

EZEKIEL

Cry Me a River

*By the rivers of Babylon, There we sat down,
yea, we wept When we remembered Zion
Psalm 137:1*

Text

Ezekiel 33:1-33

Topic

The destruction of Jerusalem & the Temple mark the end of Ezekiel's first watch.

Title

"We've Got The Watch"

"End of Watch" is a solemn phrase used in law enforcement and the military to mark a service member's death or retirement.

The radio dialogue for a law enforcement line-of-duty death follows (more or less) this order:

- Dispatch alerts all personnel to clear the air and to stand-by for priority traffic.
- Dispatch then makes several attempts at contact. There is empty air on the radio.
- Dispatch announces Final Call, then declares "End of Watch," followed by the appropriate information regarding the officer.

Lastly all hear, "Thank you for your service. *We have the watch.*"

In our verses, Ezekiel has an experience we could call an "End of Watch-man."

By the rivers of Babylon, the exiled Jews Were anxious for news from Jerusalem. They had already received news from God, however. For 7yrs Ezekiel had been providing news to them *in advance* via prophecy. The Temple & the City were going to fall.

The captive Jews rejected his message, convinced God must protect His Temple.

Ezekiel's first watch ended with a blunt message from Jerusalem: "The City has fallen."

When covering lengthy Old Testament passages, it is helpful to use a clear, conversational version of the Bible. Today, we'll use the New Living Translation.

Ezk 33:1 Once again a message came to me from the LORD:

Ezk 33:2 "Son of man, give your people this message: 'When I bring an army against a country, the people of that land choose one of their own to be a watchman.

Ezk 33:3 When the watchman sees the enemy coming, he sounds the alarm to warn the people.

Ezk 33:4 Then if those who hear the alarm refuse to take action, it is their own fault if they die.

Ezk 33:5 They heard the alarm but ignored it, so the responsibility is theirs. If they had listened to the warning, they could have saved their lives.

Ezk 33:6 But if the watchman sees the enemy coming and doesn't sound the alarm to warn the people, he is responsible for their captivity. They will die in their sins, but I will hold the watchman responsible for their deaths.'

It is a simple illustration from everyday life in a walled city.

Usually **"the people** of that land **choose** one of their **own** to be a Watchman." People didn't choose Ezekiel. God chose him. After reading both Jeremiah & Ezekiel, you'd agree that anyone they chose would lie about what was going to happen. People tend to choose what they want to hear, not what they need to hear.

Ezekiel also didn't choose himself. Believers often push forward, overestimating their abilities. That's likely why Scripture features so many reluctant servants. Eagerness isn't wrong, but it's not a fruit of the Spirit.

Let God do your choosing.

This exhortation to Ezekiel about his responsibilities & the consequences of disobedience is really for the benefit of the Jews. Because Ezekiel was a righteous person, he would faithfully conduct his watching & warning. The onus would be on them.

Notice this parallelism: "[The Watchman] is responsible for their **captivity**. They will die in their sins, but I will hold the Watchman responsible for their **deaths**." Being killed or being taken captive were the two possibilities. This is not about eternal life. Not even a little.

Ezk 33:7 "Now, son of man, I am making you a watchman for the people of Israel. Therefore, listen to what I say and warn them for me.

God commissioned Ezekiel to a *second* watch.

What greater honor than being given more to do? Every Christian longs to serve more. Talk to Jesus about what that looks like in your life.

Ezk 33:8 If I announce that some wicked people are sure to die and you fail to tell them to change their ways, then they will die in their sins, and I will hold you responsible for their deaths.

Ezk 33:9 But if you warn them to repent and they don't repent, they will die in their sins, but you will have saved yourself.

"Saved yourself" *from death*. Again, **not** eternal life.

In Deuteronomy twenty-eight, God promised His chosen nation blessings if they obeyed Him, but "curses" (His word, not mine) if they disobeyed. One example was rain & rainfall:

- In Deuteronomy 28:12 the blessing for obedience was, "The LORD will open to you His good treasure, the heavens, to give the rain to your land in its season..."
- In Deuteronomy 28:24 the curse for disobedience was, "The LORD will change the rain of your land to powder and dust; from the heaven it shall come down on you until you are destroyed."

Rain means **rain**; condensed moisture of atmosphere falling in drops. It isn't a metaphor for *spiritual* blessings & curses from Heaven.

If you're still not convinced this is not about eternal life, ask yourself this question: "Does God condemn **you** for **my** disobedience?" Of course not.

Ezk 33:10 "Son of man, give the people of Israel this message: You are saying, 'Our sins are heavy upon us; we are wasting away! How can we survive?'

Ezk 33:11 As surely as I live, says the Sovereign LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of wicked people. I only want them to turn from their wicked ways so they can live. Turn! Turn from your wickedness, O people of Israel! Why should you die?

The people claimed their sins were too heavy, but not from conviction. They blamed God for the burden. Ever met someone like that? They act hopeless, when all they need is to repent. God doesn't want to crush you. He wants to carry your burden(s).

After listening to a believer share their burdens, we could ask them to choose:
"Crush? or Carry?"

Do you believe that God wishes sinners to turn to Him? Your immediate answer to that says a lot about what you believe about God's character.

Second Peter 3:9 is similar in presenting God's wishes: "The Lord is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance."

Reformed pastor J. Montgomery Boice commented, *"Second Peter 3:9 is not talking about the salvation of all men and women, but only of the elect... God has delayed [Christ's return]... because He wants to bring to repentance all whom He has determined in advance will be gathered in."*

We argue that "all" means whosoever will believe.

Ezk 33:12 "Son of man, give your people this message: The righteous behavior of righteous people will not save them if they turn to sin, nor will the wicked behavior of wicked people destroy them if they repent and turn from their sins.

The Jews in Jerusalem 'worshipped' the LORD alongside idols. They thought this would insulate them from punishment. It would not. Can't serve two masters.

Ezk 33:13 When I tell righteous people that they will live, but then they sin, expecting their past righteousness to save them, then none of their righteous acts will be remembered. I will destroy them for their sins.

The CEV translates this, "These people will certainly be **put to death** because of their sins." They would suffer Capital Punishment.

California's legal framework is comprised of:

1. Tens of thousands of statutes across 29 codes.
2. Approximately 396,000 regulatory restrictions.
3. Numerous local ordinances.

If you get a speeding ticket, you cannot argue that you kept hundreds of thousands of other laws, expecting the Judge to overlook the one law you broke.

Ezk 33:14 And suppose I tell some wicked people that they will surely die, but then they turn from their sins and do what is just and right.

Ezk 33:15 For instance, they might give back a debtor's security, return what they have stolen, and obey my life-giving laws, no longer doing what is evil. If they do this, then they will surely live and not die.

Ezk 33:16 None of their past sins will be brought up again, for they have done what is just and right, and they will surely live.

These verses picture life in Israel as it was meant to be - sin confronted, repented from, followed by obedience, and the sure promise of blessing and life in the land.

Ezk 33:17 "Your people are saying, 'The Lord isn't doing what's right,' but it is they who are not doing what's right.

Ezk 33:18 For again I say, when righteous people turn away from their righteous behavior and turn to evil, they will die.

Ezk 33:19 But if wicked people turn from their wickedness and do what is just and right, they will live.

- Obey Him, and they would enjoy an abundant **life** in the Promised Land.
- Disobey him, and they'd be dying a slow **death**."

Ezk 33:20 O people of Israel, you are saying, 'The Lord isn't doing what's right.' But I judge each of you according to your deeds."

Jeremiah was God's prophet in Jerusalem He warned that the Jews felt invincible because of the Temple. But its sacrificial system showed God would not overlook sin.

Ezk 33:21 On January 8, during the twelfth year of our captivity, a survivor from Jerusalem came to me and said, "The city has fallen!"

Much that outwardly marked Israel as God's chosen - His presence, the Temple, the city, and the land - was now gone.

Ezk 33:22 The previous evening the LORD had taken hold of me and given me back my voice. So I was able to speak when this man arrived the next morning.

I forgot Ezekiel was voluntarily mute for most of 7 years. It forced him to act-out the prophecies he received. That may seem like a hindrance, but if you ask me, signs are often a better communicator than words.

Ezk 33:23 Then this message came to me from the LORD:

Ezk 33:24 "Son of man, the scattered remnants of Israel living among the ruined cities keep saying, 'Abraham was only one man, yet he gained possession of the entire land. We are many; surely the land has been given to us as a possession.'

Ezk 33:25 So tell these people, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: You eat meat with blood in it, you worship idols, and you murder the innocent. Do you really think the land should be yours?

Ezk 33:26 Murderers! Idolaters! Adulterers! Should the land belong to you?

They appeal to Abraham. The LORD listened, then responded, "I know Abraham. I walked with Abraham. Abraham obeyed My voice and kept My covenant. Judah - **you're no Abraham."**

Ezk 33:27 "Say to them, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: As surely as I live, those living in the ruins will die by the sword. And I will send wild animals to eat those living in the open fields. Those hiding in the forts and caves will die of disease.

Ezk 33:28 I will completely destroy the land and demolish her pride. Her arrogant power will come to an end. The mountains of Israel will be so desolate that no one will even travel through them.

Ezk 33:29 When I have completely destroyed the land because of their detestable sins, then they will know that I am the LORD.'

God warned the survivors would die by sword, beasts, and plague, and the desolate land would testify to their sin.

This pivotal chapter marks the start of "The Time of the Gentiles," when the Jews no longer have full control of Jerusalem.

- It began with the captivity.
- It continues today.
- It ends when the prophesied King, the Son of David, returns and has sole control of Jerusalem.

Ezk 33:30 "Son of man, your people talk about you in their houses and whisper about you at the doors. They say to each other, 'Come on, let's go hear the prophet tell us what the LORD is saying!'

Ezk 33:31 So my people come pretending to be sincere and sit before you. They listen to your words, but they have no intention of doing what you say. Their mouths are full of lustful words, and their hearts seek only after money.

Ezk 33:32 You are very entertaining to them like someone who sings love songs with a beautiful voice or plays fine music on an instrument. They hear what you say, but they don't act on it!

Ezk 33:33 But when all these terrible things happen to them - as they certainly will - then they will know a prophet has been among them."

The cry, "The City has fallen!" would have struck Ezekiel like a blow to the heart. Yes, he had seen it coming. He had carried that burden for seven long years. But as a believer, and as God's prophet, he must have still hoped for repentance. To know Jerusalem was lost, and that the name of the LORD would be dragged through the mud by Gentiles - it would have pierced him deeply.

I'll risk saying it. Ezekiel may have felt like a failed Watchman. Given the chapter's tone and human nature, I know I would have.

This is a wonderfully tender way of God saying to Ezekiel, "Well done My good and faithful servant."

Are we Watchmen? Sure, but not the same way.

The church, and by that I mean Church Age believers, are described as a household of faith, consisting of living stones, put together as a holy habitation, being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit. As a household of believers, each of us is Watchman to the other:

- We are Watchmen by heeding the many "one another" verses in the Bible. (Look them up).
- We are Watchmen when we discover and exercise the gifts that God has given us that are anointed by God the Holy Spirit.

(Don't stress about discovering your gift or gifts. It shouldn't be a burden, but a blessing. Just start hanging around Christians, especially the church when it meets, and get to know people. Pretty soon you'll be ministering to them in ways that the Lord puts on your heart).

- We are Watchmen when we are *watching* for the Lord to return.

I discovered this compilation of ten of the New Testament's encouragements for our Watch:

"As believers, we are called to live in eager anticipation of our Lord Jesus Christ's return. Our citizenship is in Heaven, from which we await our Savior, who will transform our humble bodies to be like His glorious one. We are to wait for the blessed hope - the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. Let us not be like those who sleep, but let us be alert and sober, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. For the Lord Himself will descend from Heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. Therefore, encourage one another with these words. Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for He who promised is faithful. And now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming. Let us be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near. May we fix our hope completely on the grace to be brought to us at the revelation of Jesus Christ, and as we eagerly await His return, let us purify ourselves, just as He is pure."