

“UNLESS THE LORD BUILDS.”

Rev. Robert T. Woodyard

First Christian Reformed Church

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Scripture Text: Psalm 127

Listen to the Word of God. This is not my word, this is God’s Word. It is unlike any other word that you have heard this week. This that you are about to hear is true, eternal, infallible, inerrant, trustworthy, authoritative. This is God’s Word, listen and to take it to heart.

Introduction.

Holy Father, I am a man of unclean lips and unclean heart among a people who are the same. By the power of your present Holy Spirit purge and purify what is evil in us, deliver us from the work of the evil one and cause what is said and heard now to glorify you and exalt Jesus and benefit the saints. Unless you do this my labor and our listening are in vain. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

The first and greatest building project in recorded Biblical history ended in disaster. The reason the Tower of Babel ended so poorly was not because they didn’t have a good plan or a good design, the reason was not because of shoddy materials or a lousy general contractor, the reason it failed was because it was done to the glory of man and not to the glory of God.

That building disaster resulted in a shattered community totally broken apart by an inability to communicate or understand each other. Our world still bears the fruit of that building project gone very bad. What they did was in vain.

Psalm 127 gives us wisdom for avoiding that disaster in our church and in our homes. Verses 1-2 give the principle and verses 3-5 illustrate the truth or teaching of the principle.

Psalm 127:1-2, principle.

Verses 1 and 2 deal with the two great human efforts of creating and conserving, making and protecting. We weary ourselves in vanity to gain for ourselves all we have and then we weary ourselves in vanity to hang on to it.

We spend all our waking hours trying to live, to build up and accumulate and then preserve and protect what we have built up and accumulated. We build or buy a

house and then we insure it and protect it. We buy computers and then fill them with software to protect them. Our lives are filling up with passwords and PIN numbers.

We build a church building and then we put in a sprinkler system and fire alarms and we buy insurance. There's a fire wall between these two buildings and fire doors to slow down any fire.

Verse 1 tells us there are only two possibilities with all of this creating and making and building; with all of this protecting and maintaining and insuring. Either all of this will be the Lord's doing or it will be pointless. There is no third alternative.

Verse 2 tells us that if we get up earlier and work harder it won't change the truth of verse 1.

In vain we build, in vain we protect, in vain we rise up early and go to bed late, in vain we fret and stew and become anxious and worried.

Unless the Lord builds, unless the Lord secures, unless the Lord grants the success, our small strivings will amount to nothing. We are utterly dependent on God for our life and for our life's work. To build without God's blessings is to build utterly in vain and to no fruitful end.

Some of us need to take this Psalm to heart and examine our own life and motives. Why are we striving and for whom? Are we rising up early and working late, working evenings and weekends, chasing the bread of anxious toil? Are we overreaching to get to the next level, to make a little more, to be more successful.

Or are we resting in Him and trusting in Him? Where is our confidence?

God is not impressed with our late nights or early mornings, with our boasting and bragging. He is impressed by our peaceful, non-anxious resting and trusting in Him. Notice the end of verse 2.

There is another way to translate verse two that fits the context better. Instead of He gives to His beloved sleep, it may be He gives to His beloved even in his sleep.

Psalm 127:2 (NASB) It is vain for you to rise up early, to retire late,
To eat the bread of painful labors; For *He gives to His beloved even in his sleep.*

In other words, it shows the contrast between man's efforts and God's work. Sleep is God's gift to humble us and remind us that we are dependent on Him and that He works when we sleep.

When did God give Solomon the desire of his heart? God gave Solomon wisdom in his sleep.

An example of this is seen in the parable in Mark 4 when Jesus says:

Mark 4:26-27 "The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground. 27 He sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows; he knows not how.

The man does his toil but is not anxious. He sleeps and while He sleeps the Lord does His work, the Lord cause the growth and the fruit. The farmer wakes up and there is life and growth and provision that are not his doing.

Just a few verses later in Mark 4 Jesus illustrated this truth for the disciples as they crossed the Sea of Galilee in a storm. What was Jesus doing? He was sleeping. He wasn't anxious, He wasn't worrying. Jesus slept peacefully knowing He was in His Father's hands. He rebuked the disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?"

Jesus said the same thing in the Sermon on the Mount, "O you of little faith. Why are you anxious, your Father knows what you need. Seek Him and His kingdom first and the rest will be taken care of."

God does more good for us while we sleep than we can do with anxious labor for ourselves while awake.

Psalm 127:3-5, illustration.

The Psalmist illustrates this truth in verses 3-5 with an example. In fact is there a clearer example how all of life is in the hands of the creator than in the creating of the life of a child?

The two halves of this psalm are seen in the contrast between Genesis 11 and Genesis 12.

In Genesis 11 man builds a tower for glory and security.

Genesis 11:4 They said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth.”

What did they achieve? A disaster, a fiasco. Total failure.

Then what happens at the end of Genesis 11 and in Genesis 12? God quietly and unpretentiously gives a son to an obscure man named Terah in faraway Ur of the Chaldeans. That son grew to be a blessing to all the nations, a blessing that continues to this very day.

Interesting, that building disaster continues to this day as a separating of the nations and the son God sent continues to this day as a blessing to the nations.

God said to Abraham:

Genesis 12:2 And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.

Genesis 15:5 And he brought him outside and said, “Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring be.”

To illustrate it’s God who gives, God who builds, God who secures, the Psalmist says:

Psalm 127:3 Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb a reward.

Children are a gift and blessing directly from God. Children are not the fruit of chance or timing or good genes or strength or health. Children are wealth from God. This turns the values of our world upside down.

I don’t want to steal any thunder from the Mexico Mission team who will be sharing with you this evening. But we had an opportunity to take food and gifts to a desperately poor migrant camp. There were a dozen families there and we fed maybe 60 children, and those were just the ones too young to be in the fields.

People from rich countries look at that and say it’s all these kids who make them poor. We think of wealth in terms of money. So we come in and try to get them to use birth control or abortion. But when we do that we are depriving them of their only wealth and their only joy and their only hope for a future.

When I preached in Albania, the poorest country in Europe, for the first time in 1995 my translator introduced me to the congregation and said I had five sons and there was an audible response. In their eyes I was a rich man, a blessed man.

Children don't make you poor, children make you rich in blessings. Children were generally viewed this way in America until the 1930's when Margaret Sanger opened the first birth control clinic that became Planned Parenthood. She started prompting contraception and birth control with an initial goal to reduce the number of poor and blacks.

When having children became seen as something we do and something we control, child abuse began to rise. And then in the 70's they said abortion would cut down on child abuse because there would be no more unwanted children, but just the opposite happened, child abuse has continued to increase. Why? Because children are no longer seen as from God, no longer seen as a divine gift and blessing.

As Christians we need to be a voice against the culture, children are a precious gift from God, that life is His doing and not ours, that children are an asset and not a liability.

The ESV unfortunately translates verse 5 in a way that sounds more like our current culture,

“Blessed is the man who fills his quiver with them!”

That's not the true sense of this Psalm that exhorts us to see our efforts as futile unless the Lord builds and gives and blesses. Most other translations have “blessed is the man who's quiver is full of them,” meaning not their own doing but Gods.

Let me be clear to acknowledge two realities about children.

There are some who very much want children but can't for reasons known only to God. This is one of life's most painful mysteries. Especially when we are told by God's Word that children are one of His favorite things and He delights to give us good gifts. Maybe the only greater suffering in this life is to be given a child and then have it taken away.

But in the midst of this great pain, one thing is very clear to us, children are a much loved and desired blessing from God and God is the one who gives them and takes them away. Their absence makes this all the more clear. And so like Abraham and Sarah, we cry out, we beg and beseech God to hear and answer, we pound on the doors of heaven to open the womb.

In the end we are humbled before a sovereign God whose ways and will are not always ours.

The other reality we must acknowledge is that when we say children are a gift and blessing from the Lord we are not saying that they aren't a lot of work and heartache. In fact it's common for God's gifts to be a big responsibility before they become a blessing. Children are a handful before they are a quiverful.

With many children come many trials. But if those trials are met in faith, there will also be joy in the labor. Fruit comes after hard labor.

Through the blood, sweat and tears of raising children miracles happen. But the miracles are born out of prayer and effort and striving and training and correcting and repeating it all over again tomorrow.

We labor trusting that the Lord is working through our labor so that it is not is vain.

Application and Conclusion.

Let me set this in the context of what we are doing here this morning. We have been richly blessed by God as a congregation. God is the one who has given us many good people with many talents and skills who have worked hard and given much to build a building. God has blessed us.

We have been blessed by God financially. God has raised all the funds needed and more to complete the building. Even the kitchen that is yet to be completed is paid for. God has provided funds from hundreds of sources. We were hesitant to believe it would all be in by the time we finished. God has blessed.

We have been blessed with favor in the community, many people are praising the design and the architecture and the quality of the finished product. It's way better than we first conceived it to be. God has blessed.

We have been blessed with a unity of spirit and purpose. God has blessed.

In all the praise and in all the accolades and in all the thanks to so many people, we will not rob God of all the glory that is due His name, for He has done it. Unless God had granted from heaven this success, it would not be here for us to dedicate today.

We are not here to praise our efforts but to praise God for what He has done. We are dedicating what He has done to Him. We are asking for His favor and grace and blessing.

This marks the end of our building of a building. But this is also an ongoing work. We are all the household of faith, the temple of God, the spiritual stones being built up and equipped for service.

The Psalmist made one application using children as the example, but that isn't the only application of our text. We can send out other arrows.

Churches prepare and train and send out arrows. Sunday School teachers, youth pastors, GEMS and Cadets leaders, pastors all prepare and train and send out arrows into the world.

We are all arrows in the work place multiplying the influence of Christ, using our God given gifts and talents for the glory of God. We can show Christ in excellence, in service, in humility, in thinking more of others, in not living for the weekend, in not despising what God has given into our hands to do.

The work we see complete in this building is physical; we see here the finished product; so too your lives should reveal the handiwork of God's grace in the city gates and beyond.

Romans 11:36 For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.

Prayer: Holy Father, we offer our thanksgiving above all to you our God, from whom every best and perfect gift comes. Remove from us all anxious toil and sleepless nights and enable us because of your perfect providence to truly rest in your goodness and grace and mercy. Apply your Word fruitfully to our hearts in our waking and our sleeping and we will give you the glory due your name.