

## "THE SIN OF OVERWORK"

### INTRODUCTION

There is a story in the Old Testament about a man who had a prisoner entrusted to his charge and who was commanded above all else to guard that prisoner with his own life. For a while the man did just that - stood guard over the prisoner - did that and nothing else. But as the tide of battle moved in his direction, he thought he could do more by lending a hand with his sword. And so he leaped into the battle for several minutes. During these brief moments, the prisoner took to his heels and escaped. When his superior officers demanded an explanation all that the man could stammer out was, "As thy servant was busy here and there, he was gone".

### DEVELOPMENT

So often, in the battle of life, it is like that. Try to do two things at once and one of them may suffer. Try to do two things at once and the thing that suffers may be the thing of prior consequence to which you should be devoting yourself with undivided energy and attention. Many a business executive could probably tell you about able young men who fall down on the job because they do not concentrate on it - they have too many irons in the fire. People lose opportunities, not, as they sometimes complain, because the opportunities never come their way, but because when the opportunities do come, they are not on hand to make the most of them. They are apt to be otherwise engaged, perhaps industriously engaged, but not on their real business. There was an old Puritan divine who wrote on the flyleaf of every book that came into his possession his name and under it: "Remember that thou art a Minister of the Word. Mind thy business".

Going back to the story with which I introduced this sermon, what I want to do is emphasize this phrase: "As thy servant was busy here and there". It so accurately describes the character and conveys the tempo and atmosphere of modern living. Always on the move. Operating on a tight and crowded schedule, keeping an anxious eye on the clock, engaged in an unending duel with time - this is the life as many know it. The pace is swifter, the pressures more severe, and the amount of work to be done heavier than it ought to be.

We talk about the sins of the body and the sins of the disposition. Perhaps it's time something was said about the sin of overwork and since this is Labor Day weekend, perhaps this is the time to do it. The sin of overwork. Many there are, of course, who never commit this sin, and give no impression of even being tempted in this direction. Many there are, too, for whom work is a drudgery, something from which to get away with all possible speed, who are yoked to an occupation which they do not enjoy and in which they are more or less miserable. I am not addressing myself to either of these groups. But rather I have in mind the men and women whose friends say they haven't a lazy bone in their body, who love their work, believe in it, derive a pleasure from it, but who are giving far too much time and strength and nervous energy to it - the people who are disregarding the strict limits - physical, mental, spiritual - which an individual may transgress.

### THE SIN OF OVERWORK

The sin of overwork. Work itself is no sin. It has been spoken of as a punishment and a curse, and yet it is far from being that. One is reminded of Carlyle's affirmation that a man perfects himself by working. "Blessed is the man who has found his work, let him ask no other blessing". To his hardworking Scots mother Carlyle wrote about a certain Lady Sandwich: "Plenty of money and fair health; but alas - nothing to do. That is not a very easy life after all". And how true. Work is one of our unchanging needs. Work is the salt of life, preserving it from decay and corruption, giving it zest and flavor. Men often tell themselves that when they retire they will have done with work, but unless they work at something - they will go down hill incredibly fast.

Work is not a sin, but overwork definitely is. For one thing, there is what happens to the work itself. Industry knows that an overwrought man is not going to turn out a good job. Labor suffers in quality when the laborer is kept too long at the job. The lesson is one that management itself is sometimes slow to learn. Henry Ford once remarked that the internal combustion engine for his first automobile would have been produced in one third less time if the men who worked at it steadily for several months - day and night - week in and week out - had taken more time away from the job to rest and relax. Unless you are a quite exceptional person, you can't do well, really well, more than a definite and limited amount of work. When a person overworks, the work itself suffers.

And then too, the worker is apt to suffer. Consider what is likely to happen to his body. Let an individual go on from week to week and from month to month with every day planned and every day filled and look what happens. Nature rebels. The body, under strain for so long, can't take the strain any longer. It can stand only a certain amount of neglect and ill treatment and after that it revolts. Its vitality sapped, either it wears down or it breaks down.

And consider what happens to the disposition. The overworked person is apt to feel irritable and nervous. His face is apt to tell eloquently what is happening inside of him even though he does not. He can't relax. He feels more and more the need of stimulants. He feels the need of tranquilizers. Finding that sleep is hard to come by, he learns to depend on sleeping pills. He is apt to flare up emotionally at the slightest pretext and in the most unreasonable and childish ways. Whether at home or business, he is not an easy person to live with. And so life is sacrificed to the work of life. What should be a means to an end becomes an end in itself. People become so occupied and pre-occupied with their business that they practically sacrifice everything to it. It may be the health of their body or their mind. They may scarcely know their own children with any degree of understanding; they may give themselves no time to trim the lamp of friendship or to cultivate the life of their soul.

#### A PLEA FOR LEISURE

I would like to make a plea for three things here this morning in connection with all of this. The first is a plea for leisure. You owe it to yourself - your inner and deepest self - as well as to your relatives and associates, to slow up, to moderate the pressure, to take time out. There should be rhythms in human life, as there are rhythms in nature: first, stress of toil, and then happy release from it. First, diligent service and then rewarding rest. There is an old Egyptian saying which goes like this:

"The boatman reaches the landing, partly by pulling,  
partly by letting go. The archers strike the target,  
partly by pulling and partly by letting go".

In order to hit the target of your life, you may need to let go occasionally and learn to relax. We can't all live like Thoreau, but we can all learn from him. "My days" he once said, "were not days of the week bearing the stamp of any heathen deity, nor were they minced into hours and fretted by the ticking of the clock". It's pathetic when a man requires to have his eye everlastingly on the clock. Make leisure. Insist on having it. W. H. Davies never wrote a poem with more challenge in it for our hurrying, feverish age than when he composed the following lines:

"What is this life, if, full of care,  
We have no time to stand and stare...

No time to stand beneath the boughs  
And start as long as sheep or cows...

No time to see, in broad daylight  
Streams full of stars, and like skies at night...

A poor life this if, full of care,  
We have no time to stand and stare...."

A PLEA FOR PERSPECTIVE

Secondly, I would make a plea for a sense of perspective in the ordering of business and the management of time. Let us try to see things and to keep things in their true proportions. Work is important, but so is home and friendship and worship. Sometime ago I read in one of our papers of where a respectable citizen of a community was in court and saw his son sentenced to a term of imprisonment for a grave offense. The father made a plea for the boy. He had been allowed too much liberty and had been running wild. He, the father, that is, had been out of the home day and night attending to his business. This is what the judge told the father: "You have been too busy to do your duty".

There is something in that distressing incident for us all. Are we too busy to do our plain duty in the home - the church - the community. Are the prior claims receiving from us the consideration they merit. Are we so pushed and driven that some of the finest gifts of God to us - good books, inspiring music, the world outdoors - go uncultivated. John Baillie, one of Scotland's great theologians and great spirits, once said to the students in the class room that the world is like a shop window into which some mischevious person has entered overnight and shifted all the price labels around so that the cheap things have the high price labels on them and the really precious things are priced low. We allow ourselves to be taken in.

A PLEA FOR THE SUPREME VALUES

In the third place, I would like to make a plea for the recognition in our lives of the supreme values of life for which Jesus stood. When a minister talks about the overcrowded life, and the pressure and the pace being greater than they ought to be, and the need for doing less, for cutting things out and having more spare time for leisurely pursuits, someone is apt to remark, half in jest and half in earnest, that he may find himself faced with some resignations from church committees and absences from the Sunday worship experience. He has to risk that; he knows from observation and experience what happens when some slow down. The first activity to be affected is their religious activity. If they are to rest from their labors, Sunday morning seems to be the morning for it.

This is why I am making a plea for a recognition of the supreme values in our crowded lives - the values for which Christ stood. Here one must discriminate. We have to pick and choose carefully. There are some things we should have no time for. There are some things we should include at all costs. The spiritual needs to be given more of a place in our lives. Our duty to God should come before our duty to anybody or anything else. First things should be put first.

In the parable of Jesus that I read to you for our scripture lesson this morning, there is a man who prepared a great feast and sent out invitations to his friends to be his guests. One by one, they tendered their apologies. The first had bought a farm and felt he should go and look it over. The second had made a good deal in purchasing a yoke of oxen, and he wanted to try them out. The third had recently told his servants to go out and bring into the feast the poor, the crippled, the blind. Do you see the point that our Lord was making? All three men were so taken up with them - so engrossed and immersed in them - that they could find no time for anything else. They were oblivious to the other interests of life - to its higher interests - and they were tragically crowded out.

To me the sad thing is that this sort of thing still happens today, even among church oriented folk. It may be that the Word of God for you this morning is this: distinguish between what is primary and what is secondary.....between what is vital and what is not.....what is urgent and what can wait....between what is of great value and what in the long run is of little value.

LET US PRAY

As we pause, O God, in thy presence once again and experience the presence of the spirit of Christ in our midst, let us be silent to hear what He has to say about ourselves and our work. Give us strength to renew our perspective - to find a greater place for leisure in our busy lives, to manage our time and our business in better fashion and lastly to save time in our lives for the work of thy kingdom. In the name and spirit of Christ, we pray. Amen

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It happens in this church - where people are too busy with other activities to take on an assignment to help their church. And they wonder why the church is having such a difficult time, struggling to keep its doors open....

TWELFTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY  
September 1, 1968

ORDER OF WORSHIP  
11 a.m.

ORGAN "Rhosymedre" Williams  
CALL TO WORSHIP  
HYMN NO. 2 "Come, Thou almighty King"  
PRAYER OF CONFESSION (Seated)  
Our Heavenly Father, who by Thy love hast  
made us, and through Thy love hast kept us, and  
in Thy love wouldst make us perfect, we humbly  
confess that we have not loved thee with all our  
heart and soul and mind and strength, and that we  
have not loved one another as Christ hath loved us.  
Forgive what we have been; help us to amend what  
we are, and in Thy spirit direct what we shall be;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen  
SILENT MEDITATION - WORDS OF ASSURANCE - LORD'S PRAYER  
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RESPONSIVE READING "God Our Help" Page 603  
GLORIA PATRI  
AFFIRMATION OF FAITH No. 2, Page 512  
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SCRIPTURE Luke 14: 7 - 24  
PASTORAL PRAYER  
ANNOUNCEMENTS OF CONGREGATIONAL CONCERN  
OFFERTORY SOLO "Lord God of Abraham" Mendelssohn  
(From the Elijah; Ray Gibbs, Bass)  
PRESENTATION OF THE OFFERING WITH THE DOXOLOGY  
HYMN NO. 256 "Faith of our fathers"  
SERMON "The Sin of Overwork" Rev. Mr. Clarke  
HYMN NO. 29 "Saviour, again to Thy dear Name"  
BENEDICTION  
ORGAN "Festivo" Klerk

\*\*\* Interval for ushering

WELCOME

We give hearty welcome to friends old and new who  
worship with us on this Labor Day weekend. The coffee  
hour that gives us such a fine opportunity for fellow-  
ship has been discontinued for several Sundays. Our  
handshake, however, is just as real and warm as if it  
were given with coffee or tea cup in hand.

If you are a visitor, we invite you to leave a  
record of your visit by signing your name and address  
in one of our guest books. If you are a new resident  
to this Yorkville community of New York City, we in-  
vite you to find a church home with us.

CHILD CARE SERVICE

During the summer months, child care service is  
available for infants, toddlers and pre-school children  
in the fourth floor lounge.

MEMBERSHIP COMMISSION TO MEET

The Membership Commission will meet next Sunday  
at 12:30 in the Community Room. All members are urged  
to be present.

TUESDAY NIGHT, SEPTEMBER 10

Tuesday night, September 10th, is the date of our  
next church night. The Finance Commission will meet at  
7:15 p.m., and the Joint Commission on Mission and  
Social Concern will also hold a meeting at the same hour.  
The Official Board will meet at 8:30 p.m.. All  
meetings will be in the Community Room.

CHOIR TO REHEARSE

The first rehearsal of the choir is scheduled for  
Wednesday evening, September 11th, at 6:15 p.m. Last  
year's singers as well as new members are invited to  
share in the rehearsal.

# PARK AVENUE METHODIST CHURCH

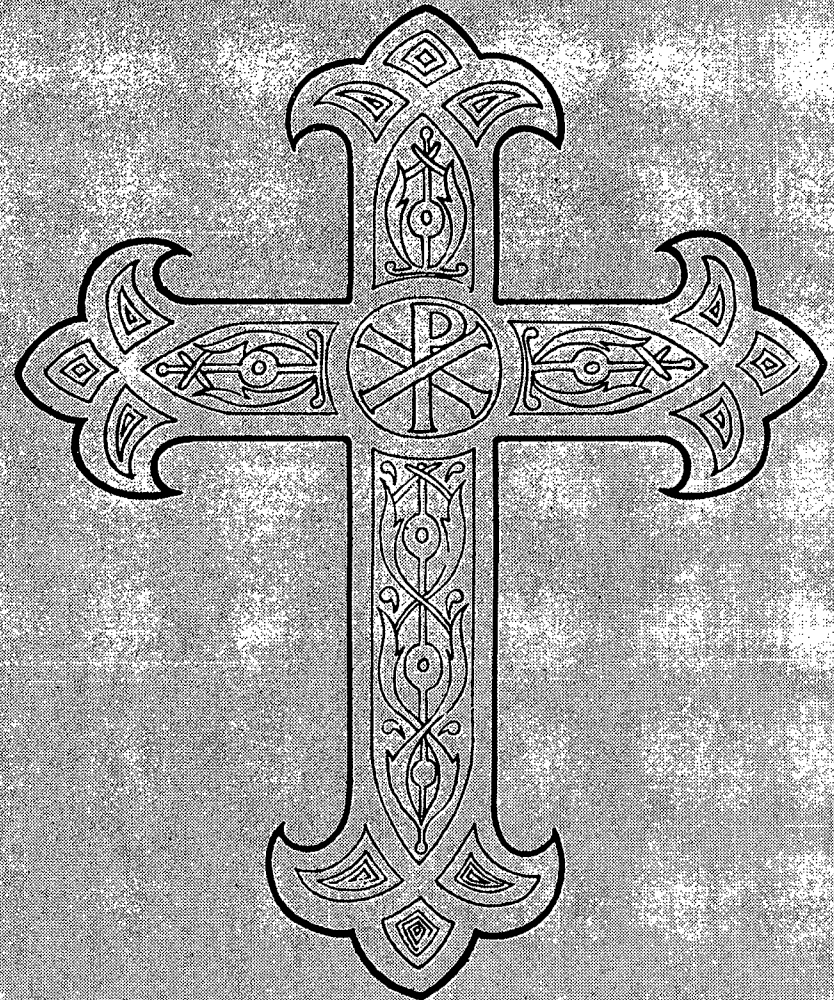
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New York, N. Y. 10028  
AT 9-6997

## CHURCH DIRECTORY

Rev. Philip A. C. Clarke.....Minister  
Rev. Ronald A. Witmer.....Associate Minister  
Dr. Harold C. Metzner.....Associate Minister, Emeritus  
Mr. Lyndon Woodside.....Organist-Choir Director  
Mrs. Thomas Booth.....Secretary  
Mrs. George Leech.....Day School Director  
Mrs. John R. White.....Financial Secretary  
Miss Vivian M. Taylor.....Treasurer  
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