

EZEKIEL 33:7-9
UNCOMFORTABLE WARNINGS

“Warning lights are flashing. Warning lights are flashing.” Well of course drivers are not going to hear that, or look up and see the lights. So, a sign had to be placed in the middle of the road. If you don’t know what I’m referring to you haven’t been downtown lately. People generally don’t like warnings, even if the warnings are meant for their own good, or if the warning is for the good of someone else, and it interferes with your life, such as a crosswalk making you stop your car. People don’t like to change their behaviours, if it’s only meant for the benefit of someone else. People generally don’t like to be told what to do, and what not to do. It’s a hard job to tell people what they should be doing, or not doing, and yet that’s part of the duties of a pastor.

This reading from Ezekiel is directed towards pastors, and at the same time it’s directed to you the people in that it tells you what you’re to expect to hear from pastors. Warnings, warnings, and more warnings. Three times that word is issued in our text. However, just as people don’t like to hear warnings, pastors don’t like to give warnings. It much nicer to tell you good things such as that Jesus died to pay for your sins. However, we first need to talk about sin before we can talk about the good things that Jesus did to take away sin.

If you look for the gospel in our reading, you’ll have to strain yourself to find it. All you’ll find is me delivering my soul if I issue God’s warnings to you, or if I don’t tell you God’s warnings then I bear the responsibility of you going to hell. Yet, if I do tell you God’s warnings and you don’t listen then you still die in your sins. However, the good news for you is that if my soul can be delivered, then your soul can also be delivered.

However, before we get to that deliverance we need to start with your iniquity, your sin. First comes the Law pointing out our sins, and then comes the Gospel showing us our deliverance from sin. In simple confirmation terms life with God is made up of two S.O.S’s. Show Our Sins. Show Our Saviour.

And so because God warns me to warn you that’s what I’ll do. Firstly, I have to point out that the real enemy here is Sin, not you. Here you get to be the victim. Oh, woe is me! You’re not playing the victim, whining that you had a bad life and all the bad stuff you do is the fault of the bad life you experienced from your family, your school, your church, your government, whomever it is that you like to blame and not take responsibility for your actions. Here you can say, “I am infected by sin, and that’s the reason for my behaviour.”

Of course that doesn't excuse your actions. You can't just say that you sin because of the Sin within you, and then God will forgive you, no problem. It's not your fault. Paul asked and answered this question saying, “What then?

Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means!" (Romans 6:15). You acknowledge that you sin because of Sin living within you, and then you try to stop sinning, trusting in God's forgiveness.

So, where do we go with that? In the Small Catechism Luther said, "Consider your place in life according to the Ten Commandments: Are you a father, mother, son, daughter, husband, wife, or worker? Have you been disobedient, unfaithful, or lazy? Have you been hot-tempered, rude, or quarrelsome? Have you hurt someone by your words or deeds? Have you stolen, been negligent, wasted anything, or done any harm?"

In another place Luther has questions and answers to help you with this confession of sin. 1. Do you believe that you are a sinner? Yes, I believe it. I am a sinner. 2. How do you know this? From the Ten Commandments, which I have not kept. 3. Are you sorry for your sins? Yes, I am sorry that I have sinned against God. 4. What have you deserved from God because of your sins? His wrath and displeasure, temporal death, and eternal damnation. 5. Do you hope to be saved? Yes, that is my hope. 6. In whom then do you trust? In my dear Lord Jesus Christ. There are fourteen more questions and answers, and I'll return to some of them shortly, especially Jesus, but first we have to wrap up my need to tell you about your sins.

This text is telling me that I am a watchman of people's souls whether those people are penitent or not. Yet, just as I am to tell you about the things that are sinful, I'm also to point you to God's promises to deliver you and restore you so that you don't bury yourselves in despair. Yes, I am to warn you about sin, but I'm also to proclaim God's message of love for sinners. And it's this message alone that can bring sinners to saving faith. I might feel like giving up at times, feeling that I've tried to tell people about sin and about Jesus, but they don't listen, they don't respond, but God tells me that I'm still His watchman. Circumstances in life may change, but God's message to you don't change.

So, what is God's message to you from today's text, other than that if you don't change your sinful ways you'll die in your sins? How well do you know your Bible? Do you know enough to know that you're not to just read little bits and pieces of it here and there, but rather you're to read all of it. The texts that we read in church are meant to prime you to read further, and what might you find if you read further?

Ezekiel writes during a time of exile. Ezekiel is in exile, and by the time you get to 33:21 the prophet received a report from a fugitive of Jerusalem that the city had fallen, and the temple had been destroyed. For the exiles, it was a dark and hopeless time. But at this very point, Ezekiel's book turned from the powerful condemnation of the Law to the sweet Gospel promises of the Saviour

to come and the restoration that He will bring, so that now when the people are brought to their lowest God might bring them hope.

One of the clearest places to see Jesus in the book of Ezekiel is in the next chapter. With the temple lost, the exiles gave up hope of ever returning. They felt abandoned and cut off forever. That's when God gave Ezekiel a beautiful promise of the coming Saviour to restore their hope. I often tell people to go home and read certain passages, but I'm not naïve enough to think that everybody does that. And so for those of you who don't read your Bibles at home, or even have a Bible at home, I'll read that passage of the hope of Jesus.

“For thus says the Lord God: Behold, I, I Myself will search for My sheep and will seek them out. As a shepherd seeks out his flock when he is among his sheep that have been scattered, so will I seek out My sheep, and I will rescue them from all places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. And I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land. And I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the ravines, and in all the inhabited places of the country. I will feed them with good pasture, and on the mountain heights of Israel shall be their grazing land. There they shall lie down in good grazing land, and on rich pasture they shall feed on the mountains of Israel. I myself will be the shepherd of My sheep, and I Myself will make them lie down, declares the Lord God. I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak,” (Ezk 34:11-16a).

Did you see Jesus, shepherding you His sinful sheep, forgiving and restoring you. Who is this Jesus whom God points Ezekiel to? He was pointed to as the Good Shepherd, as the Messiah in the Old Testament, or as the Christ in the New Testament, as we're more familiar with Him.

So, as our catechism asks question 7. Who is the Christ? The Son of God, true God and man. 9. What has Christ done for you that you trust in Him? He died for me and shed His blood for me on the cross for the forgiveness of sins. 11. How do you know this? From the holy Gospel, from the words instituting the Sacrament, and by His body and blood given me as a pledge in the Sacrament.

You know this by the words of Jesus. “I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. I am the Good Shepherd. I know My own and My own know Me, just as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep”, for all of us sinful wandering sheep – the Gospel of John 10:11-15. Amen.