

Men's Bible Study – Tuesday, September 1, 20 (8 am) – Pentecost XIV

TEXT: Ezekiel 33:7-9 – “The Watchman Cries, ‘Turn Back from your Evil Ways’”

1. These three verses taken from deep within this prophetic book raise difficult questions about God's judgment and forgiveness. There is more to this passage than a simple call to repentance. **Ezekiel 33:1-20 forms the larger literary unit and consists of an oracle concerning a watchman.** This image is used earlier in the book of Ezekiel for the prophet. As part of a prophetic commissioning, God appoints the "son of man," Ezekiel, as a watchman or lookout or sentinel in Ezekiel 3:16-21. The image or metaphor is used in the book both to describe **Ezekiel's prophetic role** -- he is to warn people of coming danger -- and to **limit the prophet's liability if the people do not listen.**
2. **Chapters 33-48** comprise the third major division in Ezekiel's prophecies. Apparently, Israel is doomed to extinction, will figuratively rise from the grave of exile to serve God's plan of salvation. Ezekiel is commissioned by the LORD to be a preacher of restoration. Son of Man us found 93 times in the Book of Ezekiel. Ezekiel is “a son of man.” Jesus is THE Son of Man (Messiah)—88 times in the New Testament. In verses 1-9, God changes Ezekiel's focus: no longer speaking against the nations, but serving as Israel's WATCHMAN warning the wicked to turn from their way.
3. The **watchman's responsibility** lies in **sounding the alarm and pronouncing the danger.** The **sentinel** would have been stationed in a lookout position and sounded a trumpet upon sight of a threat. The **watchman**, however, is not responsible for the people's response to the warning. He or she cannot force people to prepare for the threat, to defend the city militarily, to fortify the surroundings. The watchman's task is to announce impending danger. The image of the watchman is particularly striking if we consider the literary context of the passage. The passage immediately after our selection, Ezekiel **33:21-22, contains a narrative report of the capture of Jerusalem by the Babylonians.**
4. Keep reading all of Ezekiel 33. Verse 11 speaks of God's final question to the house of Israel: **"why will you die?"** This question reframes the inquiry from Israel: "how can we live?"—verse 10. It flips the earlier query on its head and emphasizes the consequence of wickedness (death). Why would you choose death when you can be alive? To choose to live is to choose to turn back from evil. This verb, "to turn" is used repeatedly in chapter 33 as a reminder of the physical understanding of repentance.

TEXT: Matthew 18:1-20 – What's Your Position? Who is the Greatest? Keep your eyes on the “little ones”. “If Your Brother Sins against You” – Initiate and seek reconciliation!

1. **Dale Bruner: Ecclesia** (found twice in the four gospels – Matthew 16 and 18). **What is it that makes a church, a church?** Two things: **Confessing Jesus as the Divine Christ**—16:13-20; and **Following Jesus as the Suffering Christ**—16:21-28. The church is both Jesus' main means (ROCK) and his main problem (SATAN, stumbling block) in bringing salvation to the world. Matthew chapter 16-20 deals with evangelical church order and ecclesiology (with a sermon on the congregation in the middle—chapter 18). Included in our text is the story of Lost Sheep; our Heavenly Father wants none to perish.

2. **Our Gospel Reading begins with a question:** Who is **the Greatest** in the Kingdom of Heaven? Jesus performs a Children's message and preaches about humility (down to earth). Those considered least and last in the eyes of the world are repositioned to the top by Jesus. Pay attention to the little ones. Don't be a stumbling in their faith walk with Jesus. Millstones don't make good jewelry. It would be better to enter eternity with some missing appendages, than to have all of body parts in hell. Making the necessary cut. God doesn't want ANYONE to PERISH. Lost lambs matter to God. **Note:** Matthew 20:20-28. Request for seats of honor create bickering among the disciples, and a promising word from Jesus: The greatest is the one who is last of all and servant of all.
3. What about **church conflict**? Churches are full of **troublesome people**. We are rather expert at spotting those **rabble rousers** around us, identifying their destructive habits, and condemning the ways they seek to destabilize our communities. Noticing when we are engaged in these very same behaviors is another story. After all, some of those troublesome people are us. **What is a Christian to do if a BROTHER sins against them?** Ignore or avoid it? Sweep it under the rug? Allow it to fester? Get even? Seek reconciliation? Issue of an errant Church member!
4. **Office of the Keys**—Binding and Loosing. Jesus reminds the faithful of the great power they wield as a gift from God (see **16:19 and 18:18**). With great power comes great responsibility. Community is God's gift to us. It is the very setting in which God promises to be with us and for us. And yet that community, as we know too well, has to be preserved and protected from **bitter rancor and pointless dissension**. **Matthew 18 is a text found in many Church Constitutions** describing the procedure for resolving conflict in a Church. To avoid gossip and further erosion of the body of Christ, conflicts need to be nipped in the bud. Step One: go to the person in private. **Note:** In Jesus' Sermon on the Mount he commands reconciliation before dropping off one's gifts at the altar (offering and peace making). Don't wait for the offender to make the first move and apologize. Step Two: bring along a witness. Try to resolve the issue at the lowest level possible. Eventually it may need to be brought before the council or the entire congregation (Special Meeting) and if all else fails (last resort), then Step Three: Excommunication/Expulsion/Estrangement (communal cohesion; that none may perish)—treat them like a tax collector or Gentile; i.e. a pagan in need of redemption. Wherever two or three gather in Jesus' name, there God dwells. Churches are sacred ground, which is precisely why conflict needs to be addressed and precisely why divisive sisters or brothers cannot be allowed to tear God's people apart. How we relate to one another in Christian community is a concern in God's heart. **The Office of the Keys** is given to the Church. Whatever the Corporate Community (church) decides banishment (bond) or forgiveness (loose), the effects of the decision will be extended even to heaven. Therefore, Judge Wisely!
5. Eugene Peterson – The Message: "If he won't listen to the church, you'll have to start over from scratch, confront him with the need for repentance, and offer again God's forgiving love". Be a Watchman. Sound the Trumpet. Matthew 18: Begins with the Disciples self-disciplining before they confront and discipline others!