

Psalm 127

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Preacher: Reverend David MacLeod

[0 : 00] Good evening and welcome to our service this evening.

It's nice to come together again and we pray that God will bless us as we gather in his presence. We're going to start our service by singing in Psalm 127.

Psalm 127 and we'll sing the whole of the psalm. Accept the Lord to build the house, the builders lose their pain. Accept the Lord the city keep, the watchmen watch in vain.

Accept the Lord to build the house, the builders lose their pain.

Accept the Lord the city keep, the watchmen watch in vain.

[1 : 22] Tis vain for you to rise betimes or lead from rest to keep.

To feed on sorrow's bread so gives ye his beloved sleep.

Lo, children, our God's heritage, the world's fruit is reward.

The sons of youth as arrows are for strong men's hand prepared.

O happy is the man that hath his quiver filled with those.

[2 : 43] The unashamed in the gate shall speak unto their foes.

Let us now come before God in prayer. Let us pray. O gracious and ever-blessed Lord, as we gather in your presence this evening, we thank you that we can come before you and we can cry, Abba, Father, that you are indeed our Father in heaven.

And as we have sung, Heaven, Father, accept the Lord to build a house. Those that labour, labour in vain. So as we have been taught to pray, Heavenly Father, we do indeed come and we pray thy will be done.

For, Heavenly Father, if we are outside thy will, we do indeed labour in vain. So as we come into your presence this night, as we bow before you, we pray, Heavenly Father, that the prayer of each and every one of us would be that we are walking within your will, that we know that you are our Father in heaven, and that, Heavenly Father, each and every step that we take, we seek to take in your strength, the strength that comes only from you.

So, Heavenly Father, as we bow and we bring before you those that are indeed mourning at this time, we do indeed remember Annie again on Scott Road.

[4 : 19] We pray, Heavenly Father, that your hand of comfort would be upon her, that she would indeed know you as our God of refuge and our God of strength. We pray for the family, Heavenly Father, each one of them.

We bring them before you in our own hearts. And we pray, Heavenly Father, that they would draw close to you. And again, that they would know your comfort and your hand upon them, blessing them at this time.

And for all those that mourn, Heavenly Father, those that may have suffered loss in these past days, we pray, Heavenly Father, that your hand would be upon them, that they would know, Heavenly Father, that you are their Father in heaven, and that they can call upon you for health and for strength.

And that, Heavenly Father, that they would not lose sight of all that you have done for them, that your blessings, Heavenly Father, to each one of us, even in times of trial, are new every morning.

For you have promised that even through the valley of the shadow of death, you are there with us, you guide and you comfort. So we pray, Heavenly Father, as we come into your presence, that each one of us would know, Heavenly Father, where we walk with you.

[5 : 34] As we come and as David will bring your word to us afresh this night, that, Heavenly Father, each one of us would see our need of you, that we would see, Heavenly Father, that unless we are walking with you, what we seek to do is in vain.

For, Heavenly Father, unless we are walking with you, unless we are close with you each and every day, we, Heavenly Father, have no strength. For the strength that each one of us has as we walk in Christ is through you.

Without you, we are nothing. Guide us, Heavenly Father, each one of us, no matter what our situation is, we pray that we would not lose heart.

And, Heavenly Father, the burdens of life can be so heavy upon us. But we thank you that you are indeed the Lord in heaven and your Son, Jesus, intercedes for each one of us.

The same Jesus that walked this earth and said to us, come unto me, all those that are weak and heavy laden, and I will give you rest. So, whatever the burdens we are, whatever the burdens we have that we carry at this time, whatever Heavenly Father is getting us out, we pray that we would come to you.

[6 : 52] We would come to you knowing that you care for us and that, Heavenly Father, you will carry our burdens. Watch over us in this coming week. As we go out, Heavenly Father, from this service, may we know that it was good to come together and to hear your word, that we would be blessed through it, and that we would go out this week and be a blessing to others, knowing, Heavenly Father, that there is indeed a burden upon the hearts of each and every one of us to see souls won for you.

So, guide us in our daily life. Guide us in our walk with you. And, Heavenly Father, when the opportunity arises, may we indeed speak for you and sow seeds into the lives of others, that, Heavenly Father, not for our glory but for yours, trusting that as seeds are sown, that according to your will, according to your purpose, and according to your time, that you will indeed, Heavenly Father, bear fruit through these seeds that are sown.

Oh, Heavenly Father, we thank you for your promise to us that your word will not return unto you, Lord. So, as we gather now, and as your word is open, may our hearts be opened and our ears be opened, that, Heavenly Father, that we may hear, that we may indeed see you, and that we would open our hearts to receive you.

Oh, that each one of us would know what it is to taste and see that God is good. Guide us now. Forgive us for our sins and for our shortcomings. And we ask all this in the name of your Son, Jesus.

Amen. We turn now, again, to God's word. We turn to the psalm that we sang, Psalm 127, and we'll read the whole of this psalm.

[8 : 44] A Song of Ascent of Solomon. Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labour in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchmen stand guard in vain.

In vain you rise early and stay up late, toiling for food to eat, for he grants sleep to those he loves. Sons are a heritage from the Lord, children are a ward from him.

Like arrows in the hands of a warrior, our sons born in one's youth. Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them. They will not be put to shame when they contend with their enemies in the gate.

Amen. May God bless you of his word to us. We'll pray again as we come back to God's word. Our Heavenly Father, once more we thank you for your word opened before us.

Once more we thank you for the promise that we were reminded of just moments ago in prayer, that your word will not return to you empty. It won't return void, but it will work in the way that you determine.

[9 : 54] And so we ask, Lord, that you would work in our lives and the lives of all that we are connected with. We pray that you would work in such a way as to enable each of us to be looking to Jesus.

And we pray that all those who listen in and who watch would be trusting the Lord Jesus for salvation. And for those, Lord, who are saved, we pray that you would be sanctifying us through your word, through your truth, that we may be steadied in our faith, that we may have our eyes fixed upon Christ, and that we may be conformed more and more to the image of Jesus.

So hear us and help us, we pray, as we look to you. And once more, we pray not just for ourselves, but we pray for all congregations, all denominations, where Christ crucified is preached.

Add your blessing, Lord, we pray. Build your church. Minister to one and all in a way that will bring glory to your name and bring salvation and encouragement into our souls.

And we pray these things in Jesus' name and for Jesus' sake. Amen. Amen. Well, we're continuing tonight in our studies in the Psalms.

[11 : 16] And tonight we come to Psalm 127, the psalm that we sang. You see from the title of the psalm, it's a song of ascents.

It's another of these songs that we've been reflecting on, that the believer sings as they continue on in their, in our walk with God.

These were psalms that we've said were sang by the pilgrims as they made their way to Jerusalem in worship. And they are songs, they are psalms, which we take upon our own lips and they come from our own hearts as we walk with God, as we seek to journey along the road with him.

And it's interesting to cast our eye back over these psalms of ascent. Even if we scan back a few psalms, we see that they begin at Psalm 120 and they carry on through to Psalm 134.

Fourteen psalms in this small section, these songs of ascents. And if we scan them, we can see that they take us through so many different experiences and emotions.

[12 : 36] All these experiences and emotions that the believer will know. There are times that we experience that we know distress. Psalm 120 speaks into that.

There's times when we're crying out for help and we feel that insecurity and we're looking to God for stability. Psalm 121 speaks into that. We have experiences as well and seasons and mountaintops where we are rejoicing and Psalm 122 takes us into that territory.

There's times when we're ridiculed. There are times when we're persecuted and we're struggling in that way. Psalm 123 speaks into that. There's times when we're in the depths of sorrow and grief as some are even now in the congregation.

And we have Psalms like 130 which speak into that. We have so many Psalms that speak into every experience of life.

And even in this small section of Psalms within the Psalter we see the whole raft, we see the whole range of emotions that we go through.

[13 : 53] And then even if we think in terms of the geographical and the physical, the Psalms that we see in this section they take us from place to place.

Some are in the setting of the battlefield, the battleground. Some are agricultural. They take us to the farmer's field. We have some of these Psalms that they point us to and they come from the city.

Some that are grounded in the place of worship. There's some that speak into the building site. There's some that come from the intensity of prison camps in foreign lands in periods of captivity.

And even here in the Psalm that we're looking at tonight, Psalm 127, and even as we scan over and glance at Psalm 128, we're taken into the home.

We're taken into the family. Not the extremity of life, but the normality of life, the domestic scene. I think the application here to take, before we even get into the text of Psalm 127, is to know and recognize that God is with us in every area of our lives.

[15 : 21] Wherever it is we are, whatever experience we're going through, whatever emotion we are touched by, God is with us. He's speaking to us. There's never a place that we can be where God is not with us, where God does not have an interest in our specific experience.

Abraham Kuyper says, there is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is sovereign over all, does not cry, mine.

There's never a situation that we find ourselves in, there's never an experience that we're going through that God doesn't understand. Sometimes we go through things in life and we struggle and we want to share something of our struggles with people who will understand and we look around and we sometimes we don't find people.

but we have a God who understands. We have a God who did not remain distant from us in glory but who condescended into this world and who understands every situation that we go through because he's been there first.

Hebrews 4, 15 and 16 says, for we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses but we have one who has been tempted in every way just as we are yet was without sin.

[17 : 11] And think about Matthew 1 when the angels spoke to Mary and Joseph about the child to be born. The words that are so familiar to us that were heard was they will call him Emmanuel.

which means God with us. And so this is a psalm where we see time and time again that God is with us.

And the whole Psalter as it's open shows us time and time again that God is with us. Three points to look at in the time that we have.

the first point to note is that God is with us in our work. The second thing we see in this short psalm is God is with us in our sleep.

And the final thing that we look at is God is with us in our home. So first of all God is with us in our work. Verses 1 and 2.

[18 : 16] Unless the Lord builds the house its builders labour in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city the watchmen stand guard in vain. In vain you rise early and stay up late toiling for food to eat.

I like John Stott's paraphrase of these first two verses. This is what he says. He says it is useless to launch a new enterprise or attempt to guard an old one unless the Lord blesses these labours.

Verse 1. The house builder's labour is vain unless the Lord does the building and the city watchman's vigilance is vain unless the Lord does the watching.

We may toil and overwork getting up early and going to bed late but all the time if we only knew it God grants sleep to those he loves.

Verse 2. As we think about these two verses and think about these words of John Stott as well as he makes a comment on these verses we find that there's both a warning and there's an encouragement in these opening lines.

[19 : 33] there's a warning for us not to try to work apart from God. Not to try and do things in our own strength in our own way because it's pointless.

That's the essence of what we're being taught here and warned of. It's pointless. To try to work apart from God is fruitless. It's unproductive.

It's to use the words of the psalm, it's vain. That's the warning. The encouragement for us is to take God into our workplace.

Whether our workplace is a pulpit or a classroom or a fishing boat or a school canteen or a hospital ward or a kitchen table where we're either preparing dinner or doing homeschooling.

The encouragement that we have here is that we can have and in fact we must have God with us in our work. Because it's possible to work furiously and yet our work is in vain.

[20 : 44] Remember Martha. Turn for a moment if you would to Luke chapter 10. Luke chapter 10. We'll read just a short passage from Luke chapter 10 verse 38 through to verse 42.

It says it is Jesus and his disciples were on their way. He came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said.

But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked Lord don't you care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself.

Tell her to help me. Martha Martha the Lord answered you're worried and upset about many things but only one thing is needed.

Mary has chosen what is better and it will not be taken away from her. What is Jesus saying to Martha in these few verses?

[21 : 58] Well he's saying to Martha essentially you're laboring in vain. I don't need you Martha to take out the royal Albert crockery. I don't need the house to be immaculate.

I don't need this spread that you're working so hard to prepare whilst you're ignoring what I'm trying to teach. Stop working Martha and sit at my feet.

I think that's the essence of what is being said there. Mary is the one who has been held up as the example of what what's the best thing to do sit at the feet of Jesus. Martha is neglecting to do that because she is so intent on laboring.

Now when we labor in vain we become like Martha in this instance. We get irritable. We get frustrated very quickly.

We become resentful of those who are not working as hard as we are. But when we have God with us in our work there's joy and there's purpose and there's a composure and steadiness in what we do.

[23 : 22] It's possible as individuals to work furiously and yet work in vain. That's what Martha I think teaches us. But it's also possible if we take the angle of the camera out a bit more it's possible for a whole church to be laboring in vain.

Remember the church in Ephesus Revelation chapter 2. You could turn there for just a moment. We'll just read a couple of verses from Revelation chapter 2.

This is the letters to the various churches. Remember Jesus he looks into these churches. He gives an analysis of what he sees in terms of the health or otherwise of the churches that he looks into.

And we have this big church in Ephesus it looks to be in great shape. It looks to be going places. And Jesus looks in and this is what he says.

He says I know your deeds your hard work and your perseverance. He commends them for that in a measure. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not and have found them false.

[24 : 39] Doctrinally this is a church that signed you have persevered and have endured hardships for my name and have not grown weary yet says Jesus I hold this against you you have forsaken your first love.

It's possible to have a full church in more normal times church fellowship that's jammed packed with online views.

It's possible to have a notice sheet that is normally full of church activities and to be laboring in vain. That's what Jesus said here.

That's the charge that was leveled against the church in Ephesus and so the warning that the psalm opens up with and the encouragement that is given to us as we reflect on these opening two verses is that we are to be careful to stay close to the Lord and to day by day ask him to come into our workplace to be in our church to be with us in our works so that we are not working in vain for our own age with our own mixed motivations but we're working for his glory.

Colossians 3 verses 23 and 24 says whatever you do work at it with all your heart as working for the Lord and not for human masters since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward.

[26 : 29] It is the Lord Christ your servant. We need to have the Lord with us in our work whatever it is God has put our hand to in terms of the responsibilities and the working duties that he's put before us.

If God is not with us in our work we're laboring in vain. Eveson the commentator says in the psalm we have the Old Testament equivalent of Jesus' words to his disciples where he said without me you can do nothing.

John 15 verse 5. So that's the first point from this psalm. God is with us in our work. That's the encouragement for us.

It's the warning that we're to keep in check that we must have God with us in our work. The second point here is we have to have God with us in our sleep.

I was glancing an NHS report yesterday evening when I was doing some preparation and it said in the report and I'll quote just a section from it, nearly a third of the population are suffering from insomnia which is affecting their health.

[27 : 52] It is said that a survey of the nation's sleep habits found that 30% are severely sleep deprived putting them more at risk of mental health and relationship issues.

So said the NHS report and that report dates back I think to 2011 if I can remember rightly. Now I've read reports in the paper in past months that say that during this period of lockdown the problem of not being able to sleep has not got better it's got much worse.

People in these times are struggling to sleep and so this psalm brings good news. God is with us in our sleep.

Verse 2 second half of verse 2 these few words that are so powerful and so meaningful for he grants sleep to those he loves.

maybe to illustrate this point further we can turn for a moment to Mark chapter 4. We're jumping about a wee bit tonight but it's good to have these illustrations in the New Testament from what we see in the Old Testament Psalms.

[29 : 07] Mark chapter 4 it's a familiar passage and we'll read from verse 35 to verse 41. It says there that day when evening came Jesus said to his disciples let us go over to the other side leaving the crowd behind they took him along just as he was in the boat there were also other boats with him a furious squall came up and the waves broke over the boat so that it was nearly swamped Jesus was in the stern sleeping on a cushion the disciples woke him and said teacher don't you care if we drown he got up rebuked the wind and said to the waves quiet be still then the wind died down and it was completely calm he said to his disciples why are you so afraid do you still have no faith they were terrified and asked each other who is this even even the wind and the waves obey him so there we see the disciples you don't know exactly what time it was

I don't think but the disciples are crossing from one side to the other and as was the case often in the sea of Galilee a furious squall just suddenly burst and the boat was rocking from side to side the disciples who were experienced fishermen feared for their lives they couldn't sleep they couldn't relax they were in a state of panic because they were caught in a storm which they thought may claim their very lives now for us storms take many shapes in our lives for the disciples it was an actual storm that caused them not to be able to relax or sleep for us it can be the storm of relationship breakdowns it can be the storm of the loss of health it can be financial hardship it can be the teenage storms that people go through where they get stressed out over how they look and what people think of them

COVID-19 has been something of a storm that we didn't see coming that hit us hard and these storms they stress us out if we're honest sometimes they throw us into a state of panic sometimes they cause us to say to God within our hearts don't you care and that actually was one of the most insensitive things the disciples ever said to Jesus don't you care the reason Jesus came to this world was because he did care the reason that Jesus ministered to these crowds with such compassion was that he did care the reason that he was so patient with his disciples who were so slow to learn was because he did care the reason he would go on to the cross was because of how much he cared to be fair to the disciples they couldn't yet see that they were still asking the question who is this but if you and

I this evening can see who Jesus is if we can see that he is God the son if we can see that he is the Lord and savior and the ever present helper who promises to be with us at times of distress if we can see that then we can be at peace we can sleep at night even when it is stormy Tim Keller says if you know that the one who loves you unfailingly is in complete charge of history you will sleep well and if you are overworked and overstressed you are forgetting who God is Psalm 4 and verse 8 says I will lie down and sleep in peace for you alone

O Lord make me dwell in safety God is with us in our work he is the God who wants to be with us in the workplace he is the God who promises to be with us and to give us sleep and he is the God who is with us sturdily finally in our home sometimes we take out photo albums we don't do that so much today as we used to when we had photographs that were physical things but sometimes we still do that we take out old photo albums we look at pictures of the home and the family and when we take pictures or when we took pictures in these days we had to go and get them developed we usually took pictures on happy days and happy times we didn't take pictures when everything was kicking off and so we have all these snapshots and albums of happy homes now note in the title of this psalm it's a song of ascent and it's of Solomon now Solomon was somebody who didn't have many snapshots of a happy home

[35 : 38] Solomon came from a very dysfunctional family who was David's son and David the psalmist we know he was a great man of God but he wasn't a perfect man he sinned and he sinned big he sinned in a way that brought real waves into his life and the life of those who were around him he committed adultery he committed murder and although he was forgiven we have the insight into that in Psalm 32 and Psalm 51 although we see the joy of how fully he was forgiven he still had to live with the consequences of his sin and one of the consequences of David's sin was that his home and his family life was very troubled and Solomon his son would have felt that so here

Solomon writes and he writes idealistically in a sense about home and family as God designed it and not actually as he had fully experienced it himself verse 3 to the end sons are a heritage from the Lord children are a reward from him like arrows in the hands of a warrior are sons born in one's youth blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them they will not be put to shame when they contend with their enemies in the gate again I think John Stott's comments are very succinct and they're very helpful he says children must be recognized as a heritage from the Lord verse 3 one of God's most precious gifts sons born and one's youth are like arrows for by the time their warrior father is aged they themselves will be old enough to defend and protect him more more more more however if his quiver is full of them he will be able to hold his own in any disputes in the gate that is in the space near the city gate where the business is transacted and lawsuits are heard now what is the psalmist saying here well he's saying

I think the central core message of this section is that he is saying that God is interested in he is with us in our home in our houses verse 1 that's the note psalm begins with and this is how it's developed and it's developed further in the next psalm psalm 128 I don't want to go into this in detail tonight but I think we just need to see with clarity here that God is interested in our homes he is interested in he is to be at the center of family life if we are those who have children we have children because God has gifted us with children and these children we have been charged to love and care for when they are needy in their youth and then we see the reversal in this psalm as well that the children who are loved and cared for by their parents in their early years in time become those who care for their needy parents when they are in their elderly years there was no welfare state in

Old Testament times there were no old folks homes Ligon Duncan I think it was said God's design for care of the elderly was children children and so we see here God is interested in God is with us his desire his determination his right is to be with us at the very center of our homes and our family life we're seeing a lot of state interference actually in the design that they would have for our family life and structure but in this psalm God is saying to us the design for family the design for households is my design if your families and your houses are to thrive so what's the main message as we close of psalm 127

I think it's that God has an interest in all of our lives and not just an hour or two on a Sunday he wants to be with us in our homes he wants to have us put him at the very center of our family life and as I said psalm 128 we'll develop that further he wants to be with us in our work whatever our work is and when we have him at the center of everything in our lives we don't need to stress we must not stress rather we can sleep knowing that he is lord of all he is in the commentator he says whether building a place to live in constructing a house or temple to serve as god's earthly home as solomon did or raising a family it can all go sadly wrong without god's involvement so the encouragement in this psalm is that we would have god involved that we would be constantly asking him to come in and to walk with us and to be with us the motto of the city of edinburgh i learned last night in preparation is nisi don't know how i'm pronouncing this right but nisi dominus frustra latin words and they're taken from this psalm literally the motto of the city of edinburgh is without the lord frustration sadly i think it's a motto that edinburgh has drifted from it's a great motto for us to take into our lives without the lord frustration but with the lord our labour is not in vain our homes are not in ruin and our sleep is not broken we'll pray lord god we pray that you would indeed be at the centre of our whole lives we thank you that jesus was called immanuel god with us we pray that you'd forgive us for the times that we try to hold you at a distance lord forgive us for the times that we try to shield certain parts of our lives from your presence help us we pray to take the warnings and the encouragements from this psalm and to have you in our workplace to have you in our homes and even as we lie down to sleep to sleep in peace knowing that you oh lord are with us and you enable us to dwell in safety even when we're in the storm to hear our prayers and give us faith we pray to believe and we ask these things in jesus name and for jesus sake amen we'll sing to conclude that great hymn abide with me fast falls the even tide the darkness deepens lord with me abide when other helpers fail and comforts flee help of the helpless oh abide with me abide abide with me fast falls the even tide the darkness

[44 : 45] deepens lord with me abide when other helpers fail and comforts flee help of the helpless oh abide with me with me swift to its close ebbs out life's little day earth's joys grow dim its glories pass away change and decay in all around i see oh thou who changest not abide with me i need thy presence every every passing now what but thy grace can foil the tempter's power who like thyself my guide my guide and stay can be through cloud and sunshine and sunshine o abide with me i fiddal whole with me at hand to bless ills have no weight and tears no bitterness where is death sting where great my victory i try to help with me at hand to bless ills have no weight i triumph still if thou abide with me hold thou my cross before my closing eyes shine through the gloom and bow and bow and point me to the sky earth's morning breaks and earth's vain shadows flee in life in death oh lord abide in death oh lord abide the who will be me and i may the grace of our lord jesus christ and the love of god the father and the fellowship of god the holy spirit be with us all both now and forevermore amen