



**“So thou, O son of man, I have set thee a watchman unto the house of Israel; therefore thou shalt hear the word of my mouth, and warn them from me” (Ezekiel 33:7).**

### **Witnessing in Difficult Times**

**Central Truth:** God's people should be faithful witnesses, whether or not their testimony for Him is accepted.

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It is a high honor to be the spokesman for almighty God. It is a high honor, yes, but it is not always an easy task.

The messenger of God is not always a popular person. He has to speak the mind of God, and the mind of men is commonly not in agreement with the mind of God (Isaiah 55:7-9). People sometimes look upon the condemnation of sin as a condemnation of the sinner. (There is a distinct difference.) They look at the voice which speaks and not at the ultimate authority and source of the message — looking at man instead of God. So their opposition to the message is often directed toward the messenger. That is why the messenger or God is not always a popular person.

Yet the Christian is under orders to speak forth as a messenger of God. “Ye are My witnesses,” Jesus said. A Christian is betraying his commission if he withholds his witness. That tension between duty and desire is a great problem to many Christians.

God has a word to say to the person in such a dilemma. He spoke it to the prophet Ezekiel in the form of a parable (Ezekiel 33). Read the entire chapter. Then read verses 1-11 again, for they form the lesson text for the study. Therein is God's word to you.

#### **I. DUTY OF THE WATCHMAN (Ezekiel 33:1-3, 6)**

The duty of the watchman is to watch. In ancient times the watchman

stood in a lofty tower built into the wall of the fortified city, his eyes scanning the countryside for any sign of danger to the citizens. In modern times the watchman sits before a radar screen, or before a radio receiver, and scans earth and air for any sign of danger to the citizens. But in every case the duty at the watchman is to watch.

What is the duty of the spiritual watchman? It is to watch against spiritual dangers. There are some whom God has commissioned to watch for us in such a manner.

What would you think of the radio or radar man who went to sleep at his post? Or what of one who saw danger coming but did not sound warning? Such conduct would be inexcusable. In the military it would merit a court-martial. The duty of the watchman is to watch.

But the watchman is to do more than watch. He is to report what he sees. The ancient town crier went through the streets of colonial towns ringing his bell and saying, "Nine o'clock, and all is well. " Or in the event of danger the call changed to "To arms! To arms!" The watchman is to do more than watch; he is to report what he sees.

The watchman who sees danger and does not report it is as serious an offender as one who does not watch at all. Watch and report. That is the duty of the watchman.

People might not like to hear the warning, but the faithful watchman must sound it anyway. To neglect to sound the warning is to have the responsibility for the death or the unwarned and unprepared citizens. To warn faithfully is to be delivered from the responsibility of unheeding citizens who suffer because they are unprepared. Oh yes, the watchman must sound the warning.

Apply that principle to your pastor, your Bible teacher, your parents, and your Christian friends. God might use any or all of them to warn you of dangers in our spiritual life.

To warn is a proof of love. Suppose you saw a child playing in the street and a car was coming toward him at rapid speed. Love would make you cry out a warning. The closer the danger the louder you would cry. To refuse to shout a warning would be heartless cruelty. God's messengers warn sinners because of the love of God for them and the love of God in them.

## **II. RESPONSIBILITY OF THE HEARER (Ezekiel 33:4-6)**

Far too many people operate strictly on the basis of emotion in the area of religion. They expect to be saved, or to cleanse their lives, when the preacher or witness is so emotional that they are overwhelmed to act. Such a

day might never come. God's appeal is for people to act on the basis of the truth they understand, not merely the emotion in a moment of invitation.

It is the duty of the watchman to issue warning. It is the duty of the hearer to respond to the warning. If one responds, he can save his life. If one hears and does not respond, he might forfeit his life. Who would be responsible if the hearer did not respond? He would be responsible; the watchman would not be responsible after giving the warning. The watchman delivers his soul of responsibility when he delivers the warning faithfully and clearly.

Isn't it strange how some sinners act toward preaching? They resist the invitations as if the preacher were trying to get them to do something personally for him. What a shame! The preacher is doing them a favor by giving warning and the hope of the Christian gospel. They are doing him no favor by accepting the gospel and trusting Jesus Christ; they are protecting themselves by doing so.

The preacher of the gospel has delivered his soul when he faithfully proclaims the message. The sinner is obligated before God to hear and respond. He will account to God for himself as to how he reacted to the warning of the messenger.

### **III. MESSAGE OF THE LORD (Ezekiel 33:7-9)**

God has designated certain of His children as “watchmen” in the world. Here is their commission: “*Thou shalt hear the word at my mouth, and warn them from me*” (verse 7). What a privilege! What a responsibility! What respect should be shown to the watchmen of the Lord!

How does the watchman receive the word from the mouth of the Lord? God has spoken through the Holy Bible. Messengers of God know the message of God from the Word of God. That message is interpreted to them by the Holy Spirit. No other message than that is to occupy the time of the Christian witness. Let every Christian stay close to the Bible.

The Holy Spirit of God not only interprets the Word of God to the people of God; He does more. He enables the child of God to interpret events in human history in the light of the will and Word of God. That way, he is able to speak with authority in areas where the Bible does not speak with great detail. For instance, what does the Bible say about X-rated movies or the use of hallucinogenic drugs? There is no chapter and verse reference. But there are principles which can be applied. The Holy Spirit interprets events in the light of the mind of God and makes the interpretation known to the messenger of God so that he may speak it forth as “the oracle of God” (I

Peter 4:11).

#### **IV. REPENTANCE OF THE SINNER (Ezekiel 33:10, 11)**

What should be the response of the sinner when he hears the witness of the messenger of God? He can do either of two things: (1) He can continue in his sins; (2) He can turn from his sins and receive forgiveness. The first will lead to death; the second will lead to life. Which course is the wiser?

What is the will of God concerning the sinner? Would God prefer that he remain in sin so God could show justice by judging him, or to turn from sin so God could show mercy by forgiving him? God answers, *“As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die?”* (verse 11). That's it! God wants the sinner to turn in repentance from sin and be healed.

Remember what repentance is: (1) Repentance is a change of attitude toward sin so one admits it is wrong and admits himself to be guilty. (2) Repentance is a change of emotion toward sin so the sinner is sorry he has sinned against God and the love of sin dies in his heart. (3) Repentance is a change of the will so that the sinner turns from his sin to God for forgiveness and cleansing. Repentance is the goal to which all Christian witnessing aims.

Make a personal application of the lesson. If you have never received forgiveness of sins in Jesus Christ, God has given you warning through these lesson comments. You are without excuse if you do not turn to Him for forgiveness. Do it now.

Make another personal application of the lesson. If you are a Christian believer, you are commissioned of the Lord Jesus to share your faith with people who have not yet believed. To neglect is to be guilty of disobedience to God and responsible for the death of one who might not hear.

Set your heart to be a faithful Christian witness in times and to all people where God opens the door to you.

1. What does it mean to “witness”?
2. Why is it such an honor to be a witness for Jesus?
3. Why is there such an obligation to be a witness for Jesus?
4. What is the basic duty of the watchman?
5. How do Christian watchmen watch and report?
6. Who are the spiritual watchmen who watch over you?
7. What is the responsibility of the hearer?

8. How does Hebrews 13:17 relate to the study?
9. In what sense is every Christian a watchman-witness?
10. What personal application can you make of the lesson?