

## **“HOW THE LORD BUILDS A HOUSE.”**

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**May 25, 2014, 10:30AM**

### **Scripture Text: Psalm 128**

**I Thessalonians 2:13** And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers.

### **Introduction.**

We have all seen them. At some crossroads somewhere, on a dangerous curve in the road, one of those little makeshift memorials, a cross, a wreath where some ones loved one died in a car accident. Each one of those memorials a testimony to the value of life.

Last year when we visited Kent in San Diego we went out to Point Loma and visited the Fort Rosecrans National Cemetery. It's especially sobering when you see not just one but 101,000 memorials, each one a testimony to the value of life.

Tomorrow Americans all over the world will set aside time to remember and honor those who have died in military service. We will be reminded again of the value of life and the value of those lives we knew and loved, who's lives touched ours.

Life is valuable because it is God-given, created by Him and for Him. The value of the life He gives is first learned and instilled in the home, the place where life is conceived, nurtured, trained, given roots and wings.

Last week we looked at Psalm 127 which tells us the source of all blessings is God's grace. "Unless the Lord builds the house they who labor, labor in vain." Solomon wrote "children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb a reward."

Psalm 128 continues the message of God's blessings and tells us how we receive those blessings and the realms in which they are experienced. Home life is the first and best life.

Or to put it in other words Psalm 127 is the blueprint for the foundation and Psalm 128 is the building materials. Both Psalms are well suited for the occasion of the dedication of our new building and for our consideration of themes related to the building of godly homes, a theme I occasionally take up between Mother's Day and Father's Day.

## **Psalm 128:1-2.**

Psalm 128 begins with *blessed*, which is sometimes translated happy.

Most everyone in the world wants to be happy. Seniors graduate and they just want to be happy. Couples get married and just want to live happily ever afterward. We start jobs just wanting to be happy. We live in a pleasure and happiness seeking world.

Everyone wants to be happy, but no one wants to follow the road to happiness mapped out by the one who is more committed to our happiness than anyone else, the God who created us. People think the road to happiness in the Bible is too hard, so they set off bushwhacking their way through the juggle of their own wants and desires and never getting where they want to get.

There is a well travel road to happiness, the trouble is few today want to take it.

**Psalm 128** Blessed is everyone who fears the Lord, who walks in his ways!

This road is called holiness, discipleship, repentance and faith.

Happiness and holiness used to be connected back in the Garden. God made the happiest place on earth, happier than Disneyland. He said, you may enjoy all the fruit of the garden except one. Obey this one command and all the happy delights of the garden are yours.

But Satan separated happiness from holiness. He told Eve that the fruit of that one tree was good, and Eve saw

**Genesis 3:6** ... that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate.

Satan says you won't be happy, in fact you can't be happy if you follow the path of obedience and holiness.

The Psalmist is reinstating the truth, what we have learned from painful reality, that there is no true happiness outside of God and His Word and will.

This happiness or blessedness we are talking about isn't just some surface or shallow thing. This is much more than having a good day or a run of exceptionally good luck. This is more than just everything going your way. This is that deep inner sense that it is well with your soul.

How can we get in on this good life? How can we achieve true happiness? What's the trick, what's the secret? There's no trick, no secret. God isn't like that. Christianity isn't one of those mystery religions with complex paths to true knowledge and inner peace.

“Blessed is the one who fears the Lord and walks in His ways.”

### ***Fear the Lord.***

The phrase the fear of the Lord is used over 150 times in Scripture. You would have a very fruit couple of hours if you got out a concordance or did a Google search of all those verses.

We are talking about something beyond knowing God or believing in God. The Bible isn't interested in whether we know God. Remember how James blows off that idea? Even the devils believe (James 2:19). Big deal.

No, the Bible is interested in our response to God. What does the very thought of God do to us? Does He really grab our attention? Does He rattle our cage? Does He silence our whining and complaining? Does He bring us to our knees, are we in awe of His grandeur and holiness, of His power and providence? Do we find ourselves wanting to talk less and listen more and receive His wisdom? Do we have a deep inner sense of God's peace and presence even in the fiercest storm? Are we more aware of our sin in His presence?

How big is your God? Is He big enough to produce reverence and awe? Do want to ***walk in His ways?***

None of us will ever do this perfectly, but that isn't the point. The point is to walk in His ways. Thy will be done, not my will.

This is the chief characteristic of a godly person, of a righteous man, a grateful, reverent fear of the Lord, a humble understanding of who God is and what He is like.

**Psalm 34:8-9** Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him! 9 Oh, fear the Lord, you his saints, for those who fear him have no lack!

Why do I fear the Lord? Because of His goodness to me. He has exposed my sin. He has brought me to godly sorrow, to repentance, to confess my wickedness, and He has forgiven me. He has adopted me into His family by the blood of Jesus. He has opened my eyes to the truth and made me to love it more than the lies of the world. He has lifted me out of selfish mindset, He has saved me from death. He has loved me with an exceedingly great and undeserved love. All of this is cause

to fear my God and respond to Him in glad obedience. Because of His goodness to me.

To the one who walks this road to happiness, he will experience God's blessings in all the realms of his life that matter to him, in his work, in his marriage, in his children and in his community relationships. That's what is spelled out in the rest of Psalm 128.

But let me acknowledge, this truth is not always self-evident and it's seemingly contradicted by countless realities in life, so we have to take some care in fully understanding it.

The principle here is that the thing to be desired more than anything else is to rest completely in God's care and provision and protection. If we truly to seek Him first then our confidence is that He will see to the rest. If we are fully persuaded that God is taking care of all the affairs of human life then what ever happens we can say, "If it pleases the Lord, it pleases me."

"The Lord gives and the Lord takes away, blessed be the name of the Lord."

How do we find this kind of contentment? By being content with one thing, having God as your heavenly Father, and knowing that He will take care of us, no matter what, during the entire course of our earthly lives until He receives us into eternal glory.

#### **Psalm 128:3-4.**

As we saw in Psalm 127, the illustration or example that the Psalmist uses of a blessed life is an illustration taken from the center of Hebrew and Middle Eastern culture, the blessing of home and family, of a wife and children.

It's not the only example of the blessings of God. By this example the psalmist is not saying that this is the only way someone who fears the Lord and walks in His ways can be blessed or will be blessed.

Some are single, some are single parents, some are divorced, some are widowed, some unable to have children. For some the things in this Psalm are a prayer.

Remember who wrote these Psalms, 127 by Solomon, 128 by David, both of whom made a mess of marriage and parenting. But they both knew what God's ideal was. Human sin and failure doesn't change what God meant for good.

Notice the example he uses is an example that includes fruitfulness and increase. In 127 it was a quiver full, here it's a table full. That's a chief characteristic of God's blessings, abundance.

Just as the lack of blessing is characterized by famine or drought or fruitlessness.

If a man has a good wife, let him know that he has received her from God, she is a blessing.

If a man has children, let him know that he has received them from the hand of God, they are His blessing, and should be received with a thankful heart.

God's blessings are a taste of God's grace, the full riches of which we cannot even begin to know until we are in heaven. They are not meant to be ropes that bind our hearts to earth, but rather ladders that make us long for more of the true blessings of His grace that are ours in heaven. Our earthly blessings are not as good as it gets, the best is yet to come.

The blessed life and the blessed home is characterized by life and fruit. But we live in a world and a culture that trumpets the virtues of fruitlessness.

Pornography lets us have virtual sex with a phantom woman who has no wrinkles, no bad breath, who makes no emotional demands on us and bears us no children. She frees us from a life of commitment and responsibility and real intimacy.

Abortion lets us have real sex without consequences and again without any responsibilities or fruitfulness.

Homosexuality allows a perverse unnatural kind of sex that bears no children, is fruitless.

Living together allows sex again without commitments, without vows, without promises or expectations, without taking responsibility.

Contraception for the purpose of selfishly avoiding children, is sex without taking responsibility, sex without fruit.

We live in a culture that is committing sexual suicide, that is devaluing life, and is in total rebellion against God and His way of blessings.

Someone once said, "If you go against the grain of the universe you get splinters" (H. H. Farmer).

And what's amazing is even the liberal cultural elites see it, they do research and write books about how living together is turning out to be a bad idea and it doesn't lower the chance of divorce, but they can't bring themselves to say don't do it. All they can say is be extra careful out there. So they condemn everyone to get splinters.

Sex without commitment, sex without responsibility, sex without intimacy, sex without the possibility of a godly seed, all of that leads to splinters.

You want romance, I'll show you romance. Romance is asking someone "will you be my wife and the mother of my children; romance is saying until death do us part, romance is committing to something you can't get out of; romance is saying no to all other women so you can say yes to one woman.

God doesn't want us to get splinters, so He takes one of His best and most wonderful gifts and He sets it for safe keeping inside a bigger blessing called marriage. He connects holiness and happiness, obedience and joy.

Responsibility, commitment, intimacy and fruitfulness are at the heart of God's gift of sex and these are lived out in marriage between one man and one woman.

**Genesis 1:27-28** So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him;  
male and female he created them.  
28 And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply."

**Genesis 2:24** Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife [and take responsibility for her and her children], and they shall become one flesh.

One wonders if the way to counter the sexual revolution we are living in is not just to warn of the bad things that happen when you don't follow God's path, but to call and train boys and men to take responsibility, to step up and take responsibility for someone besides themselves.

We are raising a generation of narcissist, self-centered, selfish, self-seeking, instant gratification adolescents who are failing to launch, no roots and no wings. Training them to take responsibility may be the best remedy.

The answer to the splinter is the life-giving, life-affirming gospel of Jesus Christ who said, "I am the way, the truth, the life. Follow me." Fear God and follow His fruitful ways.

This psalm is about the blessings that come to a man who takes up his godly call to responsibility, about the fruitful blessings that will be his. This is life giving.

### **Psalm 128:5-6.**

The fortunes of the family are bound together with the prosperity of the whole community. And the welfare of the nation rests upon the welfare of the family (Anderson, *Psalm 73-150*, p. 871).

“As goes the home, so goes the nation.”

The hope and welfare of a nation is in generations of godly children. Is this not the best inheritance, the best legacy we can leave behind, and the best hope for a better future and a better nation?

We don't raise up godly children just so they can get to heaven. We do so that the fruit and influence of their lives will be for the prosperity and peace of others.

We are not called to be individualistic or isolationist, keeping only to ourselves. We are blessed to be a blessing and our blessed families are to be a blessing to our communities and nation.

I am reminded of the instruction God gave to the people of Israel when they were scattered into exile.

**Jeremiah 29:7** seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.

Our blessing is bound up in the blessing of our city, state and nation. This is no empty thing, the human family is deeply connected and interconnected.

We can lament the darkness or light a candle.

We can lament our nation or we can strengthen our homes and churches.

Let's strive to train ourselves and our families in righteousness, raising godly seed that will bear fruit for His glory for generations to come.

## **Conclusion.**

Let me close with an arresting thought I came across this week:

“During the past 10 years an army of over 30 million people have come to the United States. Because they have arrived one by one, appearing innocent and harmless, we have not suspected their potential power. Someday soon, however, we shall awaken to the fact that this army has taken over our nation. They will publish our papers, operate our radio and television stations, control our churches, and teach in our schools. They will capture Washington and dominate the federal government, as well as the administration of each state. They will take over business and industry, including the control of atomic energy. Complete authority will be in their hands. All that will remain for the rest of us will be to submit and die. This army, of course, is an army of children. We have the power to decide whether these future conquerors of our country are to be pagan or Christian” (J. Allen Blair, “Discovery Digest”, July, 1979).

The outcome depends upon our following God's blueprint and using His building materials, given in Psalms 127 and 128. Are we building homes based on God's blessing? Is our home being built on the fear of the Lord? Are we walking in His ways depending always on His grace? May our labors not be in vain and may peace fall upon Israel, upon America.