

7 "Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the people of Israel; so hear the word I speak and give them warning from me. 8 When I say to the wicked, 'You wicked person, you will surely die,' and you do not speak out to dissuade them from their ways, that wicked person will die for^[a] their sin, and I will hold you accountable for their blood. 9 But if you do warn the wicked person to turn from their ways and they do not do so, they will die for their sin, though you yourself will be saved.

10 "Son of man, say to the Israelites, 'This is what you are saying: "Our offenses and sins weigh us down, and we are wasting away because of^[b] them. How then can we live?"' 11 Say to them, 'As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign Lord, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, people of Israel?'

Look Out

As children my brother and I were always looking out for one another. My older brother would look out for mom as I'd sneak cookies or make one of our special afterschool chocolate drinks. You had to be on the lookout because you never knew when you'd be in trouble. When all was safe and sound the words, "Coast is clear," greeted our ears. We found comfort in those words spoken late at night when we played nintendo or watch tv after hours. We needed a lookout.

In a similar way God provided Israel with a lookout only it wasn't so they could get away while breaking rules but rather because they already were breaking the rules. It's not that God was the parent who didn't know and the Israelites needed a lookout or else God might get them. God does something rather counterintuitive because you don't usually send a warning before you catch a child in the act. You surprise them. But God sends sentinels, lookouts, and watchman to warn all who will listen where their sin and rebellion would lead them.

God still sends people to look out for us. We call them pastors, teachers, elders, or simply Christians. But we aren't always excited to have someone confront us in our sin. Especially in our society where we live and let live. It's not that God needs a snitch. He is well aware of our actions but he wants us aware of the consequences. Thank God that he has sent someone to confront sin because his purpose is not to leave us in despair but to comfort us with his word from a lookout.

But as for Israel, God placed Ezekiel as one of many lookouts, *Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; so hear the word I speak and give them warning from me.* Ezekiel wasn't to aid them or help them get away with anything but rather he is to confront the wayward children with words of rebuke. Warn them just as he has been for the past 33 chapters. And yet, the results would probably have been the

same if he had said nothing. Ezekiel is a lookout whether the people listen or ignore his warning is none of his concern. His purpose is to warn. If he didn't sound the alarm, if he didn't speak faithfully - God said, "*I will hold the watchman accountable for the sinner's blood.*" (Ezekiel 33:6).

God would hold Ezekiel accountable so that nobody can say, "Nobody warned me." Just as God reminds Ezekiel of his calling another lookout arrives. He's come from Jerusalem. He escaped and announces, "*The city has fallen.*" This is the greatest crisis in Israel's history. The final destruction of Judah and its capital, Jerusalem: This is the loss of the Promised Land and with the tearing down of the temple this sends a signal they won't be returning anytime soon. They are suffering the consequences of their rebellion. Ezekiel warned them repeatedly and it happened just as he said. Although they thought the coast was clear, they weren't getting away with anything.

If my brother failed as a lookout the worst we'd get would be swat to the back side or manual labor. But if a lookout failed the results were devastating. If attention were to wander the city, friends, and family would be caught unprepared and defenseless. Worse yet, If a lookout fell asleep they would be responsible for the death of friends and the enslavement of family. The security and well being of loved ones depends on them.

If the physical well being is important how much more our eternal? A watchman is almost as important as God's looking out sharing warnings about our advancing enemies of sin, death, and the devil. We are all to look out for one another. That's what a church is and does. We have each others back. Last week I mentioned that we shouldn't be so hard on Samson because he probably never had a friend who would pull him aside and say, "I know this is none of my business but I think she's trying to kill you." But we do. Jesus tells us, "*If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault...*" When we don't look out God holds us accountable.

The results can be devastating as a loved one wanders further and further from the truth. But it's difficult. We live in a culture of coexist: we're all the same anyhow. No. No we're not. We are very much different. That's why we practice "fellowship" principles. We don't pray with those we disagree with. We don't participate with those who hold to false teachings and give the impression everything is okay. We warn them. But when we point out sin and stick our finger in open wounds we aren't always met with thankfulness. Nobody likes to be told what they are doing is wrong. You'll be called, "Narrow minded," and "Intolerant."

I'm sure we can think of better words if we are the ones being warned. How do we react? With humble thankfulness or a defensive question, "*Who are you to judge?*" I'm a nobody. I'm just a lookout. My opinion doesn't matter certainly you can describe me as narrow but I prefer the biblical term of faithful. Faithful with the word of God but even then I'm not. I fall under the same sentence. Although it is so much easier to ignore - God is serious. Judgment is not some distant event even if we think we the coast is clear, we aren't getting away with anything.

God's Judgment on Israel left them without a king, without a priesthood, without a temple, and without the Promised Land. The city has fallen. But this is not the end of Jerusalem nor the end of Ezekiel's ministry. Verse 7-9 restate Ezekiel's call to serve. The city may be done for but the people still need a lookout.

Israel cries out in utter despair, "*Our transgression and our sins weigh upon us, and we waste away because of them; how then can we live?*" They saw no hope of return. They saw God as a punishing judge. And Ezekiel responds with God's Word, '*As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign Lord, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, people of Israel?*' Even in his anger and just judgment of sin, God has a purpose. God has not cut them off. He's calling them back just like he has done throughout scripture starting in the Garden of Eden after Adam and Eve rebelled, God went on the lookout. He went on a search and rescue mission for his people calling out to them, "*Where are you?*" He then looked out for Cain questioning him, "*What have you done?*" It's not for himself that he asks these questions but he wants them to repent and return. God repeatedly sent lookouts to confront and comfort.

God sent a lookout pointing them the way out of judgment. Like a parent announcing their presence before surprising their children. God gives them every opportunity to repent. God cares about this world and the work of his watchmen is critical. That's why God has a "no tolerance" policy when it comes to negligent if they fall asleep on the job or ignore their work.

But what if a lookout fails? What if one gets away? "*Will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go look for the one that wandered off?*" (Matthew 18:12). *Our Father is not willing that any of these little ones should be lost* (Matthew 18:14). God goes after the wicked like us with real threats because he wants us to see our sin and be spared from judgment. Jesus preached, "*Repent for the kingdom of heaven is near*" (Matthew 4:7).

Repent not only calls us to believe Jesus as Savior from sin but to turn from our sin. Jesus came to seek and to save the lost, to confront sinners and call them to come follow him.

Jesus lived that perfect life we never could. He took the punishment that we deserve and brings us peace. Because of that I can tell you to look out. Look away from yourselves and your sin and see what it deserves but then see your savior who is outside of you. When we finally look out and see Jesus' work for us then we can look out for others. That's what led Paul to look out for Peter and confront him. That's what led Paul to press on through storm, stoning, and the stress of rejection. That's the same good news that allowed Martin Luther to look out for the church place his life on the line by confronting them in their failure to be faithful to God's promise of salvation through faith in Christ alone.

If someone confronts you with sin thank God you have a friend who cares enough to tell you, "I think this sin is trying to kill you." Thank God. Cling to his Word with all our heart, listen to it attentively, and be changed by it. *Better a poor but wise youth than an old but foolish king who no longer knows how to heed a warning. (Ecclesiastes 4:13)*. If God did not excuse his specially chosen people when they despised his Word and persecuted his prophets, why would anyone think he will excuse us for doing the same thing? We have been redeemed and forgiven by God for Jesus' sake. Take warning: repent and turn to the Lord for forgiveness. Then glorify God by turning away from sin.

It wasn't often that we were caught but that's because we were such good kids or we were such a team, outnumbering our parents and pulling one over them time and time again. Not really. We didn't get away with anything. My parents new perfectly well what we were up to but they gave us time to stop, repent, and start over. We knew we were in trouble. God wants us to know, he knows. So he confronts sin: realize the coast isn't clear. We aren't getting away with anything but God has provided a way out, he provides lookouts, who point us to look out from ourselves and look out for others pointing all to our Savior who confronts and comforts. Amen.