

Rev. Seth D. Bode † Sermon 309, 03-03-2019 † Transfiguration Sunday

“Lord God, you have appointed me as a Bishop and Pastor in your Church, but you see how unsuited I am to meet so great and difficult a task. If I had lacked your help, I would have ruined everything long ago. Therefore, I call upon you: I wish to devote my mouth and my heart to you; I shall teach the people. I myself will learn and ponder diligently upon your Word. Use me as your instrument – but do not forsake me, for if ever I should be on my own, I would easily wreck it all.”

“Sir, we would see Jesus.”

EZEKIEL 33

¹The word of the LORD came to me: ²“Son of man, speak to your countrymen and say to them: ‘When I bring the sword against a land, and the people of the land choose one of their men and make him their watchman, ³and he sees the sword coming against the land and blows the trumpet to warn the people, ⁴then if anyone hears the trumpet but does not take warning and the sword comes and takes his life, his blood will be on his own head. ⁵Since he heard the sound of the trumpet but did not take warning, his blood will be on his own head. If he had taken warning, he would have saved himself.



We heard this command from God the Father on the mountain: “*This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to Him*” (Luke 9:35). Now, Jesus appeared as glorious, dazzling and bright on that day. I doubt that no one was arguing with Jesus in His glorious appearance.

But sinners argue with Him today. How so? By opposing His faithful ministers of God’s Gospel. In His office of prophet, Jesus is still teaching us. He carries out this prophetic office by calling workers and sending them out with His Word. Not everyone wants to listen to these workers, and while they give various excuses, it is because not everyone really wants to listen to Jesus.

Being sent to proclaim the Word of God cannot mean ‘flatterer of people’ or ‘people-pleaser.’ Those who preach in order to please God’s people are rejected by God Himself. We can see that clearly in the Bible:

- Luke 6:26 – *Woe to you when everyone speaks well of you, for that is how their fathers treated the false prophets.*
- Galatians 1:10b – *If I were still trying to gain the approval of men, I would not be the servant of Christ.*

We must spread God’s Word in order to please God, not people. Yet a preacher does not have a prerogative to abuse his hearers. He must rebuke sin, and this cannot always be done politely, since plain language, and language to the point, must be used. Yet, the pulpit isn’t the place for unnecessary harshness, for railing at people, or verbose diatribes. To Titus Paul writes:

- Titus 1:13 – *Correct them sharply so that they may be sound in the faith.*

Paul also writes to Timothy:

- 1 Tim. 5:1 – *Do not rebuke an older man harshly, but encourage him as a father, younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, with all purity.*

In the chapter before us God Himself lays down this rule so very important for preachers:

- Ezekiel 33:7 – *Hear the Word I speak, and give them warning from me.*

Pulpits are built for preaching God’s Word to men, and this is done best in God’s own wording of the Bible. It is God’s Word to human beings, and a preacher doesn’t require the people to believe a thing because he preaches it, or to do a thing because he says it. Paul writes:

- 2 Corinthians 1:24 – *Not that we have dominion over your faith, but we are helpers of your joy. For by faith you stand firm.*

A minister's calling is to lay the Word of God before the people and to exhort them to receive it, because the Lord has spoken it; and to do it, because the Lord has commanded it; and here then you, as hearers, have a sacred duty ...

Listen To Him!

1. *Because the Word is preached*
2. *Because the soul is at stake*

I. ***Because the Word is preached***

The whole topic of the task of a preacher and the task of the hearer in this chapter of Ezekiel is introduced in comparison to a watchman. *When I bring the sword against a land, and the people of the land choose one of their men and make him their watchman, and he sees the sword coming against the land and blows the trumpet to warn the people...* The word "sword" here means as much as war. In wartime, towns and communities located on the border are exposed to invasion. The only sensible thing to do is post a watchman on a high hill or a tall tower commanding a view of the surrounding country.

A. The watchman isn't appointed to sleep and take it easy, nor to eat and drink and enjoy himself, nor to amuse the citizens for their pastime. He is desperately needed to scan the country and see if the enemy is coming.

If he sees the enemy coming, and he blows the trumpet, he performs his task. Everyone who hears the trumpet have the chance to take warning and either prepare to meet and fight or retreat to a place of safety. If someone hears the trumpet and ignore it and are attacked, the watchman is excused, since he gave the warning.

But if the watchman doesn't blow the trumpet, even though the enemy is coming, then the blood of those destroyed by his fault is on him. That's just and right. In martial law, the sentinel who willfully neglects warning his forces of the enemy's approach is justly counted a traitor. And it's not unjust to have him executed, because he may have cost someone or many people their life.

"Now wait a minute, Pastor, you might be taking this whole thing too seriously. We live in a great country of peace where we don't have to worry about blood feuds or battles between Carmel and Zionsville; between Fishers and Noblesville; or between Indianapolis and Fort Wayne." Good. You know our warfare is not flesh and blood. But **between the kingdom of Christ and the kingdom of Satan there is continual warfare**, and pastors are set as watchmen to give warning of the coming destruction. The trumpet given to these watchmen is the Word of the Lord and they are charged to blow that trumpet in season and out of season.

Sadly, so many of these watchmen are idle, or busy themselves here and there preaching politics, science, sentimentalism or sensationalism; but the trumpet of the Lord they do not sound. It would seem at times that there were no faithful watchmen anymore, as under popery and the days of Rationalism. We live in a time where the parking lot attendants are labeled "pastor." Those times are described as the *watchmen who do not blow the trumpet*. God requires the blood of those watchmen.

B. What is the task of the people of that border town during wartime? **What is your task today?** In this place built for worship; this place intended not only for members but for the entire community; this place where Christ crucified must be preached as if we know nothing else; may everyone within reach fill the pews. When a church preaches, teaches, and shares God's Word in its truth and purity, then it

is by the grace of God alone. This is a place where we feed on the bread of life on the morning of the week when Jesus Christ rose again for our justification.

So listen carefully. Should a child of God step out of church saying, "That was a fine sermon," and never think about it again?

- Hebrews 4:2 – *"The message they heard did not benefit them, because those who heard it did not combine it with faith."*

A hearer of course isn't supposed to be so credulous as to believe everything simply because you hear it preached. You must make sure that what you hear is Scripture, God's truth. But you must make sure you hear correctly. Don't be like the high council of Jerusalem who martyred Stephen by throwing stones at him until he died. Stephen pierced them with the Word of God, but they set themselves against it and finally plugged their ears with their hands.

- All hearers should be like Samuel, who said, 1 Samuel 3:10 – *Speak, Lord, your servant is listening.*
- To the Bereans we have this praiseworthy testimony, Acts 17:11 – *The Bereans received the Word very eagerly and examined the Scriptures every day to see if these things were so.*
- Mary sat at Jesus' feet eager to eat up every word that fell from Jesus' lips, and these words she kept in her heart.

But aren't we free to choose whether we receive the Word or not? Don't we have the right to say, "I like that doctrine, but I don't accept that one"? Shouldn't citizens have liberty in these things? I would suggest the answer, you have the *power* but not the *right* to talk that way. You are guaranteed the liberty to deny God's Word in this nation's Constitution, but God grants no one the privilege to reject His Word or any one of His words. **This book is God's Word.**

- Habakkuk 2:20 – *The Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before Him.*
- Hosea 4:6 – *Because you have rejected knowledge, I will also reject you; seeing you have ignored the Law of your God, I will also ignore your children.*

Teachings invented by people and not taught in the Bible we are commanded to reject.

- 1 Timothy 6:3,5 – *If anyone teaches otherwise, and doesn't consent to the sound Words of our Lord Jesus Christ ... separate yourselves from such people.*

No one has the right to pick and choose from God's Word, as if we were selecting from a buffet or church pot luck. No one has the right to wonder if the Word of God is agreeable to his taste and liking. It always was and always remains that the natural heart doesn't like the Word of God. We should expect not to enjoy it all. In its natural condition the heart is wayside and wild woodland soil. But let no one say going to preaching can do you no good, because you could not believe. On the contrary, as long as someone doesn't occupy himself with the Word of God he can not and will not believe, because no one can change sinful hearts or create saving faith in it. Instead, *"faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the Word of Christ."* More of God's love for us means more love for God.

- Psalm 26:8 – *Lord, I love the house where You reside, the place where Your glory dwells.*

II. Because the soul is at stake

A church where the Gospel of Christ dwells and the Word is spoken without fear or favor is a precious gift of God. What did Jesus say about the cities where He often preached and performed miracles?

- Matthew 11:23 – *And you, Capernaum, exalted to heaven ...*

A. He pronounced Capernaum exalted to heaven, because so many miracles were performed and the Word of grace was preached in it so abundantly. **The place where God's grace is preached full and free is like the door to heaven.**

- John 10:27-28 – *“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; and I give them eternal life, and they will never perish.”*
- James 1:21 – *Receive with humility the Word planted in you. It is able to save your souls.*

So it follows that the very fact that people live near the place of gospel preaching but would not go to hear; or, hearing, would not receive the Word, this fact will weigh heavily against them on the day of judgment. This is what Jesus says about Capernaum:

- Matthew 11:24 – *It will be more bearable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for you.*
- Similarly, our text of Ezekiel 33:5 – *Since he heard the sound of the trumpet but did not take warning, his blood will be on his own head.*

Whoever won't hear and receive God's Word brings destruction on their own heads. People frequently put the fault for their not going to church on the preacher, or on the church, or on their own family, and some of these excuses may get attention in human eyes. But before God neither the trumpet or the watchman or the border city gets the blame. Everyone's blood will be on his own head, or as St. Paul expresses it:

- Galatians 6:5 – *Each man will bear his own burden.*

B. ⁵*Since he heard the sound of the trumpet but did not take warning, his blood will be on his own head. If he had taken warning, he would have saved himself. How can a person deliver her own soul when the Scriptures so clearly teach that no one can save herself?* There is a clue in the life of Jesus. He was on trial and words were used against Him. They were lies and deceptions for the innocent party. In fact, Jesus Himself was told not to speak.

- John 18:23 – *If I said something wrong, bear witness of what was wrongfully said. But if I was right, why did you hit me?*

So Jesus was struck on the mouth for the times when we ignored Him.

The Word of God tells us two things: First that we are sinners subject to God's wrath and death, and second that the blood of Jesus Christ shed for us cleanses us from all sin. Now if someone takes warning based on the first word and repents of sins to make a free confession before God; and then that someone turns to the second word and lays his sin on Jesus, saying, "You are my sin-offering, the Savior of my soul," that person delivers her own soul. Jesus covers over the multitude of sins. To lay our hand on Jesus Christ and claim His sacrifice as the offering for our sin is faith. That faith comes by hearing God's Word.

In Jesus' name, Amen.