

OUR RESPONSIBILITY AS CHRISTIANS

Ezekiel 33:7-11

The duties of a watchman, or sentinel, are simple, but very important; and all armies, ancient, medieval and modern, place great responsibility on a sentinel, and impose the severest penalties if he neglects his duty. The watchman on the wall is one of the familiar figures of the Bible. His duty was to watch for the approach of the foe, for a night attack by the invading army, for a sudden assault or a surprise attack. When he saw the foe, he was to sound the trumpet and thus warn the people to prepare for battle. If they failed to pay any attention to his warning, and were taken by surprise and slain, their blood was on their own heads. The watchman was clear of their blood; but, on the contrary, if he saw the sword coming, and failed to pay any attention to his warning, and were taken by surprise and slain, their blood was on their own heads. The watchman was clear of their blood; but, on the contrary, if he saw the sword coming, and failed to sound the trumpet of warning, then the blood of those who perished was required at his hand, for his neglect to sound the warning was responsible for their death.

In giving Ezekiel his message of repentance, righteousness and judgment, God told him that He had set him as a watchman on the wall, where he was to speak the word of warning which God had given to him. Not as a watchman on the wall in the time of siege or battle, but in the constant siege of Satan and sin, he was to warn the evildoer in order that he might turn from his way. If the wicked man disregarded the warning, then Ezekiel was free of his responsibility. But if the prophet did not warn him, or changed the message which had been given to him, or held out any false hopes of safety, then he would be held accountable for his death. He was not responsible for what men did with his message, but he was responsible for the delivery of the message as it had been received from God.

It was well that Ezekiel was given clearly to understand what was expected and required of him, not by the people to whom he was sent, but by the God Who sent him.

I. The Responsibility.

Ezekiel stood as a watchman for his people. To this office and for this task God had appointed him. Upon this subject the mind of the prophet was clear. Ezekiel had heard God addressing him and saying, "I have set thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore thou shalt hear the word at my mouth, and warn them from me" (Ezekiel 33:7). The prophet did not assume the office and attempt to do the work at the instigation of his own heart. It was not through any vanity or ambition that he took upon himself the responsibility of speaking authoritatively to his fellow countrymen. Ezekiel certainly was not invited or summoned by the Israelites to be their counsellor.

Ezekiel's responsibility was two-fold, namely, to watch and to warn. Upon seeing a danger, it was the duty of the watchman to inform the endangered at once. If he happened to be a watchman on the wall around a city, he was obligated to awaken the slumbering guard, blow the trumpet or run to the belfry and sound an alarm. Such work entailed great responsibility.

However, there was a limit to his responsibility. If the people refused

to believe what he said or to heed his warning, the watchman could not compel them to prepare for the inevitable conflict. If they still preferred their couches to their swords, the watchman could not force them to arm. He was not the commander of the city, but merely a watchman.

God commissioned Ezekiel to warn men to turn from their sins in penitence and faith and thereby escape condemnation and perdition. The people needed to turn from their evil ways of self-deception, impenitence and rebellion. Many of them ignored God, while many others had contempt for His mercy.

Those who speak for God are not responsible for what their hearers do with the message of life, but they are obligated to deliver it to them. Our Lord laid this responsibility upon His church at the beginning. He said, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15). "Ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Our Lord chose to give men the good news of the gospel through those who had repented of their sins and believed on Christ.

II. The Response.

When God said to His prophet, "Warn them from me," Ezekiel understood that it was quite likely that some of his listeners would not heed his warning and turn from their iniquities. Nevertheless, his duty and responsibility were very plain, so he resolved that he would be faithful in discharging them. He did not want the blood of anybody to be on his hands. Ezekiel plainly set before the people both their sin and their danger. Out of a heart of love he warned them of the consequences of their sins.

In like manner, God has set watchmen in the world today to warn people of the consequences of their unbelief and to try to persuade them to trust Christ as their personal Saviour. All Christians have a trumpet to sound. The message of warning is not their own, but it is God's.

From God's Word we learn that sin is subtle and that in nothing does it manifest its subtlety more than in its effect upon the minds of men. Deceived by Satan, men are led to think that somehow everything will finally come out right, that somehow, after all, it will be well with them no matter what they do. The unsaved are not only lured into a feeling of false security, but their spiritual perception is beclouded and impaired. In fact, they feel that what they do is all right, or at least not very wrong. As they see it, to the drunkard there is no moral evil in drinking; to the gambler there is no moral wrong in gambling; to the thief there is no sin in stealing; to the libertine there is no evil in immorality; and to the blackguard there is no wrong in profanity. Bad men nearly always try to justify or excuse their wrongdoing. They are disposed to condemn severely only those things of which they are not guilty.

Ezekiel met, as every faithful witness for Christ does today, with unbelief and hostility, and with ingratitude and resentment. But, because his duty was so plain, the prophet performed it faithfully whether the people received or rejected his message.

In every generation sinners must trust Christ and be saved or remain in their lost and condemned condition forever. Christ said, "Verily I say

unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18:3). He also said, "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish" (Luke 13:5). From His conversation with Nicodemus we read, "Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3).

God's Word tells people to turn or to burn. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die" (Ezekiel 18:4). "For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 6:23). "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life" (John 5:24).

III. The Result.

Ezekiel discovered that many to whom he spoke refused to turn from their wicked ways and died in their sins. However, it was not any discredit to the message or the messenger that they did not accept God's Word and act favorably upon it. The same is true of God's children who are faithfully proclaiming God's message to lost sinners today.

When Ezekiel had set before his people both their sin and their danger, some of them, being hardened intransgression, hating reproof and endeavoring to evade the force of it, cast the blame for their sin and misery upon God Himself. This they did by the plea of necessity, saying, "If our transgressions and our sins be upon us, and we pine away in them, how should we then live?"

Their question implied both the imminent peril of death and the total inability of men to save their own souls. Sin carries its penalty with it. It enfeebles the body, injures the mind and degrades the soul. It is an increasing burden which ends in hopelessness. It causes man to feel that there is nothing better for him in the future. To all such the gospel of Christ conveys a message of hope.

God frankly stated His desire for the salvation of the lost. He completely exonerated Himself by declaring His attitude toward sinners. "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, O house of Israel?" (Ezekiel 33:11). In I Timothy 2:3-4 we read, "For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the Knowledge of the truth." "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (II Peter 3:9). God has provided a sin bearer and Saviour for us. Since God has done all of this, why are there some who are still unsaved? It is because they refuse to receive Christ as their Saviour. In what is perhaps the saddest utterance that ever fell from His lips, our Lord said, "Ye will not come to me, that ye might have life" (John 5:40). "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16)

The message which the followers of Christ are to present to the unsaved everywhere is that of repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus. There is no other message. If anybody proclaim any other, it will be

one of his own invention or discovery and not that of the Bible. There is only one Saviour, and He is the Lord Jesus Christ. There is only one way to be saved, and that is to believe on the Christ Who said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6). There is only one time to be saved, and that is now. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."