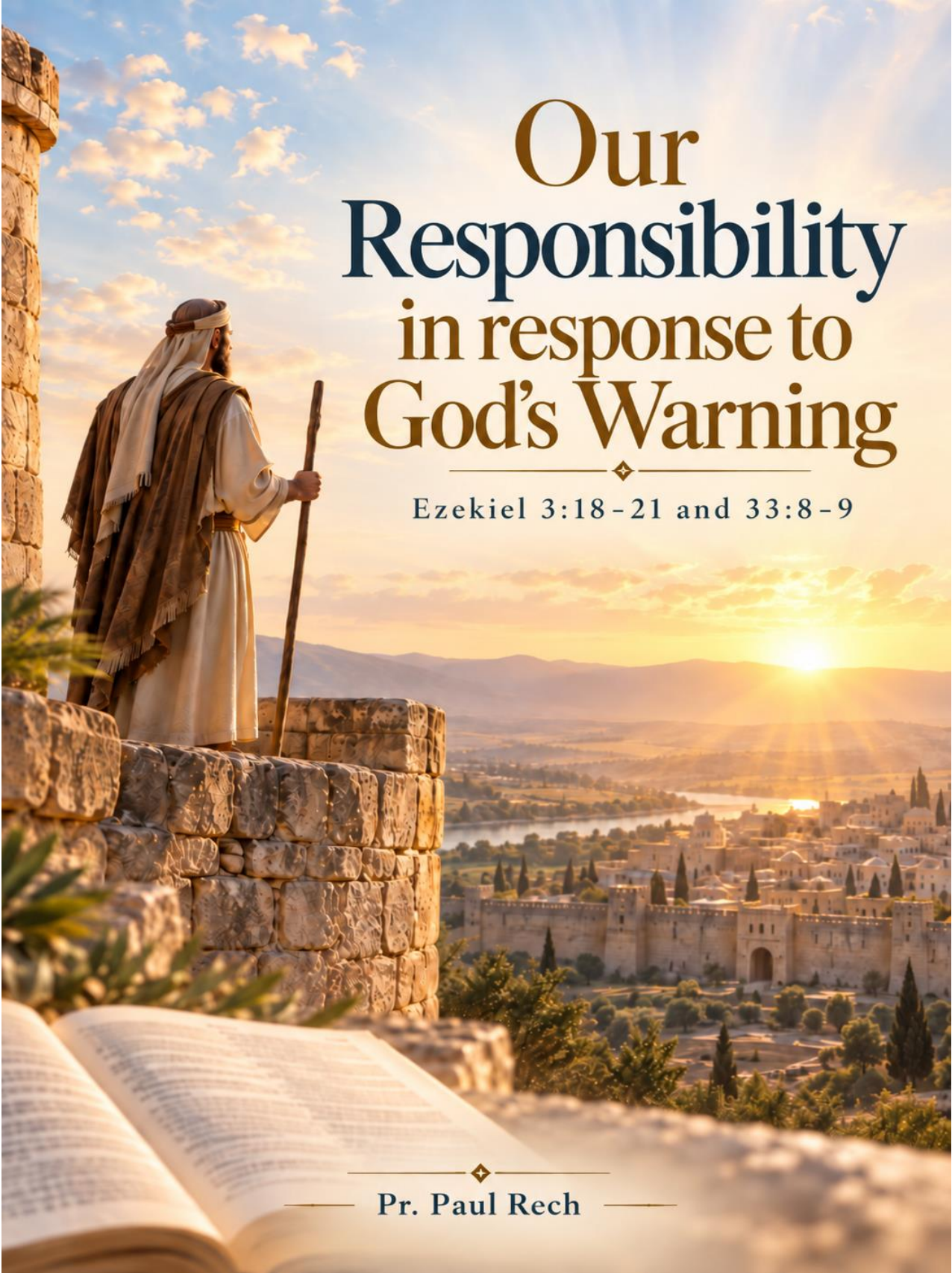




Our Responsibility in response to God's Warning

Ezekiel 3:18-21 and 33:8-9

Pr. Paul Rech

OUR RESPONSIBILITY IN RESPONSE TO GOD'S WARNING

Ezekiel 3:18–21

“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 or 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.”

Ezekiel 33:8–9

“When I say to the wicked, ‘O wicked man, you shall surely die!’ and you do not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at your hand. Nevertheless, if you warn the wicked to turn from his way, and he does not turn from his way, he shall die in his iniquity; but you have delivered your soul.”

There are biblical truths that appear only once and would already be sufficient to demand our attention. Yet there are truths that God chooses to repeat, as though He does not want the reader to pass over them too quickly. This is exactly what we find in the book of the prophet Ezekiel. At the beginning of his ministry, in Ezekiel 3:18–21, God gives the prophet a solemn responsibility: he was to warn both the wicked and the person who, having lived righteously, began to turn away from the ways of God. Many chapters later, in Ezekiel 33:8–9, the same responsibility is reaffirmed through the image of the watchman.

This repetition is not accidental. It reveals the seriousness with which God regards the responsibility of the person who has received a message and has been entrusted with communicating it.

This subject is not limited to Ezekiel's prophetic office. Although we must respect the specific context of his calling and not mechanically apply every condition of Old Testament prophetic ministry to the Church, a deeply relevant spiritual principle remains: whoever knows God's truth has not received that truth merely for personal benefit. Knowledge produces responsibility. Privilege produces mission. Whoever has been reached by the light is called not to hide it.

It is at this point that Ezekiel's message meets the words of the apostle Peter:

“You are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people...” 1 Peter 2:9

But Peter does not stop by describing who we are. He explains why God has called us: ***“...that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.”***

This passage brings together two great truths: **privilege and responsibility.**

We are a people called by God, but we are also a people sent by God. We have received the light, but now we must proclaim it. We know the truth, but now we must bear witness to it. We have experienced grace, but now we are entrusted with pointing others to the One who gave us that grace.

The Figure of the Watchman

To understand Ezekiel 3 and 33, we need to understand the figure of the watchman.

In ancient cities, especially fortified cities, men were stationed on walls or observation towers. Their responsibility was to look into the distance. While the people of the city worked, rested, traded, and went about their daily activities, the watchman had to remain alert.

If an enemy army were approaching, he could not simply watch in silence.

His responsibility was to sound the trumpet.

He was not responsible for defeating the enemy army by himself. He was not responsible for building the walls at that moment. He was not responsible for the decision each citizen would make after hearing the warning.

His responsibility was **to see the danger and warn the people.**

This is the image God uses when speaking to Ezekiel.

In Ezekiel 33:7, God declares that He had appointed the prophet as a watchman for the house of Israel. He then adds that when Ezekiel heard a word from the mouth of God, he was to communicate it to the people.

Notice the order.

First, **hear from God.**

Then, **warn the people.**

The true messenger does not invent the message. He does not create a warning based on personal preferences. He does not proclaim his own opinions as though they were divine revelation. His first responsibility is to hear correctly what God has said.

Only then comes the responsibility to communicate.

This order remains indispensable for the Church. Before speaking in God's name, we must know God's Word. Before warning someone, we must make sure that what we are saying truly corresponds to Scripture.

It is very easy to replace God's Word with traditions, cultural preferences, political opinions, denominational customs, or personal convictions.

God's watchman does not proclaim his own thoughts.

He communicates what he has received.

That is why Paul instructed Timothy: “**Preach the word...**” 2 Timothy 4:2

Not our opinions. Not our prejudices. Not our preferences.

The Word of God.

When God Says, “If You Do Not Warn”

Ezekiel 3 presents one of the most solemn statements in the Bible concerning spiritual responsibility.

God explains to the prophet that if the wicked person were walking toward death and Ezekiel failed to warn him, that person would suffer the consequences of his sin, but God would hold the prophet responsible for his silence.

On the other hand, if Ezekiel warned the sinner and the sinner refused the warning, the prophet would have fulfilled his responsibility.

This establishes a fundamental distinction.

We are responsible for proclaiming. We are not responsible for controlling the response.

This truth should bring both reverence and relief.

Reverence, because silence in the presence of truth can become a form of negligence.

Relief, because no human being can produce repentance in another person's heart.

We can teach.

We can warn.

We can counsel.

We can testify.

We can pray.

We can present Christ.

But we cannot force anyone to believe.

We cannot convert anyone through our own ability.

The transformation of the heart belongs to God.

Paul understood this distinction when he wrote to the Corinthians:

“I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase.” 1 Corinthians 3:6

Our responsibility is faithfulness.

The final result belongs to the Lord.

The Danger of Remaining Silent

There are many reasons why people who know the truth remain silent.

Some are afraid of rejection.

Others fear being considered intolerant.

Some avoid difficult conversations because they do not want to lose friendships.

Others think, “Everyone should mind their own business.”

Still others say, “I don't want to judge anyone.”

There is certainly a wrong way to approach people. The Bible does not authorize arrogance, humiliation, aggressiveness, or hypocritical condemnation. Jesus clearly confronted those who saw the speck in another person's eye while ignoring the beam in their own.

But there is a significant difference between arrogantly judging someone and lovingly warning someone.

If someone is walking toward a cliff, warning that person is not a lack of love.

A lack of love would be watching silently.

If a house were on fire and we knew a family was sleeping inside, no one would consider it aggressive to knock on the door and shout:

“Fire! Get out of the house!”

The urgency of the warning would be directly related to the seriousness of the danger.

That is exactly the awareness we see in Ezekiel's ministry.

The prophet was not called to irritate people.

He was called to warn them because their decisions had real consequences.

The same principle appears repeatedly throughout Scripture.

Paul declared in Acts 20:26–27 that he was innocent of the blood of those to whom he had ministered because he had not failed to declare to them the whole counsel of God.

He did not say:

“Everyone accepted my message.”

They did not.

He did not say:

“Everyone agreed with me.”

They did not.

What he essentially said was:

“I did not hide the truth.”

That should also be our concern.

When we stand before God, we will not be judged by the number of people we managed to convince, but it certainly matters whether we were faithful to what we received.

The Warning to the Wicked

Ezekiel 3 begins by addressing the person living in rebellion against God.

The message is clear: the sinner must be warned about his way.

This truth runs throughout Scripture.

John the Baptist began his preaching by calling people to repentance.

Jesus began His public ministry proclaiming:

“Repent, and believe in the gospel.”

Mark 1:15

Peter, on the Day of Pentecost, called his listeners to repentance.

Paul affirmed that God calls people to repentance.

The Christian message has never simply been:

“God loves you, therefore continue living however you want.”

The biblical message is deeper.

God loves.

God calls.

God forgives.

God restores.

But God also calls the sinner to repentance and to a new life.

God's love does not eliminate His holiness.

God's grace does not make sin insignificant.

In fact, the cross of Christ demonstrates both the seriousness of sin and the greatness of grace.

An immeasurable price was required for our redemption.

That is why Paul wrote: **“Woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!”**

1 Corinthians 9:16

He understood that the Gospel was far too good and far too urgent to be kept to himself.

Romans 10 develops the same truth when it asks how people will believe in the One of whom they have not heard, and how they will hear without someone preaching.

God could have chosen to proclaim the Gospel through angels.

He could write His message across the sky every day.

He could reveal His will in countless other ways.

But He chose to entrust the message of the Gospel to people who themselves had been transformed by the Gospel.

That is an enormous privilege.

And also an enormous responsibility.

The Warning to the Righteous

There is a detail in Ezekiel 3 that must not be ignored.

God does not speak only about the wicked.

He also speaks about the person who had been living rightly but began to turn away.

This reminds us that spiritual responsibility does not end when someone makes a profession of faith.

We need evangelism, but we also need discipleship.

We need to reach the lost, but we must also care for those who are part of the community of faith.

Hebrews 3:13 says that we should exhort one another daily so that no one may be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.

Notice the expression: **“one another.”**

The Christian life was never designed to be lived in complete isolation.

We need one another.

There are moments when I may see something in your life that you cannot see in yourself.

And there will be moments when you may see something in my life that I cannot see in myself.

Sin has a dangerous characteristic: it is deceptive.

I do not believe anyone wakes up in the morning saying:

“Today I am going to destroy my life.”

Destruction usually happens gradually.

One small compromise.

Then another.

One justification.

Then another.

A prayer that is no longer prayed.

A Bible that remains closed.

One absence from worship.

Then another.

A wrong friendship.

An irresponsible financial decision.

A hidden temptation.

A resentment that is nourished.

An attitude that once troubled the conscience slowly begins to seem normal.

By the time we realize what has happened, we may be very far from where we started.

That is why God has placed people around us.

Pastors.

Leaders.

Brothers and sisters.

Mentors.

Spiritual family.

Christian community.

People who can say in love:

“Be careful. You are moving in a dangerous direction.”

James 5:19–20 speaks about the person who helps someone return after wandering away from the truth. There is something precious about this ministry of restoration.

It is not about condemning a brother or sister.

It is about helping that person return.

Paul teaches in Galatians 6:1 that if someone is overtaken in a fault, those who are spiritual should restore that person in a spirit of gentleness.

The important word is: **restore**.

Biblical warning is not intended to destroy.

It is intended to restore.

1 Peter 2:9 — Privilege That Produces Responsibility

Perhaps one of the greatest tragedies of the Christian life is wanting the privileges of God's people without accepting their responsibilities.

We like to hear:

“Chosen generation.”

We like to hear:

“Royal priesthood.”

We like to hear:

“Holy nation.”

We like to hear:

“God's own special people.”

But we must keep reading.

Peter explains that we received this identity in order to **proclaim the praises of Him who called us out of darkness into His marvelous light.**

We were called to proclaim.

Saved to testify.

Enlightened to give light.

Blessed to bless.

We were not brought out of darkness merely to admire the light.

We were called to point others toward it.

Jesus used the same reasoning in Matthew 5:14–16 when He called His disciples the light of the world.

A hidden lamp loses its function.

It remains a lamp, but it does not fulfill its purpose.

In the same way, a Church that knows the Gospel but does not proclaim it preserves the message while abandoning an essential part of its mission.

The Gospel was not given to the Church to be kept like a museum piece.

It was entrusted to the Church to be proclaimed.

The Example of Noah

Noah lived in a deeply corrupt generation.

According to 2 Peter 2:5, he was a “**preacher of righteousness.**”

During the time he was building the ark, his own life became a message.

Every piece of wood placed into that construction declared:

“**Judgment is coming.**”

But the ark also declared:

“There is a way of salvation.”

That combination is essential.

Warning without hope produces despair.

Hope without warning can produce false security.

The biblical message presents both.

There is sin.

There is judgment.

But there is also grace.

There is forgiveness.

There is salvation.

There is a cross.

There is a Savior.

True Christian warning always points toward an open door.

The Example of Jonah

Jonah received a message for Nineveh.

At first, he tried to run away from his responsibility.

It is interesting to notice that Jonah did not misunderstand his mission.

He simply did not want to fulfill it.

This may be one of the great dangers for us.

Many times we do not need more knowledge.

We need more obedience.

We know someone needs to hear a word.

We know we should make a phone call.

We know we need to seek out a certain person.

We know a son or daughter is heading in a dangerous direction.

We know a friend needs to be confronted in love.

We know a certain situation requires a word of wisdom.

But we delay.

Jonah discovered that running from God's mission does not eliminate the mission.

When he finally reached Nineveh and delivered the warning, something extraordinary happened.

The people responded.

There was repentance.

The warning that might have sounded harsh became an instrument of mercy.

This is an important truth:

When God warns, His warning may be an expression of His grace.

The warning demonstrates that there is still an opportunity to change.

As long as God is speaking, there is a door of repentance open.

Jesus and the Responsibility to Warn

No one demonstrated greater love than Jesus.

And precisely because He loved deeply, Jesus also warned clearly.

He spoke about repentance.

He spoke about sin.

He spoke about hypocrisy.

He spoke about judgment.

He spoke about eternity.

At the same time, He welcomed sinners, touched those considered untouchable, forgave the guilty, restored the broken, and wept over Jerusalem.

That combination should shape our witness.

Truth without love can become harshness.

Love without truth can become omission.

Jesus demonstrated both truth and grace.

When we warn someone, we do not do so because we are better.

We do so because we too have been reached by mercy.

We are not judges standing above other people.

We are sinners reached by grace pointing other sinners to the Savior.

Silence May Seem More Comfortable

Being a watchman is not always comfortable.

Sometimes the person who sounds the trumpet is accused of disturbing the peace.

Imagine a sleeping city.

Everything appears peaceful.

Suddenly, the watchman sounds the trumpet.

People wake up.

Children cry.

Doors open.

Soldiers run.

Someone might complain:

“Why are you making so much noise?”

The answer would be simple:

“Because danger is coming.”

There are times when faithfulness produces discomfort.

This does not mean that we should seek unnecessary conflict.

The Bible says our speech should be seasoned with grace. We are also called to be ready to give an answer concerning our hope with gentleness and respect.

But gentleness does not mean silence.

Respect does not mean omission.

Love does not mean abandoning the truth.

We must learn to say difficult things in the right way.

Our Responsibility Begins at Home

It is easy to imagine our responsibility only in relation to a distant world.

But the first mission field for many people is very close.

Our family.

Our children.

Our grandchildren.

Our friends.

Our church.

Our coworkers.

Our neighbors.

Deuteronomy 6 presents the responsibility of transmitting God's Word to future generations. God's commandments were to be taught in the home during the ordinary activities of daily life.

This means we cannot completely outsource the spiritual formation of our children to the Church.

The Church helps.

The pastor teaches.

The Bible teacher guides.

The youth leader cooperates.

But the spiritual responsibility of the family remains extremely important.

Parents need to talk about God.

They need to teach principles.

They need to talk about decisions.

They need to demonstrate through their actions what they profess with their lips.

Because there is a form of warning communicated through words, but there is also a warning communicated through example.

The Credibility of the Messenger

One of the greatest obstacles to Christian witness is not only what we fail to say.

It is also the contradiction between what we say and how we live.

If we proclaim holiness but deliberately live in sin, our message loses credibility.

If we speak about love but treat people with contempt, we create a contradiction.

If we preach honesty but are dishonest in business, we damage our testimony.

If we proclaim Christ publicly but our conduct at home denies what we proclaim, something is wrong.

Paul instructed Timothy to be an example to believers in word, conduct, love, faith, and purity.

The watchman must be able to see.

But he must also remain standing.

Our lives will never be perfect on this side of eternity. We all depend continually on God's grace. Yet there is a difference between someone who struggles against sin and someone who has made peace with it.

The person who warns others must also allow God to examine his own life.

We Must Not Replace the Holy Spirit

There is another danger.

When we understand our responsibility to warn, we can go beyond the boundaries of what God has called us to do.

The watchman sounds the trumpet.

He cannot force the entire city to respond.

Likewise, after faithfully communicating the truth, we must allow the Holy Spirit to work.

Some people try to produce repentance through pressure.

Others manipulate.

Some threaten.

Others repeat the same warning so aggressively that they close every possibility for dialogue.

We need to remember:

Conviction of sin is the work of the Holy Spirit.

Our responsibility is to present the truth.

We can reason.

We can teach.

We can counsel.

We can cry.

We can pray.

But only God, the Holy Spirit, transforms the heart.

This also prevents us from developing a false sense of superiority.

We are messengers.

The message belongs to God.

When Someone Does Not Accept the Warning

Ezekiel 33 makes this very clear.

The watchman delivers the message, but some people do not respond.

This is one of the painful aspects of ministry.

Parents experience this.

Pastors experience this.

Counselors experience this.

Leaders experience this.

Friends experience this.

You can love a person deeply and still watch that person make destructive decisions.

You can counsel.

You can present evidence.

You can show biblical principles.

You can remind the person of previous experiences.

You can pray.

You may even cry.

And that person may still say:

“I am going to do it my way.”

There comes a time when we must understand that every person has responsibility before God.

That does not mean abandoning love.

It means recognizing the limits of our responsibility.

Ezekiel had to warn.

He could not choose for the other person.

This distinction is important even for our emotional health.

Some people are carrying guilt that God never placed upon them because someone close to them chose to reject every piece of counsel they received.

We need to ask:

“Did I love?”

“Did I pray?”

“Did I speak the truth?”

“Did I try to help?”

“Was I faithful?”

If we have done our part before God, we cannot assume responsibility for another person's final decision.

The Church as a Watchman

The Church also has a prophetic voice in the sense that it must faithfully proclaim God's Word in its generation.

This does not mean that the Church should become an instrument of aggression or domination over society.

It means that the Church cannot abandon its message.

When culture changes, God's truth does not have to be altered to follow every cultural change.

The Church must speak about hope.

But also about repentance.

About grace.

But also about holiness.

About forgiveness.

But also about responsibility.

About heaven.

But also about judgment.

About love.

But also about truth.

About freedom.

But also about obedience.

Paul warned that a time would come when people would seek teachers who would tell them only what they wanted to hear. For this reason, his command to Timothy became even more urgent:

“Preach the Word.”

A Church that speaks only what society wants to hear has lost its function as a watchman.

But a Church that only condemns society without presenting the grace of Christ has also failed in its mission.

The complete message must be proclaimed.

To Warn Is Also to Love

Perhaps we need to recover this understanding.

Warning can be a form of love.

Proverbs teaches that wounds from someone who loves us can be faithful.

A doctor who discovers a serious illness does not show compassion by hiding the diagnosis.

Imagine a patient undergoing tests, and the doctor discovers a treatable disease but says: "I will not say anything because I don't want to worry the patient."

That would not be love.

It would be negligence.

True love speaks the truth with sensitivity because it seeks the person's good.

That is exactly how we should understand spiritual responsibility.

We do not warn to prove that we are right.

We do not warn to win arguments.

We do not warn to humiliate.

We do not warn to demonstrate superiority.

We warn because lives have value.

The Urgency of the Mission

Jesus left a clear commission to His disciples in Matthew 28:18–20:

Go.

Make disciples.

Baptize.

Teach.

The Church was not authorized to remain still waiting for the world to come to it.

The Church was sent.

Acts 1:8 also presents this missionary dimension when Jesus says His disciples would be His witnesses.

A witness speaks about what he knows.

We do not need to know how to answer every theological question in order to testify.

We can say:

“I was lost, and Christ found me.”

“I was without hope, and I found hope in Him.”

“I lived in guilt, and I discovered forgiveness.”

“I lived without direction, and I found purpose.”

Our personal testimony does not replace Scripture, but it can open doors for the presentation of Scripture.

The Samaritan woman did something similar in John 4.

After meeting Jesus, she returned to the city and called others to meet Him.

She did not have advanced theological training.

She had an experience.

She met Christ.

And she spoke about Him.

One Day Our Opportunity Will End

There is also a time dimension to the responsibility of the watchman.

He must sound the trumpet **before** the army arrives.

A late warning may produce no benefit.

This reminds us that some opportunities do not remain open forever.

There are conversations that need to happen.

There are apologies that need to be made.

There are people for whom we need to pray.

There are children who need to hear certain words while they are still close.

There are friends who need to know about our faith.

There are opportunities to testify that may never come again.

James reminds us that our life is like a vapor that appears for a little time and then disappears.

Therefore, we should not live constantly saying:

“One day I'll say something.”

“I'll look for them later.”

“I'll invite them another time.”

“At the next opportunity.”

Perhaps the right question is:

What if this is the only opportunity?

Before Warning Others, We Must Listen to God

There is, however, something even more important.

We also need to be warned.

It is very easy to read Ezekiel and immediately think about the people who need to hear something.

Perhaps God first wants to speak to us.

Is there an area of our life in which we are ignoring a warning?

A behavior we are justifying?

A decision we know we should not make?

A sin we are hiding?

A reconciliation we are postponing?

A responsibility we are avoiding?

A person God has placed on our heart whom we have not yet sought out?

The watchman is also under the authority of the King.

Before announcing a message, he must receive it.

That is why David prayed in Psalm 139, asking God to search his heart, test his thoughts, and show him whether there was any wicked way in him.

Perhaps this should be our constant prayer:

“Lord, before You use my life to correct someone, correct me.”

“Before You use my mouth to warn someone, speak to my heart.”

“Before I show the way to someone else, keep my feet on the way.”

Our Generation Needs Faithful Watchmen

We live surrounded by voices.

Social media.

Videos.

Influencers.

News.

Opinions.

Algorithms.

Ideologies.

Advertisements.

Everyone wants our attention.

In this environment, the voice of the Church does not necessarily need to be the loudest.

It needs to be the most faithful.

We were not called to compete in aggressiveness.

We were called to stand firm in the truth.

We need Christians who know the Word.

Parents who teach their children.

Pastors who are not afraid to preach the whole counsel of God.

Leaders who know how to warn with love.

Friends who have the courage to say:

“I am concerned about you.”

Brothers and sisters willing to seek the person who is drifting away.

Believers who do not hide their faith in the workplace.

Young people who represent Christ in their schools and universities.

Families who make their homes places where God's presence is known.

Churches that proclaim both the seriousness of sin and the greatness of grace.

The Privilege Is Great, but So Is the Responsibility

We finally return to 1 Peter 2:9.

“Chosen generation.”

Privilege.

“Royal priesthood.”

Privilege.

“Holy nation.”

Privilege.

“God's own special people.”

Privilege.

But then comes the responsibility:

to proclaim.

Perhaps one of the most important questions we can ask is:

What are we doing with what God has allowed us to know?

We have received the Word.

We have received the Gospel.

We know the cross.

We know the resurrection.

We know the promise of eternal life.

We know there is forgiveness.

We know there is hope.

We know Christ saves.

We know He transforms.

We know eternity is real.

And now?

Will we keep all of this only to ourselves?

Conclusion: The Trumpet Still Needs to Sound

Ezekiel 3 and Ezekiel 33 reach across the centuries with an uncomfortable but necessary question:

What are we doing with the truth we have received?

The watchman did not choose the threat.

He did not create the danger.

He did not write the message.

His responsibility was to remain alert, listen to the voice of God, and sound the trumpet.

Our mission is similar in principle.

We are not saviors.

Jesus is the Savior.

We are not the Holy Spirit.

He is the One who convicts.

We are not owners of the truth.

We are servants of the truth revealed by God.

But we are witnesses.

We are messengers.

We are light.

We are salt.

We are a people called out of darkness into marvelous light with a very clear purpose:

to proclaim the praises of Him who called us.

Perhaps there are people in our lives waiting for someone to have enough courage to speak.

Perhaps there is a son or daughter who needs guidance.

A friend who needs a warning.

A brother or sister who has drifted away and needs to be sought out.

A desperate person who needs to hear about hope.

A sinner who needs to discover that forgiveness exists.

A discouraged Christian who needs to be reminded that there is still a way back.

We do not know how each person will respond.

But we know what our responsibility is.

And perhaps, when we stand before God, one of our greatest joys will be to discover that a word spoken in love, a conversation we almost did not have, an invitation we almost did not make, or a testimony we were afraid to share became an instrument in God's hands to change a life.

May we never confuse love with silence.

May we never confuse tolerance with omission.

May we never use the truth as a weapon to hurt.

But may we also never hide the truth when it can save, restore, correct, and lead someone back to the right path.

God continues to seek men and women willing to stand on the spiritual walls of their generation.

People who hear His Word.

People who live His Word.

People who proclaim His Word.

People who have the courage to sound the trumpet.

Because the privilege of knowing the truth is great.

But the responsibility of proclaiming it is also great.

“You are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.” 1 Peter 2:9

May our generation hear God's message not only through our pulpits, but through our lives.

And when God places before us an opportunity to warn, guide, restore, testify, or proclaim the Gospel, may we be able to answer:

“Lord, I have heard Your voice. I will not remain silent.”

Pr. Paul Rech