

"Then they will know that I am the LORD"

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[0 : 00] We're starting at verse 1. The word of the Lord came to me. Son of man, speak to your people and say to them, when I bring the sword against the land and the people of the land choose one of their men and make him their watchman, and he sees the sword coming against the land and blows the trumpet to warn the people, then if anyone hears the trumpet but does not heed the warning and the sword comes and takes their life, their blood will be on their own head.

Since they heard the sound of the trumpet but did not heed the warning, their blood will be on their own head. If they had heeded the warning, they would have saved themselves.

But if the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet to warn the people and the sword comes and takes someone's life, that person's life will be taken because of their sin, but I will hold the watchman accountable for their blood.

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. 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 their sin, and I will hold you accountable for their blood.

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. Son of man, say to the Israelites, this is what you are saying.

[1 : 28] Our offences and sins weigh us down and we are wasting away because of them. How then can we live? 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? And then at verse 21. In the twelfth year of our exile, in the tenth month on the fifth day, a man who had escaped from Jerusalem came to me and said, the city has fallen.

Now the evening before the man arrived, the hand of the Lord was on me and he opened my mouth before the man came to me in the morning. So my mouth was opened and I was no longer silent.

Then the word of the Lord came to me, Son of man, the people living in those ruins in the land of Israel are saying, Abraham was only one man, yet he possessed the land.

But we are many. Surely the land has been given to us as our possession. Therefore say to them, this is what the sovereign Lord says. Since you eat meat with the blood still in it and look to your idols and shed blood, should you then possess the land?

You rely on the sword. You do detestable things and each of you defiles his neighbour's wife.

Should you then possess the land? Say this to them. This is what the sovereign Lord says.

[2 : 53] As surely as I live, those who are left in the ruins will fall by the sword. Those out in the country, I will give to the wild animals to be devoured and those in strongholds and caves will die of a plague.

I will make the land a desolate waste and her proud strength will come to an end and the mountains of Israel will become desolate so that no one will cross them. Then they will know that I am the Lord when I have made the land a desolate waste because of all the detestable things they have done.

As for you, son of man, your people are talking together about you by the walls and at the doors of the houses saying to each other, come and hear the message that has come from the Lord. My people come to you as they usually do and sit before you to hear your words, but they do not put them into practice.

Their mouths speak of love, but their hearts are greedy for unjust gain. Indeed, to them, you are nothing more than one who sings love songs with a beautiful voice and plays an instrument well, for they hear your words, but do not put them into practice.

When all this comes true, and it surely will, then they will know that a prophet has been among them. This is the word of the Lord. Good morning, St. Silas.

[4 : 16] If we've not met before, I'm Martin Ayers, the lead pastor here. And it would be great help to me if you could keep your Bibles open on page 864. Thanks, Katrina, for reading that for us.

And you can find an outline inside the notice sheet to follow along with if you find that helpful as we look at this chapter of Ezekiel together. We're in a series, a sermon series as a church, looking at this prophet Ezekiel who lived around 600 years before Jesus.

And this is where we've got to. So let's pray and ask for God's help as we turn to his word. Almighty and loving Heavenly Father, we thank you that you have not left us in the dark about who you are, but you've given us the gift of your life-giving word.

We pray that you will speak to us by your spirit. And may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be pleasing in your sight. Oh Lord, our rock and our redeemer.

Amen. Amen. Well, in the movie, 2021 movie, Don't Look Up, it's all about an astronomer called Dr. Randall Mindy, a professor, and a student, Kate DiBiansky, and they observe through a telescope a massive comet.

[5 : 35] And they do their calculations about this comet and they realize it's 5 to 10 kilometers wide and it's going to hit planet Earth in six months' time and it's an extinction-level event.

In other words, when this comet hits Earth, all of life will be wiped out. And what the movie explores is them discovering that and then trying to bring that news to the world and the way that people don't want the news, they don't want to hear the bad news, so they find ways to avoid it and explain it away.

So they have an audience with the President of America in the Oval Office and she's there with her West Wing and they just laugh off this news. They trivialize it and say, look, you can't say that to people, that there's 100% certainty that they're going to die.

You can't say these things. And they realize that they won't win many votes with this idea of a doomsday event. So that doesn't work. Then they get a media appearance to get to appear on TV on like a news chat show, magazine type show.

But just before they go on, they get told by the producer, remember, keep it light. And they go on and their sort of faces have fallen and they say with great urgency, we're all going to die unless we stop this comet.

[6 : 53] And the news presenters, again, just trivialize it and say, oh, well, you know, that can't really be true. And so the movie is a comedy, but the cutting edge of the film is that it's saying we find ways to avoid and explain away bad news that we don't want to hear.

When we don't want it to be true, it's not that we can't believe it, it's that we won't believe it. And obviously that's hard for the messengers. Now we're spending time with Ezekiel and he had a similar experience in his time of God called him to be a prophet and in chapter three, he was forewarned by God that he would bring this message to a generation of God's looming judgment on the people, but they wouldn't listen to him.

We found Ezekiel in chapter one a few weeks ago by the rivers of Babylon. He was one of God's people at the time when they were living around Jerusalem in Judea and they'd been living there for nearly 400 years since God had brought them into the promised land and the temple had been built for the presence of God among his people in Jerusalem, but they'd rejected God and so they'd become, because they're against God, God is against them and the first movement towards that judgment has happened that Ezekiel and some of his friends were taken from Jerusalem by the Babylonian Empire into exile in Babylon and they're yearning, they're longing to get back to Jerusalem and the presence of God, but the news that Ezekiel has been given from God is that they're not going home.

In fact, God is leaving his earthly home of the temple because his people have rejected him and he's taking, he's bringing the judgment of God into Jerusalem that the Babylonian Empire is going to come and the people will go off into exile, but Ezekiel's generation, they won't listen to him and that's what makes verse 21 the kind of turning point in the whole book.

It's when the news that Ezekiel has been proclaiming finally happens. If you have a look at verse 21, in the twelfth year of our exile, in the tenth month on the fifth day, a man who had escaped from Jerusalem came to me and said, the city has fallen.

[9 : 25] And Ezekiel has actually been speechless himself since chapter 3 when he was called by God. He has only been allowed to speak the words God gives him for seven and a half years.

But this news from this running refugee to say Jerusalem has gone, the city's fallen, brings a new era. Verse 22, Now the evening before the man arrived, the hand of the Lord was on me and he opened my mouth before the man came to me in the morning.

So my mouth was opened and I was no longer silent. And in this chapter, chapter 33, God reiterates his call to Ezekiel to be a prophet. But in the next, in what remains of the book that we're going to come to in the coming weeks, we see that he has a new message, a message of hope for those who will trust God.

But we'll get there next week. Our first point this morning is about God's call to Ezekiel. The call to be a watchman, the sword is coming. So he sums up that call in verse 7 if you just have a look.

This is God speaking to Ezekiel in verse 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.

[10:42] And in the first verses of the chapter, he kind of colors in this picture of what it means to be a watchman. You imagine a land in the ancient world vulnerable to attack from enemies, people living in villages in the land, maybe agricultural fields to harvest cattle and maybe a stronghold, a kind of capital city, a keep that they could run to.

And the land is vulnerable, people live in the villages, so what they do is they set a watchman on a hill night after night and if the watchman sees an enemy approaching to attack, they sound the trumpet so that the people can wake up and take evasive action.

If they hear the trumpet and they don't listen, then it's their fault. If you have a look at verse 5 of chapter 33, since they heard the sound of the trumpet but did not heed the warning, their blood will be on their own head.

If they'd heeded the warning, they would have saved themselves. But if the watchman doesn't do his job, if he sees an enemy coming and he doesn't blow the trumpet, then their blood is on his hands so verse 6, if the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet to warn the people and the sword comes and takes someone's life, that person's life will be taken because of their sin but I will hold the watchman accountable for their blood.

So who is the enemy at the gates in the picture? It's the Lord God himself coming in judgment against people who've rejected him. In chapter 1 we heard Ezekiel saw a vision of God, the likeness of the glory of God and it was this man on fire on a throne above a vault above these four warrior angels above whirling wheels because it was a war chariot coming from the north from where Israel's enemies used to come and this is the Lord in holy judgment against sin among his people because they've rejected him.

[12:52] So the challenge for Ezekiel is I'm telling you the Lord says judgment is coming don't be a watchman who just watches sound the trumpet that my people will have an opportunity to turn and it's striking to think that God is on both sides in this picture he is the holy God bringing his sword of judgment against sin because he's just and righteous but notice he also sets the watchman for his people why would he ask Ezekiel to be a watchman?

He longs that the people will take action so that the judgment doesn't fall on them. The whole point of God appointing watchmen is that he is gracious and merciful and wants people to turn back to him to come to their senses and escape judgment.

Now this was January 585 BC that this was written and Ezekiel's call to be a watchman was special and specific but for Christians today God has called us to be his watchmen and watchwomen.

We know the reality from Hebrews 9:27 that everyone is destined to die once and after that to face judgment and in Hebrews chapter 10 the writer says it is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

not because God is not good but because he is good and we're not good. We've not been good and he is perfectly good in his assessment of that.

[14:32] And this image of being a watchman challenges me to think how much am I clear with the people around me who don't know God that I believe judgment is coming that that's what God has said in his word that ultimately judgment is coming.

even where I'm brave enough to share with friends that I'm a Christian which is easier for me because if they ask me what I do you know it comes with the job it should come with the job but even if I'm brave enough that they know I'm a Christian and they know I believe things about Jesus that he's good news do they realize that I believe that God's word says judgment is coming and that they will perish if they don't turn to Christ to save them.

Is that what the people around us know that we believe? It's giving people both sides of the message that the apostle Peter says Jesus gave his apostles in Acts chapter 10 we looked at this last week we hear both sides if we just get it on the screen these verses here I think we're better at verse 43 the second half than we are at the first half Peter says of Jesus he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead all the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name we like to bring people the offer of forgiveness from God through Jesus because we know if we're Christians what a wonderful thing it is to be forgiven by God and be friends with him and reconciled to him the message of the Bible is that the reason people need that message is that judgment is coming one day we will all stand before the judgment seat of Christ and this is really good for us to reflect on on the first Sunday of Advent

Advent is the season where for centuries Christians have remembered the coming of Jesus and we think of that first and foremost about his first coming and Christmas is coming but actually just as much as that in Advent we're to reflect on his second coming that he's going to come in glory to judge the living and the dead and Jesus warns us to be prepared for his coming that the day will come like a thief in the night and he says that there is a wide highway that leads to destruction and many are going down it and there is a narrow way that leads to life and only a few will find it so in Scotland today we need more watchmen we're not messing around when it comes to the Christian faith if people don't hear about Jesus they will die in their sin that's the message of the scriptures where we lived before Scotland we lived near Manchester for a few years and there's a motorway across west to east on the in England it goes over the Pennines the M62 and there was a night some years ago where there was terrible fog and then the next morning people get on the M62 in rush hour and you know if you drive the rule with driving when there's fog you have to be able to stop in the distance you can see but there was this thick fog on the motorway and people were evidently just trying to get to work and just driving at 70 miles per hour on the M62 and cars started to crash on the M62 and people even 50 yards away behind them were hurtling into this pile up not aware because they couldn't see what was coming and the highways agency and the police had arrived on the scene of the crash and they tried to warn people from the hard shoulder but people weren't taking any notice and they got so desperate to avoid the crash the pile up that they started taking traffic cones and hurling them into the road onto the windscreens of cars just hoping in desperation to wake people up that they had to stop or they were going to die as they crashed into this pile up and so it is that there is for the Christian today a similar sense of urgency about recognizing that the people around us are perishing without Jesus Christ heading towards a day of reckoning before God

I don't know what you think about that but one thing I wrestle with is how much knowing that reality how much is it reasonable still to appeal to people's felt needs when it comes to talking to them about Jesus so I became a Christian through the Alpha course millions of people have done the Alpha course as a first connection into church so I think it's a good thing but for years the Alpha course's slogan has been is there more to life than this and they've had things like cinema adverts you know in the trailers before the cinemas where they'll show people who seem really fulfilled but then are asking is there more to life than this and you get this sense that what they're trying to do and what we often try and do in other ways as Christians is recognize people are kind of trying to fill their lives with other things without God and there are chinks in the armor ultimately that will not work for people and it might be that in the midst of difficulty in life in suffering they realize my life isn't making sense and we try and speak into that from a Christian point of view or it might be that they're having a great time but that actually we want to say to them the good things you're enjoying actually are not meant to be the ultimate thing and without God you will be unfulfilled so how much is that a legitimate approach to talking to friends and how much is it kind of ducking the big issue here that actually without Christ they are hurtling towards a day of reckoning where they will perish [20 : 42] I remember taking some friends to a guest talk it was I was working in a law firm as a lawyer and there were lunchtime talks every week nearby by a church and I took some friends who were not Christians one day to hear the talks and a couple of Christian friends came with me to kind of back me up and help and we went along to this talk and the speaker one of the things he talked about was judgment and he talked about how on our own we can't be good enough for God and strikingly it was the Christians with me who got really angry with the speaker and they went to see him afterwards and said I thought we weren't meant to talk about judgment because it puts people off so I guess you know maybe in the balance one of the questions we should be asking ourselves

is where is the place where I would be willing to share with a friend the truth that I believe there is a judgment because Jesus warned us that's where we're all heading and that's why he came so there's a tension there isn't there and we see in Jesus' approach often he is full of compassion and appealing to people drawing them in with appeal to how he can offer them living water so they don't thirst again but at the same time he will have a place to warn people of coming judgment and say unless you repent you'll perish when the 20th century

Welsh preacher Martin Lloyd-Jones was terminally ill and knew he was close to dying he got interviewed I think it was his last ever public words at the end of the interview the man asking the question said is there anything else you would like to say and Martin Lloyd-Jones said this yes flee from the coming wrath and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ I cannot say it any better our lives are but of vapour I'm nearly 60 years old and I marvel wondering where did all the years go I'm astounded at how quickly a year now passes none of us are long for this world if one is not prepared to die then one is not prepared to live and you're not prepared to die if you are not covered by the blood of Jesus Christ shed at Calvary's cross we will all stand before God and give account of every careless word every deed we've done in the flesh whether good or bad if we have not the righteousness of Jesus Christ covering us then we are in a most dreadful condition God cannot and will not wink at your sin he is not a benevolent grandfather who looks the other way at your sin he must judge it well there was a faithful watchman and as we head into Christmas there will be opportunities for us to be faithful watchmen and watchwomen so that's our first point the call to be a watchman then our second point the responses of the people and we're going to move around a bit in the chapter here just bear with me because woven into the chapter God keeps telling Ezekiel what different people are saying as they hear him people back in Jerusalem people around him among the exiles so first we hear about the words of the complainers they say that God is not just if you just have a look at verse 17 yet your people say the way of the Lord is not just and then verse 20 yet you Israelites say the way of the Lord is not just in other words they're saying this news that God will judge people he wouldn't be just to judge me that's their complaint and we would kind of hear that

I think we sort of grasp how common that objection is today if we replace the word just with the word good because around us today when we hear that God is a God who is holy and he will judge people will think to themselves well God is not good if he's going to judge people and God's answer is he is good that's why he will judge the problem is we're not good and that's what he says back to the people here they say the way of the Lord is not just he says no it's you that are not just and that is the problem they've not been just so he sets up this contrast these two options in how to live in verse 18 and the big idea is that he's saying forget about the past what matters is how are you responding to God today if you have a look at verse 18 if a righteous person turns from their righteousness and does evil they will die for it and if a wicked person turns away from their wickedness and does what is just and right they will live by doing so now when he talks here about being righteous or wicked what he's describing is what's the fundamental direction of your life have you let God be king in your life are you saying to God your will be done or are you living for yourself and have you rejected God we know from truth right through the Bible that when it's talking here about the righteous person the wicked person that none of us can be righteous in the sense of I've kept all of God's commands everyone falls short when it comes to God's standard of goodness at the same time his call isn't for us to be good here it's for us to turn back to him turning away from a sinful way of life away from him trusting God's promise of forgiveness and pledging that in our hearts we want his will to be done and God says here that if you do that today he will give you life if you have a repentant heart the problem for these complaining people is they were relying on their past performance and they've drifted from it like the person today in our city who might think when they hear you know God's gonna judge us and there'll be a judgment day a day of reckoning before God they think well I've got nothing to worry about because I got baptized when I was a baby and I go to church on Christmas day and I have bread and wine when I go to church or maybe someone who who says you know

[27 : 13] I was in a youth group and I made a commitment when I was younger and I got baptized you know once saved always saved but actually over the years there's no real evidence of a genuine walk with God of living faith and repentance so what does the Lord say through Ezekiel he says how is your heart today are you repentant of the things you've done wrong so that's the complainers we hear a second response to Ezekiel's words at the end of the chapter and it's the

words of the comfortable in verse 30 and it sounds good because they say come and hear the Lord's message through Ezekiel in verse 30 but there's a snag in verse 31 God says to Ezekiel my people come to you as they usually do and sit before you to hear your words but they do not put them into practice and in verse 32 he says they treat you like Celine Dion or something verse 32 indeed to them you are nothing more than one who sings love songs with a beautiful voice and plays an instrument well for they hear your words but do not put them into practice so for them going to church it's like a cinema trip the best preachers you can find online you'd find them on their Spotify playlists you know

Alistair Begg is on in their car Tim Keller when they go for a run they chat with their friends about their top 10 favorite preachers but really they're just being entertained it's a danger in today's evangelical world you know we go to the Keswick Convention every summer great event down in Keswick in the Lake District where you can gather for a week with other Christians and thousands of people together and you hear really good Bible teaching there but what can happen is you come out from the meetings and you chat with people and you end up in conversation saying wasn't that a marvelous sermon wasn't that a great story that the preacher said didn't he put that really well and what you can find is the danger is you're kind of talking about the orator and the kind of the delivery of a talk without ever actually sitting under the word of God and letting it bear its weight on your life you see it in churches where a church gets a reputation for having strong preaching and it becomes like a preaching station where people come from far and wide to one place to hear the sermons but over time the danger is you look and think these guys they're just comfortable

Christians they're just coming to be entertained there's no fruit in their lives so those are the comfortable hearers in Ezekiel's time we've heard about the complainers God is not just with this news of judgment the comfortable who say yeah just come and listen it's like a beautiful song but there is a third group who get things right in the chapter we hear the words of the convicted so have a look at verse 10 the Lord says to Ezekiel verse 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 them how then can we live so these people they acknowledge that the judgment the hard times they're going through are a foretaste of God's judgment and they feel despair they recognize their own guilt and they see that they've blotted their copy book when it comes to God there is no way for them on their own merit to put things right and when we hear

God's word when we hear his standards his glory his holiness his commands this is the kind of hero we want to be in a sense that there is an experience in the Christian life of feeling on my own without God's help I'm on a precipice I'm facing God's judgment without hope because that brings us to our third point from the chapter we've heard the call of the watchman the different responses of the hearers thirdly and finally the appeal of the living God turn and live so the convicted asked the question in verse 10 how then can we live and Ezekiel has to answer them so look at verse 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 it's a wonderful moment because God tells us here what gives him pleasure he is a God who judges sin he has to judge sin and we heard last week he'll be glorified by condemning sin it demonstrates that he is good and powerful and just and yet he can say in verse 11 he would rather he didn't judge sin at all he takes no pleasure in it what gives him pleasure when people turn back to him it's a bit like when Jesus tells the story in Luke chapter 15 he tells three stories of lost things that get found the lost coin gets found by the woman who's lost it the lost sheep and the shepherd goes and looks for it and finds it and then the lost son who comes back to his father and each is a picture of someone turning back to God and what the three stories have in common is that each time there is a great celebration and Jesus says in the same way there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents and that means for any of us today is a new day where we can ask ourselves do I feel convicted either for the first time or that I've been I've drifted from seeking to live God's way and put to death the old way of life then if only you will turn to God in your heart you would delight him because he is ready with open arms to receive you back all by his grace and give you life it's a return that he has made possible through the blood of his son shed at the cross so that we could be promised life with him and this is momentous news in a world where people around us all the time feel defined by their past by things they've done or by things that have been done to them one of the great truths of Ezekiel 33 is that we've been liberated from our past the Lord says turn and live and for any one of us who does that we can hear the

promise of verse 16 and some of us will need to be reminded of this afresh today verse 16 that for everyone who turns back to God trusting the Lord Jesus none of the sins that person has committed will be remembered against them they have done what is just and right they will surely live let's pray together almighty God and loving heavenly father we praise you for your grace in sending us word that brings us the truth of future judgment that we might turn and live we pray that you would help us as we reflect on your word to be faithful as watchmen and watchwomen towards the people you've given us to love around us and you'd help us to respond rightly to your word convicted as we stand by ourselves but running gladly and confidently to the Lord
[35 : 37] Jesus Christ we ask in Jesus name Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen That's things for me Amen Amen Amen