think of other places in the Psalms David and others are saying the same thing. Psalm 37:7 says *[7] Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him; fret not yourself over the one who prospers in his way, over the man who carries out evil devices!* Psalm 46:10 says *[10] "Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!"* Then one of my favorite Psalms is Psalm 73 where Asaph is really honest with God. This could also apply to today. He is basically looking around and saying 'the wicked are winning and shaking their fists at You, God. Our culture is going to pot and I'm seeking to follow You, what is the deal?' I paraphrased that but Psalm 73:16–17 says *[16] But when I thought how to understand this, it seemed to me a wearisome task, [17] until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I discerned their end.*

So many times we say we have been put on this earth to glorify God and enjoy Him forever and John Piper took that and tweaked it a bit and said 'the chief end of man is to glorify God *by* enjoying Him forever.' He went on to say that God is most glorified when we are most satisfied in Him when we truly look to God first in everything. In Piper's second edition of *Desiring God* he talks about how much more it means to him now than 16 years prior when he wrote the first edition. These last years have been harder for him. He says 'life is hard and yet God is good. As we grow older and our bodies weaken, we much learn from the Puritan pastor, Richard Baxter who died in 1691. To redouble our efforts to find strength in spiritual joy not natural supplies, he prayed 'may the living God who is the portion and the rest of the saints make these carnal minds so spiritual and our earthly hearts so heavenly that loving Him and delighting in Him may be the work of our lives.'

Piper goes on to say 'when delighting in God is the work of our lives there will be an inner strength for ministries to love to the very end.' We have to hear what God has to say. What is distracting us from hearing God? Are we too busy? Are we too independent? Are we too proud? Are we too self-reliant? If we want to be a watchman for God we have to know what

He wants us to say. The only way we are going to know what God wants us to say is to spend time with Him and hear what He has to say.

Do you believe God wants to speak to us today? Yes. Do you believe that He is? Yes. Our theme this year is based on being led by the Spirit. We have to be listening. We don't want to grieve the Holy Spirit. We want to be in tune with Him. We want Him to convict us of sin. We want Him to lead and guide us in the Truth. When God does lead us we experience some great things.

I want you to follow this illustration and it involves two Mikes. A few years ago there was a man involved in our ministry named Mike Hill who was with a big accounting firm and had moved to Atlanta. I had heard that his wife was critically ill. I was at the office and it was like the Lord brought Mike Hill to my mind. I try to listen when those things happen. I was thinking it might be too late to call Mike Hill. I also have a friend in Atlanta named Mike Smith who I had discipled at Florida State when I was with Campus Crusade. We discipled Mike Smith's wife Judy as well and Mike was a pilot with Delta Airlines now. Well, I decided to call and instead of calling Mike Hill I accidentally called Mike Smith. Mike Smith's wife Judy answered the phone and I realized I called the wrong Mike but Judy said "Phil, did you mean to call me?" I said "I didn't but I'm sure God didn't make any mistake here, so how are things with you?" There was this pregnant pause and Judy said "If you had called me any other night I probably would have lied and said things were ok but things are not ok."

For the next hour she shared with me about their marriage and the things they were going through. I asked Judy if she thought Mike would talk to me because I was going to be in Atlanta for the General Assembly soon and she said she thought that he would. Long story short I was able to hook up with Mike Smith when I was there and we talked. God used that occasion as well as many other people in his life to restore his marriage. He recently had his 60th birthday and now has his first grandchild. Here I was wrong in the person I meant to call but God used me and that opportunity.

I look for people in the business community through newspapers, magazines or articles that I see might have an openness to the Gospel since our ministry is to Young Business Leaders. I write them notes of appreciation for what they do especially when I see they conduct themselves with integrity and good leadership. This one man I sent a note to responded back to me about wanting to get together with me and talk. The man used to be the chief of staff for the mayor and we recently met up this past week. He said "When your note came it meant so much to me and it was at a time that I really needed it. I think God wants us to work together in some ways. How can we make this happen?" He is now a part of a revitalization team with AME churches in Alabama. He spends every Sunday at Auburn with the churches there trying to help them. I hooked him up with this team of people at our church who does this revitalization in churches.

It's when we walk this adventure that God will speak to us, we will listen and we will know where to go because we spent time with Him. Who is our refuge? When Michael Jordan was inducted into the NBA Hall of Fame he made this statement; 'basketball has always been my refuge. That's my safe place.' Where is your safe place? I hope that God is your refuge. A watchman needs to hear what God says and say what God wants him to say.

Jeremiah is a great example of someone who is a little hesitant about doing what God wanted him to do. God had to constantly encourage him and remind him. Jeremiah 1:4-7 says [4] *Now the word of the LORD came to me, saying, [5] "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the*

nations.” [6] Then I said, “Ah, Lord GOD! Behold, I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth.” [7] But the LORD said to me, “Do not say, ‘I am only a youth’; for to all to whom I send you, you shall go, and whatever I command you, you shall speak. [8] Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, declares the LORD.”

God may not ask us to run through the streets naked and barefoot as He did to Isaiah. He may not ask us to wear a linen belt and then bury it like He did to Jeremiah. I don't believe He'll ask us to marry a woman of harlotry as He did to Hosea but He does call us to speak His Word. He does call us to be ready for any opportunity for Christ, to be ready to give an answer. He does call us to pray for people that we want to come to know Christ. He does want us to bloom where He has planted us, to make a difference wherever we are.

The truth is on our side. This article touches on this and it's about transgender people. The man who wrote this is Dr. Paul McCue who is a former psychiatrist and chief for John Hopkins Hospital. He said that transgenderism is a mental disorder that merits treatment. “Sex change is biologically impossible and people who promote sexual reassignment surgery or collaborating with are promoting mental disorder.” He also reported on a new study that the suicide rate among transgender people who have reassignment surgery is twenty times higher than the suicide rate among non-transgender people. As a result of his influence they don't do that surgery any more at John Hopkins Hospital. We have the truth and we need to be ready to share what God puts on our heart.

I recently ran into two people at whose stories illustrate speaking the truth when the opportunities arise. One was an elder in our church who went out to California that a higher institution was checking on to hire in finding people for the University of Berkley. It is one of the most liberal institutions in our country if not the world. As he is interviewing trying to get this job, the interviewers asked him his thoughts on gay marriage. He ascertained that everyone in that room would disagree with what he was about to say about gay marriage. Quite possibly it would be the last time he would see them because he is probably not going to get that job but he chose to share what he thought about gay marriage. He left thinking that would be the last time he would see them.

He received a call when he was at the airport as he was about to head back to Birmingham that said “We had an interesting discussion after you left about your view point on gay marriage. We didn't necessarily agree with it but we need someone with the courage you had to tell us the person we need for this institution. You are hired.” He told me today that four years after that one of those people have reached out to him to help them find another personnel situation. It doesn't mean that it will always work out that way but he spoke what God wanted him to say, the truth and God blessed that to put him in that situation as light in a dark place.

I also had a conversation recently with a person who is involved with pro athletes. This particular day he was going around encouraging them and one of them stopped him and said “I want a lesson” which meant I want a lesson from the Bible. He thought about it a minute and shared the lesson from the prodigal son just briefly. The guy said to him, “I'm the guy in the pit with those pigs” and over time they had conversations. Finally he had so much knowledge that people saw changes in this athlete's life. My friend said to this athlete, “You know you're a believer, right?” He said “Yes I figured that out.” It was just a kind word that God led him to say. Perhaps God wants you to tell someone that you are praying for them and God uses the truth in their life.

Here are two sports illustrations. Babe Ruth said “Never let the fear of striking out get in your way.” John Wooden, a former coach at UCLA said, “Do not let what you cannot do

interfere with what you can do.” We need to hear from the Lord and say what God says. Then thirdly, we need to point others to Christ.

We have the ministry of reconciliation. We have the greatest hope, the greatest message of anyone on the planet. That is what we celebrate this evening, what Jesus did for us. We remember and celebrate. II Corinthians 5:16–20 says [16] *From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. [17] Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. [18] All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; [19] that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. [20] Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. [21] For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

In the 2015 commencement address at Hillsdale College a man from Oxford was speaking and he said “All we have to decide to do is to do what God has called us to do in the time He has given us.” He also quoted Mother Teresa saying “We are not called to be successful but we are called to be faithful.”

Douglas Webster who is a Beason Professor at Samford wrote some devotionals on John 13. In one he talks about Martin Luther giving a sermon on John 13. Martin Luther says “It is a Christian duty to wash the feet of others. We must stay where they are. We must be among the people who wade through unclean, filthy places.” He goes on to say “We need to bring our rags, water and everything to wash their feet.” He is saying that we need to go where the people are with the message of hope and reconciliation.

With this being Memorial Day weekend we think of those who went before us and many know that Paul Revere had a pretty famous ride to warn the people that the red coats were coming but in Malcolm Gladwell’s book The Tipping Point, he talks about the other rider that night. There was a rider named William Dawes. Dawes went from west Boston to Lexington but Dawes’ ride did not have the impact remotely close to that of Paul Revere. Why? Gladwell said it was because Paul Revere was a connector. Revere connected with the right people, made friendships, knew the people that needed to hear his message and so when he went through to let them know the British were coming people responded and took arms. Dawes sent very few men against the British.

Part of our charge to be a message of hope and reconciliation to share the truth is that we have to have others that will listen to us. It is great to be able to share the truth but if there is no one to listen then it will fall on deaf ears. We need to be connectors. We need to be people that can connect people who want to reach our city, our neighborhood and people we come in contact with. We need to find ways that we have common ground so that we can share the truth with them.

Charles Trumbull who wrote the book Taking Men Alive, with the subtitle of Sharing the Gospel with Men, says after making a resolve, “Whenever I was in such intimacy with a soul as to be justified in choosing my conversation, the theme of themes should have prominence between us, so that I might learn his need and if possible meet it.” He went into relationships to build friendships but also to look for opportunities if he was given it, if he earned the right to share Christ.

In Fortune Magazine from April 2016, they give the fifty greatest leaders of the last year. They do this every year. Number 14 is Bono who is the lead singer of the music group U2. He is an Irish singer who has sold many, many albums and he has a passion to help the poor. He has built friendships all over the world. He is great friends with Tim Cook, the CEO of Apple. He is good friends with Howard Schultz, the CEO of Starbucks. I can't find any two people more diverse with our concept of conservatism than those two CEOs but Bono has made great friends with them. Bono helped get the late Jessie Helms on aids research. Jessie saw that as a scourge on people that were disobeying God's law but Bono was able to make connections with these people and Fortune has this huge article on what Bono did.

One of the senators of Delaware said about this organization called the One Campaign which Bono founded, "They come every year. They are polite. They are prepared and they are persistent." Howard Schultz talks about how Bono is a true servant leader that really cares. Bono quotes this Irish poet who says "We need to write songs as if we were dead with nothing to prove. We need to live our life that way so I am writing songs as if they are the last songs I ever write but I hope they are not."

Isn't that what Christ calls us to when we come to Communion? We have been dead to sin and alive to righteousness. We have died with Christ so we really don't have anything to fear because of what He did for us. The late Bill Bright, the founder of Campus Crusade For Christ, is kind of a personal hero of mine. I spent ten years on staff with Campus Crusade and met my wife while on staff with them. In his last book, The Journey Home: Finishing with Joy, he talks about when he and Vonette, his wife, were walking together. He said "Before our evening walk was over the twilight passed and suddenly two kinds of light kept the darkness at bay. The light from the city in the valley before was artificial but its twinkles and flickers assured us of human life. We often wondered aloud and prayed over all these souls in the valley, 'what was the condition of their souls? Do they know the Savior? How would we tell them in new and better ways?' O dear Lord, if we can look down on a beautiful sea of darkness and rejoice in the electric lights below, how much more do You look down into the darkness of sin and celebrate the souls in whom the light of Christ dwells? Did our Lord Jesus have to say more than this; I Am the Light of the world? Sin darkens the soul. Jesus brightens it up."

We have been called to spend time with God. We have been called to say what He wants us to say. We have been called to offer hope and reconciliation to everyone that we can that will listen and to even pray for those who won't listen that God would give us the opportunity. That's why we come to this Table. It speaks of reminding us of what Christ did for us. It reminds us of reconciliation that He has done for us. It reminds us to be faithful. On this Memorial Day weekend think about the supreme sacrifice of those soldiers and what they and their families have suffered.

I recently saw the movie Black Hawk Down. It was based on a true story. I heard Jeff Struecker speak who was a Humvee driver who had to go back into that battle three different times. I had to turn it off because of the bloodshed and sacrifice those men made in an untenable situation. They were surrounded by thousands of enemies against them and there were just a few of them. They made a huge sacrifice and yet we come to this Table because of the sacrifice Jesus made for us.

Sin grieves God's heart. He cannot tolerate it, look at it, and He set up all of human history to redeem us because of that sin. So as we read the words of institution in I Corinthians 11:23-25 it says [23] *For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, [24] and when he had given thanks, he*

broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." [25] In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."

As we come to this Table, prepare your hearts and let's remember and rejoice that we have a part of being His ambassadors, His watchmen for a hurting world. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father we love You and we thank You for Your faithfulness to us. Thank You for what You have done in our lives. Lord, help us to live in light of the sacrifice that was made and that we would be pleasing and acceptable in Your sight for it is our reasonable source of worship, in Jesus' Name, Amen.