



The book of Jonah is as much, if not more, about the personal attitudes and decisions of Jonah the prophet as it is about the city of Nineveh. Stated briefly, God not only wants to redeem the lost, but he intends to shape and use the redeemed in the process. Jesus' Great Commission in Matthew 28 identifies those purposes clearly both in his intent for the lost and in his call to his people. It also alludes to the choices we make and the consequences of those decisions.

Ezekiel 33:1-11 describes the same mandate with the image of the watchman, an individual dedicated to the task of watching for enemies and warning of their impending arrival. In verses 1-9 God's metaphor of the watchman provides Ezekiel with a clear explanation of his responsibilities as God's servant and the consequences he can expect from fulfilling them or not. Simply put, if he sounds the warning as directed he bears no responsibility for what happens, but if he fails to do his job, he will bear the consequences for his failure to the degree that they could have been avoided.

Having said that, the image of the watchman cannot be considered apart from verses 10-11, otherwise we might see our responsibilities to God as simply a personal obligation. These two verses place Ezekiel among his own people, a people "wasting away" because of their heavy offenses and sins. They are dying and are desperate to find life. At the same time, God's desire is for repentance to bear fruit in life. On the one hand, the people are dying, and on the other hand God is equally motivated to help them live. In the middle is Ezekiel, whose job is to point to the God who desires their salvation. He is to announce God's judgment, not as a word of condemnation, but with God's own compassion in order to provide direction for their redemption.

Modern parallels might be EMTs on the street or on-call nurses advising callers with dangerous health symptoms. They have individual obligations by virtue of their jobs, but they are most effective and find their work most fulfilling when they (1) genuinely seek the well-being of others, and (2) recognize their roles in the larger context of the community. When we align our hearts with God's heart, we also long to see life breathed into seemingly dead souls. Our responsibility is no longer an obligation but a desire. At the same time, we come to recognize our roles as critical while recognizing that it often takes many of us to bring someone to Jesus, who alone is the great physician. I might give a heart attack victim CPR to sustain life, but it takes someone calling 911, an ambulance crew to take him to the hospital, and the heart surgeon himself to save him.

Discussion Questions

How did you come to know the great physician, and how did different people and experiences contribute to you meeting him?

The danger for Ezekiel's watchman is that he watches (and runs) only for his own preservation, or he fails to watch because of his own desire for comfort. What distractions could potentially sideline us from our responsibility to point others to life?

What could Ezekiel expect for warning and leading the repentant people of Judah? What might we anticipate?