

SEVEN Deadly Sins - #3 SLOTH

There's one thing you can say about human nature. It doesn't change much. In the sixth century Pope Gregory 1st wrote down a list of the sins he found people struggled with the most in their lives. That list is known as "*The Seven Deadly Sins*". Here's they are. PRIDE, LUST, GREED, ENVY, SLOTH, WRATH (ANGER), & GLUTTONY.

So far we've talked about PRIDE and GREED. If you missed those messages you can check them out on the Sermon link on the church website at www.standrewsnewmarket.org. Today we are going to talk about the deadly sin of SLOTH.

SLOTH isn't really a word we use today, so let me unwrap it for you. On the original list of deadly sins SLOTH was actually called SADNESS. But it wasn't sadness in terms of grief or sorrow, it was sadness of the soul. The word we would use today for SLOTH would be APATHY, meaning indifference, lack of concern, or lack of interest, or lack of action. Later on, SLOTH was defined as the failure to love God "***with all your heart, mind and strength***" and the failure to use the gifts that God had given you.

SLOTH is the sin we find in the parable Jesus told in Matthew Chapter 25. You'll remember the story. A master had three servants all of whom had different abilities. While he was away on a trip he gave these servants responsibilities for his resources. He gave one person, \$5,000. The second \$2,000. And the third \$1,000. Now understand, these were huge sums of money at the time. The first two servants immediately got to work and ended up doubling their master's investment. But not the third servant. ***"But the servant with the single thousand dug a hole and carefully buried his master's money."***

Wow! This servant didn't even make an effort to manage the master's resources. He was too lazy to even walk down the street to the bank to deposit the money so it could gain interest. Instead, he played it safe. He buried it! But honestly, how safe is that? Someone could have discovered it. An animal could have dug it up and destroyed it. He could have forgotten where he buried it. And if he had died no-one would have known where the money was.

I think the key to the master's intention for his money is in the part of the story where it says that, ***"After a long absence, the master of those three servants came back and settled up with them."*** It seems pretty obvious that the master had left these servants some instructions. That's

why there was a settlement. Notice his response to the two servants who had doubled the investment he had left them with. **'Good work! You did your job well. From now on be my partner.'**

"You did your job well." This surely implies that all the servants had been given specific instructions about what was expected of them. This explains his reaction to the third servant who had buried the money and only returned the exact same amount to him. ***"The master was furious. 'That's a terrible way to live! It's criminal to live cautiously like that! If you knew I was after the best, why did you do less than the least? The least you could have done would have been to invest the sum with the bankers, where at least I would have gotten a little interest. 28-30 "'Take the thousand and give it to the one who risked the most. And get rid of this "play-it-safe" who won't go out on a limb. Throw him out into utter darkness.'***

There's the tragedy in this story. Because of his sloth - his apathy, his indifference, and his laziness - this servant lost probably the best opportunity he would ever have to improve his situation in life.

Now you'll remember that for every one of the deadly sins, Pope Gregory specified a corresponding holy virtue. The counterbalance to the sin of PRIDE, was the virtue of HUMILITY. The counterbalance to GREED, was the virtue of GENEROSITY. And the virtue that counterbalances SLOTH was said to be the virtue of DILIGENCE. That's what this third servant was guilty of. A lack of diligence. He was careless. He wasn't thorough. He settled for the bare minimum. Here's the interesting thing about sloth. The other six deadly sins cause problems in your life because of what you do. This one causes problems because of what you DON'T do.

So what does sloth look like? It's when someone cheats on an exam, instead of studying for it. It's when you drink from the milk carton because you're too lazy to get a glass that you'll have to wash. It's when you leave the next person a toilet roll with only two pieces of tissue on it, instead of replacing it with a new roll. It's when you drive the car until the gas tank is almost empty and leave it to your spouse to fill it. It's when you spend time on Facebook when you should be working. It's when you regularly turn up for work late. Here's a great definition of sloth. ***"Sloth is doing less than the right thing'***

James, the brother of Jesus told us what sloth looks like in a Christian. It's having faith but never putting it into action. Here's one example he gives us. James 1:22 (Msg), ²²⁻²⁴ ***Don't fool yourself into thinking that you are a***

listener when you are anything but, letting the Word go in one ear and out the other. Act on what you hear! Those who hear and don't act are like those who glance in the mirror, walk away, and two minutes later have no idea who they are, what they look like. Here's the reality. When push comes to shove, the Scriptures were not given to us for information, they were given to us for transformation. So when we read or hear Scripture, diligence require that we act on what we hear. If not, we are guilty of the sin of sloth. **"Sloth is doing less than the right thing"**

Jesus knew that it was really easy for us as Christians to avoid putting our faith into action. So he told us in Matthew 14:15 (Msg). **"If you love me, show it by doing what I've told you."** The Old Testament Book of Proverbs actually warns us very specifically about the deadly nature of sloth. Proverbs 6:6-11:

6-11 You lazy fool, look at an ant.

Watch it closely; let it teach you a thing or two.

Nobody has to tell it what to do.

All summer it stores up food;

at harvest it stockpiles provisions.

So how long are you going to laze around doing nothing?

How long before you get out of bed?

A nap here, a nap there, a day off here, a day off there,

sit back, take it easy—do you know what comes next?

Just this: You can look forward to a dirt-poor life,

poverty your permanent houseguest!

So when Jesus spoke about why he had come he set a different goal for our lives. John 10:10, **"My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life."** And that explains why Satan encourages sloth and apathy in our lives. It's because it produces a life that does not live up to its full God intended potential. Satan likes it when we hear the Word of God and don't live it out. He likes it when congregations get lazy about their mission in the world. He loves it when we play it safe, just like that third servant.

But that's not God's plan or purpose for us or for our church, so here are some questions we can use for self- examination. Do I always do my best for God, or do I usually take shortcuts? Am I keeping the promises I made to God at my baptism, or confirmation when I became a member of the church? Am I passionate about obeying Christ and living according to his example? Am diligent in reading Scripture and spending time in prayer or are these low priority for me? Am I living an unfocused life, or am I pursuing with passion God's plan and purpose for my life?

Do you remember what Jesus said the greatest of all the commandments was? The Message translation says, "**Love the Lord God with ALL your passion and prayer and intelligence and energy.**" In other words. Commit yourself completely. Don't hold anything back as you love and serve God. Give your whole self. And isn't that exactly what Jesus did for us?

Friends, when it comes to our commitment to God, lukewarm doesn't count. Do you remember what the Christians in the Church of Laodicea were condemned for in the Book of Revelation? Jesus says to them, ¹⁵⁻¹⁷ **"I know you inside and out, and find little to my liking. You're not cold, you're not hot—far better to be either cold or hot! You're stale. You're stagnant. You make me want to vomit.**

Sloth. Apathy. Indifference. They are all deadly. They all cause sadness of the soul and make us ineffective Christians and they cause our congregations to fail to reach their full potential as agents of Christ. So here's my challenge to you this week. Think of the three servants in the parable Jesus told. If God came to settle accounts with you right now, do you think he would invite you to partner with him, or would he fire you?

PASTORAL PRAYER

Almighty God,
You know us inside and out.
You call on us to love and to serve you with our whole being,

Yet we confess that we are often indifferent and apathetic,
preferring to put our lives on cruise control
instead of following the leading of your Spirit. Teach us how to love you
totally and how to serve you passionately.

We pray for those who would work, but cannot find employment.
We pray for those who use well the spiritual gifts, abilities and natural
talents you have given them, and we pray for those who are still discovering
how they might best serve you.

We pray too for those who use their gifts in the service of others,
especially those who serve as municipal, provincial or federal employees.

We pray for those who work tirelessly to feed the hungry,
to bring justice to the oppressed, and to advocate for the poor.
May they never grow weary in well- doing.

Hear these our prayers in Jesus Name. Amen.