

Ezekiel 33:7-11

I'm fairly confident in assuming that everyone present here today is familiar with a **railroad crossing**. Especially in our climate, filled with extremes of hot and cold, railroad crossings can become quite a **road hazard**. Railroad crossing **signs** point out well in advance that a crossing is coming up, and quite often, especially if the tracks are in **disrepair**, it's a good idea to **slow down** a bit. Perhaps a few of you have had to have the front end on your car **realigned** because you failed to **pay attention** to such signs. That advance **warning** makes those signs very **valuable**. But of course, there are **worse** things that can happen at a railroad crossing. Such places have been the site of **crippling**, and even **fatal** accidents. But thanks to a little electronic device found right at the crossing, those accidents are **few** and far between. This electronic eye serves as a **watchman**, and it sets off a whole series of **warning signals**. When we see those long wooden bars blocking the roadway, and the flashing red lights, and we hear those clanging bells, we know that a **train** is quickly approaching the intersection, even though we may not be able to **see** it. The electronic **watchman** alerts us to the fact that **danger** is near. It makes us **stop, look, and listen** - in order to avoid a terrible **crash**.

God has established **us** as **watchmen** - watchmen over **our** souls, as well as over the souls of **others**. That means we have a certain amount of **responsibility** - a responsibility to give audible and visible **warnings** as we see **danger** approaching. This morning, as we consider that responsibility, I would offer you this question, "**Watchman, What Are You Doing?**" The LORD Himself exhorts us to do **three** things - **not** to stop, look, and listen - but rather to **stop, listen, and speak!**

The LORD came to Ezekiel and called him "*Son of man.*" That's a name which He uses more than **90 times** in the Book of Ezekiel alone. But why use **that** particular name? Why didn't He just call him **Ezekiel**? As always, the LORD had something **specific** in mind. Really, the LORD might just as well have been speaking to any one of **us**, because we are **all** sons of men - and that's exactly the **point**. Ezekiel was **human** - possessing all the attributes which are **common** to mankind - including a **sinful nature**. Even though the LORD had **honored** Ezekiel by sending him many **visions**, the LORD also continually reminded Ezekiel that just like **all** men, he was made of **clay**, and would one day return again to **dust** and **ashes**. The LORD was keeping Ezekiel **humble** by calling him "*Son of man.*"

You may not know this, but Ezekiel never really **wanted** to be a prophet. He wanted to be a **priest**. But, just about the time Ezekiel was ready to begin his service for the LORD in the **temple**, the **Babylonians** came and started **deporting** people. And wouldn't you know it, they took **Ezekiel** too. Imagine the **frustration** which Ezekiel must have experienced. Picture yourself as a student for the public ministry. You have just completed four years of college and an additional four years of Seminary training. You have received your **call** from a Christian congregation, and have moved into your new home. Then, just as you are stepping into the pulpit for the very first time to speak to the flock under your care, and begin to carry out the **work** which you have been trained to do, the heavens open up, and the LORD **returns** in all His glory saying, "It's **Judgment Day!**" Now, even though that's an announcement which all believers are looking **forward** to hearing, that would be pretty **frustrating**, wouldn't it - to be so **close** to doing what you have **prepared** to do, only to have your call **taken away**. Ezekiel experienced a **similar** frustration, however the LORD had not **completely** taken away Ezekiel's call. He had merely **changed** it from being a **priest** to being a **prophet**. My guess is that Ezekiel would have **preferred** to serve as a **priest**, offering sacrifices for the sins of the people - rather than to prophesy the fall of **Jerusalem**, and the **judgment** of Judah.

It was going to be a **difficult** task, as the preaching of the **Law** always is. But to make matters even **worse** for Ezekiel, like many of the **other** prophets Ezekiel knew **ahead** of time that his message would not be **accepted** by the people of Judah. God told him, "*The house of Israel is not willing to listen to you, because they are not willing to listen to Me, for the whole house of Israel is **hardened and obstinate.***" I don't **blame** Ezekiel for being unhappy. **Nobody** wants to be put into a situation where he **knows** he will be **unsuccessful!**

But Ezekiel didn't have a **choice**. The LORD said, "*I have **made** you a watchman for the house of Israel.*" Ezekiel was compelled to **stop** what he **had** been doing, and become a **watchman** - because that's what **God** wanted him to do. But God had **also** taken Ezekiel **out** of the land of Judah, **away** from the temple of the LORD, and made him a watchman in a **strange land**. God was saying, "Ezekiel, **stop!** I want you to **change!**" And that's the **same** message which God has brought to each of **us**. At the time of our **baptism** God told us to **stop** being children of this **world** - to turn **away** from the works of **Satan**, and to start being **His** children. God also sends us **other** reminders - reminders to **stay** on His path - to **stop** leading **sinful** lives - and to love **God** most of all, by following

His will for our lives. Just as a practical example, God may place us into the **hospital** to make us realize that we need our **health** to carry on His work. Or He may lead us to a different **job**, so that we can have more **time** to serve Him. He may even bring us near to **death**, so that we again realize that **He** controls our life from its **beginning** to its **end**. Whatever God does in our life, we can save ourselves a lot of **worry** and a lot of **trouble**, if we simply **stop** what we are doing - and do what **He** says.

Well, God made Ezekiel a **watchman**, and again, He has done the same thing for **us**. **Watchman, What Are You Doing?** How are you fulfilling God's expectations of you as a watchman? Let's look at what those expectations **are**. God told Ezekiel, "*Listen to the Word I speak.*" Ezekiel was to **listen**. God had **told** him to **discourage** the people from thinking that they would **quickly** return from their captivity in Babylon, because it was going to take **70 years**. God also told Ezekiel to emphasize the fact that this judgment was **just**, and to teach the people to **repent**, and finally to offer them **comfort** while they waited. Ezekiel could have **ignored** those commands, but that would have made him a pretty poor **watchman**, wouldn't it?

What kind of watchmen are **we**? Do we **listen** when God speaks to us? And if so, do we listen **closely**? And again, if we do, do we **enjoy** listening? God has made us all **watchmen**, and a vital part of **watching** - is **listening**. If a watchman fails to listen, perhaps by falling asleep, he is obviously in the **wrong**. But what if he **does** watch and listen, and simply doesn't **like** what he sees and hears? Perhaps he sees an army or some other danger approaching on the horizon. What should he **do** with that kind of information? God told Ezekiel, "*Give them warning from Me.*"

Ezekiel had to do **more** than just **listen** - he had to **speak**. God told him, "*When I say to the wicked, 'O wicked man, you will surely die,' and you do **not** speak out to **dissuade** him from his ways, that wicked man **will die** for his sin, and I will hold **you** accountable for his blood.*" If God had sent a message of destruction to Ezekiel, and he didn't pass it on to the Israelites, for whatever reason, then the **Israelites** would **die** in their sin, and it would be **Ezekiel's** fault. That's important for us to remember in our **outreach** efforts. God has set up a kind of **relay system** for getting His Word out to all people, and **we** are a **part** of it. God has given His message of salvation to the **Church**. Any church which does not train **pastors and teachers** to take that Word to **others**, will be judged as a

poor watchman. On the **next** step, any **pastors and teachers** who do not train their **people** to take the message still farther, will **also** be judged as **poor** watchmen. And finally, **any** individual Christians who do not carry the message of Jesus to **others**, will **also** be judged as **poor** watchmen. God has given us His Word to **speak** to others, and we **must** speak that Word - or be held **accountable** for the **souls** who were **lost** because of our **silence**.

On the other hand, God promises **blessings** to the **faithful** watchman. He said, *“If you **do** warn the wicked man to turn from his ways and he does **not** do so, he will **die** for his sin, but you will have **saved** yourself.”* In **either** case, the **wicked** man will be **lost** - as is **always** the case with those who reject the Word of God. God is not **mocked**. Every sin must be **paid** for, and God will receive **everything** He has coming. Yet, in this **last** case, the **watchman** will be saved. The Christian will **not** be held responsible for any soul which is lost as long as he was **faithful** in carrying out his **duties** as a **watchman**.

My fellow **Watchmen**, **What Are We Doing?** Are we wide **awake**, **hearing** the Word of the LORD **faithfully** and **frequently** - watching out for **sin** in our **own** lives, and for **dangers** which may **harm** our faith? And taking it a step farther, are we watching for sin and weakness in the lives of our **fellow Christians** - so that we may point out the **dangers** toward which **they** are heading and **urge** them to return to the **LORD's** way? And taking it farther yet, do we speak to **non-Christians** about the horrible **consequences** of their sins, and tell them about their **need** for a **Savior**? Do we invite them to come and learn **more** about that Savior in our church services, or in our Bible Classes? Many times we **do**, however, there's always room for **improvement** in **all** of our lives. May the LORD continue to **strengthen** us, and increase our **zeal** through His Word and Sacraments - that we may ever be watchmen who are willing to **stop** anything we are doing, in order to **listen** to our LORD, and **speak** His Word to others. Amen.