

The Judgment of God: Loving the Unaware and the Unprepared

Learning from Ezekiel – Ezekiel 33 KSBBC Aug.8, 2010

Introduction In many parts of our world where security is an issue, it is customary to have both a wall around your property and a security guard posted on duty. Many of you have visited or seen pictures of the homes of our Bethesda Outreach partners in South Africa. Their homes are surrounded by walls with multiple gates or doors for entry. Often these walls are topped with broken glass or razor wire. Guards and watchmen are common. This past week I heard a story from a missionary from the Democratic Republic of the Congo in Africa about their hiring of a security guard to stand watch at night while the missionary family slept. The missionary reported that when the security guard showed up for work with a mattress, the missionary soon began to explore other means for security.

Remember from previous weeks, only six chapters into the Bible it becomes clear that God is committed to getting his way. He creates everything and establishes the rules by which everything and everyone must exist. He provides for and sustains all life and then expects the life he gives to honor and respect him. God's way is so perfect and right that he protects it and draws people to it through judgment. God is determined to be exclusively and decisively the one true God. God's judgment has happened, is happening and will happen. There is a final judgment coming that will completely destroy and forever condemn every power and person that does not honor God.

In a time when God was exercising his judgment on the people of the Old Testament, he in his patient mercy appointed Ezekiel to be a security guard . . . a watchman. We turn this morning to Ezekiel to learn from his life and ministry how we can love the unaware and unprepared in our lives. God's judgment is coming. God's judgment has been satisfied in Christ. There are people in our lives that are not safe. They are unaware and unprepared for the reality of the coming wrath of God. They have not heard the warning and run to Christ for safety. Ezekiel can help us help them.

Some introduction is necessary. Ezekiel is not as well known as perhaps he should be even among those who believe and follow the Bible. He is an amazing man and servant of God.

Ezekiel the man . . . Lived in Babylon among Judean exiles 6th century BC

A prophet who was married and belonged to the priestly class

Called and appointed by God as a watchman and spokesman for God

Ezekiel's ministry . . . Call attention back to glory and majesty of God

Warn hardened people of more judgment to come

Personally communicate message through his life in times of great confusion

Ezekiel's message . . . Unrelenting, hard, violent call to repentance and reform

Oracles, visions, symbolic acts, parables and proverbs

Called people to honor God - 'Then they will know that I am the Lord'

Promised restoration to those who repent and trust

Let's find Ezekiel 33 (720) and jump into a slice of Ezekiel's ministry to the unreceptive about halfway through his career as a prophet. In many ways this chapter summarizes his life work of warning people to take decisive action because God's judgment is real. This chapter is a final appeal to his fellow exiles to respond to his message from God. It teaches and illustrates for us how we can be effective watchmen for those in our lives who are unprepared, unaware and even unresponsive.

Read

Who are they in your life? The unprepared. The unaware. The unresponsive. Have you given up on them? Are you following a careful and biblical strategy to faithfully love and warn them? It is too easy to become discouraged or upset and as a result, stop loving and warning. Ezekiel can help us. Ask God to open your heart to these truths from Ezekiel's life and stir you to renewed energy and action in loving the 'un' people in your life.

1. Like Ezekiel, you are a watchman. 33:1-9

Note in these verses that God speaks to Ezekiel and the people about the concept of warning and response to warning. The first six verses describe being a watchman in general. In verses 1-5, God calls our attention to what a watchman does when the enemy is sighted and the two possible responses of the people when warned. People take the warning and are delivered or they do not heed the warning and are killed. There is responsibility on the watchman and the people. Verse six describes the scenario when the enemy is sighted by the watchman but he fails to give a warning to the people. The people end up dying at the hand of the enemy. The people are responsible for their own guilt but the watchman has a special responsibility because he failed to obey God by warning them.

Verses 7-9 then apply the watchman responsibilities specifically to Ezekiel as a warning to the exilic community that they are in danger from God. They are the wicked ones who are told by the watchman to turn from their wicked ways.

As God's watchman, you have been appointed to . . .

- See clearly the danger that people are in with God. 33:3, 7
- Warn skillfully the unprepared and unresponsive. 33:3,5,6,8,9
- Accept responsibility for the influence you have been assigned. 33:6-8

2Corinthians 5:11ff; 20 Persuade people because of the fear of God
Ambassadors; ministry of reconciliation; negotiate peace
Urge, exhort, beg to be reconciled to God

Penn Jillette illustration Atheist who is on record as saying it is unloving for people who believe in hell not to proselytize.

2. Like Ezekiel, you must address heart issues. 33:10-29

This next section of the chapter simply describes how the watchman went about his duty. The pattern that we all can relate to in some way is that a clear warning is given and instead of acting on the warning, a dispute begins. There are questions, opinions, assumptions and demands that the skilful and faithful watchman must address. God's appointed watchman cannot see the enemy coming, blow the horn and then get back to what he wanted to do. In these verses there are three disputes that arise. These are popular responses and opinions contrary to the message of the watchman that demand explicit exposure and refutation. These are common responses of the hardened or fossilized heart.

1. Like Ezekiel, you are a watchman.
2. Like Ezekiel, you must address heart issues.

While Ezekiel served about 25 centuries ago, amazingly enough the responses and disputes about God getting his way in judgment are the same that you hear from your friends and coworkers today. Let's survey these three disputes and be equipped to address heart issues of our 'un' friends in a more effective and courageous manner.

Dispute #1 It's hopeless, our sins are all encompassing. 33:10-16

- Popular opinion: Our sins haunt us, cause us despair and survival is hopeless – God has no problem destroying hopeless people like us. 33:10
- Truth: God does not delight in the death of the wicked but delights in their repentance. 33:11
- Application of truth: Why will you die? Why not turn back? There is a way for your sins to not be

remembered against you. 33:11b-16

Dispute #2 It's not fair, God's judgment is nonsensical. 33:17-20

- Popular opinion: God is not fair, he is without principle, makes no sense to be totally at his mercy. 17
- Truth: God is absolutely consistent, note that even the professing righteous who do wickedly receive death while the wicked who turn to him shall live. 17b-19
- Application of truth: God judges everyone according to their works/deeds. 20

Dispute #3 It's ok, I am confident I will survive. 33:23-29

- Popular opinion: We are confident in our advantages and pride. God has blessed us and we are sure he will take care of us. The fittest will survive. 33:24
- Truth: Far from being qualified before God, you consistently break and disregard his laws. 25-26
- Application of truth: God will get his way. You will face full effects of his wrath. Then you will know that he is God. Claim to confidence with God must be accompanied by devotion to his ways. 27-29

Cmp. 1 Peter 3:15 – tell the truth about God; provide a rationale for faith – do not let assumptions and opinions go unspoken to.

3. Like Ezekiel, you must be faithful. 33:30-33

Note the strange report that the Lord gives Ezekiel about the people he is warning. How do you know if you have sufficiently warned someone of coming danger? Is it by their response? What about their response will indicate that the unaware and unprepared have accepted the good news of warning and safety? These are important questions for anyone committed to telling the truth about God to others. Your success is in many ways is measured by your faithfulness to speak the truth. Faithfulness is connected to two observations from these words of encouragement from God to Ezekiel.

- Be encouraged to faithfulness by understanding your audience. 33:30-32

Note what people do . . . come, sit and hear but will not do it

Note what people want . . . the sensational and their greed . . . entertainment . . . 2 Tim. 4:3-5

- Be encouraged to faithfulness by trusting in God's word and promise. 33:33

Note that judgment will come.

Note that at that time they will know what they refuse to know now. Vindication

A cynical church evaluates the ministry of the word for its aesthetic qualities and the messenger for his ability to hold an audience. You as a watchman and messenger for God must find your security in God in such a way that you are gripped by the message personally, you deliver the message as effectively as you possibly can and then commit the results to God.

Paul's claim Acts 20:26 . . . Paul knew that he was a watchman!

Loving the unaware, the unprepared and the unresponsive as Ezekiel did . . .

1. Like Ezekiel, you are a watchman.
2. Like Ezekiel, you must address heart issues.
3. Like Ezekiel, you must be faithful.

Study Questions

1. Read Ezekiel 33 in 3 sections as a group. (1-9; 10-29; 30-33) Note observations, questions, terms and themes

after reading each section.

2. 'Then they will know that I am the Lord' is found in verse 29 and over 60 other times in Ezekiel. Find and reflect on a few other times where this occurs in Ezekiel. What are the implications of this statement for your view of God's judgment and your warning others? How should God's judgment be defined – what is it?
3. Do you think it appropriate to apply the watchman assignment and warning others of danger to people who are not called, vocational preachers or missionaries like Ezekiel? Why or why not? Support your thoughts with scripture.
4. Do you think the blood of anyone may be on your hands – Acts 20:26? What does that statement mean or imply for your current understanding of responsibility for people in your life?
5. Read 2Cor. 5:11-20. What are the common or connecting terms/concepts to the watchman description found in Ezekiel?
6. Have members of group role play how the 3 disputes of Ezekiel 33 would be expressed and answered today. What is the core truth that must be told or patiently explained in each dispute?
7. Do you think it is a fair comparison to say that we listen to God's messengers in a similar way as described in verses 30-32? What are evidences that you observe that there may be some similarity? How does 2 Timothy 4:1-5 instruct us regarding this?
8. What do you want to do, use or remember from today's study?