

Pastor writes

The theme for our morning's meditation is, 'The watchfulness that is required in the Church's pastors.' Watchmen have a duty to perform: they are to protect and watch-out for any harm to people or thing entrusted to them. In many robberies watchmen are usually in connivance with the robbers.

The passage in Ezekiel talks about the prophet being a watchman to the people of Israel and the strange thing was that Yahweh himself was the one who was bringing the punishment. The watchmen particularly in West Asia were stationed on to look out towers that were on the walls of the city, the roofs of gate houses or in watchtowers that were built outside the city. The watchman's charge involved paying careful attention to the movement of the enemy and if there was any imminent danger, then he was to blow the trumpet and warn those inside, preparing the soldiers to attack and warning the civilians to take cover.

Ezekiel is now presented with four hypothetical scenarios. In the first scenario the Lord says, 'If I say to the wicked, 'you shall surely die' and you give them no warning, or speak to warn the wicked from their wicked way in order to save their life, those wicked shall die for their iniquity but their blood I will require at your hand.' In this situation Ezekiel had the responsibility of warning the wicked and had to pass on Yahweh's message that they would surely die. Failure to pass on the message would make Ezekiel responsible for the wicked man's death. The individual would also die for their own guilt. As scripture reminds us, 'the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord' (Romans 6: 23), so also the pastors are watchmen who are to communicate this warning.

In the second scenario, the Lord says, 'But if you warn the wicked, and they do not turn from their wickedness, or from their wicked way they shall die for their iniquity but you will have saved your life.' If the prophet warns the wicked and the wicked do not repent and persist in their wicked ways then the watchman has absolved himself of the responsibility of their death because he had faithfully communicated God's message to them. His own life will be saved because he was faithful to the message.

In the third scenario, the Lord talks about a righteous person who has now turned into a wicked person. The individual appears to be a member of the faith community but his actions indicates that he has repudiated the covenant. In response Yahweh puts a stumbling block before him which would lead to his death. The prophet is also called to warn the righteous person who has left his former righteousness and has become wicked. His fate is determined not by how he began his life but whether he has persevered. The point is not the fate of the backslider but the duty of the watchman who will be accountable for his blood. Perseverance till the end is of uttermost importance.

In the final scenario, the case describes the fate of a repentant backslider. The watchman was to warn the righteous person not to sin and if he does not sin he will surely live because he took the warning. The voice of the watchman symbolizes the grace of God reaching to those under the sentence of

death. As much as the previous righteousness of a backslider will not be credited to him if he persists in sin, so also the previous evil of a sinner will not be held against him if he repents the error of his way. God is indeed on the side of life, even for the wicked rather than an intention for death.

In all these four pictures the role of the watchman is vital. In a similar manner the Church's pastors also have this awesome responsibility for the life and death of the people in their charge. We are called to repent and invite others to repent. The pastors are accountable to God for the people he has entrusted to them. Not only do they themselves have to be faithful to the end, but they are to call others to faithfulness and perseverance. Satan wants to alienate us from the love of God by making us live a life of sin. The message of God is that sin and wickedness require a radical prescription; repentance and casting oneself totally to the mercy of God. May we cast ourselves before God's throne of mercy.

Shalom
Paul Swarup
19th August 2013