

Unless the Lord Blesses

Psa. 127:1-5

Introduction:

1. Psalm 127 is the eight of fifteen psalms known as Psalms of Ascent. These were songs sung as ancient Israelites journeyed up to Jerusalem for the various feasts in the Jewish calendar.
2. The Psalm naturally divides itself into two sections: 1) vs. 1-2; 2) vs. 3-5.
3. What is the Psalm saying and what does it teach us?

Discussion:

- I. Unless the Lord blesses the effort all men's labors are ineffective (1-2).
 - A. "Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it. Unless the Lord guards the city, the watchman keeps awake in vain."
 1. The word "house" has a variety of meanings in the O.T.
 - a. Sometimes it has reference to a family dwelling, the structure in which a family lives. Lot invited the angels who came with a message about Sodom to spend the night in his house (Gen. 19:2).
 - b. Sometimes it refers to a household. Gen. 46:27 refers to the house of Jacob, who came to Egypt. There were 70 persons that composed his family or household.
 - c. Sometimes it refers to the whole people of Israel. Ex. 40:38 refers to the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night that appeared in the sight of all the house of Israel.
 - d. Sometimes it refers to a ruling dynasty. 1 Kings 16:3 distinguishes the house of King Baasha and the house of King Jeroboam.
 - e. 2 Kings 22:3 refers to the temple in Jerusalem as the house of the Lord.
 2. The parallelism of this psalm suggests that there is a correlation between "the house" and "the city." "unless the Lord builds the house . . . unless the Lord guards the city." It would be easy to think that the city is Jerusalem and the house the temple.
 - B. There is a very powerful passage in 2 Sam. 7 which illustrates the different uses of the term "house" and emphasizes the significance of God building a house.
 1. The house as a physical structure for someone to live in (7:1-3). David lives in a cedar house and plans to build a house for God.
 2. Seems like a nice proposal, but God objects (4-7).
 3. Instead of David building a house for God, God will build a house for David (11ff), but it will not be a house of cedar. It will be a lineage, involving an eternal kingdom and an eternal dynasty.
 4. There is some sense in which the city of Jerusalem, the capital, is associated with this house and the people of Israel, the citizens of the kingdom are part of the house that God would build (23-29).
 5. While the physical structure of the temple is the house of God, there is a special

sense in which Israel is the house of God. It is not a physical structure, but it is the family or household of God.

- C. The emphasis is Psa. 127 is that unless the Lord builds the house all efforts are useless. Verse 2 says, "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."

II. In the O.T. culture building an intergenerational lineage was very important. Sarah gave her servant Hagar to Abraham to produce a descendant. Jacob's wives Rachael and Leah seemed to be in competition with one another to produce the most children and gave their handmaidens Bilhah and Zilpah as wives to produce children.

- A. Probably the idea of "becoming one flesh" in Gen. 2:24 was less about the sexual relationship and more about building a lineage, an intergenerational family.
1. The promise made to Abraham encompasses a long-range view of "building a house." God said, "Go forth from your country, and from your relatives and from your father's house, to the land I which I will show you; and I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great; and so you shall be a blessing; and I will bless those who bless you and the one who curses you I will curse and in you all the families of the earth will be blessed" (Gen. 12:1-3).
 2. Gen. 46:27 describes how 70 persons of the descendants of Abraham were originally in Egypt at the time of Joseph.
 3. But Ex. 12:37 describes how about 600,000 men, aside from children, left Egypt.
- B. How does one build a house like this?
1. It begins with a covenant.
 - a. God made a covenant with Abraham and with his descendants the Israelites.
 - b. In Deut. 29:10ff Moses speaks about this covenant.
 - c. This covenant involved an exclusive relationship with God (14-21).
 2. It involves complete and total submission to the plan and will of God (Deut. 26:16-19).
 - a. Deut. 27 and 28 describe both curses and blessings. Curses when unfaithful and blessings when faithful.
 - b. The relationship between God and His house was a marriage. God was the husband and Israel was the wife. It was a family. God was the Father and Israel was the children.
 3. How do you go about building a house? See Psa. 127:3-5. Houses are built through children.
 - a. And so, God promised Abraham a son.
 - b. But not just a son (Gen. 15:1-5).
 - 1) God promised that Abraham would become a multitude of nations (Gen. 17:4-5).
 - 2) The Lord multiplied Abraham as the sand on the seashore and as the stars of heaven (Gen. 22:17-18). Note that God made this promise as a result of Abraham's faithful dependence upon God as demonstrated in the offering of Isaac.
 - 3) Houses are built on faithfulness to God.
 4. Of course, David was a descendant of Abraham, a man after God's own heart,

who relied on the Lord to build his house.

III. The idea of God building a house is projected right into the N.T.

- A. I used to read the genealogical record in Matthew and Luke, not recognizing their importance and because I had difficulty pronouncing the names would skip over these records with little thought.
1. But what the writers are trying to get us to see is that God is building a house.
 2. Jesus is a descendent of Abraham.
 3. And of David.
 4. And God is using Jesus to build a house. It is not a house of cedar. It is not a physical structure like the temple, but it is a spiritual house, a lineage, the family of God.
 5. In Eph. 2 Paul speaks of Jews and Gentiles being included in the house of God. Read 11-22.
 6. Go back and consider Eph. 2:10: "We are His workmanship created in Christ Jesus."
- B. Observe that it is not limited to Israelites, descendants of Abraham, but is extended to Gentiles.
1. Gal. 3:26-29 says, "You are sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise."
 2. Note "heirs according to promise." Remember God said to Abraham, "in you all the families of the earth will be blessed." I am going to make you as numerous as the stars of the heavens and as the sand on the seashore.
 3. This is what happens when God builds a house.
- C. Now picture yourself going up to Jerusalem during the first century, let's say to the Feast of the Passover. You are going to celebrate the deliverance from Egypt and you are singing Psa. 127. "Unless the Lord builds the house they labor in vain who build it." You are singing it in light of the promise made to Abraham. In light of the promises made to David. While going into the temple you recognize that this is the house of God, but only a representative structure, a physical structure that represents you and your relationship to God.
1. Now what does it mean to you that "children are a heritage of the Lord" (Psa. 127:3) when you recognize that you are that heritage?
 2. Paul said in his letter to the Ephesians, "I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe" (1:18-19a).
 3. Do you understand that the Lord has built a house. Do you understand that you are the house that the Lord has built? Heb. 3:6 says, "Christ was faithful as a Son over His house—whose house we are, if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end."

Conclusion:

1. There are many ways that we can apply this lesson.
 - a. We can apply it to marriage and the magnificent commitment and loyalty that is implied there.
 - b. We could talk about the spiritual training of our children and the development and perpetuation of a godly household.
 - c. We could talk about the church as the household of God.
 - d. We could talk about the value of faithfully trusting in the word of the Lord in our efforts to be the family of God.
2. All this would be important, but what I want you to see is that the Lord is in the business of building His house and we need to submit to His plan.