

BLESSING

Psalm 127

August 9, 2009 – Grace Covenant Baptist Church

One of the greatest statesmen our nation has ever known was Benjamin Franklin. Though not educated well according to the principles of the world, he was well-educated in common sense, able to effectively communicate with Americans as well as Europeans. However, though he was a great statesman, Franklin was not a Christian. He was a deist, and like most deists, he often used the language of God's providence, which is somewhat interesting since a deist denies God's divine intervention in human affairs. One oft-quoted passage from Franklin's speech delivered to the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia in 1787 bears this out:

In the beginning of the contest with Britain when we were sensible of danger, we had daily prayers in this room for the Divine protection. Our prayers, Sir, were heard, and they were graciously answered. All of us who were engaged in the struggle must have observed frequent instances of a superintending Providence. To that kind Providence we owe this opportunity of consulting in peace on the means of establishing our future national felicity. And have we now forgotten this powerful Friend? Or do we imagine that we no longer need his assistance? I have lived for a long time (81 years), and the longer I live the more convincing proof I see of this truth, that God governs in the affairs of men. And if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without his notice, is it possible that an empire can rise without his aid? We have been assured, Sir, in the sacred writings, that "Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it." I firmly believe this, and I also believe that without his concurring aid we shall proceed in this political building no better than the builders of Babel.¹

Well, Franklin certainly was not a very convincing deist on that day! And though not a Christian, he understood the truth of our psalm this morning. The psalm is one of two attributed to King Solomon, the other being Psalm 72. Fittingly then it is a psalm of wisdom. On first glance, the psalm seems to lack the unity we are used to in the other of these psalms of ascent. Some believe because of the change of subject matter and tone that this must have been an entirely different psalm originally. But while there certainly exists a movement from futility of man to blessing, I believe even in the futility we find blessing, and it is those blessings that I use to guide our thoughts this morning. Solomon captured the tenor of this psalm in Proverbs 10:22, "It is the blessing of the LORD that makes rich, and He adds no sorrow to it." That should be the heart understanding of all men, and it is this truth that *man needs God's divine blessing in all of his undertakings to survive and succeed* that we see set forth by Solomon in this psalm.

I. The blessing of prosperity and protection (127:1)

The opening verses are structured around the words "**unless**" and "**vain,**" and again I believe this sets the tone and truth of the entire psalm. Any activity attempted without the Lord is "**in vain.**" Here we have echoed the words of Solomon throughout the book of Ecclesiastes, "Vanity, vanity, apart from God, all is vanity." In the Hebrew, "**in vain**" appears at the beginning of the clause, doubly emphasizing the folly and failure of attempting to build a house

¹ Found in James Montgomery Boice, *Psalms*, vol. 3, 1118.

without God. What we see here is that success depends on more than hard work and conscious endeavor, though both are important. Solomon does not suggest that man should not be involved in building a house or being watchful in the community. He was known to be quite the house-builder! Jesus taught the importance of considering the cost before building a tower (Lk. 14:28) and that a wise man builds his house upon a rock (Mt. 7:24). So it is not the building of the house itself that is futile, nor is seeking protection and security vain. However, no matter how technologically advanced man becomes, security is still beyond him. Quoting Isaiah 27:3, Spurgeon said, “‘I, the LORD, keep it’ is better than an army of sleepless guards.”² Solomon forbids man to trust in what he has done, which leads to self-sufficiency and self ambition, but to remember that prosperity and protection are of the Lord! God must bless what a man does. God Himself must build the house and guard the city, or it will come to nothing. Without the Lord, our building is frustrated.

So we see the warning associated with our attempts to build and secure apart from God. But we also have a promise: the Lord does build and the Lord does guard! There’s the blessing! We see clearly here that God works and takes delight in those who delight in Him.

Psalm 1:1-3 – ¹ How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the path of sinners, nor sit in the seat of scoffers! ² But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night. ³ He will be like a tree *firmly* planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in its season and its leaf does not wither; and in whatever he does, he prospers.

3 John 1:2-3 – ² Beloved, I pray that in all respects you may prosper and be in good health, just as your soul prospers. ³ For I was very glad when brethren came and testified to your truth, *that is*, how you are walking in truth.

Who is building your house? Where do you turn for security? In whom or in what do you really trust?

Genesis 11:4 – Come, let us build for ourselves a city, and a tower whose top *will reach* into heaven, and let us make for ourselves a name, otherwise we will be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth.

Their problem was vainglory. They lived and labored for their own glory and their own name, not God’s. However, God intervened and confounded their language and scattered them. Why? Because God will not share His name with anyone, nor will He allow His name to be profaned. **“Unless the LORD builds the house, they labor in vain who build it.”**

II. The blessing of work (v. 2)

Verse 2 provides a picture of a man who toils anxiously, starting early and ending late painfully laboring for a bit of bread. Solomon does not depreciate the importance of hard work nor does he promote laziness.

Proverbs 6:6-11 – ⁶ Go to the ant, O sluggard, observe her ways and be wise, ⁷ which, having no chief, officer or ruler, ⁸ prepares her food in the summer *and* gathers her provision in the harvest. ⁹ How long will you lie down, O sluggard? When will you arise

² Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David*, 1321.

from your sleep? ¹⁰ “A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest”—
¹¹ Your poverty will come in like a vagabond and your need like an armed man.

Hard work may involve rising early in the morning and going to bed late at night. But Solomon criticizes this as an inferior way of life if the work is only to provide daily food and clothing apart from trusting in the Lord. That is foolish. He warns against burning the candle at both ends, neglecting time with family, and failing to depend on God. Steve Lawson notes, “Without time for God, their food only maintains people in their miserable existence.”³

The blessing of God is on the man who trusts Him with and for his labors. God has promised to provide them with all they need and more. It is God who makes one’s work meaningful. Apart from God, frustration. With God, satisfaction. The important thing is to look to Him. Is that not what Jesus called for in the Sermon on the Mount?

Matthew 6:25-34 – ²⁵ “For this reason I say to you, do not be worried about your life, *as to* what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, *as to* what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? ²⁶ Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, nor reap nor gather into barns, and *yet* your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they? ²⁷ And who of you by being worried can add a *single* hour to his life? ²⁸ And why are you worried about clothing? Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin, ²⁹ yet I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these. ³⁰ But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is *alive* today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, *will He* not much more *clothe* you? You of little faith! ³¹ Do not worry then, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear for clothing?’ ³² For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. ³³ But seek first ²His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. ³⁴ So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”

St. Augustine once said, “Pray as though everything depended on God. Work as though everything depended on you.” (Barak Obama—National Prayer Breakfast) Solomon is not advocating that the builders stop building, that watchmen stop watching, or that workers stop working and let God do it all. They build, they watch, and they work, but they trust God to build, watch, and work, too. God’s blessing depends on a balance between working and trusting. It is not either-or; it is both/and.

Philippians 2:12-13 – Work out your salvation with fear and trembling; ¹³ for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for *His* good pleasure.

Colossians 3:23-24 – ²³ Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men, ²⁴ knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve.

“For He gives to His beloved *even in his sleep.*” 1 Kings 3:5, “In Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream at night; and God said, “Ask what *you wish* me to give you.” Do you believe that this morning? Are you resting in Christ today, who is our peace? Spurgeon wrote, “Those whom the Lord loves are delivered from the fret and fume of life. They take sweet rest on their Lord’s bosom. He blesses them while they rest, blessing them more while

³ Steven J. Lawson, *Holman OT Commentary: Psalm 76-150*, 288.

resting than others get from their striving and toiling. God is sure to give the best thing to His beloved. Here He gives them sleep, a laying aside of care, a forgetfulness of need, a quiet leaving of matters with God. This sleep is better than riches and honor.”⁴ Remember Christ, who in the midst of a violent storm slept peacefully (Lk. 8:24). He knew He was in His Father’s hands. It would be the same for us if we were more like Him.

III. The blessing of family (123:3-5)

Here Solomon makes the sharp shift from futility to blessing, centering on the importance of the family in God’s divine plan. We face many problems in our nation, but I would suggest that many of the woes we are experiencing today are somehow related to our failure to uphold God’s institution of the family. Solomon reminds us of the priorities and the practice of a family that is built by faith, a house that is more than bricks and wood, but a home where a father and a mother seek to bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, rearing them in God’s way, not the way of our secular humanistic and relativistic society.

1. Children are a gift of God (v. 3)

It goes without say that we live in a culture that has lost its way concerning the words, **“Behold, children are a gift of the LORD, the fruit of the womb is a reward.”** Legalized abortion has created a culture of death with little regard for the gift of life. Here Solomon plainly states that all children, regardless of circumstances surrounding their birth, are literally a “heritage.” Children, all children, are to be looked at as a blessing, not a burden. They are an expression of God’s goodness, love, and mercy and a reflection of His creative power.

This truth is important to settle upon. The very act of having children is a blessing from God. Thomas Manton gives several points concerning this, stating that “there is much in God’s providence exercised in and about children.”⁵ He first considers the strength to even conceive, noting that this was something that Sarah obtained by faith. Though childbearing is a natural act, God still has a providential hand in it. God’s blessing is also displayed in the framing of the child in the womb.

Psalm 139:14-16 – ¹⁴ I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; wonderful are Your works, and my soul knows it very well. ¹⁵ My frame was not hidden from You, when I was made in secret, *and* skillfully wrought in the depths of the earth; ¹⁶ Your eyes have seen my unformed substance; and in Your book were all written the days that were ordained *for me*, when as yet there was not one of them.

David attributes it all to God. A parent cannot will a boy or a girl, determine health or length of days, or even suggest color of hair or eyes. All of it is God’s will, and the child is a gift, a reward. Further, God grants the strength to bear children. Pain and difficulty in childbearing is a result of the Fall. Yet God in His mercy takes even that and turns it into one of the most delightful things on earth. **“The fruit of the womb is a reward,”** an expression of divine favor.

Our children are our best possessions. They are part of the fabric of the society that God would have. If we are to have a community that God desires, one that honors and glorifies Him, then we must understand the favor that God bestows in our children.

⁴ Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David*, 1322.

⁵ *The Works of Thomas Manton*, vol. 18, 86-87.

2. Children must be prepared by parents (v. 4)

Solomon compares children to “**arrows in the hand of a warrior.**” The comparison suggests two actions:⁶

(1) *Arrows must be shaped and sharpened.* In Solomon’s day, you didn’t go down to the local sporting goods store and buy arrows. Neither did you find them lying around on the ground. Sticks aren’t arrows by nature. They had to be carefully shaped and sharpened. Children are the same. This implies work. Derek Kidner suggests, “It is not untypical of God’s gifts that first they are liabilities, or at least responsibilities, before they become obvious assets. The greater their promise, the more likely that these sons will be a *handful* before they are a *quiverful*.”⁷ Children don’t grow into straight, sharp arrows by being left to themselves or to the TV set. It takes diligent effort on the part of wise parents to bring them up in the training of the Lord.

(2) *Arrows must be aimed and released.* Arrows left in the quiver or shot haphazardly in any which direction are not much good. In fact, they can be the cause of great harm if they are not aimed carefully. This implies skill and direction. The archer must know his target and have sufficient skill to fire his arrows into it. The point of rearing children is not to keep them for ourselves. Many parents lose their kids because they try to hang on to them. Our goal, as one pastor put it, is to aim them at the target—Satan’s kingdom of darkness—and release them as burning arrows for Jesus. You need to instill in your kids from an early age a burden for missions. There’s a cost involved. They may leave you and go to some far corner of the world. You may not get to see your grandkids grow up. You may be separated from your kids. Jim Elliot, who gave his life trying to take the gospel to the unreached tribes of South America, was feeling pressure from his Christian parents to stay in the United States. He wrote to them,

Grieve not, then, if your sons seem to desert you. Remember how the Psalmist described children? He said that they were as an heritage from the Lord, and that every man should be happy who had his quiver full of them. And what is a quiver full of but arrows? And what are arrows for but to shoot? So, with the strong arms of prayer, draw the bowstring back and let the arrows fly – all of them, straight at the Enemy’s hosts.⁸

3. Families are a witness to the Lord (v. 5)

The city gate was the place where Hebrew men gathered to conduct business and carry out justice. The idea here is that a man with exemplary children will not be ridiculed by his opponents because his children will be a living testimony of the man’s uprightness and integrity. Applying this to our day, a satisfying home is a powerful source of witness for Jesus Christ. In a day such as ours, when teenage rebellion and fragmented relationships in the home are the norm rather than the exception, a home where the children are valued as God’s gifts, where God’s grace is an operational principle and the blessing of God is obvious, will be a light shining in the darkness.

What about those who have few or no children? Spurgeon is superb here, “When sons and daughters are arrows, it is good to have a quiver full. Yet, if they are only sticks, knotty and

⁶ From Steven J. Cole, “Blueprint for a Satisfying Home.” See also Lawson, *Psalms 76-150*, 289 and Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David*, 1323.

⁷ Derek Kidner, *TOTC: Psalms 73-150*, 442 (emphasis mine).

⁸ Elisabeth Elliot, *Shadow of the Almighty*, 132.

useless, the fewer the better. While those whose quiver is full are blessed, *many are blessed who have no quiver*. A quiet life may not need such a weapon. Anyway, we may be sure that life does not consist in our abundance of children.”⁹ If you do not have children, you can still be family-oriented, seeking to serve those who do have children.

Conclusion

- 1. Rest in the Lord’s blessings to you.**
- 2. Communicate to your children how much a blessing they are to you (verbally and nonverbally)**
- 3. Children are *a* blessing, not *the* blessing.** Beware of making any of God’s blessings an idol. Is your home centered on the Lord or your children? Let me ask it another way—Who is leading you, the Lord or your children? Who are you living for—the Lord or your children? Who is getting the glory?
- 4. Parents can do everything right, and still have a prodigal son *or* the elder son.**

⁹ Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David*, 1324.