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*Warnings Save Lives (Ezekiel 33:7-11)*  
*9/24/2017 Sermon by Pastor Jason Liebenow*

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*"Listen, my children, and you shall hear Of the midnight ride of Paul Revere."* Paul Revere is remembered as one of the heroes of the American Revolution. We owe him our thanks. He is one of the many valiant people who helped secure the freedoms and prosperity that we enjoy in the United States.

But Paul Revere is not remembered for fighting bravely in battle. He's not remembered for some scientific or industrial advancement that benefits our daily lives. Instead, Paul Revere is a hero because he warned people about coming danger. He is a hero because Warnings Save Lives.

Today, as we see God call Ezekiel to be a watchman for God's people, we are reminded of our duty and privilege to warn other people about their sins and point them to Christ for forgiveness. Today, our God shows us that Warnings Save *our* Lives and Warnings Save *their* Lives. In fact, this is God's will.

Just as God told Ezekiel, so he tells us that Warnings Save *our* Lives. It is our duty to warn others about their sins. No one wants to wake their neighbor up at 6:00am on a Saturday. But if you see their house on fire, it would be criminal to let them keep sleeping!

If the house is on fire, "they need their sleep" is not a good excuse! Satan tempts us to think, "Well, I don't want to bother them. They are just gonna get angry with me." But this is a matter of life and death! That neighbor needs to wake up!

No one wants to have conflicts, especially not with friends and family. But when avoiding those conflicts becomes more important than the other person's eternal well-being? At that point, we are being purely selfish at the deepest level.

If our neighbor's house is on fire, it would be wrong to ignore them and say, "I better check first to make sure *my* house isn't on fire." Saving the life is more important! Satan tempts us to think, "I don't want to be a hypocrite. I have my own sins that I'm struggling with. I'd better just focus on myself." Yeah, we all still have sinful natures. We all have sins that we have struggled with for a long time. We don't want to be called out for our sins. But is avoiding personal criticism more important

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than the other person's soul?

If that really concerns you, then let it be another reason for you to repent of your sins. If your own sins are keeping you from your duty to your neighbor, do something about it! Ask another Christian to help you fight temptation. Ask me! Sin is not an excuse to keep sinning. Don't let your sins be an excuse to not care about your neighbor's eternal wellbeing.

Still, we may feel we have no right to speak to the other person about their sins because of our own. There's some truth to that. But again, what is at stake here? If your house is burning down too, at least you are aware of it! At least you are awake enough to get out of the house! Your neighbor may not be awake yet! Wake them up before they die in the flames!

Maybe we don't have the right to confront someone about their sins. Maybe we aren't worthy. But what does worthiness matter when lives are at stake? Should I let my neighbor die so that I don't have to deal with my own sins? Should I let my neighbor die in the flames just so I can go on pretending my own house isn't on fire? Should I let my neighbor burn in hell just so I don't have to talk about my own sins?

Ultimately, being our brother's keeper is a matter of loving our neighbor as ourselves. (And in Scripture, "my neighbor" is not only those who live close to me. It simply means "any other person with whom I interact.") If my neighbor is living in unrepentant sin, if my neighbor is on the road to hell because of their sinful life, how can I do nothing? How can I care so little about another human being?

Honestly, could there be a deeper form of hatred for someone else? If I hate someone enough to kill them, they may still go to heaven. An atheist once said that he didn't find God unbelievable. He found Christians unbelievable. He asked, "How can they sincerely believe that other people are going to hell, and do so little to stop that?"

If we refuse to love our neighbors enough to call them to repentance, then we need to repent. We are living in selfishness. We are despising our neighbor. We are ignoring God's will for us. We need to repent and start loving others instead of just ourselves. Warnings Save *our* Lives, because refusing to warn our neighbors is a selfish and uncaring sin of which we need to repent. If we refuse to repent, then we

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are the ones in trouble; we are the ones on the road to hell. Warning others about their sins is our duty as Christians. It's a matter of love.

But it's not just a duty, it's also a privilege, because Warnings Save *their* Lives. When I was a kid, I liked watching gameshows on TV. A lot of gameshows love to put contestants into the scenario where they can either quit early and keep what they have, or they can risk it all for a chance to double how much they win.

That's a tough question. Do you risk it all for more, or just keep what you have? As I sat on my couch with nothing to lose, I found it easy to say, "Risk it all! Come on! It's worth a shot!" But that question comes up when we have the chance to confront someone about their sins. Do you risk the conflict, the accusations of hypocrisy? Do you risk the ruined relationship?

That's tough, but the payoff puts things into perspective. Yeah, those are big risks, but what is the possible payoff? It's not doubling your money. No, it's far more valuable than that. The potential payoff is the other person's repentance. The payoff is the other person turning from their sins and back to God! The payoff is the other person escaping the fires of hell!

If we try to wake up our sleeping neighbor, there may be times when they get angry at us and tell us to mind our own business. There may be times when they say, "Never speak to me again!" There may be times when they shove us away and go right back to sleep.

But there will also be times when they will wake up and get out of the house before the fire kills them! Isn't that outcome worth far more than any risk to ourselves? Isn't that outcome worth trying for even if the odds say we will fail? If there's only a 1% chance of multiplying my money, I might skip out. But if there's a 1% chance of saving my neighbor's life, isn't that worth it? With our neighbor's very soul on the line, with their salvation as a possible outcome, doesn't that far outweigh the risks? It is our privilege and duty to call others to repentance because Warnings Save Lives.

And that is God's will. In verse 11 of our lesson, God makes it clear that he *wants* us to be saved! My wife's family loved to go hiking when she was a kid. Sometimes they would go on some pretty wild trails and walk along high cliffs with

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no fences. My in-laws gave their kids this rule: 10 feet from danger. They had to stay 10 feet away from that cliff at all times. I imagine they came up with that rule pretty quickly and enforced it rather harshly. As a parent, it would be terrifying to see your child running toward a cliff!

But this is the picture God gives us in Ezekiel 33. God is the parent and he sees us, his children, running toward that cliff. Our sins are leading us off the edge so that we fall into the depths of hell. Like little children, we think it all fun and games. We don't realize the danger. But God is screaming to us, "Turn! Turn around! Come back!"

God doesn't want anyone going off that edge. He doesn't want anyone going to hell. He doesn't want sinners to die in their sins. That is why he gives us the duty and privilege of calling others to repentance. That's why he sends others into our lives to call us to repentance when we are living in sin. God wants us to turn away from that cliff and come back to him before we fall.

God is serious about this. When God says, "I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked," it's a Hebraic oath formula. It occurs a lot in the Old Testament Hebrew language. God literally only says, "If I take pleasure in the death of the wicked." The full implied oath would be to the effect of, "May I be cursed if I take pleasure in the death of the wicked." "May God punish me if I take pleasure in the death of the wicked." God would rather be cursed himself, be punished himself, than see the death of the wicked, even though they deserve it.

And God in fact did that. Jesus Christ became cursed for us. He took all the sins of the wicked on himself when he went to the cross. He took our selfishness to the cross; the times we cared more about our earthly comforts than about someone else's salvation. He took the sins that our neighbors are living in right now. He took the sins of the entire world to the cross. There Jesus Christ was forsaken by God in our place. There Jesus received the death that the wicked deserved. There Jesus Christ suffered hell for us. Jesus died for our sins because he does not want to see anyone die for their sins.

God desperately wants Lives Saved. And Warnings Save Lives. Therefore, it is our duty and privilege to warn others about their sins. Never forget: Warnings Save *our* Lives. Warnings Save *their* Lives. Amen.