Truth for Today
The Bible Explained

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Things to think about on your way to Church
We are going to meet the God who builds
Psalm 127

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The New King James version of the Scriptures used unless otherwise stated.]

Hello, and welcome to the next talk in our series entitled "Things to think about on your way to Church" and today we are going to be considering Psalm 127 under the heading of "We're going to meet the God who builds." This is an incredibly positive thing in a world where there is so much negativity which can sometimes grind us down, so I feel the best place to start is to read this short Psalm together.

A Song of Ascents. Of Solomon

> Unless the LORD builds the house, they labour in vain who build it;
> unless the LORD guards the city, the watchman stays awake in vain.
> It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows; for so He gives His beloved sleep. Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb is a reward. like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one's youth. Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them; they shall not be ashamed, but shall speak with their enemies in the gate.

How often do we rush off to Church and do not give much thought to the purpose of us going there? If you are anything like me then I am sure we have to admit that's quite often. And yet if we give some consideration to the person we are going to meet with and the purpose of doing so then how different this would be. We are going to meet with the Creator and Sustainer of the universe, and we only need to think about this for a few minutes and we will be awestruck at the enormity of this. On the other hand, this Almighty Creator God is still interested in you and me personally and seeks, in fact desires, our company. This closeness with God can be ours at any time through our faith in the finished work of Christ at Calvary's Cross, but there is also something very special to experiencing His company when we meet together with other believers in our particular place of meeting.

God's desire to meet with His people is a principle that goes back to the very beginning of time. In Genesis chapter 3, after Adam and Eve disobeyed God's commandments and sin had entered the world, they hid from God. We are told in verse 8 that when they heard the sound of God walking in the garden, they recognised who it was which shows that this was a regular occurrence. But then, because of sin, they didn't want that fellowship to continue as it had before. They were ashamed. But after they confessed that sin, God made provision for them in order for that fellowship to be restored. And from that very point throughout all of the Old Testament, we see this same principle being carried through. By way of introduction to our theme before us today I feel it is important to understand this desire of God even further.

God Speaks from the Mountain and the Tent

In the Book of Exodus, we read the thrilling story of how God used Moses to bring the Israelites out of bondage in Egypt. In the wilderness He took Moses up mount Sinai and delivered to him the ten commandments. That mountain was a terrifying place of fires and thunderings with a strict instruction that nobody was to go near it. Moses's interactions with Jehovah on those occasions were awesome moments. However, it is really important to notice that part of these instructions was to build a tabernacle, quite literally a tent of meeting, where God would meet with His people through Priests, and in particular the High Priest, on the basis of animal sacrifices. Once this Tent of meeting had been established, it was from there that God then started to meet with Moses. We see this in the very first verse of the first chapter of Leviticus. When we reach chapter 23 of Leviticus the Lord gives to Moses the instructions for certain feasts or festivals, times of celebration, that the Lord wanted His people to keep in remembrance of His many mercies and goodness towards them.

The Tabernacle becomes the Temple

As we move forward in the history of the Israelites, we come to King David and he was moved of God to provide a permanent structure built in order for God to meet with His people in a Temple in Jerusalem, as opposed to a moveable tent in the wilderness, or at Shiloh, or in a tent outside his palace in Jerusalem. By then Israel was settled in the land that had been promised to their forefathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and its centre was Jerusalem. However, God also told David through the prophet Nathan that, as he was a man of war, it would be his son Solomon who would complete the temple after David had made the initial plans and collected all the material to start the build. Solomons name literally means 'peaceful' and in 2nd Samuel chapter 7 we get the account of all that the LORD told King David through Nathan. He reminded him about how He had been with him in every aspect of life, protected and blessed him. King David reacted tremendously well to this message in spite of what must have been a real disappointment for him. His reaction was to go into the tent where the ark had been placed and pour out his heart in thanksgiving and worship to God for all His goodness to him. God had promised him that He would build David's legacy and raise up a son, Solomon, who would build the temple. God's House would be built by the man who would be God's answer to the one who would build Kind David's house. Three of the feasts of Leviticus chapter 23 required each male to travel to Jerusalem to celebrate them in and around the temple. The three feasts which required this annual pilgrimage were: 1) the feast of unleavened bread or the Passover; 2) the feast of weeks, or Pentecost or harvest; and 3) the feast of tabernacles, or booths or in gathering. During these wonderful journeys to Jerusalem the people of God would sing. They were excited to be going to Jerusalem, to meet with and have fellowship with their kinsman and to meet others of the same faith. The result of all this is that they would sing.

Songs of ascents

In the same way as Christians have Hymn books, the people of Israel had a Hymn book; it was the Book of Psalms. The Book of Psalms is a book of praise and, at the same time, one of human experience. It is worth remembering that however wonderfully expressive our hymns may be they are not inspired of God as the Psalms were. The Psalms are split into five books. Book 1 is Psalms 1-41, Book 2 is Psalms 42-72, Book 3 is Psalms 73-89, Book 4 is Psalms 90-106 and Book 5 is Psalms 107-150. Across these five books there is another helpful classification which puts them into certain groups, although not divinely inspired as the above five books. This is 1) The Songs of Ascents, 2) The Penitential Psalms, 3) The Alphabetical Psalms, 4) The Hallelujah Psalms, 5) The Imprecatory Psalms, and 6) The Messianic Psalms. It is this first classification, The Songs of Ascents, that we are considering in this series, these are Psalms 120- 134. The only classification that are all grouped together. They are known in the title of each one as, Songs of Ascents. These were the Songs that they would sing as they ascended to Jerusalem. Of these 15 Psalms, King David wrote 4, King Solomon wrote 1, and 10 are anonymous. It is the one attributed to King Solomon that we are thinking about today. It is surely then not coincidental that the man who would be commissioned by King David at the LORD's instruction to build the magnificent

temple to God's glory would be the man to write this Psalm. The only one of the Songs of Ascents attributed to Solomon and the one that refers to the God who builds. As mentioned already, Solomon would not only build the legacy of his father's household, but build the temple of God.

Main themes in Psalm 127

The main themes of Psalm 127 are the main earthly blessing that the Jews sought, i.e., the building of a house, the keeping of a city, and the abundance of children. These are basic things that we surely all seek after in our earthly lives even now: prosperity, security, and family legacy. Yet, two things are crucial in thinking about this. 1) This in itself cannot be all that life is about; and 2) These desires are futile if God is not the foundation of them. The major message of God being central to and sovereign in life sounds very familiar to some of the thoughts expressed by Solomon in Ecclesiastes, for example, chapter 2 verses 24 and 25, chapter 5 verses 18-20, chapter 7 verse 13 and 14, and chapter 9 verse 1. What we have in Psalm 127 and in Ecclesiastes is a call to keep things in proper perspective. Many people enjoy the finer things of life and give God no credit for it. It has even become a rarity for people to give thanks for their food. Or on the other hand, some people become so broken down by the troubles of life that they seek to blame God for it. Both of these attitudes are wrong and should not mark the Christian Believer.

Three ways of looking at the Psalm

As with most of Scripture, especially the Old Testament, there are three ways we can look at it. These are: firstly, the historical actual context in which it was written, i.e., what did it mean at the time? Secondly, what relevance does it have for us today, what can we learn from it? Thirdly, does it have future significance? The third point can often be overlooked and yet in Luke chapter 24 verse 44 the Lord Himself says "that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me." Also, in Acts chapter 2 verse 25, Peter tells his predominately Jewish audience, "For David says concerning Him". So, we clearly have a New Testament precedent that we should always see the Psalms as well as the whole of the Old Testament from a prophetic point of view.

Building a House

Whether they were building their own houses or in Solomon's case, building the House of God, the Psalmist is very clear that if they were not building by trusting in the LORD their labour was in vain. This is indeed a strong statement. The word vain means empty, or useless. The people of that day would have been aware of a very important building of ancient times which the LORD had deemed useless because He had not built it, that was the Tower of Babel. We can read this story in Genesis chapter 11. At the start of the chapter, we are told that all the earth had one language and one speech. The people then came to a beautiful plain in the land of Shinar and while they dwelt there, they had the idea of building a tower that would reach up into the heavens. That perhaps on the face of it seemed a noble project, but verse 4 tells us that the reason for the tower was so that they could make a name for themselves.

Down through the centuries many large and grand Churches and Cathedrals have been erected and there is no doubt that in general these were done with the best of intentions, but this was not the case with the Tower of Babel. The LORD was not in the build, and it was not to His Glory. His displeasure was shown very clearly. In verse 7 we read: "Come, let US go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech." This was indeed a severe response to a building that was not in God's mind and the effects of which are still seen to this day. It is worth noticing in this verse the term used for the LORD is 'US.' Exactly the same word used in Genesis chapter 1 verse 26: "Then God said, "Let US make man in Our image, according to Our likeness."" This reminds us again of the nature of the triune God. Some may say that the word "Trinity" does not appear in Scripture but here we have a very direct reference to that very thing. What a contrast this is in comparison to the instruction to Noah to build an ark for the saving of his family. This he did exactly as God had told him and what a blessing this was. In verse 2 of

Psalm 127 we are told that it is vain, useless, to rise up early and to sit up late and how true this is if God is not the driving force. I am sure Noah had many late nights and early mornings during his 120 years of building the ark, but God was with him every step of the way and in doing so he would no doubt have enjoyed the sleep to which the end of verse 2 refers.

I believe we learn from this that the same principle applies today. How often we do see men and women building things that the world would rate as successful, but which bring no real satisfaction. They are indeed "eating the bread of sorrows" referred to in verse 2. This can apply to physical houses, businesses, careers, and indeed anything that the world holds dear. It reminds me of that wonderful hymn by Graham Kendrick that says,

> All I once held dear, built my life upon,
> all this world reveres and wars to own,
> all I once thought gain I have counted loss,
> spent and worthless now compared to this."

And what is the "this" that the author refers to. It is "Knowing you Jesus."

Protecting a city

The people of God all through the Old Testament were also shown in very powerful ways that when they called upon God and relied solely on Him, He would be with them in their conquests and protect them from their enemies. In Exodus chapter 14 we read about the great deliverance of the Children of Israel when they came to the mighty Red Sea and the army of the Egyptian Pharaoh was hot their heels. Moses obeyed God, the Red Sea parted, and they crossed on dry land. The sea then closed up as the Egyptian army tried to cross and the people were saved. This drew from Moses a great song of thanksgiving as recorded in Exodus chapter 15. Down through the centuries many nations have sought the protection of the Almighty God in times of great pressure, often in war, and have proved Him still faithful. The order of Cromwell was, "Trust in God, and keep your powder dry", but C H Spurgeon adds to this that in this Psalm we are told that dried powder will not be enough if the trust is not in God. He adds, "Happy is the man who hits the golden mean by so working as to believe in God, and so believing in God as to work without fear."[1]

The abundance of Children

In verses 3-5 of Psalm 127, we are reminded of the blessings children bring to a family. The Israelites reading this in the day it was written would have needed no reminder of the promise of God to their father Abraham. In Genesis chapter 15 we read about Abram, as he was still called then, thinking that he was too old to be a father and that his chief steward Eliezer would by default become his heir. The LORD took him outside and asked him to look up at the stars of the heavens and explained to him that his descendants would be innumerable like the stars of the sky. So, it was from that day on that the abundance of children was a key blessing that the people of God sought after. This ensured their family legacy would remain strong, protected their inheritance, and supplied the soldiers for the armies of the Israelites and the priests to administer in the things of God. Like Abraham, many years on we read of Hannah who thought she was too old to bear children. We read about her in 1st Samuel chapter 1. Not only was she sad that she had no children, but the priesthood had fallen into very wicked hands in the shape of Eli and his two sons Hophni and Phinehas. Hannah made a vow to the LORD that if she were given a child, she would dedicate him to the service of God. Little did she know at that time but that was exactly what the LORD had in mind. Samuel was born and he was used as a major figure in bringing the priesthood back into the proper service of God. Ultimately Samuel anointed Saul and then later David as the first and second Kings of God's people. Again, what do we desire if God grants us the wonderful privilege of children? Do we want for them what the world perceives as success or do we want them to grow into men and women who will be for God in this world and a blessing to others?

In verses 3 and 4 we have children being referred to as a “heritage” and a “reward.” Surely this should be true in a rightly ordered society. Children should be regarded as an inheritance not as an incumbrance and they should be received as a reward not with regret. How sad it is that we live in a society where abortion is viewed as normal and there are more and more calls for it to be made even easier than it already is. How our forefathers and especially those Old Testament characters we have been considering would have found our current society’s norms abhorrent.

Restful sleep

As we come to the end of our considerations, I would like to make a further comment for us to consider in respect of verse 2 which is in direct contrast to the vanity and bread of sorrows that those who build without God have to endure. “For so He gives his beloved sleep.” How often are we unduly concerned and instead of believing in God’s sovereignty in every aspect of our lives we still try to add to it our own efforts? Jacob, in Genesis chapter 32, was praying when he should have been resting in God’s promise to him. Conversely, in Acts chapter 12 we read that Peter, chained between two soldiers, was so restful in his situation and had faith in God, that his rescuer had to awaken him from his deep and restful sleep. Then of course, the best example we have to learn from was when our Lord himself, the true “beloved blessed one,” was asleep when the storms raged on the sea around Him in Mark chapter 4. If we have Him before us, surely we should be able to rest soundly through the storms of life.

Future application

In conclusion then as we have thought of what this Psalm meant to the people of that day and the lessons we can take from it for our own day, we should just have a thought about what this Psalm might mean in the future. This “Song of Ascents” may well have been used as the captives returned to Jerusalem after their captivity as well as their ongoing annual pilgrimages for the three feasts previously referred to. As they returned, the house and the city must have been a wonderful prospect, and the joys of homes and households must have been again before them. Their fruitfulness and prosperity in their own land would have given them a wonderful answer to their adversaries. So, it will be in a future date when the remnant of Israel returns to their own land from all the corners of the earth, when indeed the LORD brings them home. So, perhaps the words of Zechariah in chapter 4 verse 6 would be an ideal way to end: ““Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,” says the LORD of hosts.”

Thank you for listening to this talk today on Psalm 127, entitled ‘We’re going to meet the God who builds’, number T1476 in the series ‘Things to think about on your way to Church’.

Endnotes

1. Treasury of David, C H Spurgeon.
2. All Bible quotations are from the NKJV unless otherwise stated.

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