

March 7, 2018

The Seven Deadly Sins
The Deadly Sin of Sloth
Colossians 3:23-24

Opening words: Lent is a time of spiritual renewal. It is a time to rediscover the person God intended you to be from the very beginning. It is not just a time to identify your sins, it is a time to take steps to eliminate your sins. Never forget it, we live in the shadow of John Wesley. He told us we should always be striving toward perfection. With that in mind, on Ash Wednesday, I began my new sermon series, *The Seven Deadly Sins*. On that evening I preached a sermon called *Taking Sin Seriously*. On the First Sunday in Lent, I preached on the first, and the most personal, of the seven deadly sins, lust. On the Second Sunday of Lent, I preached on the second deadly sin, greed. Last Sunday, the Third Sunday of Lent, I looked at gluttony. (Wasn't the chicken good tonight?) On Sunday, the Fourth Sunday of Lent, I will look at pride. This evening's message is called *The Deadly Sin of Sloth*. Our scripture is Colossians 3:23-24.

Colossians 3:23-24 Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, ²⁴ since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.

Sloth has been defined as, *a reluctance to work or make an effort; laziness*. For those of us raised right here in the Mahoning Valley, there is nothing worse than a lazy person. Hard work is part of our community's DNA. Many believe, if you are not working, then you are wasting time. If you find some truth in that statement, say, "**Amen!**" How many lazy people do you know? Let me ask you a more personal question: Do the people in your life consider you lazy?

James K. Polk (1795-1849) was the eleventh President of the United States. He held that office from 1845-1849. He was a Democrat from the state of Tennessee, who only wanted to serve as President for one term. During that four-year period, the United States expanded significantly, with the annexation of the Republic of Texas and the Oregon Territory. His last day in office was March 4, 1849. He was succeeded by Zachary Taylor. March 4, 1849 was a Sunday, and Zachary Taylor was a devout Christian and refused to be sworn into office on the Sabbath. According to the Constitution of the United States there must always be a President, so there was a problem. To solve the problem, the country swore in David Rice Atchison for one day. Do you know what David Rice Atchison did on his one day in office? He did absolutely nothing. For this reason, some consider him the greatest President in the history of our country. Others consider him the laziest President in the history of our country. I don't consider him the best and I don't consider him the laziest. I think that label is unfair. No one likes being called lazy. If you can agree with that statement, say, "**Amen!**" That takes us to this morning's scripture lesson.

We find ourselves this evening in the Epistle to the Colossians. The background of this letter is straightforward. Everyone agrees, the author of this letter was the Apostle Paul. He wrote it about the year AD 60. Colosse is in present-day Turkey. Several hundred years before Paul's day, it had been the leading city in Asia Minor. It was a commercial giant. The reason Paul wrote this letter was to confront a heresy. However, the details of the heresy remain a mystery. The verses for this evening came from the third chapter. In the third and the fourth chapters, Paul gives us guidelines for holy living. Part of that holy lifestyle is to maximize your effort in *all* activities. Never forget it. You are a disciple of Jesus Christ. The world is watching you. The world is judging you. The world is holding you to a higher standard. This is the question you must answer this evening: Are you doing your best in every aspect of your life, or are you lazy? If that makes you think, say, "**Amen!**" The text for this evening is not just about getting a job. That would be too easy. Our society is filled with lazy people who are on the dole. This evening I want to talk about maximizing every aspect of your life. So, let me ask you this question:

Are you working hard to maximize your body, or are you being lazy? I am not talking about being a professional body builder. I am talking about taking every step to be a healthier person.

Did you know the American Heart Association recommends you take 10,000 steps per day? The average American takes half that number. How many hours a day do you spend sitting?

Did you know the American Dietetic Association says the average woman should eat 2,000 calories a day to maintain her weight? The average man needs 2,500 calories a day to maintain his weight. The average man and woman should consume 500 calories less than they burn each day in order to lose weight. If you do that, then you will lose one pound a week. The average American, both men and women, eat more than 2,700 calories in a day. How many calories do you burn on an average day? How many calories do you consume on an average day?

Are you working hard on your body, or are you being lazy? There is a new organization you may have heard of, the YMCA (the Young Men's Christian Association). They would love to sign you up! If that makes you think, say, "**Amen!**" That leads me to my next question.

Are you working hard to maximize your mind, or are you being lazy? I am not talking about becoming a Rhodes Scholar. I am talking about becoming a more rounded person. The American Negro College Fund had a tag line I have never forgotten. Do you remember it? "*A mind is a terrible thing to waste.*" Are you wasting your mind? Did you know, according to the American Education Association, the average American has a speaking vocabulary of about 5,000 words. The average American has a writing vocabulary of about 10,000 words. How large is your vocabulary?

Are you working hard to maximize your mind, or are you just being lazy? There is a new organization you may have heard of, The Mahoning Country Library. They would

love to sign you up and give you a card. You can take out books for free! If that makes you think, say, **"Amen!"** That leads me to the next question.

Are you working to maximize your faith, or are you being lazy? This is supposed to be our specialty. Last year, my Lenten sermon series was called *Don't Give Up!* We looked at the various spiritual disciplines to help you build your faith. This was my list:

- Prayer
- Worship
- The Bible
- Meditation
- Fasting
- Confessing

I preached that series a year ago. You have had plenty of time to practice each one. So how are you going? How much time do you spend in prayer? How much time do you spend in worship? How much time do you spend reading the Bible? How much time have you spent meditating? How much time have you spent confessing? Has fasting become part of your life? Are you working hard to maximize your faith, or are you being lazy? If that makes you think, say, **"Amen!"** I don't preach to entertain you, I preach to edify you. If I entertain you and don't edify you, then I have failed.

In my life, I have a friend by the name of Rick. Before we moved to our present house, Rick was my neighbor. It was a nice fit for us as a family. Kathryn and I, and Rick and his wife Amy, are about the same age. Our children, Sarah and Anna, and their children, Lucas and Kourtney, are about the same age. Time has changed our relationship some. Our children grew up and moved out and we moved to another neighborhood, but our friendship remains. We went out to dinner with them last Friday night, and once a week, I go to Rick's to escape my world. It is one of the highlights of my week. Can I be honest with you? I am not sure why Rick and I are friends. In many ways, we are polar opposites. I am a preacher and he flips houses for a living. In other words, Rick can fix anything, and I can't fix anything. I like hearing about his work, because it is nothing like mine. Every week, our visit ends the same way. Rick gives me a long list of things he is planning to do, then he will look at me and say, "Well, what are you going to do this week?" I will answer, "Sick people, dead people." He responds, "So, you are doing nothing," and laughs. Can I ask you a question?

What are you going to do this week? Do you remember the definition of sloth? It is a reluctance to work or make an effort; laziness. Let me ask you the question again. Do the people in your life consider you lazy? I am not just talking about your vocation. I am talking about every aspect of your life. Are you working hard to maximize your body? Are you working hard to maximize your mind? Are you working hard to develop your faith, or are you being lazy? Never forget it. Laziness, or sloth, is one of the seven deadly sins. This is Lent, a time to repent. And all of God's hard-working people said, **"Amen!"**