

Ezekiel 33

The Role of the Prophet

Read Ezekiel 33:1-9: What happens when a prophet decides that there is no point in continuing to put out God's warning messages? What if we conclude that nobody is listening? The prophet will become responsible for that blood and loss of life himself. There are examples of reluctant prophets. Jonah was a prophet who knew that God would bring judgement, unless the people repented. Jonah did not want the Assyrians to repent, because they were so cruel to his people. Jonah ran from his responsibility to sound the alarm. God literally would not let him slip out of it.

The scriptures describe the role of the prophet in a number of ways. In general, they are people who receive God's messages (through visions or dreams) and share them with the people. Prophecy comes in two flavors. There is the common usage of foretelling. This involves God using the prophet to tell the people what will happen in the future. Secondly, there is forthtelling. That means that someone is breaking down scripture for public consumption.

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. (2 Timothy 2:15)

Prophets are also called seers, because they have insight into the invisible spiritual world. In this chapter, God calls Ezekiel the prophet a watchman. Historically, people have ignored the true prophets and listened to the false prophets.

A watchman is like a sentinel or a guard or a protector. He is in place both day and night. His job is to keep his eyes on the horizon and search for incoming danger. If he sees an incoming threat he is supposed to blow his trumpet and wake up the city to take action. It is an early-warning system. A good watchman would be vigilant and not sleep or become distracted.

The trumpet described here is a shofar. This is the special ram's horn that symbolizes urgent prayer to heaven. The prophet may not be a priest, but he is called to intercede as well. The shofar is a spiritual alarm clock that is used during Rosh Hoshana. The Jews consider this the most dangerous time of each year, as so many of God's judgements have fallen during this time. It is a call to action to turn away from the mundane daily activities and deal with our own imminent danger from sin.

It is easy to get people excited about an incoming meteorite; but a little harder to get people to realize that they are asleep spiritually. Real Christians are to be awake and tuned in to what is happening. Our awareness and readiness relate directly to our relationship with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit like a beacon or a lamp bringing awareness to our dark situations. To spiritually slumber is to have a light that is not functioning.

“Then the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. ² Now five of them were wise, and five were foolish. ³ Those who were foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them, ⁴ but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. ⁵ But while the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept. ⁶ “And at midnight a cry was heard: ‘Behold, the bridegroom is coming; go out to meet him!’ ⁷ Then all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps. ⁸ And the foolish said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’ ⁹ But the wise answered, saying, ‘No, lest there should not be enough for us and you; but go rather to those who sell, and buy for yourselves.’ ¹⁰ And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding; and the door was shut. ¹¹ “Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, ‘Lord, Lord, open to us!’ ¹² But he answered and said, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you.’ ¹³ “Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming. (Matthew 25)

True believers are not merely educated on the truths of scripture. They are keyed up to see it playing out in their world. They are paying attention, and they care about ongoing spiritual activity. The Holy Spirit will not allow you to be an indifferent observer. Spiritual saints are also characterized as being sober and dialed in. They are also quick to shed any hindrances or influence that could cause them to forget God’s priorities. To not take action is a cause for judgement. An apathetic Christian is a spiritually asleep Christian.

¹⁷ Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is. ¹⁸ And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹ speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, ²⁰ giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ submitting to one another in the fear of God. (Ephesians 5)

We have been entrusted with much scripture and history. We have even more accountability than the ancient Jews.

But he who did not know, yet committed things deserving of stripes, shall be beaten with few. For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more. (Luke 12:48)

The Enemy of our Soul

One reason that we need to be discerning and vigilant is that our enemy is subtle. Satan camouflages and mischaracterizes what he is doing.

Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, “Has God indeed said, ‘You shall not eat of every tree of the garden’?” (Genesis 3:1)

¹⁶ “Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves. ¹⁷ But beware of men, for they will deliver you up to councils and scourge you in their synagogues. (Matthew 10)

The prophet may not only be communicating what danger is coming their way. He might be telling them that they are way off track

Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent. Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you. (Revelation 3)

God is bringing a sword onto the land himself. It is not about the bad guys. In this case, God’s people are the terrorizing bad guys. The terrorists are his appointed agents of correction. Those who turn a deaf ear will pay with their life. Those who refuse to pass on the warning will be accountable to God for the loss of life. We are more accountable than unbelievers.

¹⁷ For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God? ¹⁸ Now “If the righteous one is scarcely saved, Where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?” (1 Peter 4)

Today we have many dangerous ideals attempting to take control in our land. Are they the issue, or are we the issue...while they are just the symptom?

¹⁴ if My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land. (2 Chronicles 7:14)

Read Ezekiel 33:10-20: We had mentioned that historically people have not listened to true prophets. They chose to listen to the more appealing messages of the false prophets. The other problem that can happen with the prophetic messages

is that the people will fixate on their hopeless predicament and become paralyzed with fear. Even watching too much news can leave you with a sense of helplessness.

God is not dropping these heavy messages on us to become anxious and so distracted that we cannot focus. We can either pray or worry.

For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind. (2 Timothy 1:7)

It is like God is telling us that we have made ourselves targets. He is telling us to change up what we are in the midst of rapidly. There have been a few examples of men who saw the signs from God and moved with haste to rectify the situation. King Josiah is one of my favorite characters in the Bible. He repented and went full speed in the opposite direction immediately. Josiah saw that God was on the verge of destroying Israel for idolatry and other sins.

¹³ “Go, inquire of the LORD for me, for the people and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book that has been found; for great is the wrath of the LORD that is aroused against us, because our fathers have not obeyed the words of this book, to do according to all that is written concerning us.” ¹⁴ So Hilkiah the priest, Ahikam, Achbor, Shaphan, and Asaiah went to Huldah the prophetess, the wife of Shallum the son of Tikvah, the son of Harhas, keeper of the wardrobe. (She dwelt in Jerusalem in the Second Quarter.) And they spoke with her. ¹⁵ Then she said to them, “Thus says the LORD God of Israel, ‘Tell the man who sent you to Me, ¹⁶ “Thus says the LORD: ‘Behold, I will bring calamity on this place and on its inhabitants—all the words of the book which the king of Judah has read— ¹⁷ because they have forsaken Me and burned incense to other gods, that they might provoke Me to anger with all the works of their hands. Therefore My wrath shall be aroused against this place and shall not be quenched.’ ” ’ ¹⁸ But as for the king of Judah, who sent you to inquire of the LORD, in this manner you shall speak to him, ‘Thus says the LORD God of Israel: “Concerning the words which you have heard— ¹⁹ because your heart was tender, and you humbled yourself before the LORD when you heard what I spoke against this place and against its inhabitants, that they would become a desolation and a curse, and you tore your clothes and wept before Me, I also have heard you,” says the LORD. ²⁰ “Surely, therefore, I will gather you to your fathers, and you shall be gathered to your grave in peace; and your eyes shall not see all the calamity which I will bring on this place.” ’ ” So they brought back word to the king. (2 Kings 22)

There are also examples of unbelievers who heard the prophecy and took immediate evasive action.

⁴ And Jonah began to enter the city on the first day's walk. Then he cried out and said, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" ⁵ So the people of Nineveh believed God, proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least of them. ⁶ Then word came to the king of Nineveh; and he arose from his throne and laid aside his robe, covered himself with sackcloth and sat in ashes. ⁷ And he caused it to be proclaimed and published throughout Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything; do not let them eat, or drink water. ⁸ But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily to God; yes, let every one turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands. ⁹ Who can tell if God will turn and relent, and turn away from His fierce anger, so that we may not perish? ¹⁰ Then God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it. (Jonah 3)

God has no interest in killing people. That is his last resort. He is saying take a sharp turn or die. It is surprising that this message is not only for unbelievers. We might have applications to our own lives here. God is clearly also talking to righteous people who are way out of bounds on one issue. All of their good living will not stop this plague if they do not make the necessary adjustments and get on the right side of a certain issue. Think that one through! We can be in the word and fellowship and still step into harm's way on an issue.

The problems that come to those who ignore God are insurmountable. The scriptures describe problems with perplexity that are beyond solutions that are coming our way as we approach the end of this age. These unsolvable problems are designed to bring untold numbers to Christ.

²⁵ "And there will be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars; and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring; ²⁶ men's hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. (Luke 21)

Today, God has sent us a president who is going full speed to fix decades of bad decisions. He is being dogged and attacked at every turn. Do we feel, like these Jews, that we do not deserve to have to endure all of these crazy people? The better question might be what we need to become engaged in our culture.

These Jews were blaming God for these bad omens. It is like people who argue that a loving God would not allow a tragedy. This is a disconnection with every message that God had spoken to the Jews. God is righteous. He will not saddle us with circumstances that are inappropriate. Placing blame is a sign of spiritual immaturity.

looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, (Hebrews 12)

Billy Graham said that if God does not judge America, he owes Sodom and Gomorrah an apology.

Read Ezekiel 33:21-29: Amidst all of this imagery of doom, it happens. Jerusalem has fallen! This is the second siege that flattens and burns the whole city. Ezekiel points out that the people of Judah are nothing like their patriarch Abraham. They are the opposite in so many ways. Their false prophets have reassured them against all prophecy. They are fully given to idolatry. Discrediting the messenger is not a good plan.

But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. For they are not all Israel who are of Israel, (Romans 9:6)

Read Ezekiel 33:30-33: God is telling Ezekiel that people are listening to what he has to say, with outward endearment and interest...but their lives are too caught up into their own pursuits. Nothing happens. His words are just like a song to them. They will continue with business as usual.

¹³ Therefore the Lord said: “Inasmuch as these people draw near with their mouths And honor Me with their lips, But have removed their hearts far from Me, And their fear toward Me is taught by the commandment of men, (Isaiah 29)