

Sunday Night Message

February 12, 2017

Psalms 127

Series – The Psalms

Text – Psalm 127

Introduction

"A Song of degree"

Psalms 120 – 134 are all “songs of degrees”, which means songs of steps or ascents. It is believed that these 15 psalms were sung by the returning remnant as they travelled back to Jerusalem from Babylon.

*"And he came to Jerusalem in the fifth month, which was in the seventh year of the king. For upon the first day of the first month began he to **go up** (same as the word translated ‘degrees’) from Babylon, and on the first day of the fifth month came he to Jerusalem, according to the good hand of his God upon him. For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments." (Ezra 7:8-10)*

It is also said that the Israelites would sing these songs as they travelled up to Jerusalem three times in the year for the feasts of Tabernacle, Passover, and Pentecost. Because of this some have called these psalms, Pilgrim Songs, or “songs of the pilgrim caravans”.

Four of these songs are attributed to David. (Psalms 122, 124, 131, and 133)

Martin Luther called these “the gradual psalms, songs of the higher choir”.

J. Vernon McGee also points out that there is a spiritual significance to these steps:

There is a spiritual meaning in these fifteen psalms. It is interesting that many writers of the Talmud pointed out the fact that life is like this—it is an ascent. We come to God as sinners who are away from Him, separated, and alienated. We come to Him for salvation, and having come for salvation, we go on to sanctification as we grow in grace and in the knowledge of Christ; it is a constant going up. We are to be climbing in a spiritual way. My friend, you and I ought to be farther along today than we were last year.¹

So, these songs were not only geared for a physical ascent into a geographical city, they were also for a people who were “going up” spiritually – growing in their maturity and faith.

Introduction to Psalm 127

¹ McGee, J. V. (1997). Thru the Bible commentary (electronic ed., Vol. 2, p. 851). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Notice that this particular psalm was a “song of degrees for Solomon”. Psalm 72 also was “a psalm for Solomon.

John Phillips believes that the psalm was written by Solomon, but he also states that he believed that it was added to the Hebrew Hymnbook by Hezekiah.

Wiersbe believes the psalm fits in within the historical context of Nehemiah and his re-building of the walls of Jerusalem after the Babylonian / Persian captivity.

The wording seems to indicate that this psalm was written for Solomon, not by Solomon, though many theologians attribute this psalm to him. When we consider Solomon with the first verse, we think of the building of the House of God – the Temple.

I The House of the Lord (vs. 1 – 2)

Notice also the use of the word “vain” in verses 1 and 2. Solomon wrote Ecclesiastes, which is the Book that teaches that everything is vanity without the Lord:

"The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem. Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity. What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun?" (Ecclesiastes 1:1-3)

"Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher; all is vanity. ... Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man." (Ecclesiastes 12:8, 13)

Notice the three things the psalmist says are vain:

1 Building without the Lord (v. 1a)

"Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it:"

This verse could be applied in a much broader application, and it fits in perfectly with our theme for the year. In order for the Lord to build the house through us, we had better be sure that we are doing what God wants us to be doing, and also doing it the way God wants it done.

A good parallel verse to this one would be:

"I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing." (John 15:5)

2 Defending without the Lord (v. 1b)

"except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain." (Psalm 127:1)

"Some trust in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the LORD our God." (Psalm 20:7)

The context of building and defending at the same time would certainly fit in with Nehemiah's situation. (See Nehemiah 4:6 – 23) The Lord Jesus also used two similar stories regarding building and protecting in order to teach a great truth. (See Luke 14:25 – 33)

3 Laboring without the Lord (v. 2) [also could be worrying]

"It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows: for so he giveth his beloved sleep." (Psalm 127:2)

This is not an instruction to be lazy.

"Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise: Which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, Provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest. How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard? when wilt thou arise out of thy sleep? Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep: So shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth, and thy want as an armed man." (Proverbs 6:6-11)

"I went by the field of the slothful, and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding; And, lo, it was all grown over with thorns, and nettles had covered the face thereof, and the stone wall thereof was broken down. Then I saw, and considered it well: I looked upon it, and received instruction. Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep: So shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth; and thy want as an armed man." (Proverbs 24:30-34)

"For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat. For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies. Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread. But ye, brethren, be not weary in well doing." (2 Thessalonians 3:10-13)

God wants us to be diligent, but He does not want us depending on our own effort for the necessities of life. He wants us to depend upon Him, and then work diligently doing what He wills for our lives.

Notice the word "beloved" –

"And David comforted Bathsheba his wife, and went in unto her, and lay with her: and she bare a son, and he called his name Solomon: and the LORD loved him. And he sent by the hand of Nathan the prophet; and he called his name Jedidiah, because of the LORD." (2 Samuel 12:24-25)

The name – Jedidiah means "beloved of the Lord"

II The Heritage of the Lord (vs. 3 – 5)

This psalm could be referred to as a family psalm. (See also Psalm 112 and 128)

"Lo, children are an heritage of the LORD: and the fruit of the womb is his reward." (Psalm 127:3)

This is almost the opposite of the way our culture sees children. John Phillips states:

Today there is a trend, even among Christians, to refrain from having children. They are not looked on as a blessing but as a burden. Nowadays so many people have heart-rending problems with rebellious children that some are suggesting it might be just as well to refrain from having children at all. After all, why spend one's life—one's strength, money, and emotions—bringing up children only to have them repay it all with defiance? To have them disobey, trample on one's ideals, spurn the living God, involve themselves in drugs and sex and open sin? The chances against seeing one's children avoid all the terrible pitfalls set for them by society today are so slim that increasing numbers of people are concluding they would be better off without them.

Then, too, the world is becoming increasingly dangerous. The superpowers are glaring at each other across the width of the world, armed with ICBMs tipped with multiple nuclear warheads. Terrorism is on the rise. Vice and violence are barely checked by society. Foul sins are accepted as permissible, even smiled upon. The church has lost its authority and most of its power. Why have children? Wouldn't it be best to avoid bringing little ones into such a dangerous world? It is an appealing philosophy and it is occurring to many.²

John and Charles Wesley were number 13 and 17 of Susannah Wesley's children. What would the world be like without these two giants of the faith?

You will recall that God promised Abraham in the Abrahamic covenant that he would have innumerable offspring:

"And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be." (Genesis 15:5)

"As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth." (Psalm 127:4)

Notice the reference to arrows. It takes a great deal of skill to learn how to direct the path of an arrow accurately, and it takes a great deal of diligence to raise godly children in this sin cursed world. The world is trying to mold them into its box, the devil is constantly on his mission of deceiving, and the child's own flesh is working against what the spirit of God is trying to do:

² Phillips, J. (2012). Exploring Psalms 89–150: An Expository Commentary (Vol. 2, Ps 127:3). Kregel Publications; WORDsearch Corp.

"For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would." (Galatians 5:17)

It takes a great deal of love mixed with prayer, instruction, correction, and protection to produce godly kids:

*"Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it."
(Proverbs 22:6)*

"Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them: they shall not be ashamed, but they shall speak with the enemies in the gate." (Psalm 127:5)

The culture that we live in would say that we are being irresponsible in this age of birth control to have a large family, but the Bible would take exception to that philosophy. My sympathies go out to those who were, or are now, unable to have children of their own.

Illustrate – Katelyn with three young boys running around. She doesn't want any more children, at least not right now.

Cindy and I have four children, and seven grandchildren. Frankly, I wish we had more.

Notice that children will be a defence for the home and family. This was particularly true in Bible days. They will also support the family, especially the elderly parents in their old age.

Illustrate – the Amish – often build a "dawdy house" on their property for the grandparents. Sometimes, it is even attached to the house like an in-law suite.

Cindy and I are both 52. We have no insurance of any kind. We have no retirement savings, but we have God and we have the children that God has given us who would not blink an eye at making sure that we are taken care of.

Notice the reference to "the gate". The city gate was a place where business matters were discussed. (Ruth 4:1) However, in this context, the reference may very well be to the gate of the man's property.