

# ST. SIMEON ANGLICAN CHURCH, OFF FUTA ROAD, AKURE

## BIBLE STUDY, 15/04/2009

### STUDY 5

## THE SLEEPY SAINTS

Matthew 25:1 ó 13

Many and varied are the figures used to describe the disciples of Christ in the Scriptures. They are spoken of as salt, as lights, as sheep, as living stones, as kings and priests. The Church is referred to as the Lamb's "wife", but individually they are termed "the virgins, her companions" (Psalm 45:14; Song of Solomon 8:13; Revelation 1:9). They are called "virgins" for the purity of their faith, worship and walk, refusing friendship and fellowship with the adulterous world, cleaving to Christó *"they are virgins: these are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth"* (Revelation 14:4).

The parable of the virgins was delivered by Christ not to a promiscuous multitude, but to His own disciples: it was *to them* that He said, *"Watch, therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh"* (Matthew 25:13). Therein He exhorted His followers to maintain an attitude of the utmost alertness and diligence, to be on their guard against a sudden surprisal, to see to it that they were in a constant state of readiness to welcome and entertain Him at His appearing. In this Matthew 25:13, Christ clearly indicated the principal design of this parable, namely, to enforce the Christian duty of watchfulness, particularly against the tendency and danger of moral drowsiness and spiritual apathy in the performance of our duties.

This call for him to "watch" signifies that he is to "keep his heart with all diligence" (Proverbs 4:23), "Keep himself from idols" (I John 5:2 1), "Keep himself in the love of God" (Jude 21). It bids us "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation, knowing that [though] the spirit be willing, the flesh is weak" (Matthew 26:41). In a word, that exhortation requires us to attend to the interests of our souls with unremitting diligence and circumspection.

### 1. Characteristics of spiritual sleep

Matthew 25:1ó13; Songs of Solomon 5:2; Matthew 26:40, 43; Luke 18:8; Romans 13:11; Ephesians 5:14; I Corinthians 15:14; I Thessalonians 5:5ó8; I Peter 5:8; Mark 13:36

But before we can truthfully answer the question, Am I spiritually asleep? we must first ascertain what are the marks of one who *is* so. The things which characterise the body when it is asleep will help us to determine when the soul is so. When the body is asleep it is in a state of inactivity, all its members being in repose. It is also a state of unconsciousness, when the normal exercises of the mind are suspended. It is therefore a state of insensibility to danger, of complete helplessness. Spiritual sleep is that condition wherein the faculties of the believer's soul are inoperative and when his graces no longer perform their several offices. When the mind ceases to engage itself with divine things and the graces is not kept in healthy exercise, a state of slothfulness and inertia ensues. When the grand truths of Scripture regarding God and Christ, sin and grace, heaven and hell, exert not a lively and effectual influence upon us, we quickly become drowsy and neglectful.

When the body sleeps it *neither eats nor drinks*: so it is with the soul. Faith is the hand which receives, hope the saliva which aids digestion, love the masticator and assimilator of what is partaken. But when they cease to function the soul is starved, and it becomes weak. The more undernourished be the body the less strength and ability has it for its tasks. In like manner, a neglected soul is unfit for holy duties, and the most sacred exercises become burdensome. Thus, when a saint finds his use of the means of grace wearisome and the discharge of spiritual privileges irksome, he may know that his soul is slumbering towards God. A slumbering faith is an inactive one. It is not exercised upon its appointed objects nor performing its assigned tasks. It is neither drawing upon that fullness of grace which is available in Christ for His people, nor is it acting on the precepts and promises of the Word. Though there still is a mental assent to the Truth, yet the heart is no longer suitably affected by that

which concerns practical godliness. Where such be the case a Christian will be governed more by tradition, sentiment, and fancy, rather than by gratitude, the fear of the Lord, and care to please Him.

## 2. Causes of spiritual sleep

Matthew 25:1613; II Thessalonians 3:5; Luke 12:37638; 21:36; Acts 24:26; Psalm 119:115; I Corinthians 15:33634

In the parable, four *causes* of spiritual sleep are indicated. (i) *Failure to remain watchful*. In its wider sense "watching" signifies an earnest taking heed unto ourselves and our ways, realising how prone we are to "turn again to folly" (Psalm 85:8). Watchfulness (the opposite of carelessness) is exercising a diligent concern and care for our souls, avoiding all occasions to sin, resisting temptation (Matthew 26:41). It is to "stand fast in the faith, quit you like men" (I Corinthians 16:13) & be regular in our duties. When we are lax in serving the Lord, in mortifying our lusts, and less fervent and frequent in prayer, then slumber has begun to steal over us. (ii) *The Bridegroom's delay* resulted in lack of perseverance on their part. Since we know not how soon or how long deferred will be our call to depart from this world, we need to be unremitting in duty, in a state of constant readiness. Not only a desirous expectation but a "patient waiting for Christ" is required of us. It was because Moses tarried so long in the mount that Israel grew weary of waiting and gave way to their lusts & a warning to us not to relax our vigilance. How long had the Old Testament saints to wait for His first advent! "Behold the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth and hath long patience for it . . . be ye also patient: stablish your hearts" (James 5:7, 8), exercising faith and hope.

(iii) *Intimacy with graceless professors*. The wise virgins failed because they were in too close contact and fellowship with the foolish ones. That is confirmed by the divine warning "Be not deceived: evil companionships corrupt good manners," which is immediately followed by "Awake to righteousness, and sin not", showing us that intimacy with the Christless produces lethargy. It is not the openly profane, but the loose and careless professor who is the greatest menace to the Christian. Hence "having a form of godliness but denying [inaction] the power thereof, from such *turn away*" (II Timothy 3:5).

(iv) *Inattention to the initial danger*: they "slumbered" (a lighter form) before they slept! How that shows the need for taking solemn and earnest heed to the beginnings of spiritual decline! One degree of slackness and carelessness leads to another: "Slothfulness casteth into a deep sleep" (Proverbs 19:15). Once our zeal abates and our love cools, we become remiss and heedless. If we do not fight against a cold formality when engaged in sacred exercises, we shall ultimately cease them entirely. All backsliding begins in the heart! Sin stupefies before it hardens. If we cease to heed the gentle strivings of the Spirit, conscience will become calloused.

## 3. The consequences of spiritual sloth

The *consequences* of spiritual sloth are inevitable and obvious. Some of the chief consequences are: (i) Grace becomes inoperative. When faith is not exercised upon Christ, it nods and ceases to produce good works. When hope languishes and becomes inactive, the heart is no longer lifted above the things of time and sense by a desirous expectation of good things to come. Then love declines and is no longer engaged in pleasing and glorifying God. Zeal slumbers and instead of fervour there is heartless formality in the use of means and performance of duties. (ii) We are deprived of spiritual discernment, and no longer able to experientially perceive the vanity of earthly things and value of heavenly, and the need of pressing forward unto them. (iii) A drowsy inattention to God's providences. Eyes closed in sleep take no notice of His dealings with us, weigh not the things which befall us. Mercies are received as a matter of course, and signs of God's displeasure are disregarded (Isaiah 42:25).

(iv) Unconcernedness in the commission of sin, so that we cease mortifying our lusts and resisting the devil. Spiritual stupidity makes us insensible to our danger. It was while David was taking his ease that he yielded to the devil (II Samuel 11:162). (v) The Holy Spirit is grieved and His gracious operations are suspended and His comforts withheld. (vi) When our spiritual senses are

dulled, we are absorbed with its attractions or weighted down by its cares. (vii) We are robbed by our enemies of God's providential smile, of our peace and joy (Luke 12:39). (viii) Fruitlessness Proverbs 24:30-31. (ix) Carnal complacency: peace and joy being derived from pleasant circumstances and earthly possessions, rather than Christ and our heritage in Him. (x) Spiritual poverty (Proverbs 24:33-34). (xi) Indifference to the cause and interests of Christ: it was while men slept Satan sowed his tares, and abuses creep into the church. (xii) A practical unpreparedness for Christ's coming (Luke 21:36; Revelation 16:15).