

Speak out in love.

Text: Ezekiel 33:7-11 for 09/24/2017 by Pastor Bolwerk

7 "Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; so hear the word I speak and give them warning from me. 8 When I say to the wicked, 'O wicked man, you will surely die,' and you do not speak out to dissuade him from his ways, that wicked man will die for his sin, and I will hold you accountable for his blood. 9 But if you do warn the wicked man to turn from his ways and he does not do so, he will die for his sin, but you will have saved yourself. 10 "Son of man, say to the house of Israel, 'This is what you are saying: "Our offenses and sins weigh us down, and we are wasting away because of them. How then can we live?"' 11 Say to them, 'As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, O house of Israel?'

As we read these words from the book of Ezekiel we find Ezekiel in a rather odd situation. Ezekiel had been preaching God's Word to Jews who were exiled in Babylon. The reason they were in exile was because people of Judah had rebelled against God, and had turned to false gods for help. So, God allowed the Babylonians to attack Jerusalem and take some of the people as captives to Babylon. God did this to move the people to repent of their sins, but they didn't. Instead many kept hoping Jerusalem and its allies would rise up and defeat the Babylonians and come and rescue them. As long as Jerusalem was still standing they had hope.

But then things changed. Jerusalem, along with its allies, tried to rebel against Babylon, but the outcome was not good. Judah's allies were defeated, Jerusalem was wiped out, and the temple was destroyed. Judah and the false gods it trusted in were defeated. The people thought there was no savior left to put their hope in.

At this point Ezekiel is probably wondering what he should do since things had changed. God comes to Ezekiel and lets him know that even though the situation has changed, God's message has not. And as the Almighty sets his words again before Ezekiel, God also speaks to us. With these words God is telling us ...

Theme: Speak out in love.

1. Warn people about their sin
2. Turn people to their Savior

There are three things in Ezekiel message that will help us understand how God wants us to speak out in love. The first thing is who Ezekiel was speaking to. He was speaking to Jews. These were God's people; the people of God's Old Testament Church. These were people who confessed to being believers in the one true God. Yet they had rebelled against God by openly sinning against him.

That leads us to the second point: What Ezekiel was saying. God said to Ezekiel, **"If you [...] warn the wicked man to turn from his ways and he does not do so, he will die for his sin"** (v. 9). The prophet was to warn people that their sin was killing them spiritually. Their sin was destroying their relationship with God. If the people continued to openly sin against God, they would not only die physically, but they would end up dying eternally in hell.

The third point we take from Ezekiel's message is why he was saying these things. God told Ezekiel, **"Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel"** (v. 7). A watchman was supposed to warn people of coming danger. When the watchman saw danger approaching he was to sound an alarm to warn people of the danger. God had appointed Ezekiel to be a "watchman" to warn believers about the danger of their sin. God says, **"When I say to the**

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wicked, 'O wicked man, you will surely die,' and you do not speak out to dissuade him from his ways, that wicked man will die for his sin, and I will hold you accountable for his blood" (v. 8). God is so serious about this message that he holds Ezekiel accountable for it. God does that because this message of repentance is really a message of God's love. God is using this message to turn people away from evil so he can save them. So, if Ezekiel does not speak this message it's as if he is holding back God's love, God's salvation.

So, what does this have to do with us? Our connection to Ezekiel's message is this: God has made us "watchmen for the house of Israel." No, we are not watching over Jewish people. Our Heavenly Father wants his believers to watch over his New Testament Church. God wants us to help our fellow Christians by warning them about their sin. Jesus tells us how to do that in the Gospel. We heard Jesus say in Matthew 18: **"If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over"** (v. 15). Jesus says, "You do this." When you see your fellow Christian sinning, doing something that his harming their soul, speak out in love to help them recognize their sin and turn from it.

Yet how often do we make excuses to not point out the sin of a fellow Christian? Let's say you have a Christian friend who is living the "good life" by cheating on their taxes and taking things from their employer. They claim they're simply taking what they have rightfully "worked" for, but your friend is clearly breaking God's Seventh Commandment, which says, **"You shall not steal"** (Exodus 20:15). We know we should say something, but instead we make excuses: "It's none of my business," or "They'll just get mad at me," or "To say something would be awkward because I'm a sinner too." Besides why would you want to go and make your friend feel bad, especially when he seems so happy?

Let's look at this from a different perspective. Imagine you and your friends are enjoying the beautiful scenery at the Grand Canyon. You are walking on a path along the edge of the canyon, looking down over the scenic Colorado River. As you walk along your friend decides to turn off the path to get a better look at the canyon. You notice that your friend isn't watching where he is walking, and he is just a step or two from walking right off the edge of a cliff. If your friend walks off that cliff he will fall almost 500 feet straight down and be instantly killed. Now, you could warn your friend, that he is about to fall to his death, but you don't want to make him feel bad especially since he seems so happy.

Do you see how ridiculous that thought is? Yet isn't that exactly how we often treat sin? We see our friends, our fellow Christians, walking straight into a sin that will damn them to an eternal punishment so horrible it is beyond our imagination. But we won't say anything because we don't want to hurt their feelings, or we are worried they might not like us anymore. How absolutely absurd! Jesus summarized the second part of God's Law by saying, **"Love your neighbor as yourself"** (Matthew 22:39). When we treat sin as if it is no big deal, when we simply ignore it because of our own selfish reasons, we are being *unloving*. We are breaking God's law by not loving our neighbor as ourselves.

Just like Ezekiel, when we don't speak out to warn a fellow believer about the danger of their sin, God is going to hold us accountable. Why? Because we are sinning just as much as they are. We are breaking the second table of God's law which says love your neighbor and do what is best for them spiritually, eternally.

We need to hear these words of warning that God speaks to Ezekiel. We need to be warned of how wicked our selfish silence really is. God calls us to turn from our sin and turn back to him

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for forgiveness.

Even though we have been unloving, God never stops loving us. God shows his love to the whole world, through his Son, Jesus. Jesus perfectly kept God's law of love by warning people of their sins and calling them to repentance. During his life in this world Jesus loved his neighbors perfectly. In his death Jesus loved the whole world by paying for the sins of all people. It is Christ's blood frees us from the guilt of those times we didn't warn others of their sin. Through faith in Jesus, God the Father forgives our sinful silence, and then, he fills us with the desire to speak out in love; to warn people to turn from their sins.

As we speak that warning we need to give people something to turn to. If you tell a person to turn from their sin, but there is nothing there for them to turn to, that person is either going to turn back to their sin, or possibly turn to something even worse. That's why when we speak out in love to warn others of their sin we also want to turn people to their Savior.

People need to be pointed to the Savior because sometimes they are so burdened by the guilt of their sins that don't know where to turn for help. They start to feel hopeless and helpless. We see this in the cry of the Israelites who were captive in Babylon. God tells Ezekiel, **"Son of man, say to the house of Israel, 'This is what you are saying: 'Our offenses and sins weigh us down, and we are wasting away because of them. How then can we live?'"** (v. 10). The consequences of sin are often painful and long lasting. Sin and its consequences blind people to the truth of God's love and compassion. The result of sin is often guilt that can weigh on a person for the rest of their lives.

This is why God wants people to turn to him. He wants people to see their sin for what it is, something that separates them from his love. God wants people to turn away from those wicked things that are killing them and turn to him so they can live free from sin, guilt, and shame. God wants people to turn to him for forgiveness so they can have a wonderful life that lasts forever.

How serious is God about wanting to save people from eternal death in hell? Look at what God said to Ezekiel in verse eleven: **"As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live."** God says, "As surely as I live [...]." God is eternal: he has always existed and he will always exist. God is saying that as certainly as he exists, that is how certain God is that he doesn't want the wicked to die eternally in hell. Instead God wants all people to turn away from the evil that is killing them, and turn to him for life.

So, as we read the words in verse eleven, God wants us to do two things with these words. First, he wants us to apply them to ourselves. We came into this world with a wicked, sinful self that tries to lead us away from God. But that is what we were. By the power of the Almighty God we have been changed. Through the gospel the Holy Spirit turned us away from that Old Self, and turned our hearts to Christ. Trusting in Jesus' forgiveness we can fight off that Old, wicked self. So, when God says, **"Turn from your evil ways!"** (v. 11) he is reminding us that every day we need to turn away from our evil self that only brings death. Every day we need to turn again to our Savior for forgiveness, peace, and life. It's as if God were saying, "That is what you were. Don't go back to that anymore. Why would you give up true life for something that only brings death?"

When we hear Jesus' calling us to repentance and forgiveness, his love gives us with the desire to speak those loving words to others. This is the second thing we are to do. We speak out in love to help our brothers and sisters in Christ to turn away from their Old, sinful selves. We

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Speak to point them to the Savior so they can feel the peace of his forgiveness. God has freely shown us kindness and love. Filled with that love, we are moved to freely speak out in love to help our fellow Christians turn to the only true God who can give them eternal life.

Speaking out about someone's sin is rarely an easy thing to do. Yet, recognizing God's love for us we speak out in love, not to hurt others but to help them. The more we see and hear of God's love the more we are moved to share it. God has called us to turn from our evil ways, and repent of our sins. Our loving Father turns us again and again to Jesus so that we can enjoy his forgiveness and live in his peace. God has spoken in love to us, and turned us to our Savior, so that we can bask in God's glory for all eternity. Amen.