

Watchman & Shepherds

(25) Ezekiel 33:1–34:31

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Ezekiel 33:1-11 – The Watchman and His Message

Again the word of the Lord came to me, saying, ² “Son of man, speak to the children of your people, and say to them: ‘When I bring the sword upon a land, and the people of the land take a man from their territory and make him their watchman, ³ when he sees the sword coming upon the land, if he blows the trumpet and warns the people, ⁴ then whoever hears the sound of the trumpet and does not take warning, if the sword comes and takes him away, his blood shall be on his own head. ⁵ He heard the sound of the trumpet, but did not take warning; his blood shall be upon himself. But he who takes warning will save his life. ⁶ But if the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet, and the people are not warned, and the sword comes and takes any person from among them, he is taken away in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at the watchman’s hand.’

⁷ *“So you, son of man: I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; therefore you shall hear a word from My mouth and warn them for Me. ⁸ When I say to the wicked, ‘O wicked man, you shall surely die!’ and you do not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at your hand. ⁹ Nevertheless if you warn the wicked to turn from his way, and he does not turn from his way, he shall die in his iniquity; but you have delivered your soul.*

¹⁰ *“Therefore you, O son of man, say to the house of Israel: ‘Thus you say, “If our transgressions and our sins lie upon us, and we pine away in them, how can we then live?”’ ¹¹ Say to them: ‘As I live,’ says the Lord God, ‘I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die, O house of Israel?’*

What is a watchman?

It is a person who warns people about an imminent danger. In this case it was God’s judgment in bringing down the Babylonian army to invade Jerusalem.

What kind of watchmen do we have today?

- Those who warn about the coming judgment of God, the Tribulation based on what God has revealed in His Word. So, essentially anyone who shares what God has revealed in prophecy is a watchman (or watchperson to be politically correct).
- Actually, all followers of Christ are called to be watchmen because unbelievers need to be warned about the consequence of not recognizing the Creator-God and His provision for salvation in their lives...

The great commission in Matthew 28:19-20 calls Us to make disciples by teaching them to observe all things Jesus commanded.

Mark 1:15 – *the Kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe the gospel.*

What is the gospel?

- It is the good news that Jesus paid the penalty for the sins that separate us from God when He died on the cross in our place... substitutionary atonement.
- The Good News is God’s provision for the ultimate consequence for sin... separation from Him in the lake of fire.
- You can’t have the good news without the bad news... hell exists, it is eternal, but no one has to go there.

Why is there so much neglect of watchman responsibilities today?

- It is not considered polite to point out that living without Jesus is being on the broad road to destruction.
- Too many have convinced themselves that fear of hell is not a legitimate motivation for embracing Jesus,
- There is way to much compromising with the world in order to fit in, be like everyone else, avoid rejection and persecution.
- We live in an age of scoffers that has been lulled into complacency thinking there is no urgency to get on with what God has called us to be about...

2 Peter 3:4 – *saying, “Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they have from the beginning of creation.”*

Given that God will hold us responsible for not warning the wicked... what are the consequences for not sharing the gospel?

Ezekiel 33:8 – *his blood I will require at the watchman’s hand.*’

We will share the guilt of the wicked. There will be regret and loss of reward when we receive our ultimate performance review at the Bema Seat Judgment...

Romans 14:10-12 – *For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ... each of us shall give an account of himself to God.*

Salvation is not at stake for the follower of Christ when we are judged, just our rewards (1 Corinthians 3:11-15).

What should our attitude be about heavenly rewards? Is this something we should work for in the here and now or should we just be happy we get to spend eternity with Jesus?

Matthew 6:20-21 – *Lay up for yourselves treasure in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*

Jesus wants us to have rewards, called here treasure in heaven.

What will be our heavenly rewards?

There will be 5 crowns for Christians:

- Imperishable Crown (1 Cor 9:24-25) for faithful endurance
- Crown of Rejoicing (1 Thess 2:19) for being a joyful follower of Christ;
- Crown of Righteousness (2 Tim 4:8) for those who look forward to the rapture;
- Crown of Glory (1 Peter 5:4) for those who have labored as an under-shepherd of God’s people;
- Crown of Life (Rev 2:10) for those who have endured persecution for Christ.

In the parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14-30) the reward for faithful stewardship was more responsibility in the kingdom of the master.

- Those such rewarded will have a greater capacity to participate in what God will be doing in eternity.

Of all the characteristics of God, what stands out as the most significant one?

In Scripture, there is a Principle of First Things which governs all other things to follow. That is why Genesis is so important, it is chock full of first things, it establishes the foundation for all the revelation from God that follows.

- So, the first of the first things we learn about God is pretty important:
Genesis 1:1 – *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.*

- Before all else (literally) God is our Creator. That is who He is, that is what He does. It is hard to imagine God not creating. Thus, we should expect Him to be creating in eternity...
Isaiah 9: 7 – *Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end*
- We should want to be as much as an active participant in what God is doing in eternity... that is our reward.

Another characteristic of God we see in our Ezekiel passage is this:

Ezekiel 33:11 – *I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live.*

Why then would such a loving God who takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked send someone to eternal punishment in hell?

God is not the One who condemns anyone to hell. People condemn themselves to hell...

John 3:17-18 – *God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He who believes is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.*

God loved us so much that He wanted us to experience the depth of relationship with Him that is only possible if we are free to accept or reject that relationship with Him. Our mortal life where we must live by faith is God’s way of determining who will accept or reject His provision for eternal life.

Ezekiel 33:12-20 – The Fairness of God’s Judgment

Summary: God told Ezekiel to speak to another accusing objection from the people of God. This was an accusation based in fatalism, which basically said: *the good are good and the bad are bad and nothing can be done about it.* To answer that objection, God reminded all that every *righteous man* could end up with a life dominated by *his transgression*. His prior righteousness would not rescue him on the day of God’s judgment.

It almost sounds like this passage is advocating salvation by works where this verse is the conclusion:

Ezekiel 33:20 – *O house of Israel, I will judge every one of you according to his own ways.*

Why would salvation-by-works be an erroneous conclusion here?

God can not contradict Himself... even before the cross, people were saved by grace through faith...

Habakkuk 2:4 – *the just shall live by his faith*

So, what role do good works have in a person's salvation?

James 2:18 – *But someone will say, “You have faith, and I have works.” Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.*

A person with faith in Christ will do good works out of gratitude for what Jesus did for them.

- People can do good works without faith but God knows their motivation for what they do and selfish motives trying to earn God's favor hold no water with Him.

Ezekiel 33:21-29 – The Fall of Jerusalem

Summary: The time reference here reveals that this happened seven years after the first prophecies of the Book of Ezekiel. A messenger told Ezekiel what had been long revealed by God, that Jerusalem had been utterly overwhelmed by the armies of Babylon. This was a sad and tragic vindication of the prophet.

The few survivors who somehow evaded death and exile were not godly, covenant keeping men. And they did not truly escape God's judgment; they only delayed it a short time. The same judgments of **the sword, the beasts, and pestilence** would strike them in time.

Ezekiel 33:30-33 – Hearing and Not Doing

³⁰ “As for you, son of man, the children of your people are talking about you beside the walls and in the doors of the houses; and they speak to one another, everyone saying to his brother, ‘Please come and hear what the word is that comes from the Lord.’” ³¹ So they come to you as people do, they sit before you as My people, and they hear your words, but they do not do them; for with their mouth they show much love, but their hearts pursue their own gain. ³² Indeed you are to them as a very lovely song of one who has a pleasant voice and can play well on an instrument; for they hear your words, but they do not do them. ³³ And when this comes to pass—surely it will come—then they will know that a prophet has been among them.”

What issue did God have with the Hebrew exiles in Babylon?

They hear your words, but they do not do them: In a superficial sense Ezekiel was popular as a prophet. People talked about his prophetic words and gave lip service the words being from God. Yet it was a very superficial sense; they heard, but they did not really listen or **do them**.

- Their interest was sensual rather than spiritual. The difference between the two may always be detected by the consequent attitude of those who hear. Sensuality hears and does nothing. Spirituality hears and obeys.

What does this problem remind you of that is relevant to the church today?

James 1:22 – *be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.*

Having knowledge but not wisdom... wisdom is applying the knowledge you have to your life.

How may we be doers of the Word?

When we hear or read God's Word, we should demonstrate a sincere commitment to the Lord by reacting to what we hear with obedient action.

- Jesus said that only doers of the Word are truly blessed: “*But even more blessed are all who hear the word of God and put it into practice*” (Luke 11:28, NLT).

James stresses the need to act on what we hear. He says we are fooling ourselves if we think we can be hearers only and not doers of the Word as well. People who sincerely love God are those who keep His commands (John 14:15; 1 John 5:2–3).

- We need to consider how God's commands apply to us, repent if necessary, and take action accordingly.

Ezekiel 34:1-10 – Irresponsible Shepherds

Summary: The idea of the *shepherd* in the ancient Near East often meant a king or a prince. Joshua is an example of a civil leader called a shepherd (Numbers 27:17), as well as King Saul (2 Samuel 5:2). Here the idea includes that, but also includes the idea of those who are *spiritual* leaders among God's people. God rebuked and warned those **shepherds** who were concerned about feeding themselves, and not their flock.

v2 – Should not the shepherds feed the flocks?

Godly shepherds must serve more of the benefit of the flock than their own benefit.

- In His great teaching on the Good Shepherd in John 10, Jesus explained this principle. *The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep* (John 10:11). Peter later wrote of this same idea (1 Peter 5:2). Faithful shepherds care for the flock, sometimes at significant self-sacrifice.

What does it mean to feed the flock?

To make it possible for them to flourish. In a spiritual sense, it is to help them grow in their knowledge and understanding of God.

- The main way a godly shepherd feeds God's sheep is by faithfully teaching God's Word to them (Isaiah 55:1-2, Jeremiah 3:15, John 21:15-17, 1 Corinthians 3:2, Hebrews 5:12-14, 1 Peter 2:2).

We are nourished in the words of faith...

1 Timothy 4:6 – *If you instruct the brethren in these things, you will be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished in the words of faith and of the good doctrine which you have carefully followed.*

Every word of God is like bread to us (Matthew 4:4).

v4- Besides not feeding the flock, what other issue did God have with the irresponsible shepherds?

But with force and cruelty you have ruled them: Instead of the care, wisdom, and compassion that a faithful shepherd should have, these unfaithful shepherds used **force and cruelty**. This was their shameful crime and one reason they were objects of God's rebuked and soon judgment.

What happens to the sheep when they have unfaithful shepherds over them?

It is worse than having no shepherd... *So they were scattered because there was no shepherd:* In both the civil and spiritual realms, when sheep have unfaithful shepherds sometimes they think the answer is *no shepherds*. They think that almost any kind of leadership among God's people is unnecessary and that the flock can lead itself. When there **was no shepherd**, it was no better for the sheep.

v10 – What would God do about the unfaithful shepherds?

I am against the shepherds, and I will require My flock at their hand: God solemnly promised to hold the unfaithful, ungodly shepherds to account. In the eyes of the flock, they may seem to go unpunished but God promised to deal with them.

- God could do it by removing them from their position (**cause them to cease feeding the sheep**).
- God could do it stopping their abuse of the flock (**the shepherds shall feed themselves no more**).
- God could do it by removing His flock from them (**I will deliver My flock from their mouths**).

Ezekiel 34:11-24 – God, the True Shepherd

¹¹ *For thus says the Lord God: “Indeed I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out. ¹² As a shepherd seeks out his flock on the day he is among his scattered sheep, so will I seek out My sheep and deliver them from all the places where they were scattered on a cloudy and dark day. ¹³ And I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them to their own land; I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, in the valleys and in all the inhabited places of the country. ¹⁴ I will feed them in good pasture, and their fold shall be on the high mountains of Israel. There they shall lie down in a good fold and feed in rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. ¹⁵ I will feed My flock, and I will make them lie down,” says the Lord God. ¹⁶ “I will seek what was lost and bring back what was driven away, bind up the broken and strengthen what was sick; but I will destroy the fat and the strong, and feed them in judgment.”*

¹⁷ *And as for you, O My flock, thus says the Lord God: “Behold, I shall judge between sheep and sheep, between rams and goats. ¹⁸ Is it too little for you to have eaten up the good pasture, that you must tread down with your feet the residue of your pasture—and to have drunk of the clear waters, that you must foul the residue with your feet? ¹⁹ And as for My flock, they eat what you have trampled with your feet, and they drink what you have fouled with your feet.”*

²⁰ *Therefore thus says the Lord God to them: “Behold, I Myself will judge between the fat and the lean sheep. ²¹ Because you have pushed with side and shoulder, butted all the weak ones with your horns, and scattered them abroad, ²² therefore I will save My flock, and they shall no longer be a prey; and I will judge between sheep and sheep. ²³ I will establish one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them—My servant David. He shall feed them and be their shepherd. ²⁴ And I, the Lord, will be their God, and My servant David a prince among them; I, the Lord, have spoken.*

v11 – How would God help His sheep who have been oppressed by the unfaithful shepherds?

I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out: Out of love for His sheep, God promised to do the work that the unfaithful shepherds would not do. The Lord would deal with the ungodly shepherds (Ezekiel 34:7-10), but He would also **seek** out the lost sheep neglected by the bad shepherds.

- There is a subtle but clear testimony here to the deity of Jesus Christ. Without doubt, Ezekiel 34 presents God as the good and perfect shepherd of Israel. Without ambiguity, Jesus took that title to Himself (see John 10:1-18), demonstrating that He is God.

v12 – What is this cloudy and dark day when God will seek out His scattered sheep?

The reference to *a day of clouds and thick darkness* has eschatological overtones (cf. Ps. 97:2; Joel 2:2; Zeph. 1:15) and suggests that this deliverance is to be the day of the Lord for Israel, that is to say, the day when the Lord acts in salvation and judgment to usher in a new age of his righteous rule on earth.

v13 – When will God bring Israel “out from the peoples and gather them from the countries”?

As promised in other places (Ezekiel 11:17, 36:24), God made promises that had a partial fulfillment in the return from exile, but still await their true and perfect fulfillment.

- This is actually in the process of being fulfilled now. The establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 was an important milestone in fulfilling this promise.

v14 – What does it mean that God will feed Israel “in good pasture”?

The restoration God promised to Israel was not only geographic, but also *spiritual*. The restoration of the land is much further along in its fulfillment than the spiritual restoration of Israel.

v16 – Why would God destroy the fat and strong sheep?

I will destroy the fat and the strong, and feed them in judgment: God promised to judge the proud among the sheep, those who were **fat and strong**, but not fed of the Lord. There would be a cleansing of judgment among God’s people.

v17 – Can the sheep blame their condition before God on the bad shepherds?

The sins of the shepherds *did not excuse* the sins of the flock. They had their own accountability to God.

I shall judge between sheep and sheep, between rams and goats: God recognized that *all sheep are not the same*. When considering sheep abused by a shepherd, it may be that one sheep has no responsibility, another sheep has some responsibility, and a third sheep has great responsibility. These distinctions may be difficult for us to make, but God makes them perfectly.

v18-20 – What would God do about the sheep that fouled the pasture for other sheep?

Being a fat sheep at the expense of others is worthy of God’s judgment.

- In acting as if the pasture belonged to *them*, these renegade sheep spoiled it for others. This shows that damage can be done to the flock not only by the shepherd, but also by sheep who are not considerate of other sheep, and who treat the pasture as if it were theirs to do with as they pleased.

How do we see fat sheep spoiling the pasture for the church today?

Those who consider themselves to be mature, knowledgeable believers cause great trouble. Their disruptions to the peace of God’s flock spoil the food for other sheep and even make them scatter.

- God promised to rescue His precious flock, not only from the unfaithful shepherds.

v23 – Who is the shepherd God would establish over Israel?

God again promised the ultimate, perfect gathering of Israel as part of the new covenant promises, when He would even set **David** over them as **their shepherd**.

When will this promise be realized?

The full realization of this promise will be the Millennial Kingdom.

- Much will be accomplished in Messiah’s kingdom! Is it any wonder that Israel has always looked forward to that day?

v24 – How does this reveal that David ruling over Israel will not just be Jesus as the Son of David?

I, the Lord, will be their God, and My servant David a prince among them: A resurrected King David will once again rule over Israel in the Millennial Kingdom (Isaiah 55:3-4, Jeremiah 30:8-9, Ezekiel 37:25, Hosea 3:5).

- Both are mentioned here to clear up any potential confusion.
- **My servant David a prince:** In this particular passage, David is not even described as a *king*, but in a lesser office – *prince*. The idea is that this is when Jesus Messiah is King over all the earth, and David rules Israel as a *prince* under Him.

Ezekiel 34:25-31 – God’s Covenant of Peace

²⁵ “I will make a covenant of peace with them, and cause wild beasts to cease from the land; and they will dwell safely in the wilderness and sleep in the woods. ²⁶ I will make them and the places all around My hill a blessing; and I will cause showers to come down in their season; there shall be showers of blessing. ²⁷ Then the trees of the field shall yield their fruit, and the earth shall yield her increase. They shall be safe in their land; and they shall know that I am the Lord, when I have broken the bands of their yoke and delivered them from the hand of those who enslaved them. ²⁸ And they shall no longer be a prey for the nations, nor shall beasts of the land devour them; but they shall dwell safely, and no one shall make them afraid. ²⁹ I will raise up for them a garden of renown, and they shall no longer be consumed with hunger in the land, nor bear the shame of the Gentiles anymore. ³⁰ Thus they shall know that I, the Lord their God, am with them, and they, the house of Israel, are My people,” says the Lord God.’

³¹ “You are My flock, the flock of My pasture; you are men, and I am your God,” says the Lord God.

What is this Covenant of Peace that God will establish for Israel?

It is the blessings of the Millennial Kingdom where most of the curse is removed...

- *cause wild beasts to cease from the land* – both human and animal
- *they will dwell safely in the wilderness* – true peace on earth
- *the places all around My hill a blessing* – The presence of the Lord among us will be a blessing
- *showers to come down in their season* – no more bad weather
- *showers of blessing* – the Holy Spirit will be active
- *the earth shall yield her increase* – there will be universal prosperity
- *they shall know that I am the Lord* – knowledge of the Lord would be the rule, not the exception
- *no longer be a prey for the nations* – Israel would be universally honored and respected as God’s people
- *no one shall make them afraid* – there will be peace in Jerusalem

v31 – Why did God depart from the sheep analogy here referring to Israel as men?

You are men, and I am your God: This wonderful reminder assured Israel that even though they were like sheep, they were much more than sheep. They were *men*, made in the image of God and capable of so much more than sheep. They needed to recognize their place as creatures (*men*) and God’s place as Creator (*I am your God*). This was both their glory and their responsibility before God.

- Ezekiel’s phrasing here (*you are men, and I am your God*) acknowledged the great divide between humanity and deity. In Ezekiel’s day that divide had not yet been completely bridged by the Messiah, Jesus Christ, both God and man.

What applications do you see from our discussion this evening?

- We are all called to be watchmen and there will be rewards for those who faithfully execute their responsibilities.
- God does not condemn people to eternal separation from him, people make that choice.
- People are saved by grace through faith even before the cross.
- We need to be doers of the Word, not just hearers.
- We need to be wary of unfaithful shepherds and avoid them.
- Jesus is our Great Shepherd and we are without excuse being led astray by an unfaithful shepherd.
- The Millennial Kingdom will be a blessed time on earth to which all people should look forward.