

Psalm 127: Biblical Reading and Reflections

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 23 December 2020

Preacher: Alastair Roberts

[0 : 00] Psalm 127, a song of ascents, of Solomon. Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain.

It is in vain that you rise up early, and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil, for he gives to his beloved sleep. Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the children of one's youth. Blessed is the man who fills his quiver with them. He shall not be put to shame when he speaks with his enemies in the gate. Psalm 127 is one of two psalms attributed to Solomon. It is a wisdom psalm, and might not have seemed out of place in the book of Proverbs. It has two parts. It begins with building a house in verses 1-2, and then follows that with building a family in verses 3-5.

The house and the household are naturally connected. As Conrad Schaeffer observes, the first is connected with the term vain, repeated three times, and the second with the term sons, here translated children, and the synonym for sons, fruit of the womb.

[1 : 14] The great endeavours of life depend for their success upon the Lord's favour. The labour of the land and the labour of the womb both rely upon the Lord. Without the blessing of the Lord, our labours are futile, and we will not know the joy, confidence and strength that comes with their success.

Sons especially, like the walls of a city, give strength and protection to the family, and extend its dominion. When trouble comes, our strength may seem to come purely from our own efforts, from the walls that surround our cities, from the sons that we have raised in our homes.

However, ultimately, it all comes from the Lord. This recognition is the antidote to anxiety and the desperation that drives the labours of those without such assurance that comes from dependents, especially when they are faced with the threats and assaults of their enemies.

It can be so easy to think that our defence depends upon the high walls and watchmen of our cities, and upon the number and might of our sons. But it really all depends upon the Lord.

The weakest can be defended by him, and the strongest can be overcome. An appreciation of this allows us to enjoy rest, to sleep, without the fears that drive the anxious.

[2 : 23] This might remind us of our Lord's teaching in Matthew chapter 6, verses 25 to 34.

Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body what you will put on.

Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air. They neither sow nor reap, nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them.

Are you not of more value than they? And which of you, by being anxious, can add a single hour to his span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field.

How they grow, they neither tall nor spin. Yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which to-day is alive and to-morrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?

Therefore do not be anxious, saying, What shall we eat? Or what shall we drink? Or what shall we wear? For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all.

[3 : 27] But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself.

Sufficient for the day is its own trouble. Or as the psalmist puts it, It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil, for he gives to his beloved sleep.