

Ezekiel 33 • God's Watchman

Introduction

One of life's lessons as a parent or friend is that you cannot make someone else's choices for them. Regardless of having given the most wise, loving advice possible, it's up to the listener whether or not to put that advice into actual practice to make the "right" choice or to pursue their own agenda.

Paul personalizes this phenomena when he states in Acts 20:26-27, "Therefore, I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God." Paul is stating that to every person with whom he came into contact he shared the truth of the Gospel so that whether or not they listened and applied God's Word to their life they are without excuse. Paul knew he couldn't "save" anyone – only Christ can do that; Paul's job was to ensure that he, personally, had performed **his** responsibility of communicating the truth.

There's a curious description in 1 Chronicles 12:32 revealing an interesting role of some of God's chosen people, "Of the sons of Issachar, men who understood the times, with knowledge of what Israel should do, their chiefs were two hundred; and all their kinsmen were at their command." Amongst a rolling inventory of tens of thousands of warriors enrolled through the various tribes of Israel we find these men who knew what Israel should do; however, it was still Israel's choice as to whether or not to follow the terms of such knowledge. The responsibility was in the communication of the knowledge which was no substitute for the people's responsibility to listen and put it into practice.

As it turns out, this is not a new concept in the "job description" of God's followers.

¹And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, ²"Son of man, speak to the sons of your people and say to them, 'If I bring a sword upon a land, and the people of the land take one man from among them and make him their watchman, ³and he sees the sword coming upon the land and blows on the trumpet and warns the people, ⁴then he who hears the sound of the trumpet and does not take warning, and a sword comes and takes him away, his blood will be on his own head. ⁵He heard the sound of the trumpet but did not take warning; his blood will be on himself. But had he taken warning, he would have delivered his life. ⁶But if the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet and the people are not warned, and a sword comes and takes a person from them, he is taken away in his iniquity; but his blood I will require from the watchman's hand.'

⁷"Now as for you, son of man, I have appointed you a watchman for the house of Israel; so you will hear a message from My mouth and give them warning from Me. ⁸When I say to the wicked, 'O wicked man, you will surely die,' and you do not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but his blood I will require from your hand. ⁹But if you on your part warn a wicked man to turn from his way and he does not turn from his way, he will die in his iniquity, but you have delivered your life.

[Read 33:1-6]

Q: What is God's watchman looking out for?

A: According to v.2 & 3 it's the coming of God's judgment.

Q: So what is it that God's watchman has to be alert for and able to detect?

A: The signs of the coming of God's judgment. (Note: "Signs" does not equal specific dates and times but rather the fact that there's still time to repent, to act on the information.)

Q: Therefore, what is the role of God's watchman?

A: To warn of God's judgment.

Q: Is this limited to JUST End Times judgment?

A: No. This should also encompass personal judgment, extending into the area of personal accountability for each other. It includes bringing attention to God's judgment for behavior and/or choices contrary to God's expressed will, warning that one's choices or behavior will ultimately lead to disastrous results.

[Read 7-9]

Q: What results does God guarantee for the watchman?

A: None as far as the **effects** of the watchman's message, only that it fulfills the watchman's **personal** responsibilities.

Q: Therefore, how can we measure our effectiveness as God's watchman?

A: By our obedience to communicate His message in every situation, to everyone possible. The result is entirely in God's hand.

¹⁰“Now as for you, son of man, say to the house of Israel, ‘Thus you have spoken, saying, “Surely our transgressions and our sins are upon us, and we are rotting away in them; how then can we survive?”’

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 his way and live. Turn back, turn back from your evil ways! Why then will you die, O house of Israel?’

¹²“And you, son of man, say to your fellow citizens, ‘The righteousness of a righteous man will not deliver him in the day of his transgression, and as for the wickedness of the wicked, he will not stumble because of it in the day when he turns from his wickedness; whereas a righteous man will not be able to live by his righteousness on the day when he commits sin.’ ¹³When I say to the righteous he will surely live, and he so trusts in his righteousness that he commits iniquity, none of his righteous deeds will be remembered; but in that same iniquity of his which he has committed he will die. ¹⁴But when I say to the wicked, ‘You will surely die,’ and he turns from his sin and practices justice and righteousness, ¹⁵if a wicked man restores a pledge, pays back what he has taken by robbery, walks by the statutes which ensure life without committing iniquity, he shall surely live; he shall not die. ¹⁶None of his sins that he has committed will be remembered against him. He has practiced justice and righteousness; he shall surely live.

¹⁷“Yet your fellow citizens say, ‘The way of the LORD is not right,’ when it is their own way that is not right. ¹⁸When the righteous turns from his righteousness and commits iniquity, then he shall die in it. ¹⁹But when the wicked turns from his wickedness and practices justice and righteousness, he will live by them. ²⁰Yet you say, ‘The way of the LORD is not right.’ O house of Israel, I will judge each of you according to his ways.”

[Read 10-11]

Q: Is our role as God’s watchman limited to just non-believers?

A: There is an emphasis in this passage on the accountability of believers. After all, believers would be more tuned in to understanding the significance of warnings concerning the signs of God’s judgment. This role is more of a believer-oriented function rather than evangelism, a call to restore the good relationship one once had with God.

Q: Is there anything that a believer cannot be forgiven by God? Is it ever too late to repent?

A: No. Time and time again God has demonstrated that He relents in immediately executing judgment in order to allow an opportunity to return to Him.

[Read 12-16]

Q: What is the only guarantee that God is providing to both the righteous and the wicked?

A: Salvation through obedience.

Q: Does a lifetime of compiling mounds of sins make salvation impossible?

A: No.

Q: Does a lifetime of righteous acts guarantee automatic entrance into God’s kingdom?

A: No. The lesson for **both** is obedience.

[Read 17-20]

Q: Can we blame our church, organization or circle of friends for our sins, our failure to be obedient?

A: No. If we’re in a bad environment or running with the wrong crowd, it’s still up to us to run back to God for our own sake.

Q: Can we obtain righteousness by associating with a good church, organization or circle of friends? Does our association with righteousness “rub off” on us?

A: No. We have no excuse because we are personally accountable to God and even being in a good environment with righteous friends will not shelter us from our personal choice while amongst them.

Q: Do we sometimes feel held back from a personal commitment to action because we're waiting on someone else or for the group to "catch up" with us?

A: [Open for group discussion. The point is that we are first and foremost personally responsible to act in the best interests of our relationship with God.]

²³Then the word of the LORD came to me saying, ²⁴"Son of man, they who live in these waste places in the land of Israel are saying, 'Abraham was only one, yet he possessed the land; so to us who are many the land has been given as a possession.' ²⁵Therefore say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "You eat meat with the blood in it, lift up your eyes to your idols as you shed blood. Should you then possess the land? ²⁶You rely on your sword, you commit abominations and each of you defiles his neighbor's wife. Should you then possess the land?"'

[Read 23-26]

Background: This refers to the remnant left after the final destruction of Jerusalem that came to Jeremiah seeking God's direction, but in reality had already made up their mind as to what they were going to do.

Q: What was wrong with their reasoning?

A: They did not see things the way God sees them in terms of spiritual quality being more important than earthly quantity.

Q: Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed and the people carried off as God had pronounced. But why was judgment not over?

A: The purpose of judgment is to either change hearts or destroy those hearts that can't be changed. The remnant demonstrated that they had not learned **any** of the lessons from God's judgment. They were like children who "took" their parent's spanking but did not change their behavior as a result of it.

[Read 30-33]

³⁰"But as for you, son of man, your fellow citizens who talk about you by the walls and in the doorways of the houses, speak to one another, each to his brother, saying, 'Come now and hear what the message is which comes forth from the LORD.' ³¹They come to you as people come, and sit before you as My people and hear your words, but they do not do them, for they do the lustful desires expressed by their mouth, and their heart goes after their gain. ³²Behold, you are to them like a sensual song by one who has a beautiful voice and plays well on an instrument; for they hear your words but they do not practice them. ³³So when it comes to pass—as surely it will—then they will know that a prophet has been in their midst."

Q: Were the people coming to Ezekiel because they saw him as the source of God's Word?

A: No. This was another form of idolatry. Instead of kneeling before their idols they were kneeling before the man.

Q: So in our role as God's watchman, is it enough that people hear us and even come to church?

A: No. The goal is to point them beyond ourselves to God and to get them to examine the condition of their heart.

(If Leading a Group Study: Do as many of the following as time will allow.)

⁴²"Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day your LORD is coming. ⁴³But be sure of this, that if the head of the house had known at what time of the night the thief was coming, he would have been on the alert and would not have allowed his house to be broken into. ⁴⁴For this reason you also must be ready; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think He will.

[Read Matthew 24:42-44]

Q: What is the result of being a "good" or "bad" watchman according to this passage?

A: Protection or destruction of one's personal house; it's keeping one's own life in tact by not being surprised when judgment finally comes upon us.

⁴⁵“Who then is the faithful and sensible slave whom his master put in charge of his household to give them their food at the proper time? ⁴⁶Blessed is that slave whom his master finds so doing when he comes. ⁴⁷Truly I say to you that he will put him in charge of all his possessions. ⁴⁸But if that evil slave says in his heart, ‘My master is not coming for a long time,’ ⁴⁹and begins to beat his fellow slaves and eat and drink with drunkards; ⁵⁰the master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour which he does not know, ⁵¹and will cut him in pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

¹“Then the kingdom of heaven will be comparable to ten virgins, who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. ²Five of them were foolish, and five were prudent. ³For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, ⁴but the prudent took oil in flasks along with their lamps.

⁵“Now while the bridegroom was delaying, they all got drowsy and began to sleep. ⁶But at midnight there was a shout, ‘Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.’

⁷“Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps. ⁸The foolish said to the prudent, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’

⁹“But the prudent answered, ‘No, there will not be enough for us and you too; go instead to the dealers and buy some for yourselves.’ ¹⁰And while they were going away to make the purchase, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding feast; and the door was shut.

¹¹Later the other virgins also came, saying, ‘Lord, lord, open up for us.’ ¹²But he answered, ‘Truly I say to you, I do not know you.’ ¹³Be on the alert then, for you do not know the day nor the hour.

[Read Matthew 24:45-51]

Q: What’s the chief difference in the role of the watchman in this passage compared to the previous?

A: The previous passage dealt exclusively with one’s own “self” or house; this one involves those for whom we’ve been made responsible by God.

Q: What is the role of the watchman in this example?

A: According to v.45 it’s the proper feeding of the household.

Q: What is the result of being a “good” watchman according to this passage?

A: The good watchman has provided “*food at the proper time*”. Note how many times “food” is equated with God’s Word throughout the Bible and its association here with being given at the “proper” time, meaning the watchman is attentive to the life and needs of those being ministered to.

Q: What are the characteristics of the “bad” watchman?

A: In v. 48, he *knows* that time will eventually run out but thinks he has time to do things his own way (he has knowledge but no obedience), and in v.49 abuses the relationships of those in his charge and engages in spiritually bad relationships.

Q: What is the end result for the “good” vs. “bad” watchman?

A: Reward (v.47) vs. judgment (v.51)

[Read Matthew 25:1-13]

Q: How does the role of the watchman differ in this passage from the previous two?

A: Whereas the previous two deal with our life in the days leading up to Christ’s return, this one deals directly with His actual return or appearance.

Q: What is the difference between the “good” and “bad” watchman?

A: One is prepared, the other is not. The “good”, through their personal preparedness by building a life whose focus and resources are wholly devoted to God, are not taken by surprise by the Master’s return and in need of something they have no more time to obtain.

¹⁴“For it is just like a man about to go on a journey, who called his own slaves and entrusted his possessions to them.

¹⁵To one he gave five talents, to another, two, and to another, one, each according to his own ability; and he went on his journey.

¹⁶“Immediately the one who had received the five talents went and traded with them, and gained five more talents.

¹⁷In the same manner the one who had received the two talents gained two more.

¹⁸But he who received the one talent went away, and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money.

¹⁹“Now after a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. ²⁰The one who had received the five talents came up and brought five more talents, saying, ‘Master, you entrusted five talents to me. See, I have gained five more talents.’

²¹“His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.’

²²“Also the one who had received the two talents came up and said, ‘Master, you entrusted two talents to me. See, I have gained two more talents.’

²³“His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.’

²⁴“And the one also who had received the one talent came up and said, ‘Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow and gathering where you scattered no seed. ²⁵And I was afraid, and went away and hid your talent in the ground. See, you have what is yours.’

²⁶“But his master answered and said to him, ‘You wicked, lazy slave, you knew that I reap where I did not sow and gather where I scattered no seed. ²⁷Then you ought to have put my money in the bank, and on my arrival I would have received my money back with interest. ²⁸Therefore take away the talent from him, and give it to the one who has the ten talents.’ ²⁹For to everyone who has, more shall be given, and he will have an abundance; but from the one who does not have, even what he does have shall be taken away. ³⁰Throw

[Read Matthew 25:14-30]

Q: Given our theme of “God’s watchman”, summarize the lesson taught in this example.

A: God has given to each one gifts and ministry for which everyone is accountable – **personally**, not collectively. Whether God will cause a large, medium or small return to come from its investment is not my concern – only that I am responsible to “invest” it.

out the worthless slave into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

³¹“But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne.

³²All the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats; ³³and He will put the sheep on His right, and the goats on the left.

³⁴“Then the King will say to those on His right, ‘Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

³⁵For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me something to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; ³⁶naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.’

³⁷“Then the righteous will answer Him, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You something to drink? ³⁸And when did we see You a stranger, and invite You in, or naked, and clothe You? ³⁹When did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?’

⁴⁰“The King will answer and say to them, ‘Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.’

⁴¹“Then He will also say to those on His left, ‘Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels; ⁴²for I was hungry, and you gave Me nothing to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me nothing to drink; ⁴³I was a stranger, and you did not invite Me in; naked, and you did not clothe Me; sick, and in prison, and you did not visit Me.’

⁴⁴“Then they themselves also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not take care of You?’

⁴⁵“Then He will answer them, ‘Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.’ ⁴⁶These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

[Read Matthew 25:31-46]

Q: How is the main viewpoint different in this passage from the previous four?

A: This is final judgment. The time leading up to Christ's return is gone and now the rendering of final judgment for being a “good” or “bad” watchman is clearly portrayed.

Q: What is similar in the actions of the “good” watchman in this passage as compared to the same in Matthew 24:45-51?

A: We are being judged in how we have responded to others, whether we have applied our efforts to communicating God's message through our actions.

Q: What is the chief characteristic that differentiates the “good” from the “bad” watchman in this example?

A: The “good” watchman makes every effort to reach everyone that comes across their path; the “bad” is making a distinction. Whether or not the recipients of the “good” watchman's ministry in turn accept Christ personally is not at issue – it's that the “good” watchman, like Paul, never passed up an opportunity for ministry and did not “hold back”.

Overall

In every example the work of the watchman is to be personally ready, discerning of the signs of God's judgments, but more importantly carrying out the most critical tasks of everyday living in His kingdom: Loving God with all our hearts and loving our neighbors as ourselves. In the end we will have done everything required of us by God to minister at every opportunity.

Ezekiel 33 • God's Watchman, Page 6 of 6