

Sound the Alarm Ezekiel 33:7-11

⁷ But I have appointed you, son of man, to be a watchman for the house of Israel. So whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you are to warn them from me. ⁸ When I say to a wicked man, "Wicked man, you shall surely die," if you do not speak to warn the wicked man against his way, that wicked man will die because of his guilt, but I will also hold you responsible for his blood. ⁹ But if you do warn the wicked man to turn from his way, and he does not turn from his way, he will die because of his guilt, but you will have saved your life. ¹⁰ So you, son of man, say the following to the house of Israel. This is what you people are saying: "Certainly our rebellion and our sins weigh us down, and because of them we are rotting away. How then can we live?" ¹¹ 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 their way and live. Turn back, turn back from your evil ways, for why should you die, O house of Israel?"

What do you do when you hear a siren go off? At a previous church where I served, we were preparing for our Ash Wednesday worship. About 15 minutes before the service began, the tornado siren went off in town. As the whistle was blowing, I asked a couple of the ushers what they did when they heard a siren go off. They jokingly told me they usually went outside to look for the storm. After some serious consideration we decided instead to move everyone into the basement of the church. Thankfully no tornado hit our town that day. And that year we started off Lent with spirit-filled worship in the church basement instead of our chancel area.

Cities in Bible times did not have the technology that we have today. But they sometimes needed to sound the alarm. It wasn't to warn people about threatening weather. They needed to warn the people about threatening armies. Most people did not live in cities. And many of those who did live in cities, did their work in the orchards and fields outside the city's fortified walls. When a threatening army approached, they needed to be warned. So they had a watchman stand guard on top of the city walls. When an enemy was coming, the watchman would sound the alarm while the enemy was still a good distance away. That gave the people outside the city gates time to get in where it was safe. You can see what an important job the watchmen had. People's lives depended on them. Now if a person heard the warning signal but paid little attention to it, it was his own fault if people were captured or killed. But if the watchman saw the danger and did nothing, that watchman was responsible for any loss of life.

Our Lord uses this picture of a watchman to show the prophet Ezekiel what an important job he had for God's people. Like a watchman on a city wall, Ezekiel was to sound the alarm when danger drew near. Ezekiel was to warn against any sins that endangered their souls. As we consider God's word to the prophet Ezekiel, we see that we need watchmen like Ezekiel still today. We need watchmen to sound the alarm when sin endangers our souls. We need those warnings so we turn to God for rescue.

When God first called Ezekiel to be his prophet, Ezekiel was far from his homeland as were many of his fellow Jews. Ezekiel had been in Jerusalem training to be a priest in God's temple. But like many in Judah, Ezekiel was carried away in captivity to Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, had led his army in a couple of waves to Ezekiel's homeland of Judah. Ezekiel may have intended to serve his Lord as a priest at the temple in Jerusalem. But now he finds himself 1,000 miles from home.

God had warned his people that this would happen. He sent prophet after prophet to sound the alarm. God wanted his people to repent of their evil ways and turn back to him. But many did not. And God's patience had come to an end. So he'd use the latest world power, the nation of Babylon, to discipline his people. At first, they were devastated to be so far from the land God had first promised their forefathers. That land is where God had promised to carry out his saving plan. But it didn't take long for God's people to forget his promises. Now they were 1,000 miles from their homeland. As they begin making Babylon their new home, many lost interest in what was going on back in Israel. They thought little about returning there so God could carry out their salvation. God's plans didn't mean much anymore. Many had forgotten how much they needed the Lord.

So God sends Ezekiel to them. God tells Ezekiel, *"I have appointed you, son of man, to be a watchman for the house of Israel. So whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you are to warn them from me. When I say to a wicked man, 'Wicked man, you shall surely die,' if you do not speak to warn the wicked man against his way, that wicked man will die because of his guilt, but I will also hold you responsible for his blood. But if you do warn the wicked man to turn from his way, and he does not turn from his way, he will die because of his guilt, but you will have saved your life."* God wanted his people to realize the trouble they were in and how much they needed him to rescue them. Judgment was still coming. It wasn't just a 70-year sentence away from their homeland. Eternal destruction was threatening. It was far worse than anything they felt under Babylon's attacks. They were heading toward eternal separation from God. These people needed to see the seriousness of their sins. They had forgotten how much they needed the Lord. So God sends Ezekiel to sound the alarm. What an important job Ezekiel had. If he kept his mouth shut, he would be responsible for any lost souls. But if they did not listen to Ezekiel's warning, they could only blame themselves when they are lost in hell forever.

We need to hear the same warning. Living in today's world, it become so easy to lose sight of where the real danger lies. As we watch the news, we can easily lose sight of who the real enemy is. Our Savior once said, *"Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell"* (Matthew 10:28). Sin still has the same destructive force it always did. We need to remain aware of its danger. We need watchmen to sound the alarm and warn us of sin's danger. God has shown us in his Word why we can't feel too comfortable about our lives on earth. We are living in bodies that are full of sin and death. The Apostle Paul knew how hopeless life is in these bodies. He admitted, *"What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death!"* (Romans 7:23). We cannot feel good about our lives. We have failed miserably at following God's ways. And God tells us plainly what he expects from us. He doesn't just want our best efforts or best intentions. He demands perfection and accepts nothing less. So why we need watchmen like Ezekiel. The first thing those watchmen must do is listen. Listen to God's Word. Then they warn God's people based on God's holy will. We need God's spokesmen to sound the alarm so we don't get comfortable with our lives of sin. Our lives cannot get us to the next life. We need our Savior to get us there. That's why we need watchmen to sound the alarm.

Ezekiel was such a watchman. When sin crept into the lives of God's people, he sounded the alarm for everyone to hear. I'm sure there were some who ignored the warning. But they could only blame themselves when they fell victim to sin's destruction. And those who did listen to the warning, could easily despair with their life in Babylon. They longed to be back in the Promised Land. They may not have understood why God would allow a foreign army to carry them into captivity. God told his prophet, *"So you, son of man, say the following to the house of Israel. This is what you people are saying: 'Certainly our rebellion and our sins weigh us down, and because of them we are rotting away. How then can we live?'"* Why God was punishing them? In reality he was disciplining them so they might turn to him in repentance. He had his prophet tell 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 their way and live. Turn back, turn back from your evil ways, for why should you die, O house of Israel?"* God does not want people to die in unbelief. Especially when he has done everything to save them from their sin. The Apostle Paul told the younger pastor Timothy, *"God our Savior wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth"* (1 Timothy 2:4). Peter tells us in his second epistle, *"The Lord is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance"* (3:9). God despises it when person's time of grace comes to an end and they're not living in his good graces. God wanted his people in Babylon to turn back to him with repentant hearts. That's why he sent them his prophet Ezekiel. God wanted them to know that full forgiveness and everlasting life was available from him. God's watchmen would point them to that.

Twice in this text and more than 90 times in this whole book, God calls Ezekiel "son of man." God would use another Son of Man to save his people. After 70 captive years, God would bring a remnant of his people back to the Promised Land. They would rebuild the city of Jerusalem and God's temple. Then they'd anxiously wait for God to fulfill his promise. About 500 years later when the Lord had governments and world powers set up the way he wanted, God sent his Son to our world to save us. He'd use an emperor's call for a census to bring his Son into our world at Bethlehem. He'd use the same government to bring the punishment of death to his innocent Son. The Son of God humbled himself to take the place of everyone. With his holy life and his innocent death, he'd appease God's wrath and win God's forgiveness for every sin. With his return to life on Easter and his return home to heaven 40 days later, our Savior proved his success. On the Last Day he will put the finishing touch on his saving work. He'll raise all the dead and award all believers eternal life with him in the mansions of heaven.

That good news is what all people need to hear. It's what God wants his watchmen to share. Whether you're a pastor, a teacher, a church leader, a parent or grandparent, God has entrusted souls to your care. When sin draws near to hurt those souls, then we need to sound the alarm. Turn them to the only path that rescues them from sin's destruction. Point them to Jesus. He is the way. He gets you to the Father as he does for everyone. We all need to be good watchmen. We all need to sound the alarm when sin threatens. Every soul needs the rescue only Christ can bring. For sinners, sound that alarm. And when you have their attention, point them to their Savior. He is the Son of God. He is the Son of Man. He's our Savior, Jesus.