

“Deliverance From Idleness”
 Pastor Sam Richards
 28 April 2024—Eastertide Sunday 5
 Texts: Proverbs 10:2-6

“You don’t waste a moment, you don’t waste a word,” my host observed,
 “and yet you are so relaxed.”

What an amazing commendation! E Stanley Jones was the recipient of this remark and he was mystified because it was not his “self-talk” at that moment in time. He was rejoicing in self-discipline—or what we might more broadly describe as *self-control*. He was saying to himself, “You are happy . . . you are free.” The connection between the two, I am citing from A Song of Ascents, is not obvious. And Jones was actually commenting on Proverbs 10:17—a verse occurring somewhat later in the chapter than our reading for today. The host’s words could easily apply to the Lord Jesus *please note that application*.

Can I assume that everyone is familiar with the Proverbs 31 woman?? There is some basis for assuming that Lemuel is another name for Solomon and that the woman in question is none other than Bathsheba.¹ (In the footnote you will find the critical opinion that Solomon did not write Proverbs. It is suggested that Hezekiah’s scribes did so—with later editing. I do not share this view. I believe that Solomon wrote down the sayings of King David and Bathsheba. It is, if that is the case, a marvelous demonstration of grace, meaning forgiveness and restoration. Quite wonderful.) The Proverb’s 31 woman is “happy and free” as Mr. Jones, or even our Lord himself—a picture of balance and well-being two marks of thriving, wholesome humanness. Note that she is not idle, and not impoverished relationally, materially, or spiritually. She is worthy of praise and of emulation—the picture of thriving and prosperous womanhood.

¹ Citation: 2. Lemuel was another name for Solomon

The ancient Rabbinical commentators identified Lemuel with Solomon. *The Babylonian Talmud (Tractate Aboth, Chapter 5)* says that six names were given to Solomon: Solomon, Jedidiah, Qoheleth, Ben Iokoh, Agur, and Lemuel. According to A. Cohen, *Proverbs* (Hindhead, Surrey: The Soncino Press, 1945), p. 209, Lemuel is another name for Solomon that when translated means “towards (lemo) God (el).”

In his book *Solomon and Solomonic Literature* (Charleston, SC: BiblioBazaar, 2008), p. 67, Moncure Daniel Conway tells a rabbinical story that relates Proverbs 31 to Solomon and Bathsheba. He wrote:

The Ancient Rabbins identified Lemuel with Solomon, and relate than when, on the day of the dedication of the temple, he married Pharaoh’s daughter, he drank too much at the wedding feast, and slept until the fourth hour of the next day, with the keys of the temple under his pillow. Whereupon his mother, Bathsheba, entered and reprovved him with this oracle. Bathsheba’s own amour with Solomon’s father does not appear to have excited any rabbinical suspicion that the description of the virtuous wife with which the Book of Proverbs closes is hardly characteristic of the woman.

The theory that Lemuel was Solomon is an attempt at defending the traditional view that Solomon wrote the book of Proverbs. It is clear from Proverbs 25:1 that Solomon did not write the book of Proverbs. Rather, the book was probably edited by the Hezekiah’s scribes or by a later editor.

<https://claudemariottini.com/2009/05/18/who-was-king-lemuel/#:~:text=209%2C%20Lemuel%20is%20another%20name,31%20to%20Solomon%20and%20Bathsheba.>

Anyway, what the host was noting about Mr. Jones was his balance and well-being—his deliverance from idleness which is my theme for today. And I want to describe for you the industrious man because we already possess that picture of God's woman.

There is a most poignant moment in the passion narrative where Jesus is brought forth with the declaration, **Behold the man**, “so relaxed, not a word, not minute wasted.”

John 19:5-6 'Then Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. And Pilate said to them, “Behold the Man!” Therefore, when the chief priests and officers saw Him, they cried out, saying, “Crucify Him, crucify Him!” Pilate said to them, “You take Him and crucify Him, for I find no fault in Him.”

Whole sermons could be dedicated to expositing this passage where Jesus the epitome of godly manhood stands forth in bold, stark contrast to the cowardly personages who abused him and cried for his death. **Christ was genuinely performing the role God had given him as a man**, Savior, Redeemer, Lord and Shepherd to perform those roles. And in performing those roles Jesus proved to be the man indeed. What a profile of manhood is presented to us! Thoroughly masculine, thoroughly manly and that is **a very good thing**. In fact, for the godly man, it is the only man to be. Let's back up from the moment of Jesus' passion presentation. Let's ask ourselves what kind of a man was it that strode into the temple, and observing the sacrilegious activity going on (the money changing, the commercialization of the temple precincts). Consider the disrespect of prayer, the dishonoring of worship and the spiritual degradation that activity embodied. Remember, he formed a scourge of rope and drove them rascals out with whipping and overturning of the tables. “so relaxed, not a word, not minute wasted.” He was a strong and powerful man, as carpenters were wont to be—carpenters processed their wood from stump to beams, they hand-hewed boards and planed them also by hand. It is hard, demanding work to produce even a single board, or beam!

There were no saw mills, no planers, no jointers and no band saws. Consider the beefy, brawny, ripped Galilean fishermen who were his rustic companions. Their presence was intimidating as men. Now the effete and delicate depictions we have of Jesus and his disciples rarely serve up how fit and buff these hardworking men actually were. Of course, the moneychangers moved out, gathering their scattered stuff as they fled. Jesus perceived something going awry and, as a strong masculine man he rectified the situation. He was the man then, too. *He dealt with sin head on—as men must do if they are to quit themselves as men.* The money-changers fled like chastised schoolchildren. Some impudently questioned Jesus' authority to **do these things** but they did not question his manhood. **I must be about my Father's business**, Jesus said. Jesus was *real strength under control*; he channels vigor, power, prowess and strength with a laser-like focus that healthy observers cheer on, and applaud! Like we cheer on the marine who defended others from a deranged and dangerous man on the subway. Like former military personnel who take down would be mass-shooters, villains to go to “gun-free” zones to spread death and mayhem. Real men, and courageous women are necessary to public safety and good order—it's more that the police can handle, besides bravery on site is superior to bravery that has to answer the call and get there. Real men cover their wives and children, enacting their manly roles as protectors—“so relaxed, not a word, not minute wasted.” Tragically a “gun-free” zone ceased to be “gun-free” the moment a killer takes his

weapon(s) there. When trouble is brewing, real men stop it before it escalates. They don't heckle, provoke and urge it on. What's needed on our college campuses is a number of real men to stand up to the haters, and to call their murderous impulsivity out! Hatred is not manly; it is far from good and never the best.

Remember the mob in the garden arrest, who came armed with clubs, spears and swords? Who came for Jesus (an excessive show of force that masked their fear and cowardice)? Jesus rightly asked **Why have you come with arms and weapons? I have been publicly accessible. You could have arrested me there. But, no, You come at night under cover of darkness to perpetrate the evil you have planned.** (A paraphrase of Matthew 26:47-57) John 18:4-8 adds the following details:

4 So Jesus, knowing all the things that were coming upon Him, went forth and *said to them, "Whom do you seek?" 5 They answered Him, "Jesus the Nazarene." He *said to them, "I am He." And Judas also, who was betraying Him, was standing with them. 6 So when He said to them, "I am He," they drew back and fell to the ground. 7 Therefore He again asked them, "Whom do you seek?" And they said, "Jesus the Nazarene." 8 Jesus answered, "I told you that I am He; so if you seek Me, let these go their way," "So relaxed, not a word, not minute wasted."

Now why did they draw back and fall to the ground? Because they saw Jesus the manhood of the man. The manliness of Jesus was on full display.

Now, reverting back to our introduction, **Here's what Jones wrote:**

"There is something in Jesus that is native to my blood, to my nerves, to my tissues, to my organs, to my relationships—to me as a total person. My blood is purer, my digestion is better, my brain is clearer, my nerves are calmer and steadier, my glands function perfectly, my being has a sense of well-being. He is "native" to me and I'm "native" to him. *We are made for each other as the eye is made for light, the conscience is made for truth, as the aesthetic nature is made for beauty.* (Underscore and italics, mine) So discipline is functioning in the way we are made to function. **Therefore discipline is delight.** To have not discipline (self-control/self-governances?) is destruction. There are no exceptions." (op. cit., Promises to Keep, Harper/Collins, 1996, p. 127)

There are five things here that are attention arresting to me—kind of "stand still and noteworthy things." They are:

1. "Native" to me as well as me to Him.
2. "Native" to my total person, or whole person.
3. We are made for each other "as eye is made for light."
4. Functioning as we are created to function defines health.
5. Discipline is helpfully seen as self-control, or as self-governance.

And all five, taken together, define well-being!

"Native" as homegrown, or indigenous seems to suggest a fresh way to describe the indwelling of Christ. In the converted, or born-again person Christ is, as it were, *naturalized*—or, made "at home," familiar, or even customary as in our best

acquaintances—or friends. Now to these senses are added another: restoration. When Christ becomes native to us there is a piece of that restoration which comes across as either as a mending, or a reconnection as in becoming “normal,” human even. We are “normal” when we are native to Christ as He is native to us. We are relationally, speaking where we ought to have been had sin not intervened and dislocated us! Mis-location is a way of ascribing a sense of displacement, or lostness, as in “*lost sheep*,”—where we experience ourselves as lost, adrift, cast out, or alienated *having gone astray*. Becoming “native” to Jesus again, or “native” for the first time, is at once a discovery and a recovery (a fruit of repentance?) of what had been spiritually lost.

It is wonderful to consider that we can experience such wellbeing; but in order to do we may need deliverance from idleness. It is a fact that God has given every man work enough to do. And God included no time for **idleness**. (And I do not mean to exclude time for rest, or relaxation in this assertion.) There is time for devotion and for worship. *These are essential to the well-balanced life!* When we have opportunity (“with little else to do”) we should occupy ourselves with dressing the soul, grooming our interior life through spiritual cultivation! In fact, we ought also to channel our business, employment, our labors into divine service *for that is our main business and witness*. *Idleness in this leads to impoverishment spiritually—and materially often*. Idleness is spiritual bondage and, frankly, it is addictive, too.

In keeping with this spiritual emphasis, we may note that for the busy person, temptation enters by way of business. But for those who are idle, temptation manifests itself thorough violent, urgent impudence. Or else is cloaked with entitlement and a sense of self-deserving. Note this: the idea person is useless to any purpose of God, or of man, in this world, this life. An idle person is indistinguishable from a dead person, being unconcerned with the needs and changes of the world. He spends his life, himself, his time and energy consumptively—eating the fruits of the earth. Whereas we were created for work, for productivity, the increase of wealth and value—which typically results in prosperity! Poor stewardship of creation originates often in poor stewardship of oneself. Always frittering, producing nothing. Cultivation, producing and harvesting do not entice the idle—until death enters as a wolf, or as vermin (or a roaring lion) and he perishes as a moldering pile of dust—unlamented in an unmarked grave (that others cannot be bothered to visit because they haven’t the time). Those who neither plows, nor carries burdens, fails to trade or visit the marketplace in a supplying vein—is useless, unproductive, and sometimes positively destructive because idle hands are prone to turn to wickedness, to thievery, robbery and looting.

And even if idleness fails to extend to such blatant evil—as it often does—it is a great extravagance in this world. Idleness is wasteful, it throws away time which is beyond value to the present neediness. And when time is past it is irrecoverable, or irretrievable by any power of art, or nature. Time turns not back, and although days appear to repeat themselves, they actually do no such thing. Lost time is lost opportunity—you could’ve served God but you didn’t. Therefore, if you are saved, your crown will lack jewels and bespeak a worrisome ingratitude joined with spiritual sloth. It is not surprising that the medieval world listed sloth as a deadly, soul-killing sin! Poverty induced by idleness is one’s own loss. And that is why wisdom says, **Lazy hands make for poverty, but diligent hands bring wealth.** (Proverbs 10:4)

We are not asserting that the poor are inherently lazy; to be perfectly clear, we are saying that poverty induced by idleness is reprehensible, a blameworthy and corruptible matter. To draw this out more fully, let's consider the hand of the diligent, or industrious person. The industrious man accomplishes many things which are profitable to himself and to others in countless ways. He relieves his own wants and needs and those of others through his work, his productivity. He becomes a source of welfare instead of a recipient of welfare. His surplus, gain or profit constitutes that source of welfare. And the industrious man increases in usefulness, increases in ease of performance and dexterity as he increases in skill—studies and improve efficiency, solving problems and driving forward innovation and technology. Inventiveness increases his output and out of love of work emerges confidence, pride and success. This perfection of powers applies to his mechanical, and his nobler mental capacity. He may venture into culture and the arts, into civil services and governmental leadership—having demonstrated his capability. I think this is the application of success building success. When a person applies himself his consciousness of himself expands; he rejoices in his life, his faculties, endowments and his use of time. The exuberance is contagious—others seek to emulate his industry and outcomes.

What we are describing is a life established on principle as well as inclination. He operates out a general sense of well-being and experiences neither languor (a fatigue which stays this side of inertia), nor discouragement and irritation. His faculties, his time are never burdens to him—he is generous with both! When it comes to play and relaxation, the industrious person enters with greater relish, verve, excitement and raps a return of pleasure because he enjoys life, he is enjoyable to be with. The idle tends towards the dull, uninviting and non-adventurous—they are insufferable and suffocating. Why is the industrious man thus? Because he is fulfilling the design for which he was made, and placed on the earth—to be a worker, a husband, a father, and man, knowing this is the best possible place to be such a person! He senses God's pleasure in him, in his usefulness to God and mankind.

Because masculine industry is a godly, and a god thing, men should be encouraged in it. When men are obedient to their divine design—they will not be brutes and violent murderers! They will operate within their proper sphere: governing, guiding, protecting and providing as they demonstrate industry and productivity. The biblical stands are correctional, they help in purring what is unmanly and purifying what is manly. Real men are not sham men—they don't "father" through surrogacy, or *in absentia*; rather **they do it in person!** They embody strength under control, they are serviceable to self and to all. There are many reasons why Jesus didn't summon the angels to assist him, to make up for human insufficiency and abandonment. But chief among them is: his manhood on his own is utterly sufficient. He needed no help in saving us . . . in getting it over the line! He was the reducer and no victim. He is our Redeemer, Jesus, the man who is also the Son of God. He didn't play us, he saved us. By faith let us embrace what he has done—it makes for better men and for better women. And this is the truth.

Amen