

Pentecost 16

Ezekiel 33:7-9 "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. ⁸When 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. ⁹But 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.

In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, who watches over us always, dear fellow redeemed

We seem to be living in time in which people more and more don't want to accept any responsibility. Someone who spills hot coffee on herself blames the restaurant who sold the coffee rather than her own clumsiness.

College and professional athletes fail drug tests and then claim that it was an accident or someone slipped the drugs to them somehow without their knowledge. People sue bars and restaurants because they were drinking and then were in an accident. Other people smoke and then sue the tobacco companies because they feel the tobacco companies are responsible for their cigarette smoking all those years.

The Lord makes it clear in his Word today that we *are* responsible for what we do, and more than that, there are times he holds us responsible for the actions of others. Let's look at this truth of Scripture today as we study:

We Are Responsible For One Another

1. The Lord has made us his watchmen
2. We warn one another to repent

1. The Lord has made us his watchmen (v.7)

Long ago, many people lived in walled cities and towns. During the day and during the night, there would be watchmen who would walk along the tops of the walls or look over the walls. They would look outside the town for anything that looked dangerous or threatening, especially for soldiers or an army that might be coming to attack. But they would also look inside the city to spot fires or thieves skulking about the streets at night. Also, many people worked and lived outside the safety of the city walls. It would be the watchman's warning that would cause them to leave their homes or the fields where they worked and seek safety and protection within the city walls in case of an attack.

God said to Ezekiel – and he says to each of us – **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.**

If for some reason the watchmen failed to do his job, and a fire burned down several houses before it was spotted, or a group of soldiers rode up to the town and climbed over the wall without the watchmen seeing them, people would have every reason to be upset with the town's watchman; he wouldn't have done his job. Homes and lives would have been lost due to his failure to do his job.

God had made Ezekiel a watchman, someone whose responsibility was to look out for any danger to his people, and then to warn the people of God about those dangers.

But God didn't want Ezekiel climbing up on the city walls to watch for danger. The danger he was to look for was danger to his people's souls. God made Ezekiel responsible not for their bodies, but that which threatened their faith and their love for God.

We also are God's watchmen. We are to look out for one another in love. Remember how God's Word urges us to love our neighbor as we love ourselves? And remember the lack of love that Cain displayed when he mockingly said to God, **Am I my brother's keeper?** And as God's redeemed people, the answer to that question is yes! Yes, we are our brother's keeper! We are to keep our eyes open and be aware of the dangers around us, dangers not just to ourselves, but dangers to others.

To be good watchmen we have to realize what is dangerous and what isn't. And we listening to what God tells us. Did you notice that about Ezekiel? God didn't tell him to keep his eyes open, but he told him to listen: **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.**

When Ezekiel sounded the warning of a watchman, it wouldn't be his own personal opinion. The warning would be the danger that God had warned him about. And so when you and I search the Scriptures, we hear God warn us of those things that are dangerous to our faith and to our salvation.

And so we know both we and our fellow men are not to mistreat, abuse or pollute our god-given bodies. We know that life is sacred, a gift of God to use to seek God's blessings and salvation, and that no matter the motivation, we have no right to end the lives of the unborn or the elderly. We know that God has given us the gift of sexuality, but he has limited

that blessing to within marriage, and all who would use outside of marriage misuse their sexuality. Like the watchman Ezekiel, we see these dangers and we warn that of the spiritual trouble that such behavior brings with it.

2. We warn one another to repent (vv.8,9)

God had a second purpose in mind for his watchmen. Not only were they to watch, but they were also to warn people to repent. God told 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.**

Our society often has told us that what other people do is none of our business and none of our concern. But God tells us otherwise.

But even the world – sometimes – sees that other people are responsible when they do nothing. If you see someone drowning but you *could* do something, but you instead you do nothing - you're responsible.

Even the world knows that if you see someone committing a crime, and you do nothing to stop it, then you become criminally responsible. I once read about a man convicted of rape. He hadn't actually raped the girl, but he had just stood by and watched. And in the eyes of the law and the jury, he was guilty of rape.

In our readings today, God tells of us his desire that we warn the unbeliever and the fallen Christian and urge them to repentance. When we warn them that God hates sin and just what the consequences of unrepentant sin are, then perhaps God in his mercy will move the sinner to repentance, forgiveness and eternal life. But if the person rejects the mercy of God and the forgiveness of God, then at least we have served as watchmen, done our jobs, and God will hold us blameless. God told Ezekiel: **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.**

We would be upset if someone saw flames coming from our house and did nothing, and our house burned down. If we were hurt, and someone saw us, but didn't do anything but walk away and didn't call for help, we'd have every reason to be angry with such behavior. But when we see a sinner on the road to hell, with their sins unforgiven, not knowing who Jesus is and what he did for them, and *we* do nothing, then we do something far, far worse. We allow them to continue on the road to hell and possibly to finally arrive in heaven without being warned that they traveling to hell.

If we see someone living in sin, on the way to heaven, and you say nothing and do nothing – you share in the blame and wickedness in the eyes of God. If we hear an unbeliever swearing and cursing and misusing the name of God, and we remain silent, then God says to us: **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.**

We are watchmen. We don't have a choice. God has made us his watchmen. And he has made us responsible for one another. So we take our job seriously, warning people that God punishes sin, and telling them also that forgiveness is found in Christ. Amen.