

“SLOTH”

Matthew 25:14-30; Mark 12:30

March 24, 2019

¹⁴ [The Kingdom of Heaven] will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his property to them. ¹⁵ To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. ¹⁶ The man who had received the five talents went at once and put his money to work and gained five more. ¹⁷ So also, the one with the two talents gained two more. ¹⁸ But the man who had received the one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money.

¹⁹ After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. ²⁰ The man who had received the five talents brought the other five. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with five talents. See, I have gained five more.'

²¹ "His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'

²² "The man with the two talents also came. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with two talents; see, I have gained two more.'

²³ "His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'

²⁴ "Then the man who had received the one talent came. 'Master,' he said, 'I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. ²⁵ So I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.'

²⁶ "His master replied, 'You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? ²⁷ Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have

received it back with interest.

²⁸ " 'Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents. ²⁹ For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. ³⁰ And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

Matthew 25:14-30

SERMON: "SLOTH"

INTRODUCTION:

The Webster's Collegiate Dictionary defines sloth as:

"A disinclination to action or labor; indolence"

"Spiritual apathy and inactivity."

Sloth is the willful wasting of time, talent and treasure that God has endowed us with.

Sloth is the failure to do good when we have the capacity to do good.

Sloth is expecting *someone else* to do the work that God has clearly called *us* to do.

Sloth is the *mismanagement* of our personal energy, our intellectual capacity, and our personal resources to the point that we are working to exhaustion and eventual burnout for worldly gain.

The question we must be asking is not *what* am I doing . . .
The question is *why* and for *whom* am I doing what I am doing.

Perhaps the *best* definition of sloth
was published by the *Chicago Tribune*:

“Sloth hits the snooze alarm,
hits the remote control
and hits the road when things get tough.”

“Sloth cheats on exams,
drinks milk straight from the carton,
and leaves exactly two sheets on the toilet paper roll
so it will have to be replaced by the next poor soul
who finds out that the remaining paper
is nothing more than a mirage.”

“Sloth does slightly less than the right thing.
It never returns anything to the lost-and-found
just keeping it instead.”

“Sloth never writes a thank-you note
never sent a birthday card on time...”

“Sloth never entertained angels!”

SLOTH vs. LAZINESS:

OK . . . which of the characters on “Gilligan’s Island”
do you think represents sloth?

None other than Mrs. Howell!

Sweet, kind, laid-back, Mrs. Howell . . .
. . . who did absolutely NOTHING
during the whole time they were marooned!

I cannot remember a single thing she may have done!

She was sweet and kind . . . a little flighty, perhaps.

Spoiled - certainly - and used to luxury -

- but not unpleasant.

The first thing I want to clear up for you

is the distinction between “sloth” and “laziness.”

Do NOT get them confused!

They are NOT the same.

Most people - and even some dictionaries - define sloth as laziness -

- not doing much of anything.

However, that is not precise;

indeed, it may be misleading.

It wouldn't be the first time Satan

has taken the sting out of a word

and tried to make it more acceptable!

A lazy person sits around watching the grass grow;

- sleepwalking through life;

- aimlessly moving from meal to meal;

- from television program to television program.

A lazy person dreams the dreams that promise great reward

but require little or no effort -

- “If I only won the lottery...”

On the contrary,

a slothful person may actually be a very busy person -

- a busy person with a full calendar

and far too many activities planned!
- busy, fussing, fidgety.
- flitting from activity to activity.

**A slothful person can be an anxious,
fast-moving, success-worshiping
- performance-oriented Martha-types
with the ulcers, nervous breakdowns and suicides to match!**

**We are far too quick to equate “busy-ness” with productivity -
and far too quick to equate worldly productivity
with living as though we were citizens of the Kingdom of God!**

**As a matter of fact,
a slothful person could be a very, very busy person -
wasting their life; squandering their talents
doing all of the wrong things!**

**A slothful person may actually plan to stay busy
as an excuse not to do the right things!**

**Somehow we have learned to equate “busyness” with intrinsic worth
- we measure our value by the amount of time we contribute.
If we’re busy - we’re important.
If we’re busy - we’re not lazy!
If we’re busy - we have value!**

**We have elevated busy-ness to the point
we compete with each other:
“You think *you’re* busy . . . just listen to what *I’ve* been doing!”**

Something in that equation is wrong!

**That's why we are busier than ever before,
with very little to show for it -
that's why we're more burnt out than ever.**

**We work longer hours . . . for what?
We just end up with fewer hours to do those things we *really* love.
And God gets shoved right out of the picture!**

**And whenever our busy-ness causes God
to be shoved out of the equation
we are guilty of being slothful people!
We are spiritually slothful!**

SPIRITUAL SLOTH:

**Henry Farlie said that spiritual sloth is
“The sin that ‘believes in nothing,
cares for nothing,
seeks to know nothing,
interferes with nothing,
enjoys nothing,
and remain alive only because
there is nothing for which it will die!”**

**St. Thomas Aquinas said that spiritual sloth is
“Fleeing from God and pursuing the world.”**

**Spiritual sloth shuns the vigilant, sacrificial effort and self-surrender
that being a disciple demands!
It is hard work following Jesus!**

It takes a lot of sacrifice to put God first!

Spiritually slothful people don't like that!

**Spiritual sloth tires of traveling the narrow path of Christianity
and yearns for the wider, more accessible road of the world!**

**Spiritual sloth is the willingness to trade
the expense of doing the will of God
for the promise of comfort and luxury.**

**If I know and understand anything about God
it is that God calls us to action -**

- God commands that we are active believers!**
- God commands active response to the faith we have.**

Spiritual sloth abhors action!

God always calls us to take a risk . . .

**. . . for Abraham and Sarah it was to leave everything behind
and go to a new land God would lead them to!**

**. . . for the people of Israel
it was to pass through the Red Sea and the wilderness
on their way to becoming the people of God!**

**. . . for the apostles
it was to leave their way of life
and follow Jesus.**

**. . . for you and me
it is to live lives which reflect we have put God first
in everything we do!**

That level of risk is an anathema to sloth!

The bottom line:

**a slothful person will never become
what God intend for that person to be!**

**It simply takes too much effort,
and the worldly return is not great enough
to warrant the expenditure of energy!**

For example,

a slothful person will not choose to read a good spiritual book.

First of all, it lacks entertainment.

**Besides, it just might challenge the slothful person
to do something!**

**Oh, a slothful person might read some action-packed Christian
fiction**

**which deals with the end of the world
and the ultimate triumph over evil in a huge battle!**

**Or they may read some odd account of a “hidden code” in the Bible
or some other trivial theological matter**

**such as “How many angles can dance on the head of a pin?”
which merely tickles their ears.**

**You can bet the slothful person won’t pick up - much less finish -
a book aimed at challenging him/her to become more committed!**

**Believe it or not, a slothful person will choose to remain joyless
when faced with God as our supreme joy -**

- if the effort seems too great!

Spiritual sloth seems to work on the maxim

that God owes every person equal and unending excitement

at absolutely no cost in time or resources!

And, you know, that simply doesn't please God!

As a matter of fact,

God seems to reserve a special hatred of spiritual sloth!

**The most stinging indictment against spiritual sloth
is found in the Book of Revelation.**

It concerns the Church at Laodecia.

John was instructed to write to that Church, saying:

**“I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish
you were either one or the other! So, because you are
lukewarm--neither hot nor cold--I am about to spit you out of
my mouth.” Rev. 3:15-16**

That's what it means to be a slothful Church!

“...neither cold nor hot...”

**- basically not concerned enough about anything
to actually do something!**

A slothful Church is one which is filled to the brim with activity -

- all of which benefits the membership

- and none of which leads the lost to Christ!

A slothful Church uses all of its resources

to perpetuate the status quo in the Church

and none of its resources to relieve hunger or poverty!

A slothful Church is more worried about its image in the community than it is in battling the social evils of the community!

**We must never allow this Church
to become spiritually slothful
hiding under the guise of “apathy.”**

**“Apathetic” Churches just don’t seem to care
about much of anything.**

**However, “spiritually slothful” Churches may seem not to care -
- but try changing something which threatens
to dislodge people from their pews
and propel them into action!**

REMEDY:

**Well, I have spoken harshly against the sin of sloth -
- against “spiritual sloth.”**

**I have danced dangerously close to accusing this Church
of being “spiritually slothful.”
I have danced even closer to calling some of us “slothful.”**

**So, let me see if I can offer some remedies -
- some ways we can counter slothful attitudes and practices.**

There are several excellent remedies for sloth.

**One remedy is courage!
Just good, old-fashioned courage -
- the courage to examine, repent and change our ways.**

**Courage of this nature manifests as a willingness to say to God:
“Here am I, Lord, send me!” Isaiah 6:8
That takes courage to say!**

**In order to overcome spiritual sloth,
we have to must enough courage to say “YES” to God!**

**Nothing breaks the bondage of sloth faster
than a willingness to serve God!**

Let me offer you one final remedy -

- the one which supersedes all others -

- one which Jesus thought important enough

that it represented the First Great Commandment:

**“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all
your soul and with all your mind and with all your
strength.” Mark 12:30**

I almost feel like I have to apologize for this last remedy...

...it’s not very flashy...

...it’s not something you didn’t already know...

...it just isn’t very entertaining, is it?

And if you just agreed with that statement -

- then you are caught in the sin of sloth

and that message was for YOU!

You see, if we work very, very hard

it will take the rest of our lives

just to understand what it means to:

**Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all
your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.**

**It takes perseverance,
it takes constant practice,
and there is no place in that quest for even an ounce of sloth!**

CONCLUSION:

**Sloth is a very real adversary -
both to the Gospel and to the Church.**

**Sloth is patiently working its will on an unguarded public -
- methodically turning our children
into a mindless, shiftless, passionless mass of drones!**

But...it doesn't have to be that way!

**The antidote for sloth is not frenetic activity!
The antidote is *balance*.**

***Balance* is what adds perspective to our day -
- that which rolls us out of bed and onto our feet
yet prevents us from serving possessions, egos, jobs,
and all the other world things that become idols
and demand sacrifices in the form of attention and time.**

***Balance* reminds us that before we can pray continually and at all
times - as Paul said in 1 Thessalonians 5:17 -
- we must pray *some of the time!***

***Balance* is inviting God to take charge of our lives -
- to be the master of our activities -
- to be . . . well, Lord of our life.**

Can you do that?

Can you make a commitment?

PRAYER:

Guiding and Challenging God, help us examine ourselves to see if we are living as You would have us live. If we find we are out of tune with You, give us the courage and energy to return to the path to which You have called us. AMEN