

## Message #36

## Ezekiel 33:1-20

There is a mindset today in many churches and among many ministers that says we need to make our message as attractive as we can to present some upbeat message that will make people feel good. That will bring in the crowds. Don't threaten. Don't warn. Don't preach judgment.

Apparently, God doesn't agree with that thinking. He wanted the people strongly warned. He wanted people to understand if they do not deal with their sin, God will deal with them. Actually this chapter starts a new section in the book that will present many positive messages for Israel. Israel will be restored as a nation and will be given her land. **But to kick off this very positive section, God addresses the subject of dealing with sin. Make sure as you are about to go into the land of the Kingdom you are not pursuing a life of sin.**

Now in Ephesians 5:5 God says to His own people that you need to know this with certainty: no immoral person, no impure person, no covetous person, no idolater will have an inheritance in the kingdom of God. I did not say that to the church; God did. The point is God's people had better turn away from those things if they want to receive an inheritance from Jesus Christ.

God offers His people plenty of time to turn from sin. If they do, they receive His grace forgiveness. If they don't they receive His judgment. That is exactly what God wanted Ezekiel to tell His people.

**WHEN GOD IS ANGRY WITH HIS PEOPLE, BECAUSE OF THEIR PERSISTENCE IN SIN, HE OFFERS THEM THE OPPORTUNITY TO TURN FROM THEIR SIN AND EXPERIENCE HIS FORGIVENESS; BUT IF THEY DO NOT TURN FROM THEIR SIN, THEY WILL RECEIVE HIS JUDGMENT.**

In **verse 1**, the Word of the LORD came again to Ezekiel and according to **verse 2**, it told Ezekiel his job was to speak God's Word to the people. In fact, God calls them "your people" which refers to Israel, God's nation.

Now what Ezekiel was to do was to communicate the importance and the responsibility of the watchman. In fact, in this chapter Ezekiel is once again reappointed as a watchman (**v. 7**).

In O.T. times every city had a watchman stationed at a high lookout point either on top of the gate to a city or some tower (II Sam. 18:24; II Kings 9:17). It was his job to warn the people of coming judgment. He did this by blowing a trumpet or by sending up smoke signals. **The judgment that is mentioned here is specifically against God's own people if they refuse to turn to Him.**

It is the job of a minister to faithfully and accurately communicate God's Word. What the people do with it or how they respond to it is not his business. His business is to faithfully and accurately communicate God's Word.

Now there are certain main messages that God wanted communicated in this section:

**MESSAGE #1** – If a watchman sees judgment coming and warns the people it is coming and the people do not listen to the message, they are responsible for the judgment they will receive. **33:1-5**

When a land was attacked with some military assault, an appointed watchman, who was a lookout, had the responsibility to blow a trumpet and warn the people. He had the responsibility to signal that danger was coming. So here is the scenario:

- 1) News comes that an enemy is invading. **33:1b**
- 2) The people appoint a watchman to be a lookout for the enemy. **33:1c**
- 3) The appointed watchman spots the enemy. **33:3a**
- 4) The appointed watchman alerts the people by warning them. **33:3b**
- 5) The people ignore the warning. **33:4a**
- 6) The people are killed by the enemy. **33:4b**
- 7) The people are responsible for their own judgment. **33:5**

If the people ignored his warning, they were accountable for their own destruction. Their blood was on their own heads.

**MESSAGE #2** – If a watchman sees judgment coming and does not warn the people it is coming God will hold the watchman accountable for what happened to the people even though the judgment was deserved because of iniquity. **33:6**

Even if the people had done vile, perverted things that brought the judgment on them, the watchman would be held accountable if he did not warn the people.

Dr. H. A. Ironside said every one of us should learn a very solemn lesson here. We who know the truth about where this godless world is heading have a responsibility to warn it. The wrath of God will come and it is our job to warn the world of that reality. He said if we do not tell the world that they are heading to wrath and they need to believe in Jesus Christ, God will settle up with us at the judgment seat of Christ (*Ezekiel*, p. 227).

When the Apostle Paul addressed the Elders of the church of Ephesus, he told them that he was innocent from the blood of all men because he had declared to them the whole purpose and counsel of God (Acts 20:26-27).

**MESSAGE #3** – Ezekiel has been appointed by God to be the watchman for Israel. **33:7**

Now probably most people expected Ezekiel to follow this up with some interpretation, but instead he follows it up with his own calling and appointment by God.

Out of all of the people in Israel, including the priests and the other prophets and the religious and political leaders, God says Ezekiel, I have appointed you. Ezekiel held this position of being a watchman by direct appointment from God. He was commissioned by God to communicate His Word.

It is one thing to arrogantly appoint yourself to a position of leadership or power or to have other people appoint you to that position. But the real appointment is from God. Real authority comes from God.

God appointed Ezekiel to this position and he didn't even want it and he wasn't looking for it. So what Ezekiel does is he applies this to himself and to Israel. He was appointed by God to be the watchman for Israel and it was his job to communicate God's Word and warnings to Israel.

The warning that Ezekiel was to give to the people was not a warning about some military force coming against them. **Ezekiel was to warn them that God Himself would judge them. His job was to confront them with their sin.**

**MESSAGE #4** – When God says to the wicked you will die and Ezekiel does not warn the wicked one, that wicked one will die because of his iniquity but God will hold Ezekiel accountable for not proclaiming the truth. **33:8**

God says here that He is the One who is demanding that His people turn from their sin or they will face death. He demands that Ezekiel tell the people just that. **The responsibility of the watchman is to warn the wicked that they will be judged.** If Ezekiel failed to warn the people that they need to turn from their sin or be judged, then he would be guilty of a capital offense. What this means is that when God sends judgment to execute His people for their sin, Ezekiel too would be executed.

The job of one who communicates God's Word is not to get results. His job is to accurately communicate truth and he better take that job seriously.

**MESSAGE #5** – When God says to the wicked you will die and Ezekiel does warn the wicked one, that wicked one will die because of his iniquity but God will not hold Ezekiel accountable and he will live. **33:9**

If Ezekiel warned the people and they did not listen, then as Daniel Block said, “the prophet would be absolved of all guilt” (*The Book of Ezekiel, Chapters 25-48*, p. 243). Communicating the whole truth is serious business.

One who has been called and gifted by God to do that had better communicate everything, the positives and the negatives.

**MESSAGE #6** – Ezekiel is to tell Israel that she is rotting away in her sin and he is to present to them a message of possible survival. **33:10**

There are three different words God uses for sin in this context:

- 1) Iniquity–evil, perverted things
- 2) Transgressions–rebellious acts of stepping off the right path
- 3) Sins–missing the mark of God’s standard of righteousness

These words clearly reveal that the judgment of God against His own people is completely justified. But this verse also presents the possibility of survival, in spite of the fact that there has been evil sin.

The word “rotting away” (maqaq) describes a flesh that is putrid. Block says this describes a flesh that is a “putrefying gangrenous flesh” (*Ibid.*, p. 246). What we do in our bodies can be pleasing to God or a stench to God. This is what sin does; it weighs us down and causes us to rot away.

**MESSAGE #7** – Ezekiel is to tell Israel that God takes no pleasure in destroying His people, but He invites them to turn from their evil ways and turn back to Him. **33:11**

This is an amazing concept. When God’s people have plunged themselves into sin, God still gives them opportunities to turn from the sin and turn back to Him. **His heart is to forgive, save and deliver His people.** He is not a God who finds great pleasure in destroying His people because of their evil. He invites His people to turn back to Him. He graciously invites His flesh-rotting people to return to Him.

He knows all of His people are sinners and He does not want that sin to reach such a level that He has to judge it, so He gives His people a gracious invitation, which is come back to Me. When people are willing to humble themselves and turn to Him, they can experience His cleansing grace. **This is all they need to do to escape judgment, turn back to Him.**

**MESSAGE #8** – Ezekiel is to tell Israel that if a righteous person turns to wickedness, his righteousness will be of no benefit in the day of judgment. **33:12a**

Now there are a series of counter points that Ezekiel makes in these verses in order to communicate a point. A person’s past does not determine one’s future, but how one ends does determine one’s future.

Just as it is possible for one sinful to turn to God and end well, so it is also possible for one righteous to turn to sin and end rotten. No believer wants to end up life having turned to wickedness. It will cost one in eternity.

**MESSAGE #9** – Ezekiel is to tell Israel that if a wicked person turns from wickedness to God, he will be delivered. **33:12b**

Again we see the point. It is not what one has done in the past that determines how one will end up in eternity; it is what they do now in view of this warning that determines how one will end in eternity. If one who was wicked turns to the Lord and pursues His righteous ways, he has nothing to fear.

**MESSAGE #10** – Ezekiel is to tell Israel that when God tells a righteous person he will live and he so trusts in his righteousness that he pursues iniquity, not only will he suffer judgment, but none of his righteous deeds will be remembered. **33:13**

There is no question that God is gracious in giving us time to resolve things and He is very concerned with how we finish life.

**MESSAGE #11** – Ezekiel is to tell Israel that when God warns a wicked person that he will die and he turns from his sin and practices justice and righteousness and makes things right, he will live. **33:14-16**

None of his sins that he committed will be remembered against him if he turns from them because he has practiced righteousness.

In **verses 17-20**, we get the response of the people.

Now the people say this is not right. They have the audacity to say the way of the Lord is not right (**v. 17**). Here God offers them cleansing grace from their vile sins and they say it isn't right. Instead of them saying what amazing grace, they are saying it isn't right that God would judge us if we don't deal with sin.

God says I am not the problem here, your ways aren't right. You are the problem.

God says I am a just God and each person will be judged on the basis of his own ways.

Turn from sin and walk in ways that are righteous and there is nothing to fear.

Turn from righteousness and walk in ways that are sinful and there is everything to fear.

No one needs to think of himself as hopeless. Turn to God and turn to His grace and mercy.

But this passage certainly militates against being careless or reckless.