

# Coming Home

## ***“Part 1: Prioritizing our Responsibilities”***

Ezekiel 33:1-9

Delivered at Central Baptist Church on August 22, 2021

### INTRODUCTION

- **(SHOW TITLE SLIDE 01)** Today I am going to begin a new four-part series that I am calling “Coming Home.” When we talked about how Central would proceed during Covid, I described Covid using the metaphor of moving into a hotel. Something big has happened to your house like the pipes bursting and your forced to move out of it and live in hotel for a year. Living in a hotel is a temporary situation. You have to adjust to it. And so I said we needed to unpack our bags because we would be in Covid for quite some time. But now life in this temporary living situation is coming to an end (Lord willing!) and we get to come home.
  - The difficulty is that we have formed all kinds of new habits while living in Covid hotel. Some habits may be good for life in a hotel, but they aren’t good for life at home. For instance, it was a good habit during Covid to make sure we worshipped through our online services, but now that Covid is coming to an end that habit needs to be broken and we need to transition back to meeting in person again.
- So in this series we are going to look at four priorities as we come home to normal life. Today I want to focus on our need to prioritize relationships. More particularly, the need to make sure we are fulfilling our *responsibilities* within the relationships God has given us.
  - To do this I want to look at a passage of scripture in Ezekiel 33. In this passage, God uses the picture of a watchman. God calls Ezekiel to be a watchman. And we will see that he also calls us to be faithful watchman.
    - So let’s develops this in three parts. Part 1: The picture of a watchman. Part 2: The meaning of a watchman. And part 3: how to be a faithful watchman.

### THE PICTURE OF A WATCHMAN

- Let’s start developing this by talking the first place about the **(SHOW SLIDE 02)** **The picture of a watchman.**
  - In Ezekiel 33 God talks to Ezekiel using the picture of a watchman. There are two sides to this picture. First, there is the side of the watchman and what he was responsible to do. Second, there is the side of the people and what they were responsible to do. We see the first side in verse 1-5
    - **(SHOW SLIDE 03)** **“Son of man, speak to your people and say to them, If I bring the sword upon a land, and the people of the land take a man from among them, and make him their watchman, (SHOW SLIDE 04)**  
**<sup>3</sup>and if he sees the sword coming upon the land and blows the trumpet and warns the people, <sup>4</sup>then if anyone who hears the sound of the trumpet does not take warning, and the sword comes and takes him**

away, his blood shall be upon his own head. (SHOW SLIDE 05) <sup>5</sup> He heard the sound of the trumpet and did not take warning; his blood shall be upon himself. But if he had taken warning, he would have saved his life.”

- So imagine a big open space with an army camped out under the stars. (SHOW TITLE SLIDE 06) As darkness comes a line of watchman are set up around the camp. Every 50 feet a man stands guard. While everyone else sleeps the watchmen all stare out into the darkness, watching carefully for any sign of movement. Hour after hour passes. All is quiet. All is still. Then suddenly the silence is shattered by the sound of a trumpet blast.
  - Every sleeping soldier knows what it means. One of the watchman has spotted the enemy army. Everywhere soldiers jump out of bed, quickly put on their armour, and rush to defend against the attack that is now happening in the camp.
    - In this case, the watchman has done his job. The enemy had counted on the element of surprise. But the watchman has taken away that element of surprise. Now if there was a soldier who heard the trumpet and just went back to sleep, then if that soldier is killed his blood is on his own head. He was warned and he failed to act.
- But there is another side to this in verse 6.
  - (SHOW SLIDE 07) <sup>6</sup> But if the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet, so that the people are not warned, and the sword comes and takes any one of them, that person is taken away in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at the watchman’s hand.
- So now imagine the same scene that we set before. (SHOW TITLE SLIDE 08) The army is asleep. The enemy feels far away and all seems safe. Then suddenly the silence is shattered not by a trumpet blast but by the shouts of a thousand enemy voices shouting battle cries. They crash through the camp, killing soldiers as they sleep. There is no time to get on armour. There is no time to organize a defense.
  - In this case, the battle was over before it began. There was no trumpet to warn the camp because the watchman had fallen asleep and failed to do this duty. In this case, the watchman is held accountable for the blood of all who are slain.
- So that is the picture that God puts into Ezekiel’s mind and into ours. It is the picture of a watchman who must be faithful in the job he is called to do. And it is the picture of the people who must be faithful in responding to the trumpet blast.

## THE MEANING OF A WATCHMAN

- The picture of the watchman is clear enough, but why does God want Ezekiel to think of a watchman? Well, in the second place let’s talk about (SHOW SLIDE 09) **The meaning of a watchman.**
  - We don’t need to guess what this means because God tells Ezekiel right after he gives the picture. Look at verses 7-9.
    - (SHOW SLIDE 10) <sup>7</sup> “So you, son of man, I have made a watchman for the house of Israel. Whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you

shall give them warning from me. <sup>8</sup> 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. (SHOW SLIDE 11) <sup>9</sup> 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.

- Imagine the effect of this on Ezekiel. (SHOW TITLE SLIDE 12) He has this clear picture of a watchman in his mind and now God says that he, Ezekiel, has been appointed as a watchman for Israel. Not a watchman who looks out for armies that attack, but a watchman who is responsible to warn people of God's words when they turn away to live sinful lives.
  - This picture would have greatly increased Ezekiel's sense of his own responsibility. A watchman must be alert. A watchman must do his job. And notice that faithfulness as a watchman is not defined by whether people listen or not. Faithfulness is defined by being alert and blowing the trumpet if it is required. Faithfulness for Ezekiel simply meant being responsible to speak God's words to God's people.
- It is not hard to see what this means for us today. Today God also says to people, "***I have made you a watchman.***" Let's think this through. Who does God say this to? Who does God appoint as watchmen today?
- First, (SHOW SLIDE 13) **God says to those in government, "I have made you a watchman."**
  - Those in positions of authority are called by God to be watchman over the nation, over the province, over the cities, and over the municipalities. They are called to govern justly and to promote righteousness. They are to warn of dangers and to protect the people. To all those who serve in government, God has called you to be a watchman.
    - We could of course digress to talk about many topics here. There could be all kinds of debates on where the government is doing this well and where they are not. Whatever our views, we must be united on one thing and that is prayer for our government. Let us obey 1 Tim 2:2 that says, (SHOW SLIDE 14) **I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, <sup>2</sup>for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. (1 Tim 2:1-2).**
- Second, (SHOW SLIDE 15) **God says to the Church, "I have a made you a watchman."**
  - We are called to be watchman who clearly speak the words of God.
    - Yet, we often fall into one of two errors here. Each of us will tend more to one of these errors more than other.
- (SHOW SLIDE 16) **Error #1: we can avoid speaking out of fear of conflict.** Some of us are more peaceable than others. Such people don't like conflict and so avoid talking about anything controversial. But this is to fail in our responsibility to be watchmen. A watchman must blow the trumpet when he sees danger.

- Acts 17 says that it is not accident that you were born exactly when you were and it is not accident that you live exactly where you do. God put you there and he has given us a job to do in our generation.
  - If we as the Church fail to address the issues of our day, if we fail to speak of Christ to our friends, family, if we are not praying for opportunities to share Christ, speaking for the helpless unborn, and helping people think through LGBTQ topics as they relate to Christ, then we are not as a Church fulfilling our responsibility as watchmen.
    - It is a great travesty when the Church becomes quiet and does not speak. Yet, there is an equal but opposite error that other Christians fall into.
- **(SHOW SLIDE 17) Error #2: we can speak in a way that lacks grace.**
  - Far too often those who are bold in speaking are also very combative. What we say will offend, but such people are often offensive in how aggressively and harsh they come across. If there are three verses that instruct us on how to be watchman who speak for Christ in our generation then they are 1 Peter 3:15-17.
    - **(SHOW SLIDE 18) . . . always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, <sup>16</sup> having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. <sup>17</sup> For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil.**
  - That is it! That is how the Church is to faithfully fulfill our role as watchmen. We must speak. We must speak of Christ. Yet, we must speak with gentleness and respect. Jesus is our model and John 1:14 says,
    - **(SHOW SLIDE 19) And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.**
      - Not just full of grace. Not just full of truth. Not even half of each to somehow be balanced. Full of grace and truth. Which one do you need more of in your life?
- Third, **(SHOW SLIDE 20) God says to parents, "I have made you a watchman."**
  - Parents are called to stand as watchmen over their homes. To equip their children in things like prayer, understanding the Bible, and setting an example of what it means to follow Christ.
    - We cannot and must not set aside our duty. Note again, our role is to do our best to equip our kids. At the end of the day though, it is up to them if they will heed the words of their parents in following Christ. Do not take their salvation upon yourself. Do your role, let God do his role, and release them.
- Fourth, **(SHOW SLIDE 21) God says to each Christian, "I have made you a watchman."**
  - Way back in Genesis 4, God asked Cain where his brother Abel was after he murdered him. Cain answered, **"Am I my brother's keeper?"** This is one of the

first great heresies. It is the idea that I am not responsible for others. It is the idea that I can just live my individual life and am not responsible to others.

- What is the answer to Cain's question? Am I my brother's keeper? Yes! That is exactly what you are. Or as Paul says in the New Testament, **"You are all members of each other."**
- We have a responsibility to love one another, to care for one another, to fellowship with one another. We have tried to do this in new and different ways during Covid, but we need to start coming back together as Covid ends. We have all learned how being in person together is far more powerful than through Zoom or Livestream.
- **(SHOW TITLE SLIDE 22)** The question we must ask ourselves is, **"Am I faithfully doing my job as a watchman with the relationships and roles God has given me?"** Or am I avoiding my responsibilities to others, to speaking of Christ, to loving, to helping, and to caring?
  - There are two possible scenarios for the final judgement day. We may stand before God and he will ask us how we fulfilled our calling to be watchman to those we knew? Some will look around and no one will be there. So many chances to speak of Jesus and yet never spoke because we were afraid. So many chances to serve others, to care for the poor, and to be involved, but we chose the path of personal comfort instead and did not serve. So many chances to give money, but spent it on ourselves. So many chances to care for the least of these, but became more self-centered. And now such a person can only say, **"Lord, there is no one standing with me. I was wrong. I did not fulfill my job as a watchman."**
    - What a terrifying moment that will be. It makes me ask myself, **"Am I fulfilling my responsibilities as a parent, as a pastor, as a friend, as a member in my family?"**
  - But there is another potential scenario. You may stand before God to give an account for how you fulfilled your role as a watchman. But before you can speak, a voice comes from behind you. It's your daughter: **"My mother taught me the scriptures. I did not listen for a long time but she faithfully prayed for me and I eventually came to Christ."** And then your friend comes running, **"There were times when I was foolish. I walked straight into sin. But she came and spoke to me. It was a difficult conversation. I got my back up but she loved me so much as to have the conversation."** And then your colleague came up, **"I also made fun of Christians but this continually modelled a Christ-like life."** And then hundreds of others come up and talk of how you gave time to volunteer to teach Sunday school, to serve others, to warn others of dangers in their life.
    - It makes me think of that old song, "Thank you for giving to the Lord." The song pictures judgement day like I have must done and people saying to you,
    - **Thank you for giving to the Lord  
I am a life that was changed**

***Thank you for giving to the Lord  
I am so glad you gave***

- Then Jesus says, “Well done, good and faithful servant.”

**HOW TO BE A FAITHFUL WATCHMAN**

- So we’ve seen the picture of the watchman. We’ve seen the meaning of the watchman – that we are all watchman for Christ. But we need to get more practical now. In the final place let’s talk about **(SHOW SLIDE 23) How to be a faithful watchman.**
  - So much could be said here, but let me just offer a few thoughts.
- First, **(SHOW SLIDE 24) pray.**
  - Ask God to open doors. Ask God to give you courage. Ask God to give you wisdom. Ask God to make you wise as to when to speak and when not to speak.
- Second, **(SHOW SLIDE 25) use what God has given you (and don’t stress about what he hasn’t given you)**
  - This passage and this sermon are meant to feel weighty. They are meant to make us feel our sense of responsibility in order that we might act. But a danger here is that we feel false guilt and feel overwhelmed that we are failing. So how do you know if you are being faithful? **(SHOW TITLE SLIDE 26)** I think Jesus’ parable of the talents helps so much here.
    - In this parable a master gives a few servants differing amounts of money. One servant gets 5 talents, another 2 talents, and another a single talent. Each servant is responsible to put his master’s money to work while the master is gone. When the master returns the servant with 5 talents shows how he has turned his five talents into 10. The servant who was given 2 talents shows how he has turned his 2 into 4. But the servant with only one talent buried his talent in the ground and did nothing with it. The master praises the first two and condemns the last.
  - Notice that Jesus does not expect the man with 2 talents to make 10 talents. The servant with 2 talents is faithful in producing 4. He is simply to be responsible with what is given to him. In the same way, this is freeing. Each of us have different gifts, different abilities, different amounts of wealth, different personalities, and different challenges. God is just. He does not expect more out of you than he has given. What he does expect is that you are responsible to use what he has given you and not to bury it in the ground.
    - Simply ask, ***“How can I take what God has given me (personality, abilities, time, money, influence, family...etc) and use it for his glory?”***
- Third, **(SHOW SLIDE 27) look to the Captain of the Watch.**
  - We are all appointed as watchman, but there is one who is the Captain of the Watch. He has gone before us. He has shown us how to do this. As Jesus stood watch over his creation he saw the enemies of sin, death, and judgement coming for us. He did not say, ***“Am I my creation’s keeper?”*** He did not fall asleep at his post. No, he acted. He fought all our enemies on our behalf. He was killed but it was through his crucifixion that he won the victory. And so to all of us, as the armies of sin, death, and judgement rush the camp the trumpet blast is sounded.

The trumpet is a call to come to Jesus, to fall in behind the Captain, to look to him to defeat our greatest enemies.

- When you see how Jesus acted on your behalf, you not only receive mercy for your own failures but you also receive the power to follow his example. You fulfill your job as a watchman because he fulfilled his on your behalf. And he did this at cost to his own life.
- **(SHOW TITLE SLIDE 28)** There is an amazing story about a hero from a certain village in China. A great earthquake began to shake the ground. This man's rice field was up high on the hillside. As he looked out over the ocean he saw that the ocean was rapidly pulling back, like a lion crouches before jumping for the kill. He knew that a tsunami was coming. He looked down and saw his neighbours and friends working the fields down at sea level. He knew that the tsunami would soon sweep them all away.
  - Without a second thought he set fire to his own rice fields and furiously rang the fire bell. His neighbours looked up and saw his field on fire and ran up the hill to help him. As they arrived at the top they turn around to see tsunami sweep over all their farms and houses bringing total devastation to their fields and houses.
    - The one farmer had seen death coming, had sacrificed all he had, in order to save his neighbours.
- When Christ saw the tsunami of death and judgement coming for each of us, he sacrificed his very self to save us. And so we say, ***“Jesus, forgive us when we fail in our roles as watchman. And teach us how to faithfully fulfill our responsibilities as watchmen.”***
  - What is one way that God is speaking to you right now? What is one area where he is calling you to be a faithful watchman?