

## An Answer to Prayer

3<sup>rd</sup> Sun. in Lent – 03/20/22 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: Ezekiel 33:7-20 Pastor Keith Besel

v. 7 [The LORD says to His prophet Ezekiel,] **“So you, son of man, I have made a watchman for the house of Israel. Whenever you hear a word from My mouth, you shall give them warning from Me.”**

### **Introduction**

⌘ How many of you have ever prayed to the LORD, asking Him to help you stay faithful to Him; asking Him to keep watch over your soul and your spiritual condition?

→ Ok, now imagine for moment that you are God and you received those prayers from you. How would you answer that request? What would you do to keep a person like you faithful? What would God’s help look like?

→ Would you send regular memos? Or shoot out weekly emails? You know all of the different ways that you are tempted to stray in your faith, so what would it take? Maybe you’d have a drone deliver warnings? And what kind of tone would those warnings have? Would they be more encouraging and subtle or would it take a more direct “thump on the head” or maybe even a swift kick in the back side? Or maybe you’d give directions through your dreams.

⌘ And why do you even need to ask for assistance from God to keep you faithful? At the beginning of this service we all confessed that we are “poor miserable sinners”; that we “justly deserve God’s temporal and eternal punishment” because we have “offended” Him in wandering from His will for our lives, countless times and in numerous ways.

→ The truth is, we’d all rather have things our way instead of God’s way.

⌘ But the good news is that you and I have confessed those things to God on our own accord. The very fact that you have prayed to the LORD, asking for Him to keep watch over your soul means that you have a new nature at work in your life ever since you were baptized and became a child in God’s family. Now, you actually desire to live a God-pleasing life.

→ You see, it’s that new you in Christ that is concerned about your spiritual welfare. Where, before Christ, you wanted to do things your own way, now you actually want to be told when you’ve wandered from God’s truth, just as you’d want the doctor to give it to you straight if you had some kind of life-threatening disease, right?

⌘ Well, you’ve prayed to God and asked Him to help you. Now, with God’s Word to Ezekiel in our Old Testament Reading, I stand before you this morning to tell you that He has answered your prayer.

→ To be perfectly honest with you, this word from God today makes me uncomfortable as your pastor, because I know there’s a risk that I might be misunderstood; that you might think I’m a bit too full of myself in what I’m about to say. At the same time, I’ve been here long enough that I know you’ve all seen my flaws and shortcomings enough that it would serve no purpose for me to try and impress you or pull the wool over your eyes by trying to make you think that I’m anything special at all – quite the opposite!

### **I. God has called your pastor as “a watchman”**

⌘ So, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, I stand here in all humility this morning to tell you that, believe it or not, “I, your pastor, am an answer to your prayer!”

- Again, this has nothing to do with any kind of special worth or talent on my part, but everything to do instead with God. Think about this: God called Ezekiel to be “a watchman”. Not the kind that walked around on the top of the city walls looking for approaching invaders; not the kind that was to keep a sharp eye out for someone trying to sneak in after the gates were closed at night.
- No, Ezekiel was called by God to be a watchman over the spiritual condition of God’s people. Listen to verses 7-8 one more time, “So you, son of man, I have made a watchman for the house of Israel. Whenever you hear a word from My mouth, you shall give them warning from Me. If I say to the wicked, O wicked one, you shall surely die, and you do not speak to warn the wicked to turn from his way, that wicked person shall die in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand”.
- ⊗ So it is that I, like every pastor you’ve ever had, have a call – that is a God-commanded responsibility to speak God’s warning to you whenever you depart from His ways.
    - It’s a crucial part of why I’m here, to tap you on the shoulder whenever you get off track; whenever I see you turn things into idols, such as sports or patriotism or money; whenever I see you deal unjustly with another person; whenever I see you steal or defraud or live unfaithfully with your spouse; whenever I see your posts on social media reveal an ungodly attitude or advocate for something contrary to Scripture or profane the Lord’s name.
    - And of course, when you get yourself in so deep that you despair and cry out, “Pastor, there’s no way out of the mess I’ve made,” God has called me to tell you, “Not true! God takes no pleasure in seeing you in this condition. So, turn away from the sorry mess you’ve created and turn back to God and live!”
  - ⊗ But there is still more to this watchman job. God has also called me to pull you aside whenever you might think that any of the good you’ve done works like a credit balance that makes up for the times you’ve jumped off the track. Don’t expect to ever hear me encouraging you to think of your good deeds as something that God places on a scale against your sinful deeds with the hope that your good might outweigh your bad.
    - No, my job is to keep you from falling into that kind of flawed and deceptive thinking. Sure, you might be able to “make up” for some wrong you’ve done to a neighbor or a family member, but that doesn’t hold water with God. You can’t make up for your sins. You can’t cleanse your own record and set things “straight”, as we often hear people try to say.
  - ⊗ But...we hear God explain to Ezekiel, that when you see that you have really messed up your life through sin, you can listen to God’s words of admonition that He has called me to proclaim. And if you take heed of those words and respond to His gift of repentance and turn back to Christ for forgiveness, you will live!
    - Then by God’s work of mercy and grace, the bad that you’ve done in the past will not be held against you. That’s the very definition of forgiveness.
  - ⊗ That’s my work as your watchman from God. That’s how I’m an answer to your prayer for His help and guidance and accountability.
  - ⊗ But let’s be honest with each other ... and with ourselves, friends. It’s not all that easy, especially in today’s moral climate. Just as it was for Ezekiel so it is today. It’s not like God gives me a word to proclaim and I share it, calling you to repentance and you just instantly admit your sin and change your ways.
    - No, much of the time, your old nature, just like mine wants to be free to do anything you please. It resents being boxed in. It resents being shown its faults and it responds in defensiveness. It leads you to say, “Does our pastor really think he’s better than me?”

→ The truth is, many people do get angry when their pastor confronts them with their sinful behavior, to the point that many just leave the church and Christ altogether. But consider the way that God addressed Ezekiel, calling him, “son of man”. He’s reminding Ezekiel, just as He reminds me that I’m a mortal too. Those words remind me that I face the same temptations, the same sins, the same rebellions that you do.

→ So I, too, must always remember that the words I speak are God’s warning, not mine. That is, I don’t come to you as some holier-than-thou guy, trying to put any of you in your place. I come simply and humbly as the messenger only.

✘ Yet this text is clear as well that there is also a warning from God to me. If I stand in so much fear or awe of you that I am too afraid to call you out when you need it, then God holds me accountable for your fate. Verse 8, “If I say to the wicked, O wicked one, you shall surely die, and you do not speak to warn the wicked to turn from his way, that wicked person shall die in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand.”

→ We see this truth in other places around us. In times of flood and heavy downpours, for example, road crews will post signs that say, “Danger – High Water,” directing cars to use alternate routes that are safe. If a road crew doesn’t put out those signs and cars then drive through water so deep that it causes them to float away and drivers to drown, then the surviving drivers will complain, “Why didn’t they warn me?” On the other hand, if the drivers see the sign but still ignore it, the blame is all theirs. They were warned.

## II. God calls the pastor to point the way out

✘ But there’s a bit of a problem with that simplistic example. I mean what road crew member, if he saw a car floating down the road, would just shrug his shoulders and say, “Too bad – we put up the warning sign”? No, they would do what they can to lead the people to safety.

→ So my job, as pastor, is not done once I’ve warned you about dangerous spiritual situations.

→ It goes further. My call from God also requires that I point you to the way out of your predicament. The LORD says in verse 11, “I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live”.

✘ You see, the way out is not to try to do better; to try harder; to do the best you can. I’m not called just to urge you to turn away from bad behavior, but also to turn you toward something – actually to turn you toward someone.

→ God has called me to point you to another “son of man” besides Ezekiel, and that is Jesus. He came as man, in human flesh to face the same temptations you and I face as mortals. Only He was able to resist perfectly where you and I cannot. He kept God’s laws flawlessly in our place, and in His great love for you, He saw to it that His obedience has now been credited to your account and mine.

→ And just as we will see in a few weeks, He did even more by giving up His life on the cross in payment for our sins.

✘ All of those benefits became yours when you were baptized into His family. It’s His free gift to you; which includes His mighty power from the Holy Spirit to help you daily as you are tempted and struggle with sin.

→ He’s already answered your prayer for help in your baptism, filling you with the Spirit and His power that helps you turn away from sin and back to Christ in faith.

→ You see, it’s my responsibility also as a watchman to point you back to Christ, should I find you depressed over your sins or discouraged in your attempts to live a godly life for Him.

## **Conclusion**

✘ Television public service announcements urge us that we should know the warning signs of a stroke or a heart attack. Family members are urged to know them too, so that when they see them in others, they know what to do.

➔ In a similar way, I serve God and you as a watchman – called to keep an eye out for the signs of spiritual danger in each of you and in this congregation. I pray that by God's grace and power, I can serve faithfully and be that blessing to you. To God be all the glory. Amen.