

A WATCHMAN ON THE WALLS

EZEKIEL 3:16-21

One of the deadliest disasters in recorded history occurred the day after Christmas 2004. A 9.1 magnitude earthquake, in the Indian Ocean, set off a series of tsunamis with waves as high as 100 feet.

It ended up killing 230,000 people in 14 countries.

One of the heaviest hit areas was Phuket Island in southern Thailand. Thousands of vacationers died.

But not on Maikhao Beach... thanks to a 10 year-old little girl, named Tilly Smith. Tilly had studied tsunamis in her geography class, so when she noticed the ocean bubbling and rushing away from the shore, she knew exactly what was happening. She told her mom they needed to get off the beach. It was a tsunami.

Her mom wasn't even sure what Tilly meant until her daughter referred to it as *a tidal wave*. Tilly and her mom convinced the others to evacuate the beach.

Minutes later the giant wave surged over the shore demolishing everything in its path. The resort was destroyed, but thanks to a 10 year-old, their beach was one of the few places on the Phuket Island where no one was killed or even seriously injured. Afterwards, the hotel manager referred to little Tilly as a *"hero."*

Lives were saved when a young, ten year-old girl saw danger and was willing to tell someone.

This AM we want to talk about another unlikely hero who warned his people of danger. A man called Ezekiel. His name means, “[God will strengthen.](#)”

And indeed God did. The Lord chose Ezekiel to be His spokesman to the Hebrews for more than 22 years.

Ezekiel was born a priest - one of a cast of thousands, who trained to serve God in the rituals of the Temple in Jerusalem. As a priest his chief duties would be lighting candles, and making bread, and blowing the trumpets, and arranging wood on the altar, but God had a far more important mission for Ezekiel...

His world was upended in 597 BC when the Babylon army visited Jerusalem - and as a show of force, took a few of Jerusalem's noble Jews back to Babel.

Ezekiel was one of them. He settled on the shores of the Chebar River in the heart of what is today Iraq. The Chebar was actually a canal that connected the two great rivers of Babylon - the Tigris and Euphrates.

Today, this whole region in Iraq is known as “[Al Kilfi,](#)” which is Arabic for “[Ezekiel.](#)” *The tomb of Ezekiel* is located in the region, on the shores of the Euphrates.

Ezekiel 1:1 says that His ministry began in “[the thirtieth year](#)” - *but the thirtieth year of what?* I think the best answer is the thirtieth year of Ezekiel's own life.

According to Numbers 4:3, though a priest was groomed for his duties since the time of his birth, he couldn't actually begin his ministry until the age of 30.

Imagine, what this meant for Ezekiel... He had trained his whole life for the priesthood, to serve God in the Jerusalem Temple. The day comes when he can finally ply his trade and be used by God, but now he's 600 miles from Jerusalem - far from the Temple courts.

How frustrating, to look forward to something your whole life only to be deprived of it on the eve of its commencement. What if on the night before your 16th birthday, the state legislature changed the driving age to 21. *How disappointing would that be? Depressing!*

And that's how Ezekiel could've felt had his eyes not been on God. Rather than be a priest with no Temple, God brings His servant Ezekiel into a dynamic relationship with Himself. He makes Ezekiel a prophet, and gives him a vision that alters his life forever.

As a priest, Ezekiel probably had a sedentary view of God. He saw God as anchored and fixed. Jewish worship was highly centralized. Jews from all over were suppose to travel to Jerusalem to worship God at the Temple. The Jewish Temple is referred to in Scripture as "God's footstool." In the OT the Temple was the one place on earth where God could be found.

But that never meant that God was limited to His Temple, and this is what God stresses with Ezekiel.

God gives Ezekiel a vision of His glorious throne, but it's not a stationary throne. It's mobile. It's a throne-chariot - a throne on wheels. Ezekiel sees it move.

When God decides “*wheels up*” - angels, specifically cherubim, with wings, propel God’s throne wherever He wishes. Remember, Elijah was taken to heaven in a fiery chariot. This is what Ezekiel now sees. And it forever changes this Jewish priest’s concept of God.

The God of Israel isn’t a God who sits isolated in a Temple. He’s not a God who resides behind four walls.

Rather, He’s a God who roams the heavens. He’s always on the move. Babylon is as much His domain as Jerusalem. He is the God of all Earth and heaven.

Ezekiel would say Amen to verses like Deuteronomy 33:26, “There is no one like... God... who rides the heavens to help you, and in His excellency on the clouds.” Or 2 Samuel 22:11, which says of God, “He rode upon a cherub, and flew; He was seen upon the wings of the wind.” God is everywhere, all of the time.

And Ezekiel was called to be God’s mouthpiece to His people. For two decades, Ezekiel was God’s press secretary to the Jews who were living in Babylon.

And it wasn’t just the vision he saw of God’s throne-chariot that shaped the tone of his ministry, Ezekiel was also given an illustration. In Chapter 3, and again in Chapter 33, he’s told of **the watchman on the wall**.

In Chapter 3 God calls Ezekiel into the ministry. And in the succeeding chapters we discover just how excruciatingly difficult that ministry was for the prophet.

Over and over God had Ezekiel act out spiritual skits, living parables, that dramatized lessons for His people. In 24:24

God said to the Jews, *“Ezekiel is a sign to you.”* Through Ezekiel’s life God spoke to His people. But these skits weren’t easy. They required sacrifice.

Some of what God called Ezekiel to do was tough on his body. At one point he laid on his side for over a year. Imagine, the bed sores and muscle spasms...

Some of what Ezekiel did was even tougher on his ego. At times he was misunderstood - even mocked.

And his signs were most brutal on his own heart!

His prophecies reached a crescendo in Chapter 24.

On the day Jerusalem was besieged and surrounded by invading troops - in Babel, another death occurred.

Ezekiel’s wife died suddenly. Perhaps from a stroke or heart attack. But two deaths occurred the same day.

The Prophet’s wife died to illustrate that God’s wife, Jerusalem, was dead in sin and judgment had begun.

And that’s not all, when Mrs. Ezekiel dies, the Prophet Ezekiel becomes mute. He’s silenced. Ezekiel loses his speech. Once the siege of Jerusalem began, God’s warnings ended. Judgment was now a reality.

God had said all He was going to say. God went silent, and He made sure his prophet was silent too.

It wasn’t until 23 months later, after the fall of Jerusalem, that a messenger reaches Babylon with news of the city’s destruction. That’s when God opens Ezekiel’s mouth. This time He speaks *words of hope* and *promises of restoration* for Jews and all mankind.

The first half of Ezekiel's ministry was a forecast of judgment. While, the second half was the promise of new birth. **But both halves begin with the same illustration... Ezekiel is God's watchman on the wall.**

Like the little girl, Tilly Smith, on the beach at Phuket Island - and like Ezekiel - we too need to sound the alarm. There is a tsunami of judgment headed our way.

The God who loves us enough to send His only Son to die in our place, will judge us if we continue in our rebellion and make a mockery of His plans. A tsunami is coming toward the shore that no one can escape.

It brings with it both the judgment of sin and the blessing of new birth, depending on the attitude of people's hearts... But either way, people need to be alerted. Someone needs to trumpet the news.

This is the lesson hammered home to Ezekiel twice. In Chapter 33 and in Ezekiel 3:16-21. That's where we read, "Now it came to pass at the end of seven days that the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "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: 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.

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.

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.

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.”

In Ezekiel’s day urban life went on within walled cities. Towns of antiquity were surrounded by high stone walls. In fact, an approaching caravan could tell from a distance a lot about a city’s prominence and prosperity by the size, shape, and strength of its walls.

A city’s walls provided its citizens two things...

First, walls provided **protection**. They kept out invading armies, looting bandits, wild animals. Anything that might disturb the peace and cause people harm.

But second, they also provided **perspective**.

Because most ancient walls had no windows the inhabitants of the city were unable to see what was going on beyond their own little world and daily routine.

The walls could create a false sense of security. The city’s occupants could be lulled into assuming that all was well; when danger was just outside their walls.

That’s why every city employed *watchmen or look-outs* - who were stationed on top of the walls.

The watchmen provided the city an aerial view of what was going on in the surrounding countryside. And when they spotted danger, it was the watchman's duty to quickly blow the trumpet, and sound the alarm!

Understand, the watchman had a vantage point the people inside the city lacked. A vigilant look-out could see dangers at a distance. He could alert the people inside the city in time to prepare for what was coming.

And in a sense God had made Ezekiel a spiritual look-out, a *watchman on the wall*. Ezekiel had a vantage point his fellow Jews lacked. They were all wrapped up in their own personal world and daily grind.

Only Ezekiel saw life from the aerial view - *from heaven's perspective*. Ezekiel knew God. He studied God's Word. He understood the dangers of sin, and relished the blessings of God. Ezekiel was led by the Holy Spirit. He considered today in light of eternity.

Most of his Jewish peers were trapped in the daily rut. They were content with life within the walls. They had their bread and circuses - they lived for food and entertainment. As long as there was something to eat they didn't think much beyond the next party or holiday.

But Ezekiel realized there was more to life than what we can taste and touch - *what we can see and savor*.

Ezekiel knew we were made for more - that God created us for a higher purpose - that there's a hole in every human heart that only God Himself can fill. Ezekiel knew we were made for fellowship with God.

And he knew that without God we're headed for judgment. If we rebel against Him - if we spurn God's mercy, a tsunami is coming. Every sin has a payday.

And as God's watchman it was Ezekiel's job to sound the alarm and alert the people to this danger.

This is also every Christian's job. We too are spiritual look-outs. **God calls us to be watchmen on the wall. And He's positioned each of us at a spot on the wall.**

There are people around you - folks you see regularly *in your family, on your team, at your school, in your office, apart of your neighborhood - at the health club, or ballpark, or grocery store, or gas station...* you see them on a regular basis - and they're headed down the path without Jesus. They need to be warned.

Like Ezekiel, you are God's watchman - a divine look-out! You have a vantage point other people lack.

Our friends don't see what we see. They **can't** see what we see. Folks without God's Spirit are blind to the ways and will of God. They're dead in sin. Spiritually speaking, they can't see the hand in front of their face.

They're certainly oblivious to what God is doing in the world at large - judgments that lurk in the distance. They're living for today, with little thought of tomorrow.

But you're God's watchman. You have *His Word, His Spirit, His wisdom, His love, His promptings, His discernment.* You see the dangers - what's unbiblical, what's ungodly, what's unloving, what's unforgiving...

And God's word to Ezekiel is applicable to us...

If you embrace this responsibility and warn the folks within your walls - God will be pleased, perhaps they'll be saved, and you'll be spared unnecessary guilt.

But the reverse is also true. Ignore this responsibility as a watchman - care less about your fellow man - fail to warn the folks within your walls... and God will be disappointed, people you know will fall victim, and you will be to blame... *We need to be good look-outs.*

Let me share some interesting statistics...

I've read that 2% of all Christians are converted through media - literature, TV, radio, etc... 6% become believers through the influence of a particular pastor... another 6% through a church's evangelistic outreach...

But that leaves a whopping **86% of all Christians who embraced Jesus due to the efforts of a friend.** It's the personal care - the individual touch that reaches.

But here're the alarming statistics... It's reported only 5% of Christians in America have ever lead another person to Jesus... Even more troublesome, pollster, George Barna says **among born-again Christians only 53% even feel a responsibility to share their faith with other people.** That means nearly half of all Christians - not only don't share their faith with anyone else - they don't even sense the responsibility to do so.

In contrast, there are Korean churches that have an interesting qualification for membership. To join, you have to bring with you a person you've led to Christ.

Korean Christians take seriously their responsibility as a watchman - so much so, you can't be a church member until you lead someone to faith in Jesus.

The story is told of DL Moody. He had a habit of telling one person about Jesus every single day.

Once, late in the day, he realized he had gone about his business without fulfilling his usual commitment.

That's when he saw a man walking by, and asked him, "Sir, are you a Christian?" The man snapped back, "*You mind your own business!*" That's when Moody responded, "Sir, this is my business."

And sharing Jesus is also my business and your business. For we are God's watchmen on the wall.

As Christians we have different values - we live a different life - and sometimes people think we're *off the wall*, but we're *really on the wall* - the reason we're misunderstood is that we see more than others see.

We see God. He reveals Himself to our hearts.

We see His holiness and purity and justice. We also see our own sin, and we know we're not unlike other people. We realize that all humans have sinned. We see our need for a Savior. We see heaven and hell.

From the top of the wall we see more, and it's up to us to warn people loud and clear when we see danger on the horizon. If we fall asleep, or get lazy, or become distracted, or get apathetic... and don't warn the people we know, the story ends tragic for them and us.

To be a good watchman on the wall there are five words we need to remember - **empathize, recognize, verbalize, depressurize,** and **personalize.**

With the time we have left, let's look at each one...

First, to be a watchman you need to **empathize.**

In verse 16 God's commissioning of Ezekiel came at the end of a seven day period. Prior to those seven days, Ezekiel saw his vision of God's throne-chariot.

He saw God's glory, the stubbornness of the Jews, the determination his job would require. And when the vision was over he *just crashed.* He was exhausted.

Ezekiel was overwhelmed by all he saw. He spent the whole week processing and thinking... just chill'n.

Ezekiel will never see God, or others, or himself in the same way again. That's why the first requirement of a good watchman is to **rethink...** That's why he's stationed on top of the wall. It's a new view from there.

Down in the trenches - on the city streets - in the midst of the daily grind - *we tend to see people as problems...* People are *roadblocks, or annoyances, or obstacles, or dependents, or inconveniences, or pests.*

Driving down Highway 78 seldom do I view my fellow motorists as eternal souls headed to heaven or hell.

More often you see them as crazed knuckleheads who are a danger to my own personal survival. It's hard to muster much mercy or empathy from street level. That's why a watchman needs to get above it all, and learn to see people from a new perspective.

Once a man visited Dwight Moody, and told him he wanted to be a great soul winner like him. Moody told the man to go to the window and tell him what he saw.

He said, *“I see a street filled with traffic and pedestrians.”* Moody said *“Look again, and tell me what you see?”* He looked a second time, and replied, *“Well, I see people - men and women, boys and girls.”*

Finally, Moody walked to the window, and with tears in his eyes, he said, *“I see people going to hell without Jesus. And until you see people like that, you will not lead them to Christ.”* This is what it means to be on the wall. God wants us to have an eternal perspective.

People are not *just people* - they're forever beings that will one day pass from time into eternity - either everlasting bliss, or everlasting torment. On top of the wall we can see that. We can *empathize* for people.

Second, to be a watchman you need to **recognize**.

In Ezekiel's day there were dozens of villages and towns dotting the Judean countryside - Jerusalem was just one city. A watchman on the walls of Jerusalem wasn't responsible for alerting all the cities of Judah.

There were specific parameters to his accountability.

He was responsible for only those people within *his* own walls - within the sphere of his own influence.

And this is what you and I need to realize. **Every Christian has their own specific sphere of influence.**

Yes, Jesus calls us to go into all the world and preach the Gospel - but read the book of Acts, and you'll realize the NT church won the world for Jesus by each person taking care of his own slice of that world.

One day, God may lay it on your heart to go overseas to share the Gospel, **but for now who are the specific people within the sphere of your influence?**

The girls on your tennis team... the guy who works on your car... the business associate you interact with on a weekly basis... the clerk you see every time you go to the grocery store... your own family and friends?

Here's what I'd like for us all to do this AM. Get out your Announcement Sheet, and jot down two names.

Think of just two people in your life who don't know Jesus. You rub shoulders with them all the time, but you know you won't rub shoulders with them in eternity, if things don't change... if they don't receive Jesus.

I want you to start by simply praying for these two people over the next few weeks. I'm going to challenge you do do more, *but first just pray*. As a watchman an initial step for us is to *recognize* those within our walls.

When Mark Richt was first hired as the football coach of the Georgia Bulldogs, ESPN Magazine did an interview in which Coach Richt shared his Christian testimony. He became a believer in Jesus while working as a coaching assistant at Florida State...

In 1986 a Seminole football player, Pablo Lopez, was killed by a gunshot outside a party. The next day in a team meeting

Coach Bobby Bowden spoke about his own faith. He told players and coaches because he'd accepted Jesus he knew where he'd spend eternity.

That's when Bowden pointed to the empty chair where Lopez would've sat, and asked, "What if it was you? Do you know where you'd be spending eternity?"

The next day, Mark Richt visited Coach Bowden, and with his help embraced Jesus as his Lord and Savior.

Typically, you don't think of Bobby Bowden or any football coach as an evangelist. I doubt if that's how he views himself, but he was definitely a good watchman.

He didn't preach to the world, but he made sure his own players and assistant coaches - the people under his immediate influence knew the truth. That's what we need to do. *Who are the people within our walls?*

Third to be a watchman you need to **verbalize**.

For the next few weeks I've only asked you to pray for the two people who's names you jotted down.

It may take a couple of weeks to develop the proper empathy towards them - but realize, with each of these people praying for them will not be enough. Eventually, you're going to have to speak up... **and go verbal!**

"But Pastor Sandy, you don't understand, I believe in walking the walk. I believe in witnessing by example."

And I do too. But what good is *walking the walk* without eventually *talking the talk*. So what if people consider you a

good guy. They also need to know why you're a good guy. An example needs an explanation.

Imagine a watchman on the wall - he sees a gang of marauders from a distance. He's a faithful look-out.

From the moment he sees the distant dust cloud he keeps his eyes on the pack. He never takes his eyes off them. He follows the horses all the way into the city.

He even watches the men kill, and pillage, and burn.

But all he did was watch... does that make him a good watchman? No way! When the watchman sees a danger he has to sound an alarm. He has to shout loud and clear. In fact, it's his duty to make sure everyone within his walls receives the news. He has to go verbal!

It reminds me of the Christian who prayed, "[Lord, if you want me to witness to someone today give me a sign?](#)" Later that same day a big burly man sat down next to him on the bus. The bus was near empty, but the man sat right next to him in the adjacent seat.

The timid Christian was anxiously waiting on his stop so he could exit the bus, when the man starts weeping.

Threw sobs and tears he cries, "[I need to be saved. I'm lost and need Jesus. Won't someone please tell me how to be saved?](#)" That's when the Christian next to him, drops his head, and prays, "[Lord, is this the sign?](#)"

It's been said, "[Some Christians are like the Arctic River - frozen over at the mouth.](#)" The sign has to jump up and hit them in the mouth... to open their mouth.

I've discovered that when I'm willing to speak out for Jesus there is no shortage of opportunities to do so.

All it takes is the willingness to go verbal!

Fourth, to be a watchman you can **depressurize**.

Ezekiel 3 is really a liberating passage. Yes, we have the responsibility to *empathize, recognize, and verbalize* - but this analogy makes it crystal clear that the results are God's responsibility, not ours. Only the Holy Spirit can convict and convince a person's heart.

Only God's Spirit can open blind eyes, and create a true transformation. This is why God tells Ezekiel in verse 19, **"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 other words, the old proverb applies... **"you can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink."**

Warn and witness - pray, pray, and pray - but once you share the truth you can leave the situation in God's hands. It's now an issue that's between God and them.

The Bible says every human being is a free moral agent. We're free to make our own spiritual decisions. I can't make your decision, and you can't make mine.

All I can do is witness and warn - and once I do so faithfully, my obligation has been fulfilled. *And this is true of witnessing to an unbeliever who has no faith, or warning a believer who's about to stray from the faith...* once we've done what God asks, it's up to Him!

As a pastor, the Lord often lays it on my heart to warn people in our church of the sin in their lives, and its impending danger. Trust me, it's never something I enjoy. I'm not fond of confrontation. *People get mad...*

It's easier to sit back, and look the other way - but if I do, God holds me responsible for their plight. As God told Ezekiel, *their blood will be on your hands*. It's often my duty to risk a negative reaction to speak the truth.

This is the problematic situation parents face with their teenagers... and relatives face with other relatives... and friends face with other friends... *if I say something to them will they ever speak to me again?*

Why upset the apple cart? Why risk rocking the boat? Why create more turmoil than there already is?

Restraining your teenager will cause a fight... it'll get messy - I'll have to burn some energy - it'll require a backbone. Aw, it's easier to just turn your head - but a parent is a watchman on the wall in their child's life.

Hey, if you see a friend in danger it's up to you to sound the alarm. If he or she takes heed - *great*. If he or she doesn't - *at least you did what God called you to do*. In a sense the pressure is off. You did your duty.

And here's one more qualification for a good look-out for the Lord... A faithful watchman needs to not only *empathize*, and *recognize*, and *verbalize*, and *depressurize* - but he also needs to **personalize**.

For I can see some of you now... *"Wow, I've got to warn the people within my walls."* So you load up the mini-van with

Gospel tracts and pamphlets and go through the neighborhood tacking them on mailboxes.

And when you roll through the last cul-de-sac and tack one to that last mailbox, you breathe a sigh of relief. You think you're done with your responsibility.

It's a form of *Gospel dumping*. It's also what happens when you walk up to someone cold turkey, and dump the Gospel on them. *"Man, you need Jesus. Get right or get left. Turn or burn. Deny or fry. Get saved or get scorched. Repent, man. And don't forget I told you so!"*

Then you walk away, wipe the sweat off your forehead, and think you've done your religious duty.

No you haven't! That's not witnessing for Jesus, it's just trying to get the monkey off your own back.

Absolving yourself of responsibility isn't what pleases God. There are some people who are more concerned with doing their duty than seeing people get saved.

This is bullhorn evangelism. You've seen the guy on the street corner with an inflammatory sign, *"Turn or Burn"* or the like... He yells at everybody who passes.

Their message might be true, but more often than not, these guys are more concerned with relieving their own guilt, than being effective at their stated goal.

This is not the kind of effort that pleases God.

I'm sure Ezekiel would agree part of the job of a watchman is to communicate his warning with *a certain sound* - one that everyone understands for what it is.

If a watchman warns people in a language different than the one they speak - or approaches them in a way that's offensive, and they never hear his message - He can't just walk away smugly saying he's done his job.

The communication has to be relevant. It has to come from his heart. It has to be presented in love.

It has to be *personalized* if you want it to be heard. It's been said, "[Contact without tact has little impact.](#)"

If I come in from mowing the lawn and my wife asks me if I want a glass of *dihydrogen oxide* I might think, "[What have I done now, she's trying to poison me!](#)"

But if she offers me a glass of water I'll appreciate her gesture. And of course, *dihydrogen oxide* **is** water.

But it's the way the offer is presented... that's the difference. And this is true for the watchman. He has a responsibility not only to warn, but to warn in such a way that those within his walls will be most receptive.

Let me close with one more football illustration...

In 1990, Bill McCartney, a devout Christian, coached the University of Colorado to a national championship.

Once, the coach invited a famous Christian evangelist to address his players before a game.

This evangelist went on for 30 minutes exhorting the players to reach beyond their personal limits, and pull together as a team to win that night's football game.

When the speaker finished, and sat down next to the coach, he asked, "[Well, what do you think of that?](#)"

McCartney told him, “All you seem to care about is whether or not they win a football game. And all I care about is whether or not they know Jesus. We need to swap places.” Apparently, what the world really needs are not more preachers who are into football, *but more Christians who really care about the souls of people.*

We need watchmen on the wall who know their job.

Who **empathize** (and care for souls) - who **recognize** (those under their influence - *recall your two names*), who **verbalize** (and speak up), who **depressurize** (and trust Jesus with the results), and who **personalize** (and seek to be as effective as they possibly can be).

And like the little girl on the beach, don't miss the main point... when you see danger, *it's best to say so!*