

Elders As Watchmen

by James Jennings

This sermon emphasizes the importance of being faithful watchmen, warning the lost of their sin, urging professing believers to heed warnings and repent, and reminding watchmen of their accountability before God. It highlights the need for boldness in speaking the truth, reliance on the blood of Christ for forgiveness, and the assurance that God will never neglect His people. The message also touches on the significance of missions and the responsibility to warn those in need of the Gospel.

Scripture: Ezekiel 3:17, 1 Timothy 4:16, Isaiah 52:8, Romans 10:14, Jonah 1:1

Topics: "Faithfulness", "Accountability in Ministry"

Description

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Transcript

into the spiritual realm and Lord to no longer be in darkness. Father, thank you. Lord, thank you so much for the great mercy that you have shown.

And Lord, I just pray that you would help me now as as I share this message or to those, the few right in front of me and then to the brethren of the Internet. Lord, we just pray, would you bless and own and be in our meeting today? Lord, we need you. We want your presence.

Lord, we long for your nearness. And so we ask for your help in Jesus name. Amen.

Okay, I want to speak on elders as watchmen, elders as watchmen, and we're ultimately going to end up in Ezekiel chapter three. But I want to start in the New Testament and work our way back briefly. And the Bible uses different metaphors to talk about the elders in the church and the roles that those elders have.

It calls us pastors, shepherds, workmen, stewards, do the work of an evangelist. So the Bible takes a real life task to illustrate and describe the elder's spiritual task towards those in the church. And the different metaphors the scriptures use, they give us a certain example that we can take to heart with the role that God has given us.

And so one of these that Paul alludes to from the Old Testament is that of a watchman. And the clearest place we see this in the New Testament, that this idea is true, is in Hebrews, Hebrews 13, 17. That's the first verse we'll look at.

Just briefly, I'll read this. Obey your leaders, submit to them. Why? They are keeping watch over your souls.

Keeping watch. That's the idea of a watchman. And we're doing that as what? As those who will have to give an account.

So we're watchmen, and we're going to have to give an account for the job that we do as we're watching. This is an extremely important task, to be alert, to be watching out for the safety of the entire church, and to give warnings from God's Word to God's people. And then let's turn to Acts 20.

Let's go back a little. There's two places in Acts that are going to ultimately lead us to Ezekiel 33 and chapter 3, Acts 20. And you think about warnings.

Even this morning, my daughter put oatmeal in the microwave without water. And before you knew it, we had a massive amount of smoke in the kitchen. But we did not have a fire alarm in the kitchen.

I thought we had a fire alarm in the kitchen. We did not. And so we were not warned.

Now, that's on a small scale. The house didn't burn down. No one perished, right? But on a smaller scale, we wish we had something there to warn us.

We needed to get an alarm and an alarm that works. But Acts 20, verse 17, Paul here in context, now from Miletus, he's sent to Ephesus, and he called the elders of the church to come to him. So you could say, as some say, there's a pastor's conference.

And Paul then goes on to say, verse 25, And now behold, I know that none of you among whom I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom will see my face again. So he doesn't think they're going to ever see him again. Therefore, in view of this, I testify to you this day, I am innocent of the blood of all.

Paul implies there he could have guilt rather than innocence for the blood of these people. Why is Paul innocent as a watchman? Verse 27, he's innocent because he did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God. It's not just that he declared something, right? Many people, they speak.

He declared the whole counsel of God. And then he says to these elders, verse 28, You need to pay careful attention to yourselves and be watchmen to all the flock in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Even that word overseers, you have that idea of you're giving watch.

You're looking over. Overseers to care for the church of God which He obtained with His blood. Verse 29, I know that after my departure, fierce wolves will come in among you.

They will not spare the flock, and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore, in view of this, be alert. Don't fall asleep.

And remember that for three years, I did not cease night or day to admonish, that's the idea of warn, to warn everyone with tears. So Paul is saying for three years, I was a watchman over you, and I did not fall asleep, and I sought to warn you and to admonish you. And he's saying to these elders who he's leaving

there, he's saying you need to do the same thing.

You need to pay careful attention to yourself and to all the flock of whom God has made you overseers over. And as he said in verse 26, there's an issue here of, I want to be innocent of the blood of all these people. There could be guilt that I would have for the failure to do the task.

And so Paul says something similar, one more place in the New Testament, Acts 18. Acts 18, verse 5, when Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul was occupied with the Word, testifying to the Jews that the Christ was Jesus. And when the Jews opposed and reviled Paul, he took out his garments and he said to them, your blood be on your own heads.

I'm innocent. From now on, I will go to the Gentiles. So here again, Hebrews 13, we hear about giving an account, right? Acts 20, we hear about Paul being innocent.

In Acts 18, Paul talks about being innocent, meaning Paul could have been the opposite of innocent. He could have had some guilt associated with a failure to be alert and warn the people or a failure to give the people the whole counsel of God. Now, the New Testament will either quote where it's very clear it's quoting the Old Testament, where it says something like Isaiah said, as the prophet Isaiah said.

But a lot of times, the New Testament authors, hundreds and some say 4,000 times, they allude to an idea from the Old Testament Scriptures. An allusion is a hint. They're hinting at that idea from the Old Testament.

Specifically in Acts 18, he says, testifying to the Jews, and he says, your blood be on your own heads. There's many places in the Old Testament that a Jew, they would have thought about when they heard that verse. And one of these places is in Ezekiel.

So we're going to turn to Ezekiel, and that's where we're going to spend the rest of our time. And in Ezekiel, there are two places. We're going to be in Ezekiel 3. But in Ezekiel 33, which is some say six years later after what the Lord said to Ezekiel in chapter 3, in Ezekiel 33, it talks about an actual watchman, the actual position, meaning not some figurative or not a metaphor, but there was an actual position of watchman in Israel.

That the Lord spiritualizes that and says, that's how you are, Ezekiel. In the spiritual sense, you're going to be a watchman. But Ezekiel 33, it says this, the word of the Lord came to me, 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, they make him their watchman.

And if he sees the sword coming upon the land and he blows the trumpet and he warns the people, then if anyone who hears the sound of the trumpet does not take warning, the sword comes, takes that person away, his blood shall be upon his own head. He heard the sound of the trumpet and he did not take warning. His blood shall be upon himself.

But if he had taken warning, he would have saved his life. But if the watchman sees the sword coming and doesn't 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. And then the Lord says this, so you, son of man, I have made a watchman for the house of Israel.

So he's putting this idea of an actual watchman. And then he's saying, look, this is how you are in the spiritual realm. And Paul in the New Testament, he speaks in similar language about accountability, that if I do not speak, I'm held accountable.

And he speaks about being alert. And he says that we are those who are keeping watch over your souls. And so Paul in the New Testament, he directly puts this idea that an elder in a church, they're an overseer, they're a watchman, similar to that of those in the Old Testament.

And so we get more of this idea of what does it mean, this aspect of being a watchman, as one of the leaders in the church. We get some of the weight of the responsibility here in Ezekiel. And so we're going to look specifically at Ezekiel 3 and point out some things.

In Ezekiel, in chapter 1 of the letter, it says in verse 3, Ezekiel is a priest. He is a priest in the Old Testament. And here the Lord is coming to him.

The Lord is calling him to go and ultimately to prophesy to these people in chapter 2. But in chapter 3, we see this example here of a watchman. So let me also read from chapter 3, verse 16, And at the end of seven days, the word of the Lord came to me, Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel. Whenever you hear a word from my mouth, notice the source, you shall give them warning from me.

Who are we speaking on behalf of? On behalf of God. From me. Verse 18, If I say to the wicked, the Lord says to the wicked, you will surely die.

And you, the watchman, give him no warning. You don't even speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way. In order, why do we speak? In order to save his life.

That wicked person, he will die for his sin. But his blood, I will require, I will make you give an account at your hand. Verse 19, But if you warn the wicked, and he does not turn from his wickedness, or from his wicked way, he shall die for his iniquity.

But you will have delivered your soul. Verse 20, Again, so he just talked about warning a wicked person. Now he talks about the righteous.

Verse 20, Again, if a righteous person turns from his righteousness, and he commits injustice, and I lay, I, the Lord, lay a stumbling block before him, he shall die. Because you have not warned him, he shall die for his sin. And his righteous deeds that he has done shall not be remembered.

But his blood, I will require at your hand. But if you warn the righteous person not to sin, and he does not sin, he shall surely live. Because he took warning, and you will have delivered your soul.

So this is a very weighty passage. This idea here, this passage really stresses, honestly, stresses man's responsibility in a way that a lot of people don't want to stress. And it also stresses the fact of our accountability to God.

And again, Paul, he points this exact same idea of accountability for the watchman not speaking. He points that out in the New Testament. And so we can't just look at this as some idea from the Old Testament.

Now, there's obviously differences here. When it talks about his blood, I require at your hand. Well, when you look in other places, it's talking about physical death.

The watchman would die for not doing his job. He would lose his life. And David says, I require your blood, when they got back from, I think it was Ziklag, and they killed the people because they failed at the task.

So we're going to look near the end how does that warning specifically apply to elders in the church and even, in a way, to all of us. There are truths here that are for all of us. You don't just want to put it on just the church leaders.

There are ideas here and truths here that are for all of us. But Paul, in the New Testament, he specifically is putting part of the weight of this on the elders in the church as watchmen. So, that's what we're going to look at.

So first, I want to make a few considerations about the watchman and then about the warnings. First thing is this. The watchman has the hard task of warning people.

And you say, what do you mean? Meaning he's the bearer of what type of news? Bad news, weighty news, right? It is, is it easier to warn people or to encourage people? I find it a lot easier to encourage people, right? I could go encourage you guys. That's easy. But if I'm watching and I'm alert and I see something off track and I've got to warn you, that's more difficult.

And so, we want to recognize the watchman has a hard task. Encouraging someone is easy in comparison to telling them, praise God, good job. And we warn, v. 18 says, in order to save his life.

We're giving them a warning in order that they might respond, right? This is a very important reality. Colossians 1.28, Paul says, Christ we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom for what end, in order that we might present everyone mature in Christ. So we're warning people in order to present them mature in Christ.

We're warning people because God uses the warnings as a means to get you to the end. And we've got to get to the end. Now, why do I mention this is my first point? Because some have said they're concerned that we have too many sermons dealing with sin, and that there's too much warnings that have been happening.

And I realize in a way I'm adding to that by this message. But I'm bringing this message because it's all I had as I was studying this week. And two, I think it's important.

If you want to look and say, is our church focusing too much on sin? And is our church, are there too many warnings? You want to look and step back and say, wait a minute. For one, the Bible is loaded with warnings. And number two, us in the leadership, one of the metaphors to describe our task is that of a watchman.

And that's a weighty task. And it's difficult to warn. It's very difficult.

And look, if at a certain section of a road, it's extra dangerous as we're driving through that, and there's an increased amount of warning signs, we shouldn't despise that. We should take heed to those warnings, get past that part of dangerous road, and then there might be less warnings because they're not as necessary at that season. But put yourself in the place of a watchman.

I'm going to give an account. If I fail to blow the trumpet, there are consequences. And it's very easy to want to fail at times because you're afraid of the response.

And fear of man is not helpful. We want to be faithful to the truth, right? So sounding the trumpet is not easy. Some people, they're tired of war.

They're tired of the constant threats of enemies. The fact is, when in this life are we not going to have threats from enemies, right? I mean, what season in the church are warnings not going to be necessary? You know, it's not going to come. Could we become imbalanced where there's too much of a focus on sin and warnings? Sure.

But where did the vast majority of the churches become imbalanced in the world? The vast majority of churches become imbalanced in that they don't warn enough and there's not enough rebuking and reproofing of sin. And that's why there's so many false types of professing Christianity out there. Now look, I never want to sound a false alarm, but I don't want to be a coward and not sound the trumpet when there's a valid concern in your life or the life of the church.

None of us who are elders in the church want to do that. We don't want to be the one who doesn't sound the alarm and people perish because they didn't have that opportunity to heed that warning in order that they might have their lives saved. So some people would say, well, I mean, the warnings, the sin, that's not an issue in my life.

If we're dealing with it, it's an issue on someone's life in the church. And therefore, you can pray for whoever that is. Even if you don't know who it is, you can pray for them that God would help them to overcome.

And we're all members of a body. So if I say, well, I don't struggle with that sin and it's being preached on so much, the fact is one of my members of my body is struggling with that and they need to get that resolved. I'm going to pray for them.

So that's one of the reasons I felt like a truth I could pull out of this for people in the church. We have a great responsibility. We're going to give an account if we fail to blow that trumpet.

And we are not wanting to lead the church in a way where there's too many warnings. But the fact is, the warnings that have happened are necessary. I don't think anyone would say, wow, the leaders are blowing the trumpet too much and there's no wolves, so to speak, and we're the boy who cried wolf.

That's not the case. They're valid concerns. And we need to be alarming those, blowing the alarm for those.

So that's the first point. The watchman has a hard task. I love to encourage people.

I would have loved to have maybe a more encouraging sermon this morning, but I don't. Now, there's an encouraging truth at the end. We're seeing something about God's character.

And at the end, I'm going to point out how this applies to God. If we see this truth of Him holding people accountable for neglect, there's a glorious truth we're going to see about our Lord. So second point is this.

The watchman has a necessary task in that even though God is sovereign, the position of the watchman is required. This really stresses man's responsibility. And listen to this.

Psalms 127. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain. Wait, wait.

Okay, that verse makes it sound like I can stay awake and it's in vain because ultimately, the Lord's watching over the city, right? I mean, if it's ultimately the Lord watching over the city, why do I need to stay alert? Well, you need to stay alert because God uses means. Just because the Lord watches over the city doesn't mean the watchman is not required to stay awake. It's as the Lord is watching over the city and the watchman is awake and alert that the Lord shows that watchman something to see and he's able to go and blow that trumpet.

God uses means. Verse 21, it says, but if you warn, if you warn the righteous person not to sin when he does not sin, he'll surely live. Why? Why does he surely live? Because he took warning.

Where do warnings come from? People. Mouths. Speaking.

A loud trumpet. Using my voice to warn people, to admonish people that they might be presented pure in Christ. So man is responsible even though God is sovereign.

I mean, we know that reality, but this text, it really stresses it in a unique way. The responsibility of man. Okay, third thing.

The watchman does not get to pick or choose what to say. And we see that in 317. Son of man, I've made you a watchman for the house of Israel.

Whenever you hear a word from my mouth, so the Lord's going to speak to Ezekiel and give him prophetic words to say, then you shall give them warning. Now that's not the New Testament reality. We're not waiting for a prophetic word from God.

We're going to our Scriptures, we're reading what the Bible says, and we're using the Scriptures to warn people. We have our standard right here. Not that God might not at times give an insight of discernment into some specific situation to refute that.

But the watchman doesn't get to pick and choose what he says. And how do they view the Word of God? Look at Ezekiel 3. Verse 1, He said to me, Son of man, whatever you find here, eat this scroll and go and speak to the house of Israel. So Ezekiel says, I opened my mouth and he gave me this scroll to eat, and he said to me, Son of man, feed your belly with this scroll that I give you and fill your stomach with it.

And real fast before we read the next phrase, what's he filling his stomach with? Chapter 2, verse 10. And it had writing on the front and on the back, and there were written on it words of lamentation, mourning, and woe. So what he's about to take in is full of lamentation, mourning, and woe.

Look back at verse 3, verse 3. Then he ate it and it was in my mouth as what? Sweet as honey? Alright, this guy Ezekiel's taking it too far. Lamentation, woe, and mourning is sweet as honey? No, no, no, we understand it. For the Christian, even the judgments and the warnings of God are sweet as honey because it's God's Word.

And we want whose perspective at the end of the day? We want God's perspective. And even you get the reality in Revelation in Isaiah or in Luke where there's the idea that in heaven the righteous might even look upon the damned in hell. And you could think, how could that be right? How could I praise God seeing family members in hell? Because it's right, and God is just for having put them there for their

rejection of Him.

And so Ezekiel shows us here, he's not letting his emotions get in the way of what God's Word says where he has a distorted perspective. The Word is sweet even though it's lamentation, mourning, and woe written upon it. And so the point is the watchman, he doesn't get to pick or choose what to say.

And a lot of people, they are picking and choosing what they want to say, right? And that's what we don't want to be. We don't want to be the watchman who say, you know what, that's a really offensive time to blow the trumpet, so we're not going to do it. And there's many out there who do that.

Ezekiel 13 even speaks of them. 13.9, my hand will be against the prophets who see false visions, who give lying divinations. So they're speaking.

They're blowing the trumpet, but it's wrong. They shall not be in counsel of My people, nor be enrolled in the register of the house of Israel, nor shall they enter the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am the Lord your God.

Precisely because they have misled My people, saying peace when there is no peace. You see, who wants to be the watchman who says peace when there is no peace? Who misleads and guess what? Keeping watch is one who's going to give an account to God. I'm going to be held accountable on how I do as a watchman in blowing this trumpet and warning.

Ezekiel 2.80, he says here, but you, O son of man, hear what I say to you. Be not rebellious. Light that rebellious house.

Open your mouth and eat what I give you. Some people don't want to eat certain passages in the Scriptures. Much less share the passage.

They don't want to even eat the passage. But if we're going to be faithful watchmen, we've got to eat this whole book. We've got to, like Job, say this is better than my portion of food.

And I need to open my mouth. The Lord says if I don't open my mouth, it's equivalent of rebellion. I'm rebelling.

I'm opposing God's way by not saying what God's going to do. It's just like the police forces right now that say you have a law and the cops don't want to enforce it. Well, they're opposing the lawgiver.

And that's what we could do. There could be people who are overseers in a church or professing church, and they're misleading people. They're not warning them.

They're rebelling and not opening their mouth. A fourth thing. The watchman, as he does his task, should expect God's help and power.

I found this very encouraging here. You have verses 16-21, where the Lord is giving Ezekiel this task and it's a weighty task. And you know what we have right before the task? He has this manifestation of the glory of the Lord.

And you know what we have right after the message is done? He has more isolation and another manifestation of the glory of the Lord. And so look at v. 12, chapter 3, Then the Lord lifted me up, and I heard behind me the voice of a great earthquake. Blessed be the glory of the Lord from His place.

It was the sound of the wings of the living creatures as they touched one another, and the sound of the wheels besides them, and the sound of the great earthquake. The Spirit lifted me up and took me away, and I went in the bitterness and the heat of my spirit, the hand of the Lord being strawn upon me. And I came to the exiles at Tel Aviv who were dwelling by the Chabar Canal.

And I sat where they were dwelling, and I sat there overwhelmed among them for seven days. And then we have our passage, and then v. 22. And He refers to the Chabar Canal again.

V. 22, The hand of the Lord was upon me there, and He said to me, Arise, go out into the valley, and there I will speak with you. So I arose and went out into the valley, and behold, the glory of the Lord stood there like the glory that I had seen by the Chabar Canal. And I fell on my face.

So he says, I'm at the Chabar Canal, and I'm seeing glory. God's power and presence. And then he gets this message, and then right after that, he has another experience.

And it's interesting because in Acts 18, when Paul is speaking about this idea of warning and testifying even when they oppose you, and Paul says, I'm innocent. You know what happened verses later in v. 9? And the Lord said to Paul, Acts 18, 9, The Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, Do not be afraid, but go on speaking, and do not be silent, for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are My people. So here you've got Paul.

He's being bold. Here you've got Ezekiel. He's given this bold message.

And in the midst of it, you don't have a watchman who is abandoned by God. You have a watchman actually who has more of the nearness of the presence and the power of God in their life. And so the point is, as the watchman is seeking to do the task, they should expect God's going to help me even in a unique way to do what is necessary that's going to honor Him.

And our danger is fear. Ezekiel 2 says in v. 6, And you, son of man, do not be afraid of them, nor be afraid of their words. Though briars and thorns are with you, and you sit on scorpions, be not afraid of their words, nor be dismayed at their looks, for they are a rebellious house.

You see, so fear could grip us. And here we have the power of God. And here Paul is speaking and warning and being reviled, and the Lord gives him a vision and says don't be afraid.

Wow, that's encouraging. We want that. We want greater manifestations of the power of God in our life.

We want the Lord sustaining us. That's what Ezekiel had. That's what Paul had.

Okay, a fifth point. One of the difficulties, I guess it's a difficulty, of the watchman is that he needs a miracle for the people's ears to be open to hear the warning. And I say that's a difficulty because you know what happens? You want to warn someone and you want them to listen.

Right? I mean, you want them to listen and you wish you had that power. And you don't. But look at v. 5-7.

Chapter 3. Look at this difficulty here. For you are not sent to a people of foreign speech and a hard language, but you're sent to the house of Israel, not to many peoples of foreign speech and a hard language whose words you cannot understand. Surely, if I sent you to such a people, people with a foreign language you can't even understand, they would listen to you.

Wait, what? You're saying if I go to the Nepali who I don't even know their language, there's a greater chance they're going to listen to me than these Jews who I speak their language? V. 7, But the house of Israel will not be willing to listen to you, for they're not willing to listen to me, because the house of Israel have a hard forehead and a stubborn heart. Isn't that an interesting thought? There's more hope of an English-speaking person going to Nepal and speaking to Nepali of them heeding the warning than an English-speaking person going to self-righteous, hardened Americans with their false Christianity and warning them. Wow, that shows ultimately if someone hears the message, it's like Ezekiel saying, it's not even the fact that they've got to understand the language, it's that God has to open their heart to give them an understanding.

And you know, one application from this could be an encouragement for missions. It's like if you're going to some country and you don't even know the language, it's like, Lord, I mean, Lord, there's got to be some way I can order an argument in Ezekiel 3. You said if I went to people of foreign speech that couldn't even understand me, that You could open their eyes. You could allow them to listen.

So we see here, this is a difficult task. You know, he's going to people who speak his language and the Lord is telling them they're not going to listen. They're not going to listen.

And sadly, people hearing a warning of a physical army take it more serious. Right? I mean, we can warn people about hell and people tend to not take it seriously. You warn people about, say, some bomb or something that's going to happen, people tend to take it serious because men in this world are not looking at the spiritual realm.

They're just focused on the physical. Jeremiah 6, 17, I set watchmen over you, saying pay attention to the sound of the trumpet. But what do the people say? We will not pay attention.

We don't want to pay attention. You know what? You blow the trumpet long enough and people don't like hearing the trumpet, you know what they do? They get out of your distance. They move cities.

And that could be misinterpreted. I'm not saying if someone moves cities, that that's why they're doing that. Yeah.

I mean, if someone's moving cities and leaving the church, I'm not saying that means you're upset at all the trumpet blowing we're doing. Okay, point six. The watchman is not directly responsible for the entire world.

Verse 17, Son of man, I've made you a watchman for the house of Israel. Right? I mean, He's God. And some idea, you get this illustration, there's a city.

Okay, same idea in Acts 20. The immediate responsibility for us elders as watchmen is this church, right? This flock. It's not every flock.

It's kind of the same idea that when Tim's preaching on Hebrews 13, 17. You don't take that and apply that to the universal church. The specific local church is the big thing binding on my conscience as a watchman that I might be faithful to this flock in which the Holy Spirit has made me one of the overseers.

And Paul said, he said he was innocent in view of what? He said, I'm innocent of your blood as he was leaving, and he said in view of the fact I will no longer see you. Meaning Paul knew, I'm not going to have an opportunity to have an impact on their lives. God is not holding me accountable for people that I don't

even have an ability to impact with the truth and speak to.

And so we see here this idea that God is reasonable. Ezekiel 3 is not painting this idea that if I go into the HEB down the street and I don't evangelize to everyone, that everyone in that store, their blood is on my hands and I'm accountable for them. That's not the idea.

I think that's taking it way too far. Again, the specific way Paul alludes to this is referring to church leaders and the elders in Acts 20. But in a broader sense, are we all responsible to speak and not be afraid? Absolutely.

And we know the times when out of fear, we do not open our mouth. And we should recognize the Bible teaches neglect is sin. It's not just sinning is sin, but neglect, knowing the right thing to do and failing to do it.

The Scripture is James 4.17. In many passages, it teaches that's sin. It's missing the mark. But God's reasonable.

Okay, so I want to think about a few considerations on the warnings in the passage. And there's basically three, a warning to the lost, a warning to the professing believer, and a warning to the watchman. So first, the warning we give to the lost.

Does this passage teach that the lost have an excuse before God because no one warned them? Some people want to say I'm excused because no one actually warned me. Look at v. 18. 3.18. If I say to the wicked, you shall surely die, so that's God speaking, and you, that's the watchman, you give him no warning, nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way in order to save his life, what happens? Look what it says.

That wicked person shall die for his sin. So can the wicked blame the watchman for being quiet? No, they die for their own sin. They're held accountable for their own sin.

You cannot blame your teachers for failing to warn you for your damnation. And you know what that tells us? That's why we want to walk in the counsel of who? The godly, right? I want to put myself around people who will warn me because the warning is a means that God can use to help me think correctly. But whether I get warned or not, I die, it's for my own sin.

You can't blame your teachers. Lost men cannot trust in their ignorance their lack of knowledge as an excuse. Right? So I go out there, I don't want to hear the truth.

That's not going to be excused in the final day. What should lost men do? They should turn. As it says in Ezekiel 33, turn from your wickedness and practice justice.

So turn from unrighteousness. Turn to righteousness. Turn ultimately to the Lord Jesus Christ.

And in Ezekiel 33, to the lost, in that account, the Lord says this, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from His way and live. I mean, if you're lost, think of that. God actually has designed watchmen to warn you because He does not delight in you perishing and you refuse the warning because of a love of sin.

God's giving opportunity. If you have no watchmen and you're not even in around the truth, you'll die for your sin. But you'll also die for your sin if you have the truth and you refuse to obey it.

But God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked. Ezekiel puts that aspect in in chapter 33. Our Lord wants us to proclaim the truth.

So the second warning is to professing believers. In chapter 3, v. 16-19, he's talking about warning the wicked. V. 20-21, he's talking about a righteous person.

And the idea of a righteous person for our New Testament context, it's the idea of warning a professing Christian. Someone who bears the name of a Christian. So this warning starts in v. 20.

Again, if a righteous person turns from his righteousness and he commits injustice. And look at this. This phrase is astonishing.

And I... Again, who's the I here? It's God. And God lays a stumbling block before him. He shall die.

Because you have not warned him, he shall die for his sin. And his righteous deeds that he has done, they will not be remembered. But because you did not warn him, his blood I will require at your hand.

So some interesting statements there in this warning that watchmen give to the righteous. If you, if I as a professing Christian, this is the idea that my present understanding of what he's saying here. As a professing Christian, if I turn from the truth and I start to go willfully in sin, the text here says God laid a stumbling block before something to trip them.

And when you tend to think of a stumbling block, you tend to think of the idea of pushing someone towards hell is the idea. In Romans 14, kind of the meaning there when you're causing your brother to stumble. What's he mean here when he says stumbling block before him? I mean, it's clearly some idea of judgment.

But often, what is one of the reasons behind God's judgments upon a person when they're going astray? It's a judgment of discipline to try to get them to come to their senses that they might turn and live. So maybe that's part of what the Lord's doing there. He's seeking to make them trip that they might become conscious of their sin and heed the warning.

But here, they might have that happen and they don't heed the warning. And in their pride, God allows them to fall. That they might keep going further.

They keep going further into sin. God's trying to trip them up. Maybe that's the idea.

But think of this, what if no one warns you? What if no one warns you? What if I go from living a righteous life saying I'm a Christian, and I just go into my sin, and no one warns me? That's scary. But what if someone warns me and I refuse that warning, and if in the midst of that, God's doing something to make me conscious of my sin, and I reject that? It just makes you terrified of the Hebrews 6 reality of the Romans 1 about God giving men over to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. And then he says in verse 20 that this person's righteous deeds will no longer be remembered.

It's a very sobering statement. Look, even in my own life, there are people who were professing Christians, and maybe they are still genuine Christians. But because of disqualification in the ministry or different things in this life, their deeds are no longer remembered.

People don't even know who they were. It's like it's wiped out. There's a consequence here.

And ultimately, the bigger thing is before God on judgment day. But His deeds shall not be remembered. And then verse 21, this is for us to take it to heart.

We want to be this person. At the end there it says, He shall surely live because He did what? He took the warning. He took the warning.

We want to be people who take warnings to heart. When someone admonishes us, which is a difficult task, we want to take it to heart. We want to apply that.

A similar idea with rebuke. Let the righteous rebuke Me. It is a kindness.

Let My head not refuse it, He says. But it's the same idea. Warning and rebuke.

They're trying to help us. Now, the third thing here. We had a warning to the lost that He gives, and then the lost is not excused if their teachers aren't warning them.

They're going to die for their own sin, right? And the righteous has a terrifying reality that as he goes and willfully in his sin, there might even be an aspect of God there laying a stumbling block before him. Whether it's to make him conscious of his sin, or whether it's part of God removing his hand as they go on a road of destruction, I'm not sure of the full implication. But the third thing we have here is this.

The warning to the watchman. He's held accountable for not speaking. Ezekiel 3, 18.

If I say to the wicked, you shall surely die, you give him no warning. He goes on to say, His blood I will require your hand. His blood I will require at your hand.

Other versions render it this way. I will hold you responsible for his death. I will hold you accountable for their blood.

Again, we've already seen this isn't teaching the idea they're in hell because it was my fault. He doesn't teach that, right? They die for their own sin. My warning is a means that they might repent.

It gives that opportunity, whether they receive it or refuse it. This is not teaching people are in hell and it's my fault. But what does the blood required at your hand mean? I already kind of mentioned this, but in 2 Samuel 4, he says there, Shall I not require His blood at your hand and destroy you from the earth? And David commanded his young men and they killed them and cut off their hands and feet and hanged them beside the pool of Hebron.

But they took the head of Ishabath and buried him in the tomb of Abner at Hebron. Blood required? The idea is this watchman who fell asleep on the job after they had had massive casualties because of his failure, they would take that man, they'd kill that man, he would die. So in doing his job, he was actually doing it in order, as it says here, to save his own life, to prevent his own death.

That's the seriousness. His silence is equivalent of murder. And we know that.

I mean, I was trying to illustrate this idea of neglect is sin to my children. If our neighbor's child is in the street and my kid sees they're in the street and my kid has the ability to warn and they don't do it and they just go away and that kid gets hit by the car and that kid dies, it's not that my kid, would my kid feel guilty? Absolutely they'd feel guilty because they had an opportunity and they didn't do it. Or you think of this idea just with the whole virus thing going on right now.

Many people are saying a government knew about a virus being spread and they tried to cover it up. Right? They didn't want the world to know. And people are angry at this communist government for this supposed cover-up.

Is that a righteous desire to be upset because people have died? Should we be holding them accountable? Yes, there's a sense of accountability. If they had the ability to warn and they didn't do it, that neglect of warning is sin. Now Ezekiel says, whether they get a warning or not, they're going to die for their own sin.

They cannot blame the teacher who did not open his mouth for themselves perishing. So this idea, it shouldn't be difficult that God holds us accountable and there is guilt involved. Meaning guilt, meaning you're not innocent, when you sin by omitting and neglecting to say something in a certain situation when you should.

Because of fear. That's not a foreign idea. So if I know something bad is going to happen, I say nothing.

I'm not off the hook. There is some guilt. There's responsibility.

So, Paul refers to this reality. He says, I'm innocent. In a way, Paul's saying, I don't have any blood on my hands.

I mean, that's what I want. That's what Tim wants. Jeff wants.

Craig, we're trying to be watchmen over this flock that God has given us, that he's bought with his blood. We're seeking to be overseers. We're seeking to keep watch as those who have to give it account.

We don't want to have blood on our hands. Meaning we don't want to have guilt for out of fear, neglecting to say something when we should. And the truth is, as a regenerate Christian, what happens when a true born again Christian out of fear gives into something and they don't do it? They do what Peter does and they go away and they weep bitterly.

And then eventually Peter, he was being very, very bold for Christ. You see, the true Christian does not go on in a life being afraid of speaking the truth. There's a lot of false teachers.

They live a life of not speaking the truth. And ultimately, they're going to be held accountable at the cost of their own life, for their own sin. Because they never truly came to Christ.

They rejected the true Christ. But what happens to me when I fail? If in fear, like Peter, I'm afraid to say something. I become a coward in a way.

And the Bible says the cowardly don't even inherit eternal life. I mean, that's on the list in Revelation. What happens to me? What happens to me if I have some guilt? Well, what happens to me when I have guilt for any sin? Where do I go? There's only one fount I know.

The blood of Jesus. In 1 John 1.9, if we confess our sins, even a sin of not warning when I should, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. I think of that verse when I think of this.

I think of the blood of Christ. When I think of the failures that I might have had at certain times to warn people because I was afraid. And that there's some guilt by me closing my mouth.

You know where that drives me? It drives me to Christ for His cleansing. And then that blood of Christ that's forgiven me gives me boldness as a regenerate Christian to do whatever I can to undo the failure I committed. You're in a conversation.

You're afraid. You don't say something. You go home.

You feel guilty. Lord, forgive me. Okay, I don't need to worry about that now.

No, what can I do? Not to make it up, but because I care about their soul and I want to give them some truth. I want to speak to them and say something to them. So James 3.1 says, teachers are going to be judged with a greater strictness.

Watchmen are going to be held account and have a greater strictness. And the Bible teaches that to neglect to warn is to sin. And that sin, like all sin, you're going to have to give an account for it.

And like all sin, how do you get forgiveness from your sin? Christ, I'm confessing and acknowledging my failure. Lord, cleanse me that I can move on as a Christian. The Christian seeks all they can do to obey God after one of their failures.

So I don't think this idea, as Paul alludes to being innocent of the blood, means that if Paul, the three years in Ephesus, was a coward the last month, that God would have struck him dead. Now, could God do that? Absolutely. I mean, does the Lord kill anyone? Can God strike someone dead? Absolutely.

I'm not saying that isn't an actual possibility. Or have there been people who were supposed watchmen over churches and a massive thing came and they refused to warn and God struck them dead to hold them accountable? I'm sure that's probably happened throughout church history. But what tends to happen when the watchmen fail is that God sends divine discipline.

Or they might even be getting eaten by a fish like Jonah, right? You're not going to go warn those people? I'm going to hunt you down. I'm going to get you back to them where you're going to warn them. Or, part of the idea is on judgment day, guess what? There's a decrease in commendation.

As the motives of the heart are disclosed, the Bible speaks about the idea of rewards and commendation. Obviously, part of that guilt would affect that. Or 1 Corinthians 3, if anyone's work is burned up, he'll suffer loss, though himself will be saved as through fire.

By being a coward, there could be something I'm doing and it burns up. It doesn't last on that day when God is judging that work because of the guilt of me being a coward and not speaking when I should. So do people perish for their own sins? Yes.

Is there guilt for the teacher for not warning? Yes. But it's not the guilt of, well, they're in hell, it's your fault. Ezekiel makes it clear they're in hell for their own sin.

It's the guilt in the sense that I have sinned by neglect of not speaking and the blood of Christ, I need that to cleanse me. So, 1 Timothy 4, 16, keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this.

You see, this isn't like a one-time warning. It's a lifetime of being consistent. You can have a watchman, he might do 10 years, be great, right? He never missed an incoming enemy.

10 years! I mean, that guy blew the trumpet at 3 a.m. He did it for 10 years. But he's got to persist. He's got to persist.

Keep a close watch on yourselves and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers. What? Save both yourself and your hearers.

It's a similar idea in Ezekiel. He says, you warn them in order to save your own soul. Now, ultimately, in Ezekiel, the idea of save your own soul is referring about you save your physical life.

But the fact is, if I stop speaking the truth, what does that indicate about my own profession of being a Christian? Right? The person who is warning according to the Bible 20 years, and then they go away from this as their standard, that's a terrifying indicator that they might not really be a true Christian. They might be like Demas, in love with the world, did not keep a close watch. So decisions in this life are not without consequences.

We don't want to fall asleep. We want to be alert. We want to be aware.

So a couple things in conclusion. What an encouragement this is to me. For one, we can be part of people having life through us speaking.

Isn't that amazing? God has given us the privilege, not just the elders in the church, who specifically Paul is alluding to as watchmen, but all of us can be a part of giving the truth that people might have life. And that's a privilege. Why would He even give us that opportunity? I mean, aren't we going to fumble stuff up? God gives us that opportunity.

And think of this. Think of all the times that I feared God rather than man, and I did speak the truth. You just look and you praise God.

Lord, I was so close to being a coward there and You didn't let me. Lord, I was terrified there and You didn't let me. You kept me.

You convicted me. And I wanted to obey You. It wasn't out of some compulsion and misery.

I wanted to speak to them about the glories of Christ. Think of this. Another encouragement.

Think of the times you're overwhelmed as Ezekiel and Paul with God's presence. I mean, I can say some of the times dealing with some of the hardest situations and having to warn is some of the times of God's greatest nearness. Because you're all the more just saying, Lord, help.

Lord, help. And the Lord's not saying, well, I don't want to help. No.

Here my people are. They want to honor me. I will draw near to them and I will help them.

So there's a lot of encouragements here. Think of all the good that was brought about by the warnings. Let's take away every warning that has ever been given in this church.

I was just saying the last 10 years. Let's just take away all the warnings that have been given from Scripture and one-on-one conversations in the last six months. If we took all those away, this church would be radically different in a bad way.

All those times the trumpet was blown, what a blessing. Again, I just remember Abigail. She rushed to warn David to not kill Nabal.

She ran in 1 Samuel 25-33. Blessed be your discretion and blessed be you. Why? You have kept me this day from blood guilt.

He would have had blood on his hands for killing a man, but someone rushed to warn him and he was prevented from doing that. And he thanked God for that person. That's how we should view those who warn us.

We should appreciate them. Look, us elders, we're literally going to give an account before God. That's actually going to happen one day.

There actually is going to be a stricter judgment where we're going to give an account. And if we fail to warn, the Bible teaches that neglect, we will be held accountable for that. Is my ultimate reliance on the blood of Christ? Yes, but those works are going to prove whether I'm genuine or not.

And I've got to take these things serious. And out of the love of Christ, we are seeking to take these things serious. Now, here's a thought I referred to at the beginning that's an encouragement.

Think about what this says about the Lord. If God holds people guilty and accountable for neglecting to warn, that shows something about His character, right? If God views neglect as sin, and that's part of His character, what's that mean God will never do to you? He will never neglect. You see, so we might look at the watchman and say, well, they failed.

God will never fail like that. God will never neglect. God will never leave you nor forsake you.

Therefore, we can confidently say, the Lord is my helper. So I thank God God holds us accountable for sins of neglect because that means what's true of Him is He won't neglect in a righteous way. Nothing good and right.

Now, last thing, I want to think of this text in regards to missions. Look, Romans 10.14 says, how are they to hear without someone preaching, right? I mean, people have to hear. Someone's got to go over there and warn them like John saying, flee from the wrath to come, okay? So what happens if someone has a true sense of God calling them to warn a people of coming judgment and give the gospel and they refuse that? Should there be a sense, if I willfully disobey something that I believe God's calling me to do and that the church is affirming and I don't do that, there is a sense of I'm not warning those people and I am going to give an account.

Now, could someone take that too far and feel a false sense of guilt? Yeah, absolutely, they could. They could heap a wrong sense of guilt upon their head. But look, Jonah was called to go to a people.

And he was not overly enthusiastic about that, wanted to go in the opposite direction. So I was reading a biography, I'm going to close with this. This is the only biography that I know of that A.W. Tozer wrote.

And if A.W. Tozer wrote a biography, I thought he must have been impacted by that guy, right? I mean, you don't write a biography about a guy you're not impacted by, at least I hope not. So he wrote a biography of Robert Jaffreys.

Video: <https://sermonindex2.b-cdn.net/QPMbOZVsylg.mp4>
Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/james-jennings/elders-as-watchmen/>

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