



# EVANGELISM

*The Supreme Task of the Church*

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**INTRODUCTION:** This evening I’ve been asked to come and share with you from God’s Word, a task that I enjoy above and beyond most others. To be one who communicates the Gospel, is to be one who stands on the shoulders of giants, those great men and women of generations past who have been charged with taking the life transforming message of Jesus to the nations!

This evening I would like to begin with a question, one that on the face of it may seem simplistic, but embodied in the answer is the very heartbeat of Jesus... **Why are we here? For what reason does the church exist?**

The answer to this question is **simple yet earthshakingly profound, easy to say, yet difficult to live out.**

**PROPOSITION:** The supreme task of the Church is the evangelization of the world!

That is why Christ **instituted her**; it is why Christ **died for her**... the church serves as **agents of Grace** in a world that is **dead**, lying in the pits of darkness and despair.

**TRANSITION:** We are a called out people, **first called to salvation**, then **called to take the message of salvation**... this call is nothing new, it’s a call that the people of God have had **since the beginning of time**, we begin our study by considering that second call of God, in this case a call that went out to a man named Ezekiel...

**BACKGROUND:** Now most of the time when we think about the book of Ezekiel we tend to focus on the, **strange events** recorded in the book, and as a prophet of God he was privy to some things that that look to be more at home in some **Si-Fi movie** than they do in the Bible. We have strange things flying in the air, wheels inside of wheels, and other such oddities, convincing some people that the Bible proves the existence of aliens! Though I don’t see any **little green men** in this book, what I do see a God that is **madly in love with His children**, and at the same time **totally heartbroken** by their behavior towards Him and towards their brothers in humanity as well.

**TRANSITION:** Seeing their indifference to God, and their appointed mission, He gives a stern reminder to this His “chosen” people concerning how their living there lives... He reminds them that there are under obligation to be...

**I. WATCHMAN ON THE WALLS [Ezekiel 3:17-19]**

**a. The “watchman” of Ezekiel’s day**

- A “watchman,” is a **sentinal that stood alert** on the walls, keeping watch over the city for issues both internal and external that may threaten her
- If he saw an invading army on the horizon or a danger from within he would sound the alarm
- They were in a literal sense their **“brother’s keeper,”** If the “watchman” saw danger and didn’t warn the people **he was personally held responsible** for the ensuing destruction

**b. The “watchman” in the biblical context... it means more than we may think it does!**

- I have discussed this passage with several preachers from across the nation, and many of them believe that this charge was **“case specific”** addressed only to this post-exilic community
- Though this may be the primary context for the passage; it has a secondary context that must not be overlooked... one that that’s focused **directly on the church today!**
- The call to be a “watchman” is one that is not to be taken lightly... we must be diligent even when it appears that **no one is paying attention**
- I imagine Paul had this passage in mind when he confronted the Jews of Corinth [**Acts 18:6**]

**c. Israel: “watchman” at the “cross-roads” of the World**

- The Prophets and Priests were called to be “watchmen” over the nation of Israel, Israel was called to be a “watchman” **over world of their day**
- They were **strategically placed** at the **“crossroads”** of the ancient world; this was no coincidence!

- God wanted his people to influence on the cultures of their day [Sphere of Influence]
  - In Israel there is an area known as the “**Shephelah**,” the region between the mountains and the coastal plain that was inhabited by pagan Canaanite tribes
  - But instead of inhabiting the Shephelah, they hid out in the mountains, keeping their “**salvation**” to themselves and allowing a destruction bound pagan society to thrive [**Joshua 16:10**]
  - By failing to accept their God-given role the Israelites missed an amazing opportunity to impact the world around them for God
- d. **The church: “watchman” at the “cross-roads” of the world**
- As the nation of Israel was placed at the cross-roads of empires, so to we as the church today are standing at the cross-roads, the **one that passes between death and life!**
  - We have the salvation that God offers, and we are to take that great salvation and pass it on being active “**agents of grace**” in a “**grace starved**” world!
  - We must always remember that wherever **God has a child, you and I have a brother or sister!**

**TRANSITION:** We see the charge that was given to the nation of Israel, a charge to stand at the cross-roads of the world, to **act as a catalyst in pointing all men back to God**, a charge given to each of us as believers, yet today its viewed more as the “great suggestion,” today many churches, like Israel of old, don’t take this call to evangelism **seriously**, for whatever reason we cease being the **watchman on the walls**, and become merely ...

## II. KEEPERS OF THE HALLS

- a. First a question... What is it that **deters us from being** “watchman?”
- To sufficiently answer that question we must ask another... **What is the opposite of “Love?”**
  - Most people would quickly respond to the question with the word “**hate**”
  - But “hate” isn’t the opposite of love “**indifference**” is the opposite of “love”
  - And apathy is lived out by an attitude of indifference! (**Arbiet Macht Fri**)
  - Consider the words of Elie Wiesel, a Holocaust survivor whose life was dramatically affected by those who were “abiding in indifference”

*“The opposite of love is not hate, its indifference. The opposite of art is not ugliness, its indifference. The opposite of faith is not heresy, its indifference. And the opposite of life is not death, its indifference.”*

- b. A clear picture of this “**keepers of the halls**” mindset can be found in many places in scripture, but I believe one of the clearest and most concise comes from a book of the bible that is often, and **much to our own detriment** overlooked; the book of **Haggai!**
- The postexilic community in Jerusalem had become, complacent, **totally indifferent** to the will of God in their lives, this being exemplified by their **actions** in their relationship with God, which in this case was “**inaction**” in the rebuilding of the Temple
  - They had laid the foundations back in the days of Ezra (c. 537 B.C.) but the work ground to a stop
  - 17 years has now passed (c. 520 B.C.) and God, being troubled by their indifference, addresses their inaction **through a prophetic word from an old man** named Haggai. [**Haggai 1:1-6**]
- c. The passage says that in “**their eyes**” it wasn’t the time to rebuild the Temple of God
- The statement makes us ask... why wasn’t it time? There are **a couple of possible reasons...**
  - **First** the **70 years** they had been told that they would be in captivity **had yet to be completed**
  - **Second** and I believe this is the most probable, was the opposition they were **facing** or **thought they were facing** from the local populations, **especially the Samaritans**
  - So for them, regardless of the reason the time just wasn’t right!

- Now in response to this, anyone who is dedicated to serving God would admit that there is rarely a time that is "**just right**" in order to do work for the Lord.
- We can **never** expect cooperation from any enemy, be it **physical**, or be it of a **spiritual nature**
- If there is work to be done for the Lord, **it will be opposed by the forces of evil...**
- **That's is a fact that you can take to the bank!**
- When looking at God's thoughts about these "**indifferent**" people, we cannot overlook the fact that He addresses them as "**This people**" not "**My people**"
- They have so defamed Him to such a degree by their actions that **He is slow to claim them**
- We must not kid ourselves into thinking that this could never happen to us... a move toward embracing an "**abiding in indifference**" standpoint can happen to even the most devout of persons, consider the words of the famed German preacher Martin Niemöller [1892-1984]

*"In Germany, they first came for the Communists, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Communist; then they came for the Jews, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Jew. Then they came for the Trade Unionists, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Trade Unionist. Then they came for the Catholics, and I didn't speak up because I was a Protestant. Then they came for me - and by that time no one was left to speak up for me."*

- d. So they are warned to "**consider their ways**" in that they should be diligent in all their decision making, in every situation in life
  - This is **not a comment made lightly**, in fact we read it again a few verses later
  - It's true that they may have faced persecution, but **if they could build paneled houses** [panels possibly from Ezra's stock] for themselves their persecution must not have been too constraining
  - The results of this indifference [**vs. 6**] may on the surface seem harsh, but occasionally God has to **take His beloved children to the woodshed**, and this is just such an occasion
  - So what did they do... they followed the call of God and God moved! [**vs. 13**]

**CONCLUSION:** The giver of every good gift **cannot** and **will not** smile on **spiritual indifference, convoluted priorities, laziness and things of the like**. The Lord wasn't going to give to them abundantly because they had their **priorities out of line**. It's **no different with us**; God will not bless us if we aren't honoring Him. In our own day God doesn't call us to "**build beautiful churches**" but to "**evangelize the world!**" Just like the Israelites of Old we must make a choice... to be "**watchman on the walls**," or "**keepers of the halls**" – Are we trusting God and looking beyond our own selves and our own congregations to transform the world we live in? Or are we living for ourselves, **allowing the world to pass into a Christ-less eternity**? That's a question that each of us must answer... The salvation of the world is at the very "**heart**" of God... are we doing all that we should to aid in that becoming a **reality in our generation**? God takes such action seriously, so must we! We must never forget that...

*"A church that doesn't take seriously its part in the great commission has forfeited its biblical right to exist!"*

Oswald J. Smith

**May we never fall into such a place!**