

11. Our responsibility to what God told us

February 20, 2014

As Karen and I walked around within Rancho Sahuarita area, we find a lot of irresponsible dog owners' remains. I don't blame their dogs at all. They do what they do as dogs. The owners know that they are supposed to take care of them right away, but the vast majority of them do not do it. I am sure that they 'd like to have a dog like this one.

The dictionary I frequently use defines 'responsibility' in this way: "the state or fact of being answerable, or accountable for something within one's power, control, or management." It is no wonder that many people don't want to take responsibility because they don't want to be accountable to anyone, especially to God. They just want to enjoy privilege without accountability and responsibility, especially the younger generation in our country. I believe that unfortunately this type of mindset is permeating through Christianity as well.

A. THE WATCHMAN AND THE PEOPLE

Ezekiel 33:1-9 Again the word of the Lord came to me, saying, 2 "Son of man, speak to the children of your people, and say to them: ' When I bring the sword upon a land, and the people of the land take a man from their territory and make him their watchman, 3 when he sees the sword coming upon the land, if he blows the trumpet and warns the people, 4 then whoever hears the sound of the trumpet and does not take warning, if the sword comes and takes him away, his blood shall be on his own head. 5 He heard the sound of the trumpet, but did not take warning; his blood shall be upon himself . But he who takes warning will save his life. 6 But if the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet, and the people are not warned, and the sword comes and takes any person from among them, he is taken away in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at the watchman 's hand.' 7 "So you, son of man: I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; therefore you shall hear a word from My mouth and warn them for Me. 8 When I say to the wicked, 'O wicked man, you shall surely die!' and you do not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at your hand. 9 Nevertheless if you warn the wicked to turn from his way, and he does not turn from his way, he shall die in his iniquity; but you have delivered your soul.

Biblical prophecies bring three very important sights to the listeners who want to learn from the Lord: Hindsight, foresight, and insight. Prophetic hindsight is important because it helps us deal with the past and understand better what God did and why He did it. Foresight helps us avoid trouble and have hope for the future. But insight helps us better understand ourselves and those around us, and what we must do to become better men and women who do the will of God.

In these chapters, Ezekiel exercises all three gifts as he exposes sin, analyzes history , and gives promises for the future. He deals with the sins of the Jewish people in chapter 33; the sins of their leaders in chapter 34; and the sins of the neighboring land of Edom in chapter 35.

Particularly in chapter 33, the Lord points out the responsibilities for the watchman as well as the people who hear the warning . Ezekiel had faithfully performed his responsibility as a watchman for Israel and exhorted the exiles for their individual responsibility.

Every Jew who had ever lived in a walled city knew what Ezekiel was talking about when he referred to the watchmen on the wall, because these watchmen were important to the city's defense. Faithful watchmen kept their eyes focused on the horizon and gave the warning when they saw the enemy approaching. If the watchmen were alert and faithful and the people obedient, lives would be saved; if the watchmen were sleeping or careless, or the people unconcerned, the city would be captured and people would die.

B. NO PLEASURE IN THE DEATH OF THE WICKED

Ezekiel 33:11 Say to them: 'As I live,' says the Lord God, 'I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live.

Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die, O house of Israel?'

Here in v11 the Lord is pleading with the unrepented Israel people through the prophet Ezekiel to turn from their wicked ways to Him. This verse might be a surprise to some of us. Because we know that God is a Holy and Righteous God, we might have a tendency to think that He doesn't mind sending unbelievers to hell as fast as He can. He doesn't. He has extremely long patience and boundless mercy. Aren't we glad that our God doesn't have temper like we do? If He did, we'd been in hell long, long ago.

The Hebrew word for 'turn' is "shuwb". Its definition is "to turn back, return, repent to God." The biblical words translated "repent" simply mean "to change your mind," but this change of mind also involves a change of life. If a thief truly repented, he or she would restore what had been stolen. The liars would confess their deception and ask for forgiveness, and the drunkards would stop their alcohol abuse.

We must correctly distinguish regret, remorse, and true repentance.

- Regret is an activity of the mind; whenever we remember what we've done, we ask ourselves, "Why did I do that?"
- Remorse includes both the heart and the mind, and we feel disgust and pain, but we don't change our ways and feel bad that we got caught.
- True repentance includes the mind, the heart, and the behavior. We change our mind about our sins and agree with what God says about them; we abhor ourselves and our sins because what we have done; and we deliberately turn from our sin and turn to the Lord for His mercy.

2 Corinthians 7:10 For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death.

This brings out that gnawing question from the back of our mind: What about the fate of people who have never heard the Gospel – would God send them to hell? To me this indicates an incorrect view of God, because the idea is that God would eagerly want to send someone to hell, or at the very least, wouldn't care if someone went there. But that is not the God of the Bible.

If we learn nothing else from the Bible, we should learn that God loves humanity and longs for fellowship and friendship with us. God doesn't want any person to go to hell, and the best evidence of this is the fact that He poured out His wrath on His own Son Jesus Christ. No father wants his child to be harmed and would gladly take that harm upon himself if it were possible. But God the Father loved us so much that He put His judgment of us on His Son who had never committed a single sin so that we would not have to go to hell.

Then, those who still would like to argue would insist, "But those people who live in Africa have never heard the Gospel. They shouldn't go to hell because it is not their fault for living in remote areas." For that argument, I have two answers":

1) It is NOT your problem whether they go to hell or not. But it is your problem once you hear the Gospel message.

You heard the warning about your eternal destiny in hell by not accepting Jesus as the Savior and Lord. Now your destiny is in your own hand.

2) God provided a salvation message in nature so that people can see and accept the truth of God in faith. But the majority of mankind rejected it.

Romans 1:20-23 For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, 21 because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. 22 Professing to be wise, they became fools, 23 and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man--and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things.

C. THE WAY OF THE LORD IS NOT FAIR

Ezekiel 33:17-20 "Yet the children of your people say, 'The way of the Lord is not fair.' But it is their way which is not fair! 18 When the righteous turns from his righteousness and commits iniquity, he shall die because of it. 19 But when the wicked turns from his wickedness and does what is lawful and right, he shall live because of it. 20 Yet you say, 'The way of the Lord is not fair.' O house of Israel, I will judge every one of you according to his own ways."

The Jews debated with Ezekiel and insisted that God wasn't being fair and that His ways were unequal. This response in itself proved that they had not really repented, because repentant sinners don't argue with God's Word. It wasn't their responsibility to prove God wrong but to admit that they were wrong.

Please note what the second half of v20 says, "O house of Israel, I will judge every one of you according to his own ways." We do not see the motive of other people's actions or comments, but only the results. However, the Lord sees the motives deep within their hearts and He judged them individually. Each individual is personally responsible and can not blame anyone else for his or her wickedness.

Someone posted this in a Facebook page. I agree with it because it is true for me: "Everything happens for a reason. Sometimes that reason is that you are stupid and made bad choices."

The Israelites really cannot complain about the fairness of God. The Lord was extremely fair to them and even went out of His way to bless them with three covenants:

1) The Abrahamic Covenant (Genesis 12) – It is God's basic program for blessing the world. In this covenant God declared that He would choose one man, Abram; from that one man He would create the nation Israel; and through that nation He would bless the world.

2) The Mosaic covenant (Exodus 20, Numbers 9, Deuteronomy) – It was closely related to the Abrahamic covenant, provided Israel's constitution that governed all aspects of life. As Israel kept the Mosaic covenant, she would receive the blessings of

the Abrahamic covenant. However, at any point in history when Israel disobeyed the Mosaic covenant, she would find also that she did not benefit from Abrahamic covenant blessings. Israel's failure to follow the Mosaic covenant was exactly what had caused her to be exiled in Babylonia. Israel found that her God was faithful to bring the judgments of their own choice as well as the blessings on her .

3) The Davidic covenant (2 Sam 7:12-16) – God promised that David's descendants would always sit on his throne: an eternal throne over an eternal kingdom. This covenant promised that someday the final son of David would rule on David's throne – the Messiah who would rule over the messianic kingdom eternally .

D. HEARING BUT NOT DOING

Ezekiel 33:30-33 "As for you, son of man, the children of your people are talking about you beside the walls and in the doors of the houses; and they speak to one another, everyone saying to his brother, 'Please come and hear what the word is that comes from the Lord.' 31 So they come to you as people do, they sit before you as My people, and they hear your words, but they do not do them; for with their mouth they show much love, but their hearts pursue their own gain. 32 Indeed you are to them as a very lovely song of one who has a pleasant voice and can play well on an instrument; for they hear your words, but they do not do them. 33 And when this comes to pass--surely it will come--then they will know that a prophet has been among them."

The Babylonian army set fire to Jerusalem on August 14, 586 B.C. The Jewish exiles in Babylon no longer had a place to return to. This validated the prophecies of Ezekiel and proved that he was indeed the prophet of God.

About five months later a fugitive arrived in Babylon and announced the fall of Jerusalem and the temple to the exiles. The hearing of this news brought about the opening of Ezekiel's mouth so that he was no longer mute when he wasn't declaring the message of God since chapter 3. He was now able to converse with people and have a "pastoral" ministry among them apart from his prophetic preaching . For about seven and a half years, Ezekiel had been under this constraint, but now he was free to speak. Certainly the exiles noticed this and would be curious to know what had happened to him.

Yet Ezekiel knew that the people who came to his house to hear him speak didn't appreciate his ministry or obey what they heard. To them, it was an entertainment of the day. They weren't concerned about God's truth or their personal responsibility and they refused to obey what God told them to do. They didn't realize that personal privilege of hearing the Word of God comes with personal responsibility of obeying it and personal accountability of being judged by the Word of God they had heard.

John 12:48 He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him--the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day.

I like what Abraham Lincoln said: "You cannot escape the responsibility of tomorrow by evading it today."

E. APPLICATIONS

1) Personal privilege of hearing the Word of God comes with personal responsibility of obeying it and personal accountability of being judged by the Word of God we hear.

2) The important thing at the Judgment Seat of Christ won't be how much Bible we studied or learned, but how much we loved and obeyed.

Today's believers in America have every possible way to access the Word of God through the Bibles, CDs, DVDs, radios, TVs, and internet. We know far more about the truth of God than any other time. We are responsible for what we know.