

Arrows in the Hand of a Warrior

Scripture Text: Psalm 127

Introduction

The front cover of the bulletin today reads: *We believe in Jesus Christ Who is the Life. We uphold the sanctity of all human life He created.* All life is sacred. All life is given by God, who is intimately involved in it. God told Jeremiah that He knew him before He formed him in his mother's womb. He also appointed Jeremiah to be a prophet before he was born (Jeremiah 1:4-5). David acknowledged that God formed him and knitted him together in his mother's womb. David declared God had "fearfully and wonderfully made" him. David also acknowledged that God knew him and had written all his days on this earth before he had lived a single one (Psalm 139:13-16). Clearly, God is the Giver, Designer and Planner of human life. As such, children are precious reminders of the sacredness of *all* human life. In this passage, Solomon gave us a picture of how precious children are. This psalm is one of fifteen psalms called "Songs of Ascents" that were written for pilgrims who were going to Jerusalem to celebrate seasonal feasts. Just imagine them singing this song that declares God as the Master-builder and Life-giver.

God's Work and Blessing Are Necessary

The basic theme of this wisdom psalm is that without the Lord's blessing, all human toil is worthless. No human task succeeds apart from God's will. The first two verses have been so important for me to remember over the past few years. They remind me that without God's work or blessing, all of our work is pointless. Look at these verses.

Psalm 127:1–2 ¹ *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.* ² *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.*

One thing these verses say is that God is at work. Even though He certainly rested on the seventh day of creation, from which we get the fourth commandment to rest on the Sabbath, God is still at work in various ways. In this passage, God builds a house. We can understand the word "house" in at least two ways. The first way is a physical building. The Jews who read this psalm could have understood the "Lord's house" to be the temple in Jerusalem. Unless God had blessed the building of the Jerusalem temple, those who attempted to build it would have labored in vain. Another way to understand "house" is the family. God builds and blesses the household as we will see in the following verses. Solomon also wrote that God watches over a city. A city is not secured by its defenses, but by the protection of the Lord. All the weapons and defenses of man are pointless unless God blesses those efforts. This psalm may have reminded pilgrims that Jerusalem was not a place of strong walls, a strong military, or of some magical protection, but that its security depended on the Lord. Likewise, a farmer must be diligent to work, but he must have faith and trust in God—in this case by receiving the sleep God wants to give to His beloved. God provides for our sustenance.

In the first two verses, the word “vain” is mentioned three times. This is the same word used in the third commandment, “You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.” That means that we should not say the Lord’s name in a way that makes it worthless or abuses it. In this psalm, the word “vain” means doing something that is futile or wasted. In Star Trek, there was a group of people who used to say, “Resistance is futile.” What they meant was that resisting them, working against them, was a waste of time and effort. In our world, we must work with God or we, too, work in vain. God commands us to “build” and “watch” and “toil”, but we must always remember that our work to do any of these is in vain apart from the grace and power of God. As our Lord Jesus reminded us, “Apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5). To use another Star Trek reference, when Gena and I went to a Star Trek convention a couple of years ago, we met an actresses who said, “If it ain’t on the page, it ain’t on the stage.” What she meant was that actors and actresses should follow the script. In the same way, if we are not working with God and following His “script”, if God ain’t in it, we are working in vain. This includes building a family (vss. 3–5), which we will in the next few verses.

Children are God’s Gift and Blessing to Us

Psalm 127 reminds us that as we labor to build, and watch to protect, and toil to provide food, our ultimate and constant dependence must be on God. He alone can make these efforts succeed and bear fruit for eternity. God builds buildings and He builds cities and He also *builds families*. We need God’s blessing to build a family and we need God to be the Head of the whole house. Until God is made Head of the family, all efforts to establish a strong family will end in frustration. The second portion of this psalm focuses on this meaning of building: *God building families through children*. We see in the last portion of this psalm that children are a gift from God. Look at the following verses.

Psalm 127:3³ *Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb a reward.*

Look at the first word in verse three: Behold! Solomon was announcing something important here. He had described the need for God’s blessing to accomplish anything, and then he wrote, “Look! Children are a gift from God.” Unfortunately, many do not view children as a gift. Many in our world view children as a burden or inconvenience. So much so, there are those who devalue the unborn and consider him or her to not be a person. Hundreds of thousands of children are killed each year under the banner of choice or convenience. The value of children has been reduced so that they can be simply discarded. The same thing happened during the Holocaust in World War II. Approximately six million Jews were killed by Adolf Hitler’s Nazi regime because they determined that the Jewish people were not really people. They were not worth living. There is a holocaust of unborn children who are being slaughtered every day that has been going on for decades. According to one statistic, about twenty-one percent of all pregnancies in the U.S. end in abortion, which does not include natural miscarriages. Of all unintended pregnancies, four in ten are aborted. There is clearly a huge gap between the way many in our society view children and the way God sees them.

God described children here in this passage in *four* ways, three of which are mentioned in verse three. Children are a heritage or gift, the fruit of the womb, and a reward. All of these are positive descriptions of children. None of them mean that a child is devalued or not a person. Being a “heritage from the Lord” signifies that children are God’s gift to us. They are evidence of God’s favor. Being the “fruit of the womb” indicates something positive, something good that is produced as a result of God’s work in the womb. Solomon also called children a reward. Oftentimes, a reward means something earned, such as a wage for one’s work. Since children are clearly a gift and a sign of divine favor, we should not view them strictly as something we earn; however, parents do work *with* the Master-builder, God, to deliver children into this world and to raise them into responsible people of God. They are the reward which God has acquired for Himself. For these reasons, all children should be welcomed with joy and affection, and none should ever be regarded as a burden. All children are a gift and blessing from God.

Children Are Given to Become Blessings to Others

This psalm places a special emphasis on the blessing of children (vv. 3–5). Those who are granted the privilege to raise children should see children as evidence of God’s blessing—they are, in the end, His children, not ours. Indeed, even our children, the fruit of our most consistent and diligent labor, come from God, are matured by God, and are to be used by God. All of life is God’s abundant grace to us. Solomon gives us one other description concerning children. The fourth description of children in this passage is “arrows”. Look at the last two verses.

Psalm 127:4-5 ⁴ *Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the children of one’s youth.*
⁵ *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.*

The children of youth are not young children, but they are contrasted with the children born to older parents, such as Isaac being born to Abraham or Joseph to Jacob, both in their father’s old age. As such, these children are already grown up when their father is growing old, and are therefore able to assist him. Here Solomon described children as arrows in the hand of a warrior. What is it like for a warrior to have arrows in his hand? We could think of it as a sign of strength. Having a quiver full of arrows might mean you are ready to fight, or maybe you just never use them. Like Legolas in the Lord of the Rings whose quiver never seemed to be short of arrows when needed, he was ready for battle and he was not a bad shot. It was prestigious, even magical, to have a full quiver of arrows. For us, having many children is a sign of God’s blessings. The one who has a lot of children is blessed. Do you believe that? Unfortunately, many look down on the large family, and make jokes about it. Interestingly, it is not a sign of disgrace in the Bible. Blessed, happy and joyful are the parents who have a lot of children.

What does a warrior do with arrows, though? He shoots them. He does not keep them in the quiver but uses them for battle. Matthew Henry once wrote that children are arrows in the hand that may be directed to the mark of God’s glory and service. But, when they are gone out into the world, they are arrows out of the hand; it is too late to

bend them then. The point here is to straighten your arrows while you have them in your quiver. This means to discipline your children and train them up to follow Jesus, then when you shoot them into the world, they will hit the target God intended. Like the first part of this psalm dealing with building and working, having children does not eliminate human effort. A husband and wife must work together with God to bring children into the world and to raise them to be faithful members of God's people. The real work is all those days, weeks, months, and years of parents teaching, correcting and discipling the children God has given them. Yes, we bear and raise our children, but then we must shoot them out as arrows (v. 4) to land in the places God designs. Parents are to raise their children in such a way that they become arrows sent out to do good for God.

Solomon also mentioned that grown up children can stand with their father when he speaks with his enemies in the gate. Court proceedings would often be held in the vicinity of the city's gate. The more sons a man had with him during a court proceeding, the more forceful he would appear in disputes. It will be hard for the enemies to intimidate such a man who has a "quiver" full of children. Likewise, parents can be supported in their old age by their children. This is certainly true of children who become disciples of Jesus Christ. Those arrows leave the hands of their parents and follow the path of that God designs. Parents who raise their children in the Lord can know that they have helped to make disciples of Jesus Christ and will never be ashamed of that.

Conclusion

In closing, all life is a gift of God as all life comes from Him. Jesus came to give life, but there is one who wants to destroy. There is one who wants to kill all life. He is a thief, a liar, and a murderer. That is not God. Read what Jesus said about His mission to earth.

John 10:10–11 ¹⁰ *The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.* ¹¹ *I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.*

Jesus gave His life so that we would have life. He wants us to have true life that is found only in Him. If you do not know Christ, then you do not know true life. Turn to the Giver and Sustainer of life so that you can experience it and have it to the full, for all eternity.

For those who follow Jesus and have the abundant life He gives, all of His people have to build up the house of the Lord, that is, the Church. We each have a responsibility to build up and disciple others, but God must be the Master-builder. He gives success from above to the work of His servants. The same is true for families. God has blessed parents with children and He has given to them the awesome responsibility to disciple children into God-fearing Jesus followers. Raising children is the work of their God *and* their parents. Discipleship begins in the home, but it does not end there. Each person in the Church has the opportunity to help shape the future of children. Each one of us ought to support and help the families around us by teaching and modeling Jesus Christ to our future members and leaders. God's work of building people begins in the family and extends to the Church. Are you helping to shoot those arrows? May it be so! Amen!