

March 20, 2022

Ezekiel 33:7-20

*On the Way to Calvary ...*

**“To Confront”**

Pilgrim Lutheran Church  
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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

If I were to ask you to tell me what you were praying for in the Sermon Hymn today do you think that you would be able to answer? Here are the opening words of verse 3: “Assist my soul, too apt to stray, A stricter watch to keep ...” When you were singing you were asking the Lord God to be a watchman over your soul. You also just confessed that your soul is inclined to wander away from the Lord God. You admitted that there is a part of you that would prefer your own way rather than the way of your Savior and you realized that left to yourself you’re not going to make it.

There’s also a part of you that wants to live a God-pleasing life. Since your filth has been washed away in the death and resurrection of Jesus, there is a part of you that is deeply concerned about your spiritual well-being. In the forgiveness of sins, and the hope of being with the Lord in heaven, you want the Lord to intervene when you begin to drift away from him. And if it were to happen that you were to wander away completely from the faith, you are asking the Lord to bring you back to your senses.

So, in the hymn you asked for help. You asked for a watchman **To Confront** you *on the way to Calvary* and as you journey to your destination in Paradise. Our Old Testament lesson gives us an example of a watchman sent by God - a prophet. More on that shortly. For now, we need to make sure that we understand what a watchman was in ancient times so that we might understand the spiritual side of this. Pastor Kieth Bernard Kuschel in his commentary on *Ezekiel* writes:

In an ancient walled city, the watchman played a very important role. In large metropolitan areas, most of the people lived outside the city walls. Even in smaller cities, the people worked in the fields, vineyards, orchards or commercial establishments, most of which were outside city walls. When danger threatened the city, perhaps from an invading army, the watchman high atop the city walls would see it first. He would then sound the warning trumpet so all within hearing distance could hurry inside the walls. The city gates would be shut and preparation made to repel the attacker. If someone heard the warning, but paid no attention, it was his own fault if something happened to him. But if, on the other hand, the watchman saw the danger and did not warn the citizens, he was held accountable for the lives of those who died.

By faith we are now members of heaven, but we are not yet safely in heaven. Everyday of our lives down here, we are in spiritual danger from enemies within and without. These enemies are opposed to the gospel of Christ and faith. There is always the danger of attack. So, the Lord God sends watchmen to watch out for the attackers while pointing out the path to heaven. The prophet Ezekiel was an Old Testament watchmen over the house of Israel. The Lord says to him:

Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel. Whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me. If I say to the wicked, O wicked one, you shall surely die, and you do not speak to warn the wicked to turn from his way, that wicked person shall die in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand. But if you

warn the wicked to turn from his way, and he does not turn from his way, that person shall die in his iniquity, but you will have delivered your soul.

God called Ezekiel to be a watchman over the house of Israel during a very rough time. The Babylonians were on the rise and had taken many of God's people into exile. But the real enemy was not so much the Babylonians. Rather, the house of Israel had no one to blame but themselves for the rise of the Babylonians. The cry in Ezek. 33:10 expresses this truth: "Surely our transgressions and our sins are upon us, and we rot away because of them. How then can we live?"

I find this statement and question to be hard hitting as of late. "How then can we live?" This is the cry of those who are losing hope. It is the cry of the hopeless. These were people who saw firsthand the consequences for their wickedness. While we have not yet experienced the crush of God's judgment on sin the way that Judah and Jerusalem experienced it, are we not currently beginning to wonder to ourselves about how we are going to make it in the days to come? Our nation and world are a mess. People thought that we had become more advanced than this. Could it be that our wickedness is bringing down upon us this suffering because of our delusional choices and increased violence? "Surely our transgressions and our sins are upon us, and we rot away because of them." And yet people will no doubt think that we are nuts for thinking and saying such things.

In the New Testament we have an echo of the watchman in Hebrews 13:17. We read: "Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you." God has placed shepherds in the church to also be watchmen. We must give an account. This is very similar to what we read in our Old Testament lesson. We will stand before the Lord to answer to him regarding how we watched over the souls of the people who were committed to us.

It does not matter that most people today would prefer blind watchmen and those who have no knowledge. It does not matter that most people of our day would prefer dumb dogs that do not bark, "dreaming, lying down, loving to slumber" as Isaiah 56:10 describes them. And woe to the watchman who turns to his own way. Woe to the one who seeks after his own gain rather than the well being of the flock. May it never be that the watchmen of our day say to themselves as they did in Isaiah 56:12, "Come, let me get wine; let us fill ourselves with strong drink; and tomorrow will be like this day, great beyond measure."

The Lord clearly communicates to the prophet in our Old Testament lesson the gravity of his work, and by extension ours. He tells his watchman to proclaim the truth whether the people listen or not. His task is to be a faithful watchman and will not be held responsible for their unrepentance. However, if he does not sound the trumpet, he will be accountable.

Now, most people today will frown upon calls to repentance and threats of punishment from God. Such words are not user friendly and not considered uplifting. Jesus was hated because he testified to the unbelieving world that its works were evil. The unbelieving world hates us too for the same reason. The issue for us *on the way to Calvary* is how will we react when the watchman raises his voice **To Confront**.

As a watchman who chooses not to be blind and ignorant, who does not want to be a dumb dog that will not bark, and who does not want to be oblivious to what's going on today, I say to you similar words in our text: "Yes. It is so! All that you are seeing in life and in this Godless, violent, and bankrupt nation, and all the delusions in this unbelieving world are because our sins are upon us, and we rot away because of them." And you may ask, "How then can we live? How will we make it?" The Lord God says to us in Ezek. 33:11, "I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways, for why will you die?"

The way out is not through ourselves. It isn't by our own ingenuity or strength. The way out is not for us to promise to do better, to try harder, or to do the best we can. I am not here to merely urge you to turn away from bad behavior. Rather, I am here that you may lose all hope in yourselves and humanity, so that you may turn to the only one who can save. A watchman warns that we are under attack. And we are under attack from all enemies, including our sinful natures. But the Lord God has called me to point you to another - to the only one who can do something about this mess we've made. He is Jesus. The Son of God became a human being and took to himself every last drop of our sin and the mess from start to finish to bring us to himself and a new creation.

A watchman reminds those who have forgotten. He shouts what many do not know. And he strengthens those who are already strong. He points out the pathway to heaven in Jesus, who lived a perfect life and died for our sins that we might be forgiven and have eternal life. He offers peace to all. And he declares that Jesus is coming soon. May the thirsty drink from the water of life without price!

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott