

“THE-WATCHMAN” – A PASTOR’S MESSAGE TO PREACH

By Tony Perkins, President, Family Research Council

On November 22, 1963, in Dallas, Texas, shots rang out as President John F. Kennedy was assassinated. At just 43 years of age, the youngest President ever elected also became the youngest to die, after barely serving 1,000 days. Kennedy was on his way to the Dallas Trade Mart to deliver a speech, in which he had prepared to say: “We in this country, in this generation, are – by destiny rather than choice – the watchmen on the walls of world freedom. We ask, therefore, that we may be worthy of our power and responsibility, that we may exercise our strength with wisdom and restraint, and that we may achieve in our time and for all time the ancient vision of peace on earth, goodwill toward men...” Kennedy’s remarks continued: “That must always be our goal – and the righteousness of our cause must always underlie our strength. For as was written long ago, ‘except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain.’”

Watchman, What of the Night? Isaiah 21:6–12

The year is 689 BC, and the world is in turmoil. The Babylonian Empire is under attack by the Assyrian Empire. All the nations in the region hope against hope that Babylon will be able to defeat the Assyrian aggressors to their north. It is not to be, however! Babylon falls to the Assyrians, who are determined to press on until they conquer the entire region. The nations are in terror at the prospect. It is against this backdrop of war, as Israel faces an imminent attack, that God commands the prophet Isaiah to assume the role of a watchman. Isaiah is to look to the prophetic future and tell the people what he sees approaching. The message he delivers might have been given nearly 2,700 years ago, but it is as timely as today’s headlines. War rages in our world today. People are losing their lives by the thousands to terrorist attacks, freak natural disasters and the horrors of war.

On another level, a tsunami of sin is rising in our world. Old convictions and standards are being swept away right before our very eyes. Behavior that was once considered immoral is now openly flaunted and widely accepted. The winds of change are blowing all around us, and alarming things lie just over the horizon. Today, just as in the prophet Isaiah’s day, there is a need for the people of God to assume the role of watchman. It is time for us to take our stand, face what is approaching and open our mouths to sound the warning.

We are living in the days when the enemies of the Lord and the Enemy of our soul—Satan himself—would love nothing more than to overrun our lives and churches. The enemy’s desire is to see ministries, families and churches dashed upon the rocks of failure. If we are to avoid that end, we must consider the work of the ancient watchman, understanding that his ministry is needed today, more than ever before. Isaiah 21:6-12 gives us further insight into the role of the watchman and his functions:

The Watchman and His Mission

This is what the Lord says to us: “Go, post a lookout and have him report what he sees.” (Isaiah 21:6)

In ancient times, those who lived in walled cities were considered blessed individuals. By being inside a city with walls, they had two forms of protection; first, was the wall itself, standing as a barrier between the citizens and their enemies. It also stood as a barrier between that which was acceptable and that which was not— a formidable discouragement to those who would wish to cause trouble.

The story of king Asa of Judah, in 2 Chronicles, illustrates the connection between protection and prosperity. Asa was a good king who turned the hearts of Israel back to worshipping the Lord. As a result, God blessed his reign with peace and prosperity. During that time, he set about securing his country by embarking upon a building-boom. The walled cities he built became the “gated communities” of their time, providing a safe place to live.

“He [Asa] built fortified cities in Judah, for the land had rest. He had no war in those years, for the LORD gave him peace. And he said to Judah, “Let us build these cities and surround them with walls and towers, gates and bars. The land is still ours, because we have sought the LORD our God. We have sought him, and he has given us peace on every side.” So they built and prospered.” (2 Chronicles 14:6–7 ESV)

Isaiah 21:6 speaks of the two-fold duty of the ancient watchman who would stand upon the walls of these cities.

He Was to Watch

The watchman who patrolled the city walls was as essential to the city’s security and survival as the walls themselves. His most important duty was to be a lookout! He was stationed in a high tower, where he could keep watch over the surrounding countryside, looking for invading armies or other dangers. The second he spied the glistening of armor, sword and spear, or saw the clouds of dust raised by the drumming of thousands of feet, he was to sound the alarm. In this way, those living inside the city walls would know to prepare for an attack.

This tradition has carried throughout history, and over time watchmen evolved into sentinels, walking the ramparts of their city. On most days, their cry was, “All is well.” But in times of peril, their cry became, “To arms!” Without the watchman, those inside the wall are “blind” to threats, and without the wall, the watchman would have been unnecessary.

He Was to Warn

Whether he saw anything approaching or not, the watchman was to report to his people the conditions outside the city whenever they enquired. When trouble arose, he was to sound the warning loudly and clearly, so that those living outside the city walls could run inside to seek refuge. In the same way, if we are to be spiritual watchmen today we must clearly warn humanity of the perils of sin, that they may have time to run to the sanctuary of God's grace and forgiveness. We are instructed, as Isaiah was, to; "Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and shew my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins." (Isaiah 58:1)

We Need Watchmen Today Who will Watch and Warn

If there was ever a time when watchmen are needed in the church, the home, the family, the schoolhouse and in the community, it's today. We need people of discernment who know the Word of God. We also desperately need people who know are well acquainted with the enemy's strategies and movements— people who will watch and warn others of what they see coming.

"Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8 ESV).

Whether we see it or not, every area our life is under attack! The enemy is doing everything he can to invade the church and lead us down the wrong path. He wants to undermine our theology, oppose our convictions, dilute our worship and denigrate the Word. He wants to sully our reputations and stifle our witness— we need watchmen who will see what is coming and sound the alarm!

The enemy is doing everything he can to destroy the home, marriages and family. Children have forgotten the meaning of submission and obedience. Husbands and wives have no concept of faithfulness and fidelity, and regularly renege on their promise, "unto death do us part." Parents have forgotten how to apply the board of education to the seat of learning, and we are raising a rebellious generation who balk at submission to authority— we need watchmen who will see what is coming and sound the alarm!

The enemy is also doing everything he can to subvert the schoolhouse! The Bible has become off limits, and children have been forbidden to participate in organized prayer. Many schools today are teaching "Values Curriculum." For the first 150 years of our nation's history we had a values curriculum—and it was called the Bible! In many class rooms—especially the college class room—young people are being taught that God is a myth from our repressed past. They are being taught as fact rather than theory that man evolved from a single amoeba, formed countless years ago in a puddle of primordial soup. If God can be marginalized and children are taught that He does not exist; if they really believe that they are the result of evolution; then all rules, speed limits, etc. will be cast off. The tragic end result will be that many of our children

will careen down the highway to hell, without thought to the consequences. We need watchmen who will see what is coming and sound the alarm!

The enemy is doing everything he can to destroy our community! People outside the walls do not want to be bothered with thoughts of God, His will and His Word. The first time President George W. Bush won the presidency, there was a concerted effort by atheists and civil libertarians to prevent the newly-elected president from placing his hand on a Bible when being sworn in. Some wanted inaugural prayers banned as well. The cry from the lost world is rising ever louder, as it demands freedom from God's laws and from God Himself— "Away with the Ten Commandments! Away with right and wrong! Away with morality! Away with Jesus, the Bible, God, Christianity and the cross!" Even as many judges accede to these demands, we need watchmen who will see what is coming and sound the alarm!

Characteristics of the Watchman

"When he sees riders, horsemen in pairs, riders on donkeys, riders on camels, let him listen diligently, very diligently." Then he who saw cried out: "Upon a watchtower I stand, O Lord, continually by day, and at my post I am stationed whole nights. And behold, here come riders, horsemen in pairs!" And he answered, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon; and all the carved images of her gods he has shattered to the ground." O my threshed and winnowed one, what I have heard from the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, I announce to you." (Isaiah 21:7–10 ESV)

1. He Was Vigilant in His Watching (verses 7-8)

Isaiah 21:7 tells us that the watchman not only looks, but that he sees. Another translation puts it this way: "he harkens diligently with much heed" (KJV). After carefully taking note of all he observes, he gives his report, showing himself to be vigilant and faithful through the night. Interestingly, lions have very short eyelids. Even when they are asleep, they have the appearance that their eyes are open and watching. The vigilant watchman is like a lion that watches both day and night. He does not leave his post, but remains there to ensure that nothing happens during the day that escapes his notice.

The watchman Isaiah sets a great example for those who would be watchmen in our day. In 1 Peter 5:8, we are told to "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, and seeking whom he may devour" (KJV). The word "sober" means "to be calm and collected in spirit", and the word "vigilant" means "to be watchful". The idea here is that the Lord's watchmen are not to get caught up in the excitement of the times. We are not to be disturbed by the events around us, but to be ever alert. The world is changing around us today at an alarming rate, for the worse. We are not to be disturbed by the things we see however, that we might soberly and effectively warn to our generation.

2. He Was Vigorous in His Warnings

When this watchman saw trouble approaching, he did not keep the message to himself. Instead, he opened his mouth and shouted a warning as loudly as he could. He sounded the alarm with all his might, that everyone in earshot would hear.

We Need Watchmen Who are Vigilant in Their Watching and Vigorous in Their Warnings

Again, there is a lesson here for the watchmen of our day. As we see the enemy approaching ever nearer the walls of our churches, our homes, our families and our communities, we have a responsibility to sound the warning. Some would say, “What’s the use? No one is listening to us!” Remember, one day we are going to face our Savior at The Judgment Seat of Christ. On that day, we will give an account of how well we sounded the alarm. This truth is illustrated well in our Lord’s words to the prophet Ezekiel, “The word of the LORD came to me: “Son of man, speak to your people and say to them, If I bring the sword upon a land, and the people of the land take a man from among them, and make him their watchman, and if he sees the sword coming upon the land and blows the trumpet and warns the people, then if anyone who hears the sound of the trumpet does not take warning, and the sword comes and takes him away, his blood shall be upon his own head. He heard the sound of the trumpet and did not take warning; his blood shall be upon himself. But if he had taken warning, he would have saved his life. But if the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet, so that the people are not warned, and the sword comes and takes any one of them, that person is taken away in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at the watchman’s hand. “So you, son of man, I have made a watchman for the house of Israel. Whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me. If I say to the wicked, ‘O wicked one, you shall surely die,’ and you do not speak to warn the wicked to turn from his way that wicked person shall die in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand. But if you warn the wicked to turn from his way, and he does not turn from his way, that person shall die in his iniquity, but you will have delivered your soul.” (Ezekiel 33:1–9, ESV)

Let us diligently warn those who have rejected God, that their souls might be delivered from sin and death— that is our responsibility and duty!

The Watchman and His Message (verses 11-12)

“The oracle concerning Dumah. One is calling to me from Seir, ‘Watchman, what time of the night? Watchman, what time of the night?’ The watchman says, ‘Morning comes, and also the night. If you will inquire, inquire; come back again’” (Isaiah 21:11–12 ESV). These words are a prophecy declared against the people of Edom. They are pictured as one who approaches the wall at night, crying out to the watchman, “What of the night?” This enquiry has been interpreted in many ways.

Some say it is the question of a careless heart, asked in a sarcastic tone— the enquirer indifferent to whether he receives and answer or not, and unwilling to make changes to prepare for what is coming.

Some believe it may be a question born out of contempt—the inquirer has asked “What time of the night?” multiple times (as implied in verse 12) but defies the warning each time because of their unbelief.

Others say it may be the question of a concerned heart— the inquirer in effect asking, “Watchman, tell me, is everything alright? When will the morning come? Is there hope?”

Regardless of the condition of the heart that birthed the question, the watchman has a three-fold answer. It is the same three-fold answer the watchmen of our day need to have ready for those we are to warn.

He Speaks of Coming Dawn

The watchman cries, “The morning comes!” His voice rings out, declaring the good news that the night is nearly spent and that dawn is about to break. The night was the most frightening time for the inhabitants of the city. The watchman could not see as well in the dark, and the enemy had a better chance of launching a surprise attack. During the day time, the enemy would be exposed far more easily. The news that dawn was coming brought comfort to the hearts of the people. In the same way, we should look forward to the promise of eternal life and coming of our Savior. It won’t be long, brothers and sisters, until the Lord comes to take us home to Heaven, as he has promised:

“Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.” (John 14:1–3 ESV)

“For the Lord himself, will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.” (1 Thessalonians 4:16–17 ESV)

Hang on church! It may look dark at present, but the morning is about to break and we will be leaving here! Thank God, with the morning comes joy!

“For his anger is but for a moment, and his favor is for a lifetime. Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning.” (Psalm 30:5 ESV)

He Speaks of Doom

The watchman informs the people that after the morning is past, night time will return! For the children of God, there is a bright, happy morning on the horizon; but for the lost sinner, there lies the danger of an eternally dark night of separation from God in hell. There is hope on the

horizon for God's people, but for those who refuse his love and rebel against Him there is nothing to look forward to but the undiluted wrath of Almighty God.

"Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him." (John 3:36 ESV).

"It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Hebrews 10:31 ESV).

He Speaks of Decisions

The watchman exhorts those who hear him to inquire, listen, and return. He is calling the wayward ones back to God, warning them, "There is great danger on the horizon, but there is still time to make a change. Come to God! Return to Him!" The same message spoken to ancient Israel is just as pertinent and must be trumpeted by the watchmen of our day! Danger, great danger, looms on the near horizon for the person outside of a relationship with God, but it is not too late. God is still saving souls. He is still changing lives. He is still receiving all who will come to Him by faith. That is the message we need to share with this lost world today. They need to hear the news that there is still hope. All is not lost—they can be saved if they will come; if they will return to God.

Where are the watchmen who are gazing out over the horizon? Where are the watchmen who see the danger of approaching judgment? Where are the watchmen who see the enemy attempting to breach the walls of our churches, our families, our homes and our communities? Where are the watchmen who will set the trumpet to their lips and sound the warning?

Will you be a faithful watchman?

In the Old Testament book of Nehemiah, the nation of Israel rallied together in a grassroots movement to help rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, and thus restore stability, safety, and a promising future to the great city. We have chosen the historical concept of "rebuilding the walls" as an allegory for rebuilding our nation's foundations; sounding the call for citizens to become involved. As Psalm 11:3 challenges us, "If the foundations be destroyed, what shall the righteous do?"