

Ezekiel 33
Pastor Kolander
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The watchman

Let sleeping dogs lie. Have you heard that expression? I like thinking about where expressions came from. I guess you have to assume in that expression that the dogs are dangerous in some way so don't wake them up if you don't want any trouble. Or a similar one, don't poke the bear. I don't know what type of situation you would have to be in order to have someone literally tell you "Hey! Don't poke that bear." But it's an expression that we use to mean don't start trouble where you don't need to.

And that's good advice. Don't rock the boat if we are smoothly sailing on the boat. Let's just peacefully ride together. We don't need to go out picking fights. We don't need to start problems where there aren't any. This life is tough enough as it is, so we don't need to look for ways to disturb the peace. Unless, it's unnecessary.

We have a lesson today from Ezekiel chapter 33. Ezekiel is a prophet of God who was sent to talk to the children of Israel. You think we have problems in our country today... you should read up on what happened to Israel. God's chosen people. A nation that God himself actually started when he called Abraham to go to the chosen land. A nation that he named when he changed Jacob's name to Israel. A nation that he rescued when he led them out of Egypt. A nation who he gave laws and commands to by speaking them to his leader. A nation that was a theocracy, meaning a nation led by not a man but by God. A nation who God literally to time and time again saying that they were his chosen people and they would have a special place here on the earth. A nation who God spoke to through prophets. A nation who God said the whole world would be blest through them. This nation, had been invaded by a neighboring country. The leaders had been tortured. Their houses were burned down. Their capitol city was destroyed. God's temple was destroyed and the treasures inside were melted down and carried away. The people that did survive the invasion were ripped from their homes and deported to a foreign nation and at least at his point are not be treated well to say the least. That's what happened to God's chosen nation. It was destruction and pain.

How can that be? How can all of that happen to God's people? That's a question that we have today but it is also a question that they had back then too. Well... A while back about a hundred years before the exile there was foreign king named Sennacherib. And he was coming to attack Jerusalem. And the king of Israel whose name was Hezekiah was afraid that his capitol was going to be destroyed. So he prayed to God for help. And God did help him. God wiped the army that was about to attack the city. God destroyed huge chunk of that army overnight and everyone else retreated when they knew that the true God was fighting for Israel. Which is great right?

The problem is the people started to think that Jerusalem would never fall. The people started to think that God would never let Jerusalem be destroyed- no matter what they worshiped or what they did. God would never let that happen to them. They got entitled. They got complacent. They stopped worshipping the true God and started to be wicked. They started to worship any god of any country if it would help out their trade or political relationships. They didn't care about being thankful to God. They didn't care about listening to his laws and following them because they loved God and they knew God loved them. They did care about his promises. They didn't care about worshiping the one and only true God. They just thought they didn't have to worry about God so what's the big deal.

That's not a very good relationship. Relationships are two way streets. Both sides care for and respect the other when it's working well. The children of Israel became wicked. They stopped caring for God. They stopped respecting him and his laws. And finally he stopped protecting them from all of the other nations around them.

This is where our text picks up:

"Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; so hear the word I speak and give warning from me. When I say to the wicked, O wicked man, you will surely die, and you do not speak out to dissuade him from his ways, that wicked man will die for his sin, and I will hold you accountable for his blood. But if you do warn the wicked man to turn from his ways and he does not do so, he will die for his sin, but you will have saved yourself."

Ezekiel had a tough job. He was sent to deliver a lot of news that was tough to hear. He was sent to tell this nation who thought of themselves as

really special and chosen, and they thought it was unfair that God had abandoned them and let them be led into exile and all of the negative things that happen before, during and after the exiling of of country. That this wasn't God's fault. It was theirs. It was their fault because they were wicked because they stopped listening to God. That's not a fun. And this wasn't like a one time job that God gave Ezekiel saying... "Hey Ezekiel, I'm sorry to tell you this but I need you to go deliver some bad news, just this once." No this is his ministry. This is his job to confront people and tell that that they are wicked. That if you do not follow the one true God you will die.

Delivering tough news or if you want to call it bad news isn't fun. It's not enjoyable. It's not something that we look forward to. But sometimes it is necessary. God calls Ezekiel a watchman. What does a watchman do? He is supposed to watch out for danger. And if there is danger he is supposed to tell someone about it! What if your alarm clock when you woke up just told you how much you overslept rather than waking you up on time. That would be a pretty annoying alarm clock wouldn't it. "You are 30 minutes late for your day." What a useless invention that would be. Or what if you had to check you fire alarms in the morning to see if you had a fire last night. If there is danger you want to know about it right now. Even if it means waking up in the middle of the night, even if it is uncomfortable, the information is time sensitive you need to know now!

You know it's not only Ezekiel that needs to deliver tough news sometimes. It's you and me too. There is time sensitive news that needs to get delivered to many people in this world. And that news is, there is only one way to heaven and Jesus is the way. And God will judge the wicked, meaning all of those who do not believe in him as their one and only Savior. The world needs to clearly know that they need a Savior from their sin.

That's what evangelism challenge is all about. Making a list of people who you think don't have a relationship with Jesus, who don't know or don't believe that he is their Savior. Those people on that list. They are important. Not only to you but also to God. At some point we need to warn them about what happens to a sinner without a Savior. It's eternal death in hell. And that's not an easy conversation to have. It's not comfortable. It's not convenient. But it's necessary.

What good is a doctor who tells you that you are healthy even when you have a disease that is possibly fatal yet treatable with the right medicine.

That's what God wanted Ezekiel to tell the people. That's what God wants us to tell people. Like we read about in our Gospel lesson from Matthew. We don't point out people's faults because it makes us feel better about our lives. We don't nitpick at people because God wants us to feel really guilty about who we are and the things that we have done wrong. He tells us to tell people that they need a Savior because as he says "He takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live." Then he calls out "Turn! Turn from your evil ways why will you die people of Israel."

I don't know when it's going to happen for you. When God is going to give you an opportunity to share the Gospel with someone close to you. It might be at a time of tragedy. The loss of a loved one might give you an opportunity to confess the hope that you have because of Jesus. But you are also a watchman. This is your orientation class. You know the dangers of this world. You know what is coming on the last day. You know that people are in trouble. And you know you can do something about it.

Because when you see the problems of this world coming at you. You don't have to run in fear like the rest of the world. When you feel guilty for your sins, you know that it's not just you that forgives yourself, but it's God who sets the standard for what is good and evil. He has forgiven your sins. That's something really special. When there is turmoil in this world. You know that it's not just random acts of violence and you should be terrified, but you know there is still a God who loves you that is in control of everything. You know that beyond this life and death there is everlasting happiness for all who believe. You get the opportunity to share those messages with this world.

It's not up to you to convince them, it's just up to you to tell them. The fire alarm isn't at fault if it goes off and no one leaves the house. The alarm clock isn't at fault if you keep hitting the snooze. God just asks you to keep letting people know what they need to know.

You know the evangelism focuses that we have here at the church about reaching out in the community, that's not for our benefit. It's not

because we want to be able to support two pastor and pay off the mortgage at this church and we need more people giving offerings in order to do that. It's not because we want more people at our fellowship gatherings and it seems to be the same people showing up to every event. The reason that we want to Build a community of Christ here is Green Valley is because there are people that still don't know about their Savior. There are people that are in danger that need help. We are doing this for them. Not for us.

But as work toward that goal together, that's how we ourselves grow. We can't help too much if we ourselves are weak. That's why we get stronger. That's why we keep studying God's word listening to the sermons, attending and participating in the Bible classes. We get strong so that we can help other out.

I never really understood bodybuilding as a professional sport. People working so hard on their muscles so that other people can see their muscles and say "Wow those are great muscles!" It seemed strange to me to have your goal be use your muscles to improve your muscles. But when I see people in the military or firefighters or police men working out, that makes a lot of sense to me. They aren't getting strong for themselves, they are getting strong to help others.

We are not here just to flex our muscles. We are here to be watchmen who help people. We are not here to spot problems in this world and then keep our mouth shut while danger and pain attack others around us. We are here to get stronger. We are here to encourage everyone to pitch in. Not guilting them to do more, but reminding them of the importance of our work so that we can achieve our common goal given to us by God of saving the world. Saving every man woman and child from eternal pain and suffering. By telling them that God so loved the world that he gave his one and only sun that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. Turn from your evil ways and live. And we can do it. We can make a difference in the lives of many people. But we have to work together.

We can't let everyone keep sleeping when danger is approaching. We might have to rock the boat a little bit, we might poke the bear. We might have to be the watchmen waking up the people that just want to go back to sleep, saying the day of the Lord is near. But that is the job we have been given. God will bless our mission.