

WATCHMEN
Ezekiel 33:1-20

Intro: In order to make the work of the Lord's servants as clear as possible, the Lord has used various titles to describe their work.

Ezekiel was a prophet, a man who ministered by divine inspiration. But to make Ezekiel's work even clearer to him, the Lord used the work of a watchman on the walls of any city of Israel. They were something of a human radar instrument.

Thus, as chapter 33 begins, we find the Lord giving to Ezekiel this picture of his work:

I. THE EXAMPLE OF A WATCHMAN (Ezek. 33:1-6).

He stood watch to warn the people of the approach of any enemy.

When he saw an enemy approaching, or even that which he thought was an enemy, he could do one of two things:

- 1) It was his job to blow the trumpet to warn the people of the city. This he was supposed to do.
- 2) On the other hand, it could be that he would not warn the people. In such a case, the blood of the people who suffered at the hand of the enemy was upon the watchman.

Likewise, the people could react in one of two ways, when he had sounded the warning:

- 1) They could ignore the warning. If so, it was not the watchman's responsibility.
- 2) If they heeded the warning, then they could deliver their lives.

This illustration was well-known to Ezekiel and to the Israelites.

The purpose of these words of the Lord is soon to be realized by Ezekiel. Beginning with v. 7 we see . . .

II. EZEKIEL, THE WATCHMAN (Ezek. 33:7-16).

Now the prophets were both pastors (shepherds) and evangelists. Here Ezekiel is seen in both roles (because he was undoubtedly speaking to some who sincerely knew the Lord). On the other hand, he was speaking to many who did not know the Lord, even though they were Israelites, and even though they had some acquaintance with the truth of God.

Notice what the Lord had done in Ezekiel's case.

- A. First, the Lord appointed Ezekiel as a watchman (v. 7a).

This was not Ezekiel's idea; nor had the people asked for someone to warn them. They would have made sure that they had a watchman in their cities for their physical safety, but people are unconcerned about their spiritual danger, and may even be unaware that there is such a danger.

So we see the goodness and the grace of God right at the beginning.

- B. Secondly, Ezekiel was instructed to hear the Word for himself (v. 7b).

He was to listen personally to the Lord for himself. He was not to get his message from anyone else.

- C. Third, he was to warn the people, but the warning was to come from the people as from the Lord! See v. 7b.

Ezekiel's mission was not his own; he was representing the Lord God of Israel. And so it would ever-so-much-more important that he get the message clear, and that he faithfully deliver the message. To fail to do so would not only be a sin against the people, but even more, a sin against God!

- D. Fourth, Ezekiel's responsibility did not extend to the response of the people (vv. 8, 9). It was that the message of warning be given. After that it was up to the people as to what they did about it.

- E. Fifth, he was to clear up any misconceptions they might have with regard to the Gospel. Their misconceptions were at least four:

1. That their condition was hopeless (v. 10).
2. That God would not help them (v. 11).
3. Concerning those who practiced righteousness as well as those who practiced wickedness:
 - a. The righteous would be spared if he turned from his righteousness.
 - b. The wicked would not be spared even if he did turn from his sin.

The Lord spoke concerning both of these in vv. 12-16.

All of these things made up Ezekiel's work as a watchman.

But the third thing that Ezekiel was told has to do with . . .

III. THE RESPONSE OF THE PEOPLE (Ezek. 33:17-20).

- A. The people said that the Lord was not "equal" in His ways, i.e., not fair. See v. 17a.

They would ignore the danger they were in, and argue about the message. They still would be inclined to think that their deliverance from eternal judgment was due to their own works, and that a person ought to be given permanent credit for the good that he had done.

They did not see that, if an outwardly righteous person turned from his righteous deeds, and committed sin, that it was evidence that his heart had never been changed. On the other hand, if a sinner turned from his sin, there was always mercy with God.

Consequently,

- B. The Lord said that the people were not seeing things in the right way. See vv. 17b-19.

In spite of what the Lord said,

- C. The people persisted in their objection (v. 20a).

Consequently, Ezekiel was to tell the people that . . .

- D. The judgment was in the hands of the Lord, and He would determine every man's fate (v. 20b).

Concl: This has to be an OT picture of the work of evangelism, the work of preaching the Gospel. (See how every part of Ezekiel's commission has application to us.)

The ominous expression which needs to jar us is that which is found at the end of vv. 4, 6, and then in vv. 8, 9.

What this means we cannot fully know. But it is used in the NT if we are inclined to feel that this belongs to the OT alone. Cf. Acts 18:6; 20:26.

It is surely intended to show the grave responsibility that God has placed upon us to proclaim faithfully the Gospel of salvation. Failure on our part will surely result in the loss of rewards, not in the loss of salvation--but, in whatever other losses there might be, we do not know.