

My Thoughts for Sunday, 31 January 2016

“Beware of Spiritual Slumber”

“I went past the field of a sluggard, past the vineyard of someone who has no sense; thorns had come up everywhere the ground was covered with weeds, and the stone wall was in ruins. I applied my heart to what I observed and learned a lesson from what I saw: A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest—and poverty will come on you like a thief and scarcity like an armed man.”

Proverbs 24:30-34

It's Saturday morning. Great! I don't have to go to work today. Then I get this thought again from earlier in the week, this is the weekend I planned to get a lot of needed tasks done around the house. Then there is that long overdue “honey-do-list” that I have been promising to start. Yup, I said start! That list has been staring me in the face for some time now and growing steadily. So much for a day off. So I proceed to get something done although I'd much rather just vegetate for the morning. After lunch and a little relax time our friends call with a desire to go out that evening for a concert, a movie, or maybe just a little time together to “catch up” on the latest happenings. That “catchup” time seemed to stretch into the wee hours of the morning and we finally decided to call it a night and go home. Sunday morning seemed to come earlier than usual today when the alarm sounded, announcing the time to arise and prepare ourselves to go to church to worship our Lord.

It must have been the overdose of “catching up” or maybe just a couple too many of the refreshments of the night before, but my wife and I decided we needed just a few more minutes of rest time. Big mistake! Those few minutes extended themselves and destroyed the allotted time we needed to get ready to go to church. We would never make it on time! Wasting a few more precious minutes deciding what we were going to do about the situation, we decided there would be no harm in sleeping in just this one time. We were secure in our faith. We had not missed a Sunday service in many months. One time shouldn't jeopardize our standing with our Lord. He knows we are sinners and sometimes make a wrong decision. We went on and on, justifying our decision to skip what we both knew we should have done regardless of, and in spite of, how we felt from our night of “catching up.”

Does this scenario ring a bell in your memory? Do you relate, from time to time, with this Sunday morning atmosphere? Without being judgmental, I must make an observation that I believe happens to many in our Christian circle of friends. It appears that some may encounter this struggle more often than others, as displayed in our fluctuating church attendance. I look back at the times I have felt this way in the past and I see a pattern unfolding. It seems that every time I extend our innocent Saturday evening get-together with friends beyond a usual short time of pleasure we have a difficult time getting back into our routine. I feel a need to break this pattern before it becomes a norm and we fall into a state of laxity in our faith and thanksgiving to our Lord who gives us all things as we need them. I am reminded of what Paul wrote to the Christians at Corinth when they felt secure in their faith: *“So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!”* 1 Corinthians 10:12 Paul was speaking to me when he wrote this warning, and to you. We often feel we are safe and secure, nothing can shake our faith. We might be correct in that thought except that the apostle Paul was inspired by God to give this warning to His followers, believers in the saving grace of our Lord. Obviously, if God is giving this warning, the possibility of our stumbling is very real.

Recently, in our daily proverb from the internet, I was led to read the 24th chapter and specifically verses 30-34 which led me to compile my thoughts around this word from the writer of Proverbs. The first verses obviously are referring to a man devoted to doing as little as possible to survive; better put,

extremely lazy. It speaks of the fallen down condition of his belongings with his lack of concern for the fact that all things are a gift from God and designed for our pleasure, benefit and safekeeping. The writer goes on to put this into perspective for our lives today. We, too, have been entrusted with many free gifts from our Creator, to manage, care for and reap the benefits of; not the lease to these, our faith. Our salvation is by this faith which is a gift from the Holy Spirit, not because we earned it, but that God loves us. (Ephesians 2:8-9)

The writer goes on to explain the lesson he saw in this example of the “sluggard” He says; *“A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest— and poverty will come on you like a thief and scarcity like an armed man.”* Too often and too easily we also could succumb to this dangerous slumber. Slumber in our Christian actions and desires. I have seen it first hand in the past. It is sometimes very difficult to miss that first church service or Bible Class; our conscience grinds at us and attempts to lead us We do the opposite. The next opportunity, the next excuse, comes along and we find less opposition from that hidden inner self. Repeated absences from the saving Word of God leads us down that ever widening road, sharing the highway with unbelievers. Like the writer said, *“a little sleep; a little slumber”*; I say; a little over-sleeping and too much slumber can and will bring us to spiritual poverty. Yes, spiritual poverty is very real and a definite problem in this fallen world. Poverty is sometimes thought of as something one is born into, a lack of material things or wealth. Poverty is also something that can be acquired as was shown by the writer of the Proverbs through lack of ambition, caring or desire to appreciate those gifts we have been given. Poverty can and does cross over into the area of our spiritual wellbeing. We need to always be alert to the warning signs. Satan is always out there working on our natural sinful desires to lead us away from his adversary, God. Satan loves company and desires to lead us all away from the saving grace of our Redeemer. I am sure you have heard the old adage “misery loves company”. This is true and Satan is miserable and knows his time is short and desires our company in his Hellish realm. Peter warns us very clearly in 1 Peter 5:8-9; *“Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. But resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world.”* I stress that phrase “resist him, firm in your faith.” It is only in our faith that we will have the Lord’s help to resist the devil. All your brothers and sisters in Christ fight the same battle.

I write this as a man who has been there. “I’ve been there, done that, got the T-shirt to prove it” as the saying goes. I have traveled that road of spiritual poverty when I felt that life in this world was more appealing than looking at the promises that our Creator of all the things has in store for me. Fortunately for me I was led back to my Lord, only through His mercy and undeserved love. I hope someday to understand just what it was that caused Him to love me so greatly, when I did not care for Him. Now I can only be thankful that I am included in the word “world” as receiving His undeserved love. John 3:16... *“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.”* It still boggles my mind that He did not just destroy His creation and start over.

All praise to our loving and forgiving God. Wake up before it becomes too late. Spiritual poverty may be right around that nest corner.