

***I Was Not Joking, But She Was!*** (Ezek 33:7-9; Mat 18:1-20).

- \* Someone once asked me a question after hearing the scary story from my past life. *What is more risky, he said, flying a jet or shepherding God's flock? To be a pastor is more dangerous business,* I answered without delay. In response the man nodded at me with a smile.
- \* People might have a different opinion on this matter recalling any unsafely occupations. But I am not joking, especially when I am thinking about the great responsibility before God; and on the other hand, about my personal weakness in carrying out this responsibility. There is also the dreadful warning pronounced upon all unfaithful servants of the house of the Lord in the Scripture. Now you might agree with my statement that the pastoral ministry is the most dangerous occupation.
- \* Take into account, for example, the warning upon disloyal spiritual leaders of Israel in (Jer 23:1). The record says, *"The leaders of my people are sure to be judged, declares the Lord. They were supposed to watch over my people like shepherds watch over their sheep. But they are causing my people to be destroyed and scattered.* From the immediate context of this chapter, we learn that God's warning was addressed to the shepherds (pastors – in Latin) who didn't care for God's flock as it was supposed to be. Those of us who are accustomed to think ahead of the times might agree with me that the pastoral ministry is the most dangerous occupation in the sense of its direct responsibility before God, who is just and holy. To be a loyal servant of the Lord's house means to be not just a teacher, steward, and an intercessor, but an upright teacher, good steward, wise intercessor and the blameless Christian, (1Ti 3:2 -10). On the other hand, the Scripture teaches that shepherding is the most respectable position among all known ranks on earth.
- \* Now, we wish to attract your attention to the teaching from (Ezekiel 33:7-9), the first reading of this Day. Its prophetic teaching must be interpreted by the analogy given in the beginning of the chapter. Nearly it says, as much as an appointed watchman responds for blowing a trumpet in view of the forthcoming enemy, so God's servants are appointed to speak out the warning addressed by God to his people, (v.v. 3, 7). In our text we found a dual responsibility on this matter. Thus, in the first instance, if a watchman utilizes all his abilities to be heard by his fellow citizens when he notices the terrible threat coming from afar, then God says, such a man is not responsible for the blood- shedding of those people who don't want to believe a warning message. And second, if a watchman sees the coming threat but keeps silent, then the blood of victims comes upon him. As soon as we understood that it is the universal principle refers to all reckless servants of the Lord, we exclaim, *Alas!* If you can, imagine the eschatological judgment upon the unfaithful servants among whom may be found each of us! Doesn't the Scripture testify somewhere that the judgment

will begin from the house of the Lord? Surely, *it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God. And if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?* (1Pe 4:17).

\* But what can we say about the prophet Ezekiel? Was he a good enough as a watcher? Or ... what? We know that Ezekiel was a priest and a prophet of the Jewish community in Babylon. However, unlike Jeremiah who was mostly perceived as a priest, Ezekiel was a pastor. The duty of priests included teaching the Mosaic Law and overseeing people's loyalty to this law. In this sense, Ezekiel was assigned by God as a watchman, (v. 4). And with regard to a prophetic office, Ezekiel had to mediate God's words to his people warning them to live as the surrounded pagan nations. Regarding Ezekiel, we conclude that he was pretty much as the pastors of our days to whom the Lord Jesus Christ appoints to mediate the written Word and to watch over the spiritual needs of his people. Therefore, Ezekiel cared for the spiritual needs of Israel in Exile, particularly those in Babylon. He was bound by the solid regulation that is valuable for all watchmen-pastors of our days. Here is the regulation. *If I say to the wicked, O wicked one, you shall surely die, and you (Ezekiel) 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,* (v. 8).

\* Dear friends, doesn't the sound of this regulation scare us? Especially if it concerns those of us who have been called to blow trumpets in view of the forthcoming calamities. Unfortunately, some of us are too political in blowing quietly or blowing not at all. This thought can be interpreted by the analogy we found from politics; that is similar to what we had in the case with a watchman on the city wall, (v. 2) and a watchman in the house of Israel as Ezekiel was, (v. 7). Here it is the analogy. According to *Low Angeles Times*, the Republican presidential candidate Michele Bachmann in her speech on Monday, August 29 described *Hurricane Irene* and last week's earthquake in the eastern United States as a warning from God! But later she said, *she was only joking*. Here we understand the Minnesota congresswoman's step back; but if an appointed by God watchman would act in such a way, it is always shameful! The bad scenario is when pastors trying to please their congregations convince them in the opposite; as for example, that the current misfortunes are nothing more than a natural process or a result of the global warming.

\* Now we wish you to focus on the lesson from (Mat 18:1-20), the reading of the Day. Here Jesus testifies that temptations will be never seized, but woe to that person through whom the temptations come! (v. 7). Now imagine the congregation where among 300 hundred parishioners found one child who believes in Jesus. Also imagine a pastor who didn't teach to obey the gospel of God, (1Pe 4:17) and even signs from Heaven turns into nothing by the power of his arguments. In this instance such a pastor became a source of great

temptation to that child. Here we come across with the worst scenario for the unfaithful watchmen-pastors. It is never good to close people's eyes on their dreadful things by keeping silent in view of upcoming Judgment. Because of this, it may cause the child of God to sin deliberately, (v. 6). In addition, we recall today Jesus' warning after Ezekiel's that is even more impressive. ... *Woe to the one by whom the temptation comes! (v.7) ... it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea, (v. 6).*

\* Dear Christians, don't the sound of this warning and many others warnings found across the Scripture scare us? As for me, I am afraid to be a teacher on my own. My own self-evaluation creates in me the solid conviction that nobody would be saved without our Saviour Jesus Christ; and none of us who are pastors would be able to carry out a pastoral ministry faithfully. This objective truth would cause the great depression and fear if the saving faith would not be imputed in our hearts. Therefore, contrary to the objective truth, the saving faith turns our sadness into joy when we believe in Christ's forgiveness and when we receive all necessary things in order to carry out our duties successfully. By the reality of being Jesus' disciples, we are witnesses of God's salvation in Christ Jesus who alone is the cause of our righteousness, and who alone is a cause of our possibility to carry the office of the pastoral ministry. The only things we have to do is to obey the Word and to carry out our duties as faithfully as we can. And the grace of God will complete our salvation to the glory of the children of God in Christ Jesus.

Amen

Beloved, trust to the Lord and be attentive to his warnings.

+ Amen +

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