

The Lion in the Streets

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There is an interesting little story which tells of a man who incessantly snapped his fingers. No matter where he went, no matter what he did, he constantly snapped his fingers. One observer, watching this strange habit, was bold enough to question the man concerning it. "My dear sir," he replied, "I snap my fingers to keep the lions away." "But," countered the first man, "there are no lions within a thousand miles of here." "You see," replied the man as he continued snapping his fingers, "it's pretty effective, isn't it?"

We read in Proverbs of another man who intended to stay safely away from lions. He remained in his house, and presumably in bed, under the pretense of protecting himself from the lion which was supposedly roaming the streets. This was the slothful man: the man who sought any excuse to remain at home; he sought excuses which would free him from the necessity of labor.

This brief proverb is one which we also could well keep in mind. Young people too will often seek all kinds of excuses in order to escape necessary labors. He also had better examine carefully those "lions" to see whether they are real or imaginary.

A real lion is a terrible animal. He is called the king of the beasts. Both man and animal would cower in terror before him. And surely man must find defense against that lion. Either he must be well equipped with arms in order to shoot him on sight, or he must be able to retire to a safe retreat that he may hide from that lion. Only if one of these two alternatives is followed, would one be reasonably secure from the threatenings of this beast.

The "lion" in this proverb suggests an insurmountable obstacle which would prevent one from performing his duties. The man of the proverb had heard of a lion roaming the streets — therefore his conclusion was that he had better go out to perform his daily labors, but more safely could he stay home in his warm bed. He was slothful and wanted to find an excuse to stay at home. At the same time, it is possible to apply the proverb to a wide variety of circumstances.

And real lions, then, would not be difficult to find. It may be that on occasion I am too sick to rise from my bed and perform the chores required of me. Or a real and terrible storm may threaten outside preventing me from doing that which otherwise must be done. I am sure that you yourself can recall many other similar and real "lions."

The trouble is that the terrible lions are often simply conjured by slothful men. A man may see all kinds of difficulties which stand in the way of his performing his duties. And if these difficulties are true, then his subsequent actions appear to be rational too. Such was the case with the man in our text. He maintained that there was a lion roaming the streets. Now if that were true, then his action in staying within his home was wise indeed. No man would blame him then for what he did (or didn't do). But the fact of the matter was that there was no lion in the street. The lion was but a figment of this man's imagination. He simply fell upon a good excuse for his own idleness or laziness.

And you, young people, do you have any of these lions roaming about in your streets? You too are bound to use faithfully the means of grace, particularly the preaching of the Word (which includes also catechism instruction). Do you not only attend but also listen attentively to the preaching of the Word? Do you prepare faithfully and diligently for your catechism classes? Or do you discover "lions" which prevent the performance of your duties? Maybe you have too much school work or too many hours of manual labor so that there is no time to perform these

other things. And which “lion” prevents you oftentimes from coming prepared to Young People’s Society? How often do we not try to excuse spiritual slothfulness by pointing to all kinds of lions? Better take a peek out that window again and discover whether that was actually a lion you saw there on the streets — or a ray of yellow sunlight which you deliberately mistook for a lion.

You as young people have doubtlessly many obligations (chores) about the home too. It is often presented as something humorous how that young people will seek to escape their regular duties and tasks. And seldom will one be found who does not have a good reason for being unable to fulfill the obligations placed on him. He finds all kinds of lions which stand in the way — anything to evade the required work.

This whole article isn’t meant to be a humorous presentation of the delinquencies of youth. Quite the contrary. There is a sound, Scriptural reason why we must perform faithfully the duties given us. We may never seek to escape them. We confess and believe that we are children of God, members of the body of Jesus Christ. And these cannot simply do as they please. They err greatly who simply seek to escape the performance of their obligations. Youthful children of God, for instance, surely observe the fifth commandment: honoring and obeying those in authority over them. They cannot simply walk in disobedience to their parents or teachers. They perform the tasks which those in authority give to them. Because the Spirit of the Christ dwells in His people, therefore they observe the Word and shun sloth in all of its many forms. They will not then try to escape learning faithfully their catechism. They will not avoid at all costs diligent study of society lessons. It is man, natural man, who is slothful. It is he who evades and avoids the Word of the Lord. But with the child of God it is not so. He is redeemed by the blood of the Lamb. He is turned from darkness to light. He is led by the spirit in all holiness. Then he does not seek to find all kinds of “lions” in order to escape his work.

What must we do with all those “lions” which constantly seem to arise? Examine each one once to see whether it is real or imaginary. Do you give legitimate objections which prevent certain actions — or do you simply give excuses to avoid as much possible doing those things required of you?

There is so often seen the ‘lion’ of lack of time. There is no time to prepare adequately for catechism; no time to prepare for society. Yet far more often than not this is simply an imaginary “lion.” I have read that on average children and teenagers watch television twenty-two hours a week. (And I surely hope that such is not the case in Protestant Reformed homes). The point is, if young people can find that many and more hours to waste in a week, then never can there arise the excuse, “I didn’t have time.”

Young people who have jobs often find “lions” preventing them from supporting faithfully the cause and kingdom of God financially on this earth. Their parents pay the share for their “family;” their cars require too much of their income and there is none left over; their other hobbies are so expensive; that support of Kingdom causes is impossible. Imaginary lions these are and must be seen as such. Recognize these lions for what they are — and then do not drag your feet in performing necessary tasks.

To be not slothful implies positively: walk by faith. This is not the same as carelessness. When real lions exist, we cannot simply rush out despite them. But faith knows and believes the Word of God. That Word directs us in the way we must go: it points out the duties and obligations of the child of God. And by faith the child of God will walk in that way — despite many “lions.” Because God directs in this way, therefore we believe that He will preserve and keep us in that way too. Walk, young people, in obedience. In the way of obedience, the child of

God continues to experience the richest blessings of our covenant God. Be not slothful, but diligent.

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