

This Is God's House; We Are His Family: You Are the Watchman!

A sermon based on Ezekiel 33:7-11

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

There's no doubt December 7, 1941 was a tragic day, a "date which will live in infamy." More than 2300 American citizens, many of them soldiers, lost their lives as Pearl Harbor was bombed in a surprise attack by the Japanese.

But could this catastrophe have been avoided? Since that day, many debates have been held over whether the US had advance knowledge warning of the attack. There're some who believe that we actually broke Japanese code and could have possibly known about the impending attack. If that's the case, then someone could have warned the navy at Pearl Harbor so this horrible event wouldn't have had to occur. How different things might have been. Lives could have been saved!

If only! Brothers and sisters in Christ, there's an even greater tragedy occurring every day. Sinful, unbelieving souls are dying...and are going to hell. Believers are even falling away as they, caught in sin, can wander down that same path that leads to hell. That can happen to people in our own family...our own church family. It's serious. Because it's not just a deep sea grave that awaits those who fall away. It's even scarier than that.

So, what can we do? Brothers and sisters in Christ, in this family, there's a lot we can do. There's a lot we need to do. In God's house, and in this family, you are the watchman.

Now, a tragic event had just occurred in Jerusalem as well. The people there, the Israelites, thought they would always live in peace and safety in the Promised Land (even if they were going to remain sinful). But Nebuchadnezzar and his powerful Babylonian army had come upon them and destroyed their beloved city and their precious temple, God's house.

But the thing is, in this case, the Israelites had been warned. They had been warned beforehand, repeatedly, by God and by the prophet Ezekiel that this very thing would happen if they did not repent and turn from their wickedness. The people, however, refused to heed that warning.

You could imagine then, how Ezekiel, now living with the other Israelites in captivity, had every reason to be just fed up with them and just want to cleanse his hands of all of their stubbornness and arrogance.

But God wasn't done with Ezekiel, not yet. He had important work for Ezekiel and an important message for Ezekiel to share. Can you see what that work was? "Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel." He was a watchman. Now, what exactly does that mean? Ah, it's time for an ancient Israel history lesson.

In Jerusalem, a watchman was not just a security guard. No, the job was much more important than that. You see, not everyone lived inside of protection of the walled city. In fact, most of the people lived outside the city, where they could have their fields or their vineyards and their homes. Was that always safe? No. But that's why there was a watchman. This was someone who was always attentive. This was someone who could see miles, could see when the enemy was coming, who then would quickly sound the alarm so the people could leave their homes, their fields, rush through the gates of the city,

and find safety and security inside the walls. There was a lot of pressure and responsibility riding on the watchman. Their job was to watch and warn.

But why Ezekiel? Why now? Why was God calling Ezekiel to be a watchman now? The Israelites had already lost. They had already been displaced from their. Now they were in captivity. There were no walls. There was no imminent danger. They were already captured, so what worse could happen?

What worse?!? There was an even more dangerous enemy at large. They couldn't see him on the horizon, because he was already there. The real threat was Satan, and he wasn't coming for their lives. He wanted their souls.

But God wasn't ready to roll over and let Satan walk all over him. "I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live!" And so, he picked Ezekiel. Ezekiel was the watchman. Ezekiel, on behalf of God, would warn the people of this imminent and eternal danger.

The message was simple. The message was clear. The people were caught in wickedness and sin. If they did not turn from this evil, they would die. They would die for their sins. If they repented and turned from their ways, they would live. It was as easy as that.

It's as easy as that, right? We talked last week about how in God's house and in this family, we've got chores. And here's one I don't think any of us are excited about or are chomping at the bit to get to work.

And yet, it's the chore, better, the opportunity our Lord has given each of us to serve him. "Son, daughter of man...son, daughter of my heavenly family, I have made you a watchman for the house of Light of the World." You, singular, are a watchman. You know what we're talking about here, don't you? Probably some of the hardest work any church ever has to do. The work of church discipline.

Jesus laid out this hard but loving work for us in our gospel. When a brother or sister in Christ sins, we go, just between the two of us. We show them their fault, show them their sin, in the hope that they're going to repent of that sin so we can assure them they are forgiven. But if they're not going to listen to us individually, then we take someone else, not to heap the guilt on them, but to show a loving concern for their soul. If they listen and repent, again, then we rejoice and forgive.

But if they won't, then the final step is to take it to the church. There is strength in numbers when a church as one unit finally goes and says to that individual believer, "We care about your soul. We want you in heaven. Repent of your sin and receive Christ's full and free forgiveness." Brothers and sisters in Christ, that's love.

Again, if they listen, we have the pleasure to forgive and restore them to the God's family. But if they don't, if they refuse to repent even then, what does Jesus say? "Treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector." In other words, treat them like an unbeliever. Tell them they themselves have stepped outside of God's family.

Those are the guidelines Jesus lays down for this family, and what's your role? You, like Ezekiel, are the watchman. Notice the title. It's not police officer...detective. We don't go actively searching out sin, nosing our way into other people's lives so we can catch them in the act. No, it's watchman, when I scan the horizons and see this believer caught in a sin, I warn.

The title's not tattletale either. That I see someone sinning, and I have to go tell Pastor or someone else about it. No, you're the watchman. Just like what Jesus said, when you see it, you go. You and I, every single one of us here is a watchman for God's house and this family.

Are you excited about this position? I wouldn't blame you if you're not. I never find joy in approaching a fellow believer who's caught in a sin, even though Jesus tells me to do it. And so, when it's time to start these loving steps of church discipline, it's time to start making the excuses not to go, isn't it?

Excuse #1 - "It's really none of my business. If that person is going to live their life in that sin, it's between them and God. The less I know, the better off I am." But, you are the watchman. Excuse #2 - "I'm afraid if I point out the sin, it's going to damage, even ruin our friendship. I don't want them to be mad at me." But, you are the watchman. Excuse #3 - "Who am I to point out their sin since I'm a sinner myself...you know, the whole pot calling the kettle black syndrome." But, you are the watchman. Excuse #4 - "This whole process, just seems so cold and unloving. I can't be a part of something like that."

When we trace such excuses to their roots, they get exposed for what they are: tricks and schemes of the devil. After all, Satan will do everything in his power to make sure we do not view sin for what it truly is—a poison that doesn't just wound or hurt, but a poison that kills. And Satan desires nothing more than for people caught in deliberate sin to continue down that road of sin impenitence—refusing to recognize their sin and refusing to recognize their desperate need for the forgiveness of our Savior. This is always Satan's desire, because the road of unrepentance leads to hell.

But you, you are the watchman. And that means you're accountable. Look at what God said to 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." Did you get that? "I will hold you accountable for his blood." In answer to Cain's question, yes, you are your brother and sister's keeper. We're the watchman.

But what happens when we fail to watch and warn? What happens when someone caught in sin continues in that sin with no desire to turn in repentance and we watch and do nothing about it? Yeah, for that person, God's pretty clear in his Word when he says, "If [anyone] deliberately keeps on sinning after [they] have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire." Yeah, for that person who continues down the road of impenitence and unbelief, that road ends in hell.

But for us, who could do something about it but not...that's cold. That's unloving. And God will hold us accountable for our inaction. I'm the watchman. You are the watchman. But we haven't always faithful to our position. We're the ones who need to be disciplined. We're the ones who need to be punished.

And God allowed us to wallow in our sins and stumble along the road to eternal destruction...No. Where you, son of man, aren't always the faithful watchman, the Son of Man...the Son of God has always been our watchman.

Jesus was always lovingly warning people when they were caught in a sin. Whether it was the Pharisees, his followers, his disciples, even his closest friend, Peter, Jesus cared about their souls and was willing to correct them and lead them back to the right path or warn them of the dangers ahead if they would continue to willingly stray.

And for you and me, he still gives loving warning. We have it here. We have God's loving rebuke in his Word. But you know how well we always listen to it.

And so Jesus, he did something no watchman is expected to do. He watched, he warned, but that wasn't good enough for Jesus. He loves us. He doesn't want us to perish. So, the Son of Man, when sin and Satan were fast approaching to attack us, he got off the wall. He jumped down. He met our foes head on. And in that fight, Jesus lived, Jesus died, Jesus rose.

He wanted to keep us as part of God's heavenly family, and so he did what it took to win us over. He lived a life of no sin. He never needed to be rebuked. He never needed to be confronted in sin because he had no sin. Jesus was perfect. But he died for us sinners. Jesus took our sins and nailed them to the cross. In exchange, he gave us his sinlessness. He forgave us.

How can we be sure of this? Because Jesus rose. Jesus' resurrection is the eternal guarantee that our sins are gone for good and now in its place is our eternal home. We are won back to God's family.

And so, because Jesus lived, died, and rose, for God's house, for God heavenly family, we want earthly gains. We love our family members. We want to win the brother or sister in Christ caught in sin back to the family. We want to be the watchman.

So what does that mean? First, we need to repent. We need to repent of our loveless sin that has failed to go, go, go as Jesus commands.

Are you sorry for the loveless way in which you've treated your brother in failing to lovingly confront him in his sin? Then I have good news for you. I already announced it to you earlier in the service, but let me say it again: "God, our heavenly Father, has been merciful to us and has given his only Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Therefore, as a called servant of Christ and by his authority, I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

And with that forgiveness, in that forgiveness, we go. When we see a fellow believer caught in sin, we can't turn a blind eye. We understand one sin, if not taken care of and repented of, can be that one drop of poison that can infect a person's soul and kill them forever. Their eternity is simply too important to be that cold. No, we go in love. "Dear brother, dear sister, I'm concerned for you. Can we talk?"

We keep going. It's not about worrying that we might damage the friendship if we point out the sin. It's all about love and wanting to see that person in heaven. We go with the end in mind—that our goal is to save this lost soul from hell. We go with the assurance that we are forgiven for our failure to love others in this way and for every sin. We go with the promise that Jesus is with us as we live to serve him in thanks for the way he lived and died for us. And we go, eager to celebrate with all of heaven when that brother or sister is gently restored to the family through their repentance and God's forgiveness! Brothers and sisters in Christ, in this family, you are a watchman, so go! Amen.