

The Responsibility of a Watchman

Ezek. 3:16-21

INTRODUCTION

There are many tremendous responsibilities of life. Some of them even seem unfair. We could say it is unfair for parents to have such great responsibilities for their children, but they have. We could say it is unfair for heads of state to have such tremendous responsibilities for their countries, but they have, nevertheless. We could say that judges and juries have an almost impossible responsibility for those accused and tried before them, but they most certainly do indeed have this almost unfair and indescribable responsibility. The Bible says those who are watchmen have a similarly awesome responsibility. Let's look at it.

I. Not to defend the people, but to warn them

A. The watchman is not supposed to draw up battle plans, or lead the troops in combat against the enemy. He does not fire the artillery, mortars, or missiles. His job is to WARN the people. Others can lead the combat charge and do other things, but if he doesn't WARN the people they will not be warned, and they will be lost.

1. It must be admitted that sounding the alarm is not the sole responsibility the church has.

There are many other things to be done, such as, evangelizing, teaching and edifying the believers, discipling them, and helping them to grow up to be more mature believers. Additionally, they must be taught how to serve the Lord and how to help others in His Name. The sick must be healed in His Name; the poor must be helped in His Name. Missionaries must be trained and sent forth into all the world in His Name. There are many, many other things to be done in a comprehensive program of ministry of the Gospel in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the church must be engaged in all these ministries.

2. But others besides watchmen can do these things which must be done in the society.

There is no one else to sound the warning about an approaching enemy except the WATCHMAN! Ezekiel was called to be a watchman to the people.

B. A Hebrew watchman was one who keeps vigil, who guards a person or property or city, usually at night.

He is a sentry who is the keeper of the gate. The watchman of the city kept the walls safe from the enemy at night and called out to insure the safety of the city so they would not be surprised. He was especially valuable in a time of siege (Jer. 51:12, "Set up the standard upon the walls..., make the walls strong, set up the watchmen, prepare the ambushes"). The biblical faith was that the watchmen worked with God, and no watchman could protect the city unless God kept it (Ps. 127:1, "Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain").

C. The prophets considered themselves as watchmen of God who observed the coming doom on the nation and announced it often to a sleeping and indifferent people. Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel all considered themselves as watchmen commissioned by God as a watchman over his people (Isa. 21:6; Jer. 6:17; Ezek. 3:17). The burden of responsibility is heavy on God's watchmen. It is the most tragic failure for the watchman to be blind, ignorant, and silent, and sleeping when they should be alert, knowledgeable, wide awake, loud and vocal as the enemy tries to approach undetected (see Isa. 56:10).

II. Not to decide for the people, but to warn them

A. Decision is a great responsibility.

Everyone needs to decide what he or she will do with Jesus Christ, whether to accept Him or reject Him as personal Savior, whether heaven or hell is to be the soul's eternal destination. Every city needs to decide for God and righteousness or against God and for evil.

But this is basically not the responsibility of the watchman; his duty is to warn the city that danger is ahead.

B. Everyone needs to decide whether or not he or she will go all out as a Christian, or merely take on a cloak of superficial respectability while leaving the style of life unaffected by the gospel. But this is basically not the responsibility of the watchman, whose sole duty is to warn people that a very real danger of disaster is coming fast. The watchman has already made some personal decisions for his own life and faith, but he cannot decide for the citizens and officials of the city; he can only warn them.

III. Not to repent for the people, but to warn them

A. Repentance is vital. There is no substitute for this personal turning away from sin and turning in simple trust to Jesus.

Everyone needs to repent.

But we must each one repent for ourselves.

No one else can do it for us.

The watchman cannot do it for the people.

He can only warn them of the dire consequences of their failure to repent, which is that they will be lost and their blood will be on their own hands.

B. If the watchman fails to warn the people, and they do not repent and act before it is too late, the Bible says they shall die in their sins, but their blood shall be on the hands of the watchman. I don't claim to understand all of what this means, but I think I know some of what it does NOT mean. It does NOT mean that they will be saved, regardless of what happens. It does not mean the watchman will go to hell in their place. There is too much very clearly written elsewhere in the Bible about personal responsibility for one's own personal salvation to mistake this point. (See Eze. ch. 18) But it does reveal clearly, as plain "as a path of tar across a field of snow," that the watchman bears an awesome responsibility, which is indicated in the expression "blood on his hands."

C. People everywhere seem to find it very hard to repent. It's not easy to say, "I'm sorry."

A former president of Southern Baptist Seminary was serving as pastor in Georgia in his early ministry. Once he made a call in a fine Christian home, and the mother told him a remarkable story. She observed from her children how grown men and women are so like children, and children are so like them in many respects. She told her pastor about her two boys; one was tall, husky and strong, and he liked to pick on his brother. Once she walked in the house just as this stronger boy slapped the other one quite hard. When he saw his mother, he froze. He knew how many times she had punished him for that. She froze, too, that time, and just stood there and looked at him. By-and-by his head dropped, and the mother walked away.

A little while later she heard him behind her. He was shifting nervously from one foot to the other. Finally he said, "Momma, can I help you in some way? Is there something I can do for you?" She told him she didn't need anything. She knew what he was thinking -- just what some grown people think, that we can pay God off with some little extra service when we've done something that has displeased him. The mother went on with the house-work. Half an hour later, while she was sewing, she heard him come in again. She felt so sorry for him, but she knew he had to learn his lesson, and she just waited. She didn't even look around. He said: "Mamma, the woodbox is about empty. Can I go get you some wood and fill it up?" She had to wait a moment before answering, because there was a lump in her throat. Then she said, "No, Son, I don't think we'll need any more wood today." She heard him turn around and start out. He got as far as the door, stopped again, and she looked around. When she did, he burst into tears and, sobbing, he came running and put his arms around her waist. He said: "Mamma, I'm so sorry. Please forgive me. I won't ever do it again." The mother who was telling the story, pointed out to her pastor, "That's what God wants to hear us say."

(Roy Angell, The Price Tag of Life)

The pastor said later, "As I looked at the tear-brimmed eyes of this mother, I knew that God suffers all the time we continue without repentance, and sometimes he allows us to face our own shortcomings in order to teach us some great lesson or shape us for some tremendous responsibility he has for us."

D. The watchman does not repent for other people or answer for their sins, but he does answer for his own sins, including leaving the people unwarned.

1. Rom. 14:12, "So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God."

We do not give account of other people; we give account of ourselves to God.

2. The watchman must give account of himself to God. He must ask, "Have I been responsible and faithful to God in my calling?"

3. The Christian must give account of himself or herself to God. We must ask, "Have I been responsible and faithful in my calling, duty, and opportunities before God and my fellow human beings?" If we are faithful in serving and warning them, and they fail to heed the warning and die in their sins, we have delivered our souls. But if they hear no warning from us and see no Savior in us, they may die in their sins, and God will require their blood at our hands; that is, God will hold us at least partly responsible, and we will have to answer to Him for this at the Judgment Seat of Christ. For this we will not lose our salvation, but we may well face His reprimand, and lose some part of our reward which we would otherwise have enjoyed and could have laid as a trophy at the feet of our Redeemer.

CONCLUSION: There is a price to be paid to be a faithful watchman for the Lord. The hymnwriter wrote words that should challenge all of us:

"Must I be carried to the skies

On flow-'ry beds of ease,

While others fought to win the prize,

And sailed through bloody seas?"

A foreign mission board once was meeting to examine some candidates for the mission field. When they came down to the last one, the secretary of the board said to the other members: "Before I bring this last young lady in, I want to read to you a telegram that came from one of the professors in the seminary from which she graduated. The wire has bothered me, for I don't understand it. It reads like this: "Be sure to ask her if she believes that Jesus Christ died on the cross to save us from our sins." Immediately one of the members bounced out of his chair. "Mr. Secretary, if she doesn't believe that, she will never go out from this board as a missionary." His statement was followed by a dozen "amens."

Into this hostile atmosphere the young lady was called. The secretary controlled his voice and said quietly, "The first question we want to ask you is, Do you believe that Jesus died to save us from our sins?" Her answer completely floored them all. With strong conviction she said: "Yes, I believe that Jesus died to save us from our sins. Also, I believe with all of my heart that he expects some of us to die to save the world from its sins. I have given him my life, and if he needs for me to die on the mission field that others may have redemption and salvation, I am perfectly willing for it to be that way." (By angels, the price tags & life)

It is a commitment like this that Paul made, and it was with that same deep conviction that the Old Testament watchmen climbed up into the watch-tower and kept their eyes on the entire landscape, knowing that the first enemy arrow may very well be aimed for their heart. God may indeed expect some of us in this church today under some circumstances to be willing to die to save the world from its sins. Can you say with the young missionary candidate, "If God needs me, I am perfectly willing for it to be that way"?

If this is a new commitment for you, come forward as we stand to sing our invitation hymn, and take your stand for Jesus Christ.

Passadena Bap. ch. Feb. 8, '87, D#51
angalea Bap. ch. July 26, '87