

EZEKIEL

Hard to Heart

“Someone to Watchman Over Me”

3:15-21

If there were a job description for a parent it might read like this:

Long term, team players needed, for challenging permanent work in an, often chaotic environment. Candidates must possess excellent communication and organizational skills and be willing to work variable hours, which will include evenings and weekends and frequent 24 hour shifts on call. Some overnight travel required, including trips to primitive camping sites on rainy weekends and endless sports tournaments in far away cities. Travel expenses not reimbursed. Extensive courier duties also required.

Possibility for advancement and promotion: None. Your job is to remain in the same position for years, without complaining, constantly retraining and updating your skills, so that those in your charge can ultimately surpass you.

Wages and compensation: You pay them. You must offer frequent raises and bonuses. A balloon payment is due when they turn 18 because of the assumption that college will help them become financially independent. When you die, you give them whatever is left.

It's a pretty accurate job description except it doesn't really catch the joy you derive from making all those sacrifices and many more!

In our passage Ezekiel will receive a job title: Watchman. He then gets a brief job description and is told some of his responsibilities.

In the New Testament we, too, are told to “watch.” In First Thessalonians 5:6 we are told,

1 Thessalonians 5:6 Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober.

Our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, told us to “watch” in Matthew twenty-four, Mark thirteen, and Luke twelve. Our watching, as New Testament believers, has a two-fold application:

1. We are to watch in the sense of being wary of the many perils and pitfalls in the world.
2. We are to be watching for Jesus - to be looking for and hastening the return of Jesus.

Since we are called to “watch” perhaps we can learn a thing or two from Ezekiel as Israel’s sixth century watchman.

Ezekiel 3:15 Then I came to the captives at Tel Abib, who dwelt by the River Chebar; and I sat where they sat, and remained there astonished among them seven days.

Ezekiel “came to... Tel Abib” by being divinely, supernaturally transported by God from one location to another.

His audience was the “captives at Tel Abib, who dwelt by the River Chebar.” I remind you that, historically, the narrative takes place after the second siege of Jerusalem by the Babylonian Empire but before the final, decisive siege in which the Temple would be ruined. The Jews in captivity still held on to groundless hope that their subjection to Babylon would be brief. They could not accept that God would allow His earthly dwelling place to be overrun by His enemies.

Too often Christians are not ready for trials or sufferings because they have an unrealistic hope. They just can’t accept that God would let bad things happen to His people. When trials or sufferings come they are, for lack of a better word, discombobulated - confused and frustrated.

Better to adopt the worldview of Job - the Lord gives, the Lord takes away; blessed be the name of the Lord.

It was Ezekiel’s task to tell the captives that God’s glory would depart from Jerusalem for a time and that their captivity would be an extended one.

“And I sat where they sat.” The other evening one of the brothers read a comment about that phrase that Pastor Chuck Smith penned in the *Word for Today Study Bible*. (So now I can’t quote from it and act like I’m really profound!).

It was to the point that we might want to get to know people before we judge them or are critical of them. Or at least give thought to their situation by thinking through the ramifications of what has gone on in their lives.

The bottom line is that we are to have and then show the love of God for those we minister among. It doesn’t mean we change God’s message to them. It just means we speak the truth with the genuine love of God for their ultimate spiritual welfare.

Apparently Ezekiel sat there without talking for “seven days.” I can’t say the precise meaning of the seven days except that the concept of “seven days” was significant to the Jews. It would at least imply to them that God was at work, that this was a divine work of God through His anointed prophet. It certainly would build suspense!

Add to that Ezekiel appeared out of nowhere, having been transported, and you’ve got quite a drama brewing.

Ezekiel was “astonished.” Well, I’d be, too, if I had been transported from one place to another.

But there are other possible meanings for the word “astonished.”

1. In its verb form it’s used to describe reaction to people or places that have been destroyed. It could be Ezekiel was looking ahead to the destruction of both people and places and it weighed heavy upon him.
2. Another meaning is to be appalled at something or someone. It could be Ezekiel was appalled that the Jews were remaining so hardhearted against God.

I think that believers today could benefit from a little more astonishment. We see what God is doing and about to do as we study Bible prophecy.

We see the destruction of both people and places. Yet so many people go on as if judgment was not coming. It's astonishing, really.

Instead of thinking we are reading something in to history, we should remain astonished that others don't see it.

Of course, the reason they don't see it is because they are are spiritually dead and, thus, blinded to the truth. But the Gospel has power to remove their blindness. It is the power of God to salvation.

Ezekiel 3:16 Now it came to pass at the end of seven days that the word of the Lord came to me, saying,

“The Word of the Lord” will come to Ezekiel something like fifty times in this book.

It can “come” to us **anytime** we read the Word with ears to hear. We are so much better-off than these Old Testament saints.

Ezekiel 3:17 "Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; therefore hear a word from My mouth, and give them warning from Me:

In Bible times cities were walled and there were towers along the wall. The watchman looked out for approaching danger and he looked in for disturbances. It was his job to warn the people of trouble from without or within.

“Hear a Word from My mouth.” That's a great way to think about reading your Bible, isn't it? Stop to hear a Word directly from God's mouth to your ears.

As a watchman Ezekiel would launch right in to a time of warning. Have you discovered yet that God has His own time table when it comes to preparing you for serving Him?

- Mostly we get ahead of God, thinking like Moses did initially that we are ready. When others don't recognize what we believe God is doing then we grow impatient. We move on to find some other place where they will

- recognize us. It's not always in God's will and, when it's not, it can't be accompanied by the anointing and empowering of God the Holy Spirit.
- Other times God's timing seems too fast! We are thrust in to a situation we don't feel at all prepared to handle. Again the key is to be in the will of God because, if you are, His Spirit will handle it through you, using you, stretching you.

Ezekiel's words of warning are going to involve two kinds or classes of Jews and it is important we understand who they are.

- There were those classified as "the wicked." Now remember his audience was entirely comprised of Jews, so these are "wicked" Jews.
- There were also "righteous" Jews. Ezekiel and Daniel and his three friends were in this class.

Here, then, is Ezekiel's warning to the wicked.

Ezekiel 3:18 When I say to the wicked, 'You shall surely die,' and you give him no warning, nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life, that same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at your hand.

Ezekiel 3:19 Yet, if you warn the wicked, and he does not turn from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but you have delivered your soul.

In passing notice, in verse eighteen, God says, "When I say to the wicked." It would be Ezekiel's voice but God's Words. That's a great way of approaching the preaching and teaching of the Word. God is speaking through His Word using our ability to speak words. We must therefore be so careful to stick closely to the Word.

Let's talk about the "wicked" before we discuss what God lays on Ezekiel. This was a Jew who was not even going through the outward motions of keeping God's Law. Nevertheless God held out the possibility that even at this late moment the "wicked" man could "turn from his wicked way" and be saved.

The "wicked man" needed to hear the Word warning him of God's judgment to come.

While we preach and teach a message of grace, it includes the very real understanding of judgment to come. The unsaved individual must know he or she is a sinner, that they have fallen short of God's standard, and that they cannot be saved apart from Jesus Christ's sacrifice on the cross at Calvary.

It's not that we point out their specific sin so much as we show them all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Is the drunkard a sinner because he abuses alcohol? Or does he abuse alcohol because he is a sinner? It is the sin nature that we want folks to understand, not just their individual acts of sin. Otherwise they get the mistaken idea that they can stop, clean-up their life, and by their works be right with God.

Let's take a look at the "righteous" man before we discuss what God lays on Ezekiel.

Ezekiel 3:20 "Again, when a righteous man turns from his righteousness and commits iniquity, and I lay a stumbling block before him, he shall die; because you did not give him warning, he shall die in his sin, and his righteousness which he has done shall not be remembered; but his blood I will require at your hand.

Ezekiel 3:21 Nevertheless if you warn the righteous man that the righteous should not sin, and he does not sin, he shall surely live because he took warning; also you will have delivered your soul."

The "righteous" Jew was the one whose genuine faith in the living God was manifested by a delight in His Word and by obedience to His Law.

Old Testament or New Testament, people are saved based on faith in Jesus Christ. When discussing salvation, the apostle Paul used Abraham as his example that everyone has always been saved the same way. Abraham was justified, was declared right, was saved, by faith before the giving of the Law. Then you see his faith worked-out in the obedience of his life.

God said to Ezekiel that He would "lay a stumblingblock before" the righteous man. *That doesn't sound like God!*

Sure it does. Here is what is meant. The “stumblingblock” is not an enticement to sin. It is not God tempting the righteous man or woman. It is what we would call a trial or a testing.

What are trials intended to do? They are intended to reveal our genuine faith and to refine it. To again appeal to Job: He said that after God tried him he would come forth as gold.

God would lay a trial upon the righteous in Ezekiel’s day and through it their genuine faith would be revealed and be refined. That trial was Babylon.

The Babylonian invasions and captivity would definitely show who was righteous and who was only going through the outward motions. The truly righteous man was thus encouraged to endure and see the glory of the Lord as he was being refined in the oven of affliction.

What about all this talk of the wicked and the unrepentant righteous dying? It is referring to their physical death, *not* eternal death. The context of this warning was the onslaught of the very literal and physical Babylonian army.

- The wicked who remained wicked and the righteous who refused to repent would be killed.
- The wicked who repented and the righteous who kept on walking with God through these evil times would be delivered from death.

God told Ezekiel he would be held responsible and would be accountable for delivering God’s message. *Nothing odd about that!* Of course we are responsible and accountable to walk with God and faithfully fulfill our ministries.

In each case we read that either God would require the wicked man’s blood at Ezekiel’s hand or that Ezekiel’s “soul” would be delivered.

Requiring his blood reminds us of the institution of capital punishment in Genesis after the flood. God was telling Ezekiel that this was a life-and-death situation. If Ezekiel failed to warn the people it would be like

condemning them to death. If he warned them, then it was on them to decide.

It's the same today. When we share the Gospel it is always a life-and-death situation because we don't know if a hearer will live another day.

What about Ezekiel's "soul" being delivered? It almost sounds like his own salvation was dependent upon his obedience.

I can't see that in the text. For one thing, Ezekiel doesn't even speak for seven days! What if someone in Tel Abib died during that time?

This passage isn't talking about eternal life or death. It isn't talking about Ezekiel's destination in the afterlife. The "soul" is often a reference to the soulish part of us as human beings, what we might call our mind and will and emotions. "Soul" is used here to indicate that Ezekiel would be free from the very real guilt and pain of failing to warn the wicked.

Don't minimize the effect of guilt and shame. It can be a life-crippling stressor.

This passage is **not** teaching us that if we fail to tell one single person about Jesus we will be guilty of their eternal death and thus forfeit our own salvation.

That's not even a good motivator for us to share Jesus. The best motivation is the love of God. As we see the judgment to come we will want others to be spared and we will naturally share with them.

We *do* have a responsibility to warn people that Jesus and judgment are coming. We *will* be held accountable for our individual stewardship of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

As to that stewardship, consider this. Ezekiel was specifically called to be a watchman. He would be held responsible and be accountable for his watching and all that went with it.

What is your calling? How has God gifted you? Where has God placed you, or sent you?

It is for those things you are responsible and will be held accountable. Do them well! *Be faithful!*

God sent them a watchman. Do you realize that in the very sending of such a watchman there is a message of hope? The watchman is sent to warn and the warning is for good.

I believe God sends us many a watchman throughout our lives. Some are people.

They can be circumstances.

The Scripture itself is a watchman. For example, we hide it in our hearts so as not to sin against the Lord.

It appears, too, there are guardian angels watching over us.

What joy knowing God is faithful and loving to send watchmen to watch over me.

