

SERMON – PSALM 127 – Homes Forged in Faith – Pastor Dennis Elhard

“A team of New York state sociologists once attempted to calculate the lasting influence of a father’s life upon his children and those who followed in subsequent generations. In this study, two men were researched who lived at the same time in the eighteenth century. The lasting legacies that each man left upon his descendants stand as different as night and day.

The first man was Max Jukes, an unbeliever, a man of no principles. His wife also lived and died in unbelief. What kind of lasting influence did he leave his family? Among the 1,200 known descendants of Max Jukes were: 440 lives of outright debauchery, 310 paupers and vagrants, 190 public prostitutes, 130 convicted criminals, 100 alcoholics, 60 habitual thieves, 55 victims of impurity, and 7 murderers. Not exactly a distinguished legacy.

The other man studied was Jonathan Edwards, the noted Colonial pastor and astute theologian, arguably the greatest preacher and intellect America has ever produced. This renowned scholar was the primary instrument that God used to bring about the Great Awakening in colonial America. Jonathan Edwards came from a godly heritage and married Sarah Pierrepont, a woman of great faith. Together, they sought to leave an entirely different kind of legacy. Among his male descendants were: 300 clergymen, missionaries, or theological professors, 120 college professors, 110 lawyers, over 60 physicians, over 60 authors of good books, 30 judges, 14 presidents of universities, numerous giants in American industry, 3 United States congressmen, and 1 vice-president of the United States. There is scarcely any great American industry that has not had one of Jonathan Edward’s descendants among its chief promoters. This was a legacy that lasts, one that honors and glorifies God.”

Psalms 127 brings a strong message on the house that God builds. For a Sunday on which we are going to dedicate three precious children, this seemed like a pretty obvious text of scripture to preach on. It’s a beautiful piece of literature, and offers a biblical perspective of the home. It is a part of a series of Psalms that are subtitled as “A song of ascents.” These are thought to be a collection of songs that the people would sing/recite as they journeyed to Jerusalem for one of the annual feasts. It is identified as a psalm “of Solomon” – so he is probably the author. (David – “for” Solomon) Many consider this a “wisdom” psalm, and it certainly does offer that. And most translations structure the psalm in two stanzas or sections, so they will form the basis of our outline this morning.

First: Unless the Lord (vs. 1-2). It’s apparent that the point of this section of this psalm is that all human effort that does not rely on the power and goodness of God is useless. All our efforts are in vain unless the Lord is in them. Notice the three time repetition of the words “in vain.” In fact, in the Hebrew they are at the beginning of each of the phrases. (Ecclesiastes)

*A. In vain the house is built.* Without the Lord’s involvement and oversight, the house builders work in vain. The building of a “house” can refer to the actual construction of a dwelling, or to the creation and raising of a family. In the OT it was a common metaphor to speak of a family as a “house.” The point is that God must do it, not that he is out there with a carpenter’s apron, but that he must be involved and consulted and inspire the construction. Without his involvement, all of our plans and efforts are ultimately in vain (worthless, false).

So the house here is the home. Raising a family is futile unless the Lord builds the house. A house that God has built is one where he is invited, where he is honored, where He is worshiped, and

where lives are lived that are seeking to please him in every way.

*B. In vain the city is guarded.* Unless the Lord is the one watching over the city, there can be as many watchmen posted as possible, but there will not necessarily be security. A city is a collection of homes and businesses and in ancient times was often surrounded by a wall for protection. But even with all of our human efforts to make our places of living secure, they will only be secure if God is the one watching them. This is not to say that all of our efforts to make our home secure are a waste of time, but that those efforts alone will be in vain if we do not rely on the Lord for his protection. Charles Spurgeon said, “We are not safe because of watchmen if (God) refuses to watch us.” Our safety and security ultimately come from God, not from our own efforts to protect the city and our property.

*C. In vain do you toil long hours.* “In vain you rise up early and stay up late, toiling for food to eat -” This is what we call in contemporary language – “burning the candle at both ends.” Early mornings and late nights and little sleep, scripture is telling us that it is futile to work yourself to death – there is no lasting gain or ultimate purpose. Now this is not meant to “depreciate the importance of hard work, but that it is inferior to the higher way of life that begins with trusting the Lord in one’s work.” One commentary says: “*Toiling* speaks of feverish activity, rising before sunrise to begin working, coming home late long after the sun has gone down, working long hours to put bread on the table. Without time for God, their food only maintains people in their miserable existence.”

The pace of these workers suggests a high level of anxiety. In fact, the ESV translates this line as “eating the bread of anxious toil.” Since they don’t really trust in God, their labour becomes increasingly futile. On the other hand, the person who trusts in God, while working hard yet within certain set boundaries, lies down at night and sleeps well, believing God will give the increase. When they have done their best, they leave the results to God, and sleep peacefully. There is another reading of this phrase – the NIV has it as a footnote – “for while they sleep he provides for those he loves.” It really seems to fit the context better. The idea is that blessing comes to the faithful even while they sleep – God provides. Work hard, but work reasonably. Here’s another great quote from Spurgeon – “Often when we are doing nothing for ourselves God is doing most.” Spend some time meditating on that.

“The point here is clear: divine sovereignty overshadows human plans and efforts – over building, watching and toiling. It is not to discount human effort, but to emphasize that, apart from God’s intervention, it is vain.” Unless the Lord...build the house.

Second. Blessed the man. (vs. 3-5) The second part of the psalm shifts the focus – from the vanity of trying to build homes apart from God, to one of the primary blessings the Lord imparts to the home. It seems that Solomon now picks up again the theme he began the psalm with – building the house. What we see in these next three verses is the biblical perspective of children:

*A. Children are an inheritance.* (ESV) “Behold children (sons – NIV) are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb a reward.” Children are an inheritance that we receive from the Lord – something of great value – and they are also a reward. God gives children, not as a penalty, but as a privilege. They are to be received as a highly valued prize, never as a burden.

One of the reasons that we struggle with issues like abortion in this culture is because we have

devalued children in general. Often children are seen as inconveniences, burdens and disruptions to our desires and life's aspirations. We claim they are too expensive, require too much sacrifice, delay our career goals and even get in the way of our recreational pursuits. These all come out of a systemic selfishness. Scripture, however, takes an entirely different view. As Matthew Henry writes: "Children are God's gifts, a heritage, and a reward; and are to be counted as blessings and not burdens: he who sends mouths, will send meat, if we trust him."

*B. Sons are like arrows – they offer strength and security.* This is an interesting metaphor – comparing sons to arrows. Arrows are instruments of death used by warriors to defeat the enemy. How are sons like arrows? Children that are born when the parents are younger can be a great source of comfort and protection in their old age. Children offer security and help as the aging years of their parents march on. They can protect them from those who would prey on the aged. While the military imagery is somewhat difficult to reconcile – "such children protect their aging parents as effectively as arrows in the hands of a warrior."

Consequently, the more sons the merrier! "Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them" - the more sons the greater the levels of protection and security. "They will not be put to shame when they contend with their enemies in the gate." The city gate in the ancient world was the place where court was held and where much of the commerce took place. The man who comes before the court accompanied by a contingent of strong, strapping sons will not be as easily pushed around by his accusers. They are there to defend the honour of their father if he is slandered in public. The more sons, the stronger will be the father's presence whether it be a confrontation before the court or in a commercial transaction. Children can and do play an important role in the protection, security and comfort for their aging parents.

So what is your view of children? Do you recognize that some of your own attitudes have been influenced by the culture? Are children always blessings - or just sometimes blessings? If we are willing to let this psalm influence our thinking/attitudes, the answer should be obvious.

(Quote) "In light of Psalm 127 we have a choice to make. We can either rely on our vanity or upon God's energy. We can either fool ourselves into believing that we can control things, or we can surrender our false sense of control to the living God. Here is the promise: if we make the surrender, God will build our house, God will guard our city, God will provide for our needs, and God will reward us with fruitfulness to the next generation. Is there really any choice to make? As we give up control, we will become emotionally and mentally healthy, to say nothing about having God's true perspective on our lives."

We want to build homes that forged in faith. We want to give the Lord our homes and trust him for his protection and blessing. We want to give up our futile attempts to control everything, and we want to see our children as blessings and as the amazing gifts that they are to us. We want to leave a legacy of faith and of godly living.

Today, we celebrate and desire to bless the new children that grace our congregation. We affirm their value and receive them as gifts from God. Their parents are dedicating them to the Lord, so that he would bless them and build their homes and watch over them. It is a solemn vow – a promise to bring them up in the faith – teaching and modeling Jesus Christ to them.