

#54 “From Lazy to Laborer”

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Proverbs 6:6-11 says,

“Go to the ant, O sluggard, observe her ways and be wise, which, having no chief, officer or ruler, prepares her food in the summer and gathers her provision in the harvest. How long will you lie down, O sluggard? When will you arise from your sleep? ‘A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest’-- your poverty will come in like a vagabond and your need like an armed man.”

Solomon instructs any who are prone to laziness to look at the ant, a tiny creature which accomplishes an incredible amount of work. What it can carry and what it can move around in such a short time is certainly remarkable. The ant is not driven to work like it does because of some boss or taskmaster, but it just works hard because that is what it does. There is nothing within the nature of the ant which is indicative of laziness. The ant is a serious laborer, and it will have no want in time of need. Obviously, this passage teaches that laziness is a sin and that those who refuse to work will subsequently find themselves short on the bare necessities of life, starving and out in the cold. These need to labor, exert themselves, and accomplish some things in life. But there is a deeper principle at stake here, and it has great implications for the church of Jesus Christ.

Many of the problems of the modern church could be traced at least in some way to laziness. Doing God’s work God’s way is extremely challenging, difficult, and laborious. It requires endurance, toughness, fortitude, and even perspiration. It is not comfortable to go knock on doors in the summer heat and share the gospel. It is not easy to go to the mission field and go on the bare minimum of food and provisions. It is a sacrifice to get up early and help set up for a Sunday service. It is tough to admit we are wrong and go to a person and ask for forgiveness, and it is certainly easier to skip reading the Bible and praying than to make time for it. There is work involved to accomplish ministry, and Jesus’ desire is for laborers to enter His harvest. Jesus said in Luke 10:2, “And He was saying to them, ‘The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.’” The church has a lot of bodies, but we need more laborers. 1 Corinthians 15:58 says, “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord.” The idea of toiling for the Lord speaks of an intense labor, something that requires severe sacrifice and energy. Paul is painting a picture that he wants the church to be what Christ asked the disciples to pray for, a body of laborers who are willing to have sorrow, grief,

sweat, and trouble if only it will advance the gospel and the name of Christ. These are not fair-weather Christians, but these are willing to do the work that is uncomfortable, which brings persecution, and which involves sacrifice.

Too often the church looks to gimmicks or quick-fixes to accomplish the Great Commission, a sort of get-rich-quick scheme in the church. Yet, just as get-rich-quick schemes are not schemes but scams, so too is any method of trying to accomplish the Great Commission that doesn't involve hard work by faith. The ant understands that hard work is required for a return on its labor, and in the kingdom, believers must labor and toil by God's grace and power if they want to be rewarded. True and lasting spiritual fruit is not easily gained. Yes, it is true that striving in our own effort is a waste of effort, but living by faith and by the Spirit's empowerment is still labor. Just ask Paul or any of the twelve disciples. They studied the Word, they preached, they tarried in prayer, they traveled as missionaries, and they suffered persecution. But they will be rewarded greatly because they were steadfast, immovable, and abounded in God's work.

There is an interesting phenomenon happening in the modern church. Many churches have a smorgasbord of "ministries," but upon closer examination, true ministry really isn't being accomplished, that is, ministry which involves evangelism, prayer, discipleship, counseling, in-depth Bible study, etc. There are typically a lot of activities, but we need more ministry. On the flip side, some churches do things which directly pertain to the Great Commission, and yet they wear people out because they expect them to come to Sunday morning service, Sunday evening service, the prayer meeting, the mid-week Bible study, the community activity on Saturday, and so on. Too much activity for people can drain them spiritually to the point where they lose their first love and merely go through the motions. The answer is not to overwhelm ourselves with activity or to engage in activity not necessarily related to carrying out our commission. Rather, we are to give ourselves where we can and as the Spirit would have us in actual, authentic, hard-work oriented ministry.

There is much in the Bible to remind us that time is short, that our lives are but a vapor (James 4:14), and that we need to walk circumspectly, making the most of the time (Ephesians 5:15-16). God doesn't want sluggards in His army, but He wants workers that put the ants to shame. May God make us effective laborers who truly engage the enemy in battle and advance the truth of the gospel in love.