



### God Makes Us Watchmen

**Ezekiel 3:17-21** *“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 I say to a wicked man, ‘You will surely die,’ and you do not warn him or speak out to dissuade him from his evil ways in order to save his life, that wicked man will die for his sin, and I will hold you accountable for his blood. But if you do warn the wicked man and he does not turn from his wickedness or from his evil ways, he will die for his sin; but you will have saved yourself. Again, when a righteous man turns from his righteousness and does evil, and I put a stumbling block before him, he will die. Since you did not warn him, he will die for his sin. The righteous things he did will not be remembered, and I will hold you accountable for his blood. But if you do warn the righteous man not to sin and he does not sin, he will surely live because he took warning, and you will have saved yourself.”*

We humans are experts at evading our responsibilities. We ask parents and teachers and spouse and supervisor to spell out exactly what their expectations are so we know precisely where to draw the line before negative consequences set in. Call it laziness, call it self-interest, call it a desire for autonomy, call it whatever you want, as with all sin it really boils down to a lack of love. This shirking of responsibility is as old as the human race itself. Already in the first generation after Adam and Eve, the envious and murderous Cain feigned innocence and brazenly asked the Lord, “Am I my brother's keeper?” (Gen. 4:9) God’s answer to Cain and his expectation for all people, especially those claiming to be his children, is an emphatic, “YES!”

The LORD illustrates this truth to Ezekiel by calling the prophet to be a watchman for his people. Nowadays when we think of a watchman, we typically picture a paid security guard sitting on a padded swivel chair looking at security monitors and occasionally patrolling a building’s perimeter, usually to protect stuff from vandalism or theft, but back in Ezekiel's time watchmen had a sacred duty to save lives. It was their job to stand on the city walls and scan the horizon by day and peer into the shadows of the night for any sign of an approaching enemy, and should they see anything suspicious, to raise the trumpet to their lips and sound the alarm. If a watchman took a nap, delayed warning, or chose hightail it out of town in order to save himself, it could result in the death and destruction of thousands of his countrymen. They were counting on him to sound the trumpet call. Their lives were his responsibility. If he was derelict in his duty, it would be his life for theirs. However, if the watchman fulfilled his duty and sounded his trumpet, but no one took warning and destruction ensued, he would be exempt from punishment for he had fulfilled his responsibility. It is NOT a watchman’s job nor within their capability to MAKE others take heed or respond appropriately. THAT responsibility falls on them.

So what does this have to do with Ezekiel and us? Precisely this: unrepentant sin and unbelief destroy lives not only here but finally robs people of eternal life with God and sends them to hell forever—the worst destruction of all! God has called all his people to be watchmen for those around us. Watchmen who bravely, loudly, consistently, clearly, and humbly sound the alarm about sin and unbelief lest our countrymen perish eternally,

and God should lay their damnation at our feet. It IS our responsibility to warn the wicked person who is intent on putting greater distance between them and God by pursuing even more depravity. It is also our job to warn the righteous—that is our fellow believers—who have fallen headlong into sin and refuse to repent, for they too can wander from the faith and be lost forever.

Now neither the wicked nor the wandering may particularly appreciate the warning we give, no matter how concerned we are and how lovingly and sincerely we speak, but speak we must, or else we are proving that we don't really care about what happens to them, or about doing what is right. Instead, we are more intent on what is most convenient and comfortable for ourselves. Others however, by the power of the Spirit working in them will express their gratefulness and genuine thanks for our tough love shown them in the Lord. With the help of God they will repent of their evil ways and turn to Christ for forgiveness, restoration, and life. But whether our alarm is met with appreciation or indignation, we go out with the added assurance that it is not our job nor in our power to change people's hearts. As we will see in an upcoming devotion, that precious miracle is God's prerogative.

So be a watchman for your fellow-man, always ready to sound the warning against sin and unbelief. It is not easy, but it is a sacred responsibility given to you and me by the Lord. It is an act of love through which God works to bring repentance and life.

*Prayer: Holy Father in heaven, as often as I stray into sin, continue to show me your love by sending bold fellow-believers into my life to warn me of the danger and lead me back to the cross of Jesus. Then use me to accomplish the same so that all whom you love may live in the true and saving faith in your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.*