

Sermon Draft

Text: Ezekiel 33:7–20

Sermon: Prayer Answered

Do you realize what you just prayed in the sermon hymn?

Without looking, can you remember what you just asked God to do? If

you can't remember, well, let's open back up to hymn 707 verse 3:

“Assist my soul, too apt to stray, A stricter watch to keep.” You just

asked God to help you keep watch over your soul, over your spiritual

condition. If you were God, how would you answer that prayer? Send

you regular memos? Shoot you weekly emails? Instant message you?

Direct you through dreams?

Did you get the reason why we desire assistance from God? We just confessed that our soul is inclined to wander away from God's will for our lives. We just confessed that our souls would rather have it our way than God's way. Through the words of this hymn, we just confessed that we need help.

But because we're also baptized children of God, our new nature desires to live a God-pleasing life. Our new self in Christ is concerned about our spiritual welfare. We want and need to be told when we've wandered away from the truth, just as we want our doctor to give it to us straight if we have cancer or some other life-threatening disease. So, we've asked God to help us. I'm standing here this morning to tell you that he has answered your prayer. I'm standing here this morning to tell you that I, Your Pastor, Am an Answer to Your Prayer!

Now before you think, "I have a high opinion of myself" think about this: God called Ezekiel to be a watchman. Not the kind that walked around on the top of the city walls looking for approaching invaders. Not the kind that was to keep a sharp eye out for those trying to sneak in after the gates were closed at night. No. He was called to be a watchman over the spiritual condition of God's people: ***"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” (vs 7–8).

I, like every pastor you’ve ever had, also have a call to speak God’s warning. God has appointed me to warn you whenever you depart from his ways. I’ve been called to tap you on the shoulder whenever you get off track, whenever I see you turn things into idols, such as sports or patriotism or money; whenever I see you deal unjustly with someone, whenever I see you steal or defraud or live unfaithfully with your spouse. Whenever your posts on Facebook go beyond the bounds of love. Oh, and when you get yourself in so deep that you despair and cry out, “Pastor, there’s no way out of the mess I’ve made,” God has called me to say to you, “Not true! God doesn’t get any kicks out of seeing you in this condition. Turn away from the sorry mess you created and live!”

But there's more to this watchman job. God also has called me to pull you aside when you think that all the good you've done is like a credit balance that makes up for the times you've jumped off the track. You won't hear me console you by agreeing with you that as far as God is concerned, the past good you've done outweighs the bad. My job is to keep you from falling into that flawed kind of reasoning.

Maybe we can "make up" for some wrong we've done to a neighbor or family member, but that won't wash with God. We can't compensate for our sins. On the other hand, if we're one who's messed up our life but we listen to God's words of admonition whether from me or someone else and we repent, turning back to Christ for forgiveness, we will live.

The bad that we've done in the past will not be held against us. That's what forgiveness is all about! Well, there you have it—that's my work as your watchman. That's how I'm an answer to this prayer.

But it's not all that easy, not all that simple for me, especially in today's moral climate. Our old nature wants to be free to do anything we please. It resents being boxed in. It resents being shown its faults. It thinks, "Does pastor really think he's better than me?" And the truth is, some people do get angry when their pastor confronts them with their sinful behavior. So, insulted do they become that they leave the church.

But consider this: just as God addressed Ezekiel as "*son of man,*" so he reminds me that I'm a mortal too. With those words, he reminds me that I face the same temptations, the same sins, the same rebellions that you do. So, I, too, must remember that the words I speak are his warning, not mine. That is, I don't come to you as some holier-than-thou guy. I do not come to put any of you in your place. I come as the messenger only. Furthermore, God reminds me that if I stand in so much fear or awe of you that I'm too afraid to call you out when you need it, he's holding me accountable for your fate.

In times of flood and heavy downpours, road crews will post signs that say, “Danger—High Water,” and direct cars to alternate travel routes. If a road crew doesn’t put out those signs and cars then drive through water so deep it causes them to float away and drivers to drown, of course the drivers who survive would complain, “Why didn’t they warn me?” On the other hand, if the drivers see the sign and ignore it, well, that’s their problem isn’t it? They were warned.

Well, not quite that simple. What road crew member, if he saw a car floating down the road, would simply say, “Too bad—we put up the warning sign”? So, my job is not completely done when I’ve warned you about dangerous spiritual situations. It goes further.

I am also called to point you to the way out of your predicament. ***“I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live,”*** says the Lord in our text (v 11). The way out is not to try to do better, to try harder, to do the best you can. I’m called not just to urge you to turn *away* from bad behavior, but also to turn *to* something, actually, to turn to *someone*.

God has called me to point you to another “son of man” besides Ezekiel, and that is Jesus. He came in human flesh to face the same temptations you and I face as mortals. Only he succeeded in resisting where you and I haven’t. He kept God’s laws perfectly for you and me, and in his great love for you, he saw to it that his obedience was credited to your account and mine.

And as we’ll see in coming weeks, he did even more by giving up his life on the cross as payment for our sins. All of those benefits became ours when we were baptized into his family. And all the power which came to us from the Spirit in our Baptism is there to help us with that daily turning away from sin and back to Christ in faith and to point you back to Christ, should I find you depressed over your sins or discouraged over your attempts to live a godly life for him.

Television public service announcements urge us to know the warning signs of a stroke or a heart attack. Spouses or children are urged to know them too, so that when they see them in others, they know what to do.

In a similar way, then, I serve as watchman, called to be alert to the signs of spiritual danger in this congregation. I pray that with God's power, I will continue to be that blessing to you.

Amen