A LITTLE SLEEP, A LITTLE SLUMBER …

We had a lecturer in the Baptist College in Belfast who, - every now and again, - would fold his arms, tilt his head to the one side, and we knew he was going to quote Prov. 6:6, Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise … 10 Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep: 11 So shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth, and thy want as an armed man. He was encouraging us to ‘keep our heads down’ and to study hard! … He was right, - you don’t get anywhere without ‘hard-graft’ (… as you say in Scotland)!

Christian knew there would be ‘hard graft’. He knew that in order to reach the Celestial City, he must maintain a steady and sometimes rigorous progress. This was all the more demonstrated to him by the next three characters he would meet, - Simple, Sloth, and Presumption. Now, immediately we can deduce these three titles were not by any means commendatory!

Previously, - to reach the cross, - Christian ran “till he came to a place somewhat ascending” … After having been at the cross, he “went on his way, that is until he came to the bottom of the hill.” He no longer is held back by his burden, - his burden had rolled down the hill, into the sepulchre … never to be seen again. … And he is going forward!

At the bottom of the hill, he met three fellow-pilgrims … In fact, it’s not absolutely correct that he met them … he … ‘came across them’. These three characters, - presumably they had also been at the cross previously, - had become tired already! They were only getting started, but they had stopped already! Here is Christian, full of excitement … rushing to get along the road … and here are these three men … no hurry, no excitement, no drawing within their hearts to keep going on. … They were “fast asleep”.

It would be hard to imagine a greater contrast … Christian full of the excitement and joy of the cross … And then he meets these three men lazy layabouts! This was reality!

I’m sure you can remember how you were when you first realised the work of grace had taken place in your life. Your excitement compelled you to speak about your faith. Christian, here, was a new follower of Christ and he was yet to be confronted with the rigours of rejection and difficulty. One of the greatest disappointments for a young believer is the indifference they can detect in many who have been saved for a good while. The fire has gone down to not much more than a spark sometimes!
It is a great disappointment when you come across people who claim to be saved … but they have little to no excitement about what Christ has done for them! They don’t seem to have any enthusiasm when the Gospel is preached, or when it is mentioned in their company. … Here is a new Christian, and he is full of the joy of the Lord … and he comes across these three characters … “wilfully sedated pilgrims”!

THEIR INTRODUCTION – THEIR IDENTIFICATION
First of all, there is Simple … ‘simple’ by name, and ‘simple’ by character! He is the type that thrives on, “Oh, I couldn’t understand that … That’s far too deep for me”. Blissfully ignorant, and content to remain so. He is the kind that doesn’t ‘push himself’ to discover more about what it means to be a Christian.

Sloth, - even the very mention of his name would make you yawn! Spiritual lethargy … that is what he signifies. He’s the type that just ‘moseys along’, without getting too excited … His professed faith doesn’t urge him on to be the best for Christ … “Och, sure I’m saved, - I’ve said the prayer, - and I’m alright. No need to take too much ‘out of yourself’, or to take it too seriously!”

And then there was Presumption … he was the haughty one. He was full of his own self-importance and self-sufficiency. Whether he could do a thing or not … he would have put up to be able to do it. … (These three characters remind me of Compo, Norman and Walter in Last of the Summer Wine!)

THEIR IDLENESS
When you are busy in the Lord’s work, - and you are seeking to be faithful, - it’s hard when you see people not taking seriously their calling. Christ ‘worked’ hard to bring about us salvation, therefore, we should work hard for Him! And besides, unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required (Lk. 12:48). The enthusiastic Christian went and wakened them with a loud cry! … Eph. 5:14 Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light … Amos 6:1 Woe to them that are at ease in Zion.

He told them they were as useless as the sailor asleep at the top of the ship’s mast in the middle of a storm out on the sea! (Prov. 23:34 thou shalt be as he that lieth down in the midst of the sea, or as he that lieth upon the top of a mast.) They weren’t living up to their profession! They were in danger of spiritual ruin … and they couldn’t have cared less! … “I’ll help you off with your irons”, said the young Christian. They should have been ashamed! The young Christian was telling them about the devil and his threat to devour them (I Peter 5:8).
Did they not already know about the threat? Of course, they did … but they
didn’t care! … “Leave us alone, young man, so we can get back to our sleep!”

Do you recognise the scorn in their tone when they replied to him? John
Bunyan tells us, “With that they looked upon him, and began to reply in this
sort”. … These three men were a disgrace. They should have been an
encouragement to this young man in the faith. Instead they were a disgrace!

Imagine someone saying to you, - concerning the Christian journey, - “I see no
danger”. … The man must have been blind! The moment you believe in Christ
as Saviour, the hosts of Hell are out to get you! They come in all shapes and
forms. What kind of a stupid person would say, “I see no danger”?! … Around
every corner lurked the enemy to confront the Lord Jesus, when He was on
earth … Therefore, we cannot expect the enemy to leave us alone. You don’t
have to go looking for him, … he comes looking for us!

But I suppose, - taking it from another angle, - this man called Simple was
very possibly telling the truth (as he saw it), “I see no danger”. When your
eyes are closed … you see nothing! When you are asleep you hear nothing and
you are aware of nothing. Those three men could have been lying ‘dead to the
world’, as we say, and the enemy could have crept up on them and slaughtered
them … and they wouldn’t have known it! And so Paul told the Corinthians, I
Cor. 16:13 Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong.

There are many people who profess Christ like Simple. It takes nothing out of
them, because they put nothing into their faith. They have no hunger for God’s
Word. They have the slimmest of interest in what it says and teaches. Their
faith comes second to everything else in their lives. And a naivety beyond
belief ensnares them into a deep spiritual lethargy. … It’s a curse, that
potentially has a devastating effect. They have no interest in furthering their
knowledge of God and His Word … How can they ever hope to proceed? …
Obviously, there was no urgency in Simple’s tone to indicate he had any hope,
- either in the long term or the short! … It is nothing less than neglect of the
means of God’s grace!

… And Sloth … he said, “Yet a little more sleep”. You could imagine him
hardly opening his eyes, and muttering those five lazy words. He hardly would
have bothered looking at Christian! “Go away and leave me alone, would
you!” How many fellowships consist of people content not to bother
themselves with the Lord’s work! …
Have they no comprehension of what Christ has done for them? … He made Himself of no reputation, - He set aside for a time the glory He enjoyed in Heaven, - and He became a servant. He humbled Himself to the basest degree when He became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross (Phil. 2:6-8). From the highest to the very lowest, Jesus came. … How then can any believer not be moved in their service for Him?! … Sloth was one of those people who took God and His grace for granted … and no one can ever expect to prosper whenever they do such a thing, least of all a professing believer!

Too lazy to study the Word, too lazy to come out to pray, too lazy to encourage a brother or sister in the Lord … What kind of a Christian constitutes such behaviour! Alexander Whyte commented, “We have all enemies in our souls that never sleep, whatever we may do. There are no irons on their heels. They never procrastinate. They never say to their master, A little more slumber. And, if so, what have you done, what are you at this moment doing, to cast that enemy out?”

Simple … Sloth … and Presumption. What was he saying? I hate it when people act all ‘better than everybody else’ and comes out with something nobody understands … and it is not remotely connected to anything! Presumption muttered, “Every tub must stand upon its own bottom” … What?! … He’s like the Walter in Last of the Summer Wine. Walter boasted of all his military prowess in the war, - he was actually a sign writer! But Walter was the one who personified arrogance and self-sufficiency … And so Presumption was so ‘full of himself’, there was no room for anyone or anything else!

Perhaps the closest and equivalent sentiment to what Presumptuous expressed was, “every person must paddle his own canoe” (every tub must stand upon its own bottom). “I don’t need anyone else to tell me what I need to or what I don’t need to do; I can work it out for myself!” … This kind of person rejects the advice of others, and especially his companions in the Lord. They ignore Christian fellowship. They don’t want anyone’s help … and they would despise being told they were wrong, or inconsistent.

Just to think this man had been at the cross, - and surely he had to be to come to that point in the journey. He had left his burden down at the cross, but from the short distance from the top of the hill to the bottom, he had picked up another burden … and it had resulted in him, - along with the other two, Simple and Sloth, - falling asleep in their idleness. Finally …
THEIR IMPACT
The Lord, of course, had a purpose in introducing Christian to these three ‘no-good’s’. He was teaching Christian about the dangers of complacency which leads to ineptitude which leads to spiritual demise. Surely, he would have remembered how he had taken the wisdom and guidance of Evangelist … but these three men, - “with fetters upon their heels”, - weren’t going anywhere. The enemy had caught up with them … soon after they had been to the cross.

There are none so blind as those who don’t want to see, and these three were not in the slightest interested in what Christian had to say to them. They pushed him away, - go away and don’t bother us! Leave us as we are! We’re happy and content … sleeping our lives away …

And as far as the shackles on their heels were concerned, it cost them no concern … for they had no notion of getting up onto their feet and resuming the journey! Surely, there are none so captive as those who call bondage freedom, and who call freedom bondage, … those who call evil good, and those who are blind and yet claim to see.

These three characters were absolutely pitiful … but you couldn’t and you mustn’t have any sympathy for them … And it was even good for Christian to meet such a trio at the start of his journey as he left the cross to head towards the Celestial City. Indeed, these three characters a warning to take great care not to end up like them!

In closing, there is one final lesson we are taught here … While Christian saw the condition of these three layabouts and he confronted them, he didn’t stay and waste valuable time and energy on them. Sometimes I think we give these kinds of people far too much attention, and it takes away from what we could be doing more profitably for the Lord. … What would Jesus have achieved in His ministry if He had spent all His time trying to sort out Judas Iscariot … or Peter’s personality, or the argumentativeness of James and John, or the nationalistic politics of Simon the Zealot?! He would not have got very far! Sometimes the most successful tactic of the devil is to get us to waste our time on that which is completely unprofitable … and that never will be anything else! … Christian is a lesson to us there is a journey ahead we must travel, and we must travel it faithfully for the Lord’s honour. Nothing ought to distract us. … These three ‘no-hopers’ lay down, rolled over and went to sleep again. Meanwhile, Christian continued on his way. It was a lesson to him … to take great care not to become as them.
CONCLUSION
Yes, they had an impact upon him … an impact the Lord used to keep Christian going on. … Simple, Sloth, and Presumption … and then … Christian. It’s easy to see who truly belonged to the Lord, isn’t it? … What a question, “Who truly belongs to the Lord?” … You would hear some of them saying, “Ah, but I have matters to deal with at home. I have concerns I must attend to” … Often they are nothing more than the “fetters upon their heels”. … “I don’t need to attend the services every week, or the prayer meeting” … and they roll over and go back to sleep.

May God set before us the example of many who, - like Christian, - kept going on, and God blessed their witness in past days and we have benefited from their testimony. It is our turn now. Even though the days are dark and we could be tempted to ‘take it easy’, we must avoid imitating the sluggard, Prov. 6:10 a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep …

Jesus is coming back again, and He will be looking to see how His grace has affected the way we live, … It’s a new life we have because of Him, and this new life we are given to live for Him … “Oh let my love with fervour burn, And from the world now let me turn; Living for Thee, and Thee alone, Bringing Thee pleasure on Thy throne; Only one life, “twill soon be past, Only what’s done for Christ will last.”

May God encourage us through the study of His Word this evening! Amen.