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Ezekiel 33:7-11

## YOU ARE A WATCHMAN FOR THE CITY OF GOD

Had there been a warning system to detect major disturbances in the vast ocean depths, perhaps countless lives could have been spared from the great tsunami that slammed Indonesia.

Thanks to weather radar and instant communication, millions of people were forewarned of the raging blasts of hurricane Katrina.

God has also set up a warning and communications system for His Church on earth. That system is you. Here in Ezekiel 33 God uses the picture of a watchman. Cities in Bible times were usually surrounded by huge stone walls with towers and ramparts. At night when the city gates were closed and secured, certain soldiers were appointed to stand on top of the city walls as lookouts. If they sensed danger approaching, maybe an encroaching army mustering a surprise attack, they were to ring a bell, or blast a trumpet, or even shout to wake up the citizens of the city. Everyone would be roused and ready. They were called watchmen.

The Church is God's city. You are a watchman for the city of God. You did not ask to be. God appointed you to it when He made you a believer. It is not optional for you and me, just as it was not optional for the prophet Ezekiel. God said to Ezekiel, *"Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; so hear the word I speak and give them warning from me."* The beauty of it is that God has not chosen to deal with us out of thin air. He has chosen to reach us and speak to us through fellow human beings.

Duty number one as a watchman for the city of God is to warn of danger. So someone is standing in a parking lot talking to you. They don't notice the car behind them backing up at them. Do you

smile and watch? With both hands your toddler grasps a bottle of dishwashing detergent and starts drinking it. Do you stand by and accept it? Wouldn't we be guilty of that person's death or at least their dreadful harm? God instructed the prophet Ezekiel, *"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. But 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."*

As watchmen for the city of God your role and my role is to warn people of the danger of their sin. Not as though we were on a self-righteous witch hunt. But in the Gospel Lesson today Jesus instructs us how to approach a fellow sinner in love. God's word of warning is so powerful that even a gentle coaxing feels like a hideous, hateful shriek to a guilty conscience. Nevertheless we warn each other because we love God and we don't want our fellow sinners to die the never-ending death of hell.

Unrepentant sin kills faith in Christ. Without faith in Christ we cannot be saved. If a person is repentant we are relieved and gladly offer them Christ's forgiveness and restore them. If they are unrepentant we warn them even more.

Every one of us comes across plenty of opportunities to be watchmen. We have responsibility to kids or siblings or parents or relatives or friends or students or especially to fellow church members. But we are reluctant to do it, aren't we? Notice how the deepest fibers of our being revolt against God's will? We're so naturally opposed to what God wants that maybe over time we became accepting of someone's sin. Maybe we became angry at someone for warning our loved one about their sin -a pastor or a board of elders or a congregation. Maybe we've even gone so far as to defend our loved one's unrepentance.

So God holds us in contempt not only for our rebellion, but also for the loss of that other soul. Let's you and I repent of that. The city is not very safe with us as its watchmen. But God has supplied His City of believers with a hero, a warrior who has already defeated

the enemy called sin. Christ suffered the fate of the damned on the cross. But He was more powerful than our sin, even more powerful than our damning rebellion. He swallowed up all our sin entirely, took it into Himself when He charged into death and yet still came back to life holy and glorified. Because of Christ you and I are forgiven. Because of Christ you and I are saved.

Therefore let's have a change of heart –a change in the way we look our appointment as watchmen for the city of God. As a watchman for the city of God your purpose is not only to warn of danger but also to rescue lives.

A city watchman in Bible times was in essence rescuing his countrymen by rousing them from their sleep –giving them a chance to escape certain doom. How many people played the role of a watchman to you to rescue your life? Maybe your parent was a watchman who raised the alarm to your sin in the form of a spanking, but when they saw you were sorry they pointed you to your hero Savior, Jesus Christ and told you that you are forgiven. Maybe you picked it up from a sermon or a catechism class or God used a grandparent, a teacher, a teenager who uncovered a hypocrisy you were harboring, a church elder or a friend who was willing to risk your friendship and tell you to your face what you hated to hear but needed to hear. And here you are. Thanks to His earthly human ministry God has rescued your life.

Let's also be glad, privileged even, to be used for rescuing the lives of others. When a person sees the pictures of the devastation left by Katrina –a whole city wiped out –a person can't even fathom where rescue efforts might begin. Rescue efforts can only be made one person at a time. Nonetheless rescue efforts must proceed. The prophet Ezekiel had just heard that his home city of Jerusalem had been wiped out too by Babylonian armies. Yet God assured him even though all seemed lost, his job was still vital, essential and necessary for the salvation of many.

Every one of us knows someone whose life seems to be a total disaster –often largely because they've made one bad decision after another. They haven't consulted with the God's Word. They

are miserable. Listen to how God feels about such people: *“Son of man, say to the house of Israel, ‘This is what you are saying: ‘Our offenses and sins weigh us down, and we are wasting away because of them. How then can we live?’ 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?’”* God's heart bleeds for these people because Christ's heart bled for them as a spear was plunged into his lifeless body slouching from the cross. Even though they seemed so hopelessly messed up, God still pursued them. He sent Ezekiel to rescue their lives. He sends you to rescue the lives of people we know just like that.

You are a watchman. You are stationed on the walls of the city of God. The whole city is depending on you. God Himself has entrusted this role to you. You are the few. The elite. Even if you reach only one person at a time, it may make the difference between life and death, between salvation and damnation for that one person.