

**"GOD'S MESSAGE WITH SOME TEETH!"**

Ezekiel 33:7-11

"When you want to make a point, then put some teeth into it!" We're sort of programmed by corporate America and the political scenery to think this way. When we want to really emphasize the effectiveness of something today, we say "put some teeth into it!"

Try cutting a ribeye with your butter knife. Try eating an apple or corn on the cob without your dentures. Try sawing branches with a dull chain with broken teeth. Try driving out of snow with bald tires. It just doesn't work.

We need laws with teeth, many cry. DWI laws have greatly increased their penalties the last few years. With cases of violent spousal abuse surfacing in the NFL, laws will be reviewed to see where some real teeth can be put in to stop such bizarre behavior. Right here in Marathon County, the drug wars are on the rise and citizens will call for stiffer penalties with some teeth to them.

Does God's Word need some teeth? Is God's message falling on deaf ears more and more each day? Are we putting earplugs into the ears of our hearts and abandoning God's commandments and shifting into condoning the sins which the 10 Commandments speak against?

For answers to these questions, we turn to the Prophet Ezekiel today. His assignment from God is not any different than our assignment from God. It's not a pretty sight. It's not an easy assignment. It's not a pleasant experience. But it's a necessary assignment of using Law and Gospel to call the sinner to repentance. And the only tool that works in doing that is.....

**"GOD'S MESSAGE WITH SOME TEETH!"**

1. Works repentance through the watchman's warning
2. Brings salvation through the Savior's Gospel

1

The events of this text took place some 600 years before Jesus was born. The ruthless ruler, Nebuchadnezzar, had taken Jerusalem and its thousands of citizens captive off to Babylon. Ezekiel, a priest in Jerusalem, was part of that revolt. When Jerusalem was completely destroyed in 586 BC, that really symbolized the total spiritual collapse of the people and subsequent judgment by God for their constant idolatry and forsaking of the Lord.

Go back in O.T. history, and God used his messengers to warn of impending doom if the people didn't repent. Think of **Noah**. God told him to build an ark in the desert because the perfect storm would come in 120 years and flood out the world. Did people turn from their wicked ways? Did people use the time to turn to the Lord? No, they spent 12 decades poking fun at Noah. Only when they found themselves knee deep in rising floodwaters did they realize how much teeth God's message had. And by then it was too late!

Or how many people wallowed in their homosexuality in Sodom & Gomorrah with Abraham bound and determined to find 50, 40, 30, 20, or 10 people who weren't wallowing. He didn't. And only when brimstone ignited every living and inanimate square inch of those cities did those citizens realize how much teeth God's message had. And by then it was too late!

God called Ezekiel to be a watchman. **SON OF MAN** (an expression used 90+ times in Ezekiel), **I HAVE MADE YOU A WATCHMAN FOR THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL; SO HEAR THEM SPEAK AND GIVE THEM WARNING FROM ME**. In Ezekiel's day, most of the people lived outside the city walls. They worked the fields, the vineyards, the orchards. When an enemy army was on the way to invade them, the watchman high on top of the city walls would see it first. The faithful watchman would then sound the warning trumpet so that all within hearing distance could hustle inside the safety of the city walls. The gates would shut and preparations made to fight off the attackers. Even if his warning was not what the citizens wanted to hear, it was a warning that they NEEDED to hear. Those who heard the trumpet warning call and did nothing to make precautions had only themselves to blame for their deaths. But if the watchman saw the danger and failed to do his duty to warn the people, he was held accountable for the lives of those who died and he'd be put to death as a punishment!

God uses this picture to show Ezekiel that he was a watchman with a life/death assignment to warn God's people of their sin. His warning was not some inconvenient disruption of people's lives, but as a call to work repentance. If Ezekiel did not do his job, he'd be responsible for the spiritual death of God's people. **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. 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**. In no uncertain terms. God says that sin is deadly serious business to him. It's serious enough to put someone to death into hell's judgment. Since God appointed Ezekiel to confront the sin of God's people, he would be held responsible if the wayward Israelites were not addressed. If he warned them and his warning was ignored, he knew that he was faithful to his calling even if his message fell on deaf ears.

My friends, **we are God's watchmen of today**. We are our brother's keeper, our sister's keeper. God commands us to show the sinner we know is wandering farther and farther away from His Word and way in order to work repentance. If we sound the trumpet of warning and that person listens – then praise God for a soul saved from hell. If we sound the warning and they do not listen, it is not our fault that they refused to heed God's warning. But if we do not speak God's trumpet warning call, then we will be partially to blame for their loss of faith and held accountable for it.

Just imagine if one our Kdgn'ers from our school or one the 4 yr olds at K2L wandered off and the teacher, the day-care worker, or even myself did nothing to stop them, wouldn't we be held responsible? (I don't even want to think about this), but if my dear Grandkids walked off at Kennedy Park and were missing, the 1<sup>st</sup> question would be: **"WHERE ARE THEY?"** and the 2<sup>nd</sup> would be: **"WEREN'T YOU WATCHING THEM?"**

Christian discipline is tough love. I don't know of a single pastor that enjoys the tough work of calling someone to repentance. I hear the frustration of Elders trying to make contact with our straying members and getting *the brush-off* or the *"it's none of your business"*. I can't tell you the # of tossings and turnings at 2:30AM when my mind races thinking of God's people persistently not in church, or living with the opposite sex unmarried, or knowingly being unfaithful to marriage vows. And then if it's not racing for their sins, it's racing for my own sins, weaknesses, and shortcomings **IN FAILING TO BE THE WATCHMAN GOD HAS CALLED ME TO BE**. You know people in your circle of family, church family, school family, or God's family who are living openly in sin and headed to an eternal destruction of hell's fury forever. This is serious business to God. And he says: **THE WAGES OF SIN IS DEATH**. (Rom 6:23). That's not a slap on the wrist – that's separation from God **FOREVER!**

This is God's **MESSAGE WITH SOME TEETH to work repentance!** Confronting someone is never easy. Being a watchman is not a preferred profession. There are risks. There is rejection. There is bitterness that says: **"Get off my back"**. But that person is really saying **"GOD, GET OFF MY BACK"** because when God's watchmen state their MESSAGE of warning, the ONLY purpose is to lead a soul to repentance and back to the Lord!

## 2

Before we do any disciplining, any warning, or any forgiving, we need to be assured that we **ARE** the Lord's disciples. **God's message has some teeth there too as His Gospel cuts through our sins and brings us salvation through the Savior!**

**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?' If God wanted the Israelites to die in their sins, why did He send Ezekiel? Instead, he was pulling for them. He wanted them back. He wanted to give them a message of salvation that had some teeth in it that bites down on sin, death, and hell through the Messiah.

God says: **TURN, TURN, Why will you die...** when the Gospel brings us salvation through Jesus. When we repent of our sin and run to Jesus with our guilty hearts, God doesn't say **"I told you so!"** He says: **"I forgive you so!"** **He takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked**. That's why He sent His BEST – the sinless Son of God to become flesh for us. Jesus came with a mission to confront our sins of wandering off from him, not worshipping or communing with him, not hearing or believing His message. For all the times we slapped God in the face, all those pet sins that control our minds, our mouths, or our movements; our addictions, our shameful mistakes, our ungodly habits – Jesus was slapped with your penalty and nailed to a cross to be crucified to shed His blood as complete payment.

You may be sitting with your sins weighing you down and thinking **"God will never forgive me for being a lousy watchman"**. God has the best solution and there are teeth in his Gospel message too. Because Christ endured the cross, he cut through your guilt to bring you salvation for that! **THERE IS NOW NO CONDEMNATION FOR THOSE WHO ARE IN CHRIST JESUS**. (Rom 8:1) He has done it all to break through sin's curse and secure eternal life. He has fixed the problem because the Lord takes no pleasure in seeing you in hell. Rather He wants you with him to live in peace and joy forever and ever in heaven!

So be a watchman with a **message that's got some teeth** to it. By God's grace and the Spirit's blessing, watch how **your warning works repentance** and **brings salvation through our dear Savior's Gospel**. **AMEN**