

Psalm 128

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Date: 19 July 2020

Preacher: Reverend David MacLeod

[0:00] Good evening and a warm welcome to the service this evening.

We're going to begin this time of worship by singing to God's praise in Psalm 128. Psalm 128, Blessed is each one that fears the Lord, and walketh in his ways, for of thy labour thou shalt eat, and happy be always.

We'll sing the whole of this psalm to God's praise, and after we sing it, Ian A. McSween will lead us in prayer in Gaelic. Blessed is each one that fears the Lord, and walketh in his ways.

For of thy labour thou shalt eat, and happy be always.

Thy wife shall last a fruitful vine by thy house sides be found.

[1:30] Thy children like to all lift plants about thy table round.

Behold the man that fears the Lord, thus blessed shall he be.

The Lord shall out of Zion give his blessing unto thee.

Thou shalt Jerusalem's good behold, whilst thou on earth dost dwell.

Thou shalt thy children's children see, and peace on Israel.

[2:34] Oh,oy■, divorce Islam. We've even Britain have a beautiful day showcase of Holyston by his force.

We give them the amazing Divine heraus for the Dalman or Dáil.

on the Bianachan and Hau Tumag ymach Osar Cain. Hachin ygataich i eigr asfór gyrra biachgich ynghannau egys chanir cael anin a ha adiedebi echin fashg oryf.

Ach, hachin taingal gyn Danic Criasta egys gynntarainia cwmysach Cormann Marceau egys gyfl ar wurnion y dosuas egys gyfl y gwention y hwle fachgol.

Hachin ygataich i eich cwtioch gwyflau'r n■rnion eich o'r wach eich o'r nyn, eich o'r wann ywrysfyn egys merachgen. Ach, hachin anion syn i eigr awsfwr.

[3:37] Ha fys acaf sain a níchyn na ha tyfystau na'ch críchyn egys hachin y gwrni gynntiw málinir ynnoch gynnyd a hachin y módlach dynan eich o'r dól ysdiach eich o'r rauwsachig dólchgo.

Ach, hachin y gwrni son ar tiachgyda a ha gyfi'r condrin ynoch egys ach, hachin taing gylo jona hwle niha eich o'r dynan eich i gwrachfwr. Ach, hachin y gwrni gwybiw málinirish san egys gynnyd a hen mochol gwyfel yw gachwmalsuas nw ddau ha e ddol ysdiachyn y fachgol a fys gynnyd a mochol gwyfel ywys gafiwygachig.

Ach, hachin y gwrni nw ddau eich o'r ddoddwymach gynnyd a ffein críchyn a fachgol a fysgol gynnyd a fysgol gynnyd a chrysta fysgol ychyd ywyr.

Ach, hachin y gwrni gynnyd a gwrachfwr nw dda wanna g Becca bachaggag eich o'r shant ag Johnnyq a hachin yn a chrysta, a chrysta a chrysta fwoSAd a chrysta f■ a chrysta fedha■ a chrysta cynnodde lemnfa a chrysta fyl■■■ ddoli gynnyd refresh aw tech, bogus flowa chrysta, ryd sma phb passion being Keine and Thunderbilled not holding him strong, his work with him the man.

He gave wanted you to do the best and you better take off his horn too. His voice music, to stain money in any type of openwork and with their resources, while exporting it in the way of doing things so many times.

[5:39] But a tax Corridor, even this is calledbecues for the teacher. He has been cattingled with a strong plan. These people have a Extension job stopped smoking.

And he■ McGonisee, the first language that he ate at hisitos. Many of them Marilyn Sannaia was famous, was the Church Ngaen Skiadin.

produced years ago, big money, and that that generation of children had been calm and glamorous happened to give Foscop lost their women A'so negun stairs and cwettigolch er nsand buoy for listening to each other, faculty help children and work together and which is to haveAr■ thief and get them done and to get out the students and move to houses into groceries.

Maintenant, I'll get back to the next guy because I'll follow his dawg with all these others. We will not ke nost■■, just check out the tickets and hoarse in abroad. We will get there and hopefully to be about who Kumschen, ich ist Magena Wochgen, er skachierst du. Amen.

Let's read now God's Word, the psalm that we sang, Psalm 128, a song of ascents. Blessed are all who fear the Lord, who walk in his ways.

[7 : 32] You will eat the fruit of your labor, blessings, and prosperity will be yours. Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house, your sons like olive shoots around your table.

Thus is the man blessed who fears the Lord. May the Lord bless you from Zion all the days of your life. May you see the prosperity of Jerusalem and may you live to see your children's children.

Peace be upon Israel. Amen. We pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you again for your Word and we pray that as we take a moment now to meditate upon it, that you would help us to understand that you would stir our hearts, that our hearts would burn within us as we know your Word at work within us.

We pray for the help of the Holy Spirit. We pray that he would apply the truths of the Scripture to each of our lives. And we ask that we would know in this time that we have met with God.

So help us, we pray, and what we pray for ourselves, we pray for the congregations around us, the denominations that meet wherever Christ crucified is preached. We pray, Lord, that you would be working both here in this community, across the islands, across the nation, and across all nations.

[8 : 51] May the name of Jesus be lifted up and may many be drawn in salvation to him. And we pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. We've all heard the old tale about there being a pot of gold at the end of the rainbow, except we know that there's not a pot of gold at the end of the rainbow.

And if we go chasing the pot of gold, not only will we miss out on a pot of gold, but we'll also miss out on the beauty of the rainbow.

And you might ask the question, what does that have to do with Psalm 128? And we'll pick up on that in a moment. But as we look at the Psalm and as we just scan through these verses, we can see that the word that's repeated in this psalm, the word that's emphasized, is the word blessing. Four times, I think, in the duration of this short psalm, we read the word blessed or blessing.

Blessed are all who fear the Lord, verse 1, who walk in his ways.

You will eat the fruit of your labor. Blessings and prosperity will be yours. Verse 4, thus is the man blessed who fears the Lord. Blessed, verse 5, may the Lord bless you from Zion all the days of your life.

[10 : 17] So blessing is a theme within this psalm. And it's actually the first time, I think, in this grouping of the Psalms of Ascent that we hear the word blessing or blessing being used.

Now, if we think about our modern context, if we think about our daily lives, when do we most hear the word blessing being used? Well, I think we would answer that by saying the time that we hear the word blessing being used, most often is when somebody sneezes.

When he sneezes, then the people around him say, bless you. Why is that? Well, we may not know. It actually relates back to the days of the plague in the Middle Ages.

One of the symptoms of somebody who had the plague or who was coming down with the plague was sneezing. So when someone sneezed at that time of pandemic, the people around them would say, bless you, which essentially meant in that context, God protect you.

I suppose the reality is that the things that we value, the things that we care for, we protect. We want protection over.

[11 : 36] At our homes, we try to secure them. We have locks and alarms to give protection. We have insurance should things go wrong. At our cars, we try to protect them.

I'm sure John Shillabos wouldn't mind me saying that he has the most beautiful Mark II Golf GTI. And where does he park it?

Does he park it out on the main road? You know, where all the lorries that are passing through Tarbert could do damage to it and knock the wing mirrors off it? Where it could be scratched and get into a mess?

No, he doesn't park it there. He has it in a garage. It's protected. Our health. We try to protect it. That's why we've been keeping the rules.

That's why we've been staying inside and social distancing. That's why we're still in a church building with no people. We want the protection of our health.

[12 : 38] And here the psalmist, he's writing about knowing God's blessing, God's protection over himself as an individual, over his family, and over the nation.

And I'm sure we share in wanting to know that blessing of God. We want to know that protection of God over our lives, over the things that we do, over the people that we love and cherish.

And so the question perhaps is, as we begin this psalm, how do we get this? How do we obtain God's blessing? How do we ensure that we have God's protection?

It's the question that we very quickly ask, even as we come to this psalm. And yet, actually, it's the wrong question to ask. You know, if we look at a psalm like this and we see these blessings coming off the page, and if our immediate response is to want these blessings and to pursue these blessings, rather than to pursue the God who is the fount of every blessing, it's like chasing the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow.

We'll never get them. And yet this psalm, it tells us that God's blessing is available. It is possible to receive God's blessing, but if we pursue it singularly, just to get the blessing, then we'll never get it.

[14 : 19] So there's something of a riddle, actually, in this psalm. But hopefully as we step through it, we'll get some clarity. The first point I think we need clarity on is what it actually means to be blessed.

It's one of these words that is a recurring word in Scripture. A very quick search told me that it occurs around about 380 times.

So it's a significant word. What does it mean? What does it mean? How do we define blessing or to bless? Well, probably the simplest definition of what it means to be blessed is to be happy.

Spurgeon says the last psalm, talking about Psalm 127, ended with a blessing. For the word there translated happy is the same as that which is here rendered blessed.

So these two songs, says Spurgeon, Psalm 127 and Psalm 128, they're joined by a catchword. And what we have in Psalm 128 is a picture of what it looks like to have that blessed happiness, that biblical happiness.

[15 : 38] And we see it in three areas or three phases of life. First of all, we see the happy man. I want to spend most of our time on the first point.

And then we see the happy family. And finally, and I'll just make mention of this and not much more, we see the happy nation. So first of all, we see the happy man in this psalm.

I have a book in the study which I dip in and out of. It's called The Happy Man, The Abiding Witness of Lachlan McKenzie. He was a minister in Loch Cairn in the late 18th century.

Now, what was it that made him happy? How was it that he was known for being this happy man? What was the root of that happiness? Well, it was the Lord.

It was the Lord and his relationship with the Lord that made him happy. And that's the opening message in this psalm. The blessed or the happy man or woman or boy or girl has the Lord in their life.

[16 : 43] There's two things that we see here specifically in relation to the happy man, the happy person. First of all, they have the fear of the Lord. And secondly, we see that they follow the Lord.

So first of all, the fear of the Lord. Blessed are all who fear the Lord, who walk in his ways.

Spurgeon says, the fear of God is the cornerstone of all blessedness.

We must reverence the ever-blessed God before we can be blessed ourselves. So what does it mean to fear the Lord?

Well, it means to revere him. It means to stand in awe of him. It means to have a deep and profound and loving respect for him.

That's the definition. And we might say, well, that doesn't sound much like fear. You know, when we think about our English word fear, you might say, we're not to fear God then in the sense that we understand the word fear.

[17 : 59] And many would say, well, that's right, we shouldn't fear God. We respect him. We are in awe of him. But we shouldn't fear God. That's what many people would say.

But actually, I would hesitate to move quickly from that. James Montgomery Boyce gives a word of caution on that point. He says, we should not dismiss the idea of fear too easily.

For in many respects, God is truly terrifying. God is holy, majestic, forceful, and frighteningly opposed to everything that is unholy or would seek to diminish his glory.

we cannot take God lightly. As we see God's power, as he reveals his power to us, as we consider his holiness, as we think about his justice, as we understand more and more of his greatness, it's

right that, in part, that should move us to fear.

When Isaiah saw the Lord in Isaiah chapter 6, how does he respond? Does he respond with a casual over-familiarity towards God?

[19 : 23] No, he doesn't. He responds in verse 5 by saying, Woe to me! I am ruined, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty.

Isaiah, when he sees more of who God is, he fears the Lord, as should we.

But that fear should cause us to seek peace with God, and not to run from him, and certainly not to rebel against him.

And when we have peace with God, when we are reconciled to God, as it says in 2 Corinthians 5.20, when we can say with the psalmist that the Lord is on my side, the Lord is my helper, the Lord is my refuge, the Lord is my strength, when we can say that, the logical next step is that all other fears flee.

And a life without fear of the things of this world is a happy life. So let me ask those who are Christians, who are watching just now, do you have a happy life?

[20 : 59] Or is our happiness stifled by fear? It shouldn't be. It must not be. What is it that keeps us up at night?

What fears are so big that we encounter and experience in this world that God cannot handle them? And the answer is no fears. Think about Romans chapter 8.

We were in it not long ago in the mornings. The apostle Paul is the writer. Now, did the apostle Paul have enemies? He had a whole queue of enemies, always ready to oppose him.

Did he have reasons to be anxious? Well, humanly speaking, he had many reasons to be anxious.

So do we find him miserable and fearful when we encounter him in Scripture?

No, we don't. And in Romans 8, he famously says, if God be for us, who can be against us?

[22 : 07] Or think about David the psalmist. Again, a man who was frequently under pressure. He always seemed to be in danger. He's a man who, humanly speaking, had many, many reasons to be fearful.

So what does he have to say on this subject of fear? Well, perhaps you could turn with me for a moment to Psalm 27. Because in that Psalm, David almost gives us a seminar on how to handle our fears.

And I'm conscious I'm packing up on this a little bit, but the reason I'm doing that is because I understand that there are many people just now who are fearful.

There's a tangible sense of fear amongst many people at this stage in our experience in this world.

This is a Psalm that's of great help when we are wrestling with fears.

Psalm 27. The Psalmist says, The Lord is my light and my salvation. Whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life.

[23 : 17] Of whom shall I be afraid? When evil men advance against me to devour my flesh, when my enemies and my foes attack me, they will stumble and fall.

Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear. Though war break out against me, even then will I be confident. And we want to actually ask David at this point, what's your secret?

Don't you see the dangers, toils and snares? And don't you see the enemies and the evil men and the armies that are opposed to you? And David says, Yes, I see them.

I've written of them in the psalm. But I also see, says the psalmist, I gaze upon the Lord who is bigger than all these dangers and fears.

That's what we see in the next section of Psalm 27. One thing I ask of the Lord, this is what I seek, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to seek him in his temple.

[24 : 30] For in the day of trouble he will keep me safe in his dwelling. He will hide me in the shelter of his tabernacle and set me high upon a rock. Then my head will be exalted above the enemies around me.

At his tabernacle will I sacrifice with shouts of joy. I will sing and make music to the Lord. And if we hit pause again at that point, we could ask the psalmist, how did you get to this place of being able to manage these very real fears in this world?

How did you get to this place of security and happiness even in the midst of trouble? And the answer is he got to this place through prayer and through preaching God's word to his own soul.

And we see that as the psalm 27 goes on. Verse 7 Hear my voice when I call to you, O Lord. Be merciful to me and answer me.

That's a prayer. My heart says of you, seek his face. Your face, Lord, I will seek. Now he's preaching to his own soul. Do not hide your face from me.

[25 : 47] Do not turn your servant away in anger. You have been my helper. Do not reject me or forsake me, O God, my Savior. It's a prayer. Though my father and mother forsake me, the Lord will receive me.

He's preaching to himself. Teach me your way, O Lord. Lead me in a straight path because of my oppressors. Do not turn me over to the desire of my foes or false witnesses.

For false witnesses rise up against me, breathing out violence. Again, he's praying. He's asking for God's help. I'm still confident of this.

Verse 13. I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait for the Lord. Be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord.

He's praying there in verse 13. He's preaching again to his own heart in verse 14. And as he bows before God, as he fears the Lord, as he comes to God in prayer, as he rests upon the promises of God, we see the psalmist.

[26 : 52] We see the psalmist knowing God's blessing. So whether it's Lachlan McKenzie, the happy man, whether it's the apostle Paul, whether it's David the psalmist, whether it's the psalmist who wrote this psalm, whoever that was, a life which is happy, a life where day by day we realize that we need fear.

No one and nothing is a life where we are steadied by that awesome, reverent, loving fear of the Lord.

That's the first thing we see within this point. And the second thing we see within the happy man here is that there is that determination to follow the Lord.

It's not just a fear of the Lord in the inner man, but there's a determination to follow the Lord in the outer experience. Blessed are all who fear the Lord and who walk in his ways.

To walk in his ways is another way of saying that we follow the Lord. And that's what the Lord Jesus called the first disciples to do and that's what he still calls all his disciples to do, to walk in his ways.

[28 : 10] There's various walks around Tarbert that we've discovered during lockdown that perhaps we never knew were there before lockdown. They're marked with colour coded posts that guide us along the way.

And the reality is the Lord has marked out for his people a way to walk. So if we fear the Lord, if we love him, if we revere him, that will be seen in the way that we walk, in the way that we live.

To be a Christian, it's a personal thing, yes. Now that comes out actually very clearly in the King James Version. Blessed is every one personal that feareth the Lord.

But to be a Christian, it's not a private thing. It's not something that's confined to our hearts and our emotions. It's something that should be seen and noticed in the way that we walk.

Spurgeon says the religious life, which God declares to be blessed, must be practical as well as emotional. It is idle to talk of fearing the Lord if we act like those who have no care, whether there be a God or no.

[29 : 26] God's ways will be our ways if we have a sincere reverence for him. If the heart is joined unto God, the feet will follow hard after him.

a man's heart will be seen in his walk and the blessing will come where heart and walk are both with God.

So the happy man or woman or boy or girl is the one who both fears the Lord and who follows the Lord.

Now is it possible to be an unhappy Christian? Well yeah, it's very possible to be an unhappy Christian.

When we talk the talk but we don't walk the walk, when we say that we fear the Lord, when we profess to be Christians but our life doesn't align with that profession, when we slip into a pattern of hypocrisy, we become the most miserable people on earth.

[30 : 40] But when we are those who both trust and obey the Lord, when we are those who both fear the Lord and follow the Lord, even though it may be hard at times to travel along the path that the Lord marks out for us, we can be happy.

we can know God's blessing. So that's the first point, the happy, the happy man. Second point, much more quickly, we see the happy family, which kind of overlaps with the previous son. You will eat the fruit of your labor, blessings and prosperity will be yours. Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house, your sons like olive shoots around your table, verses two and three, the happy family.

We sometimes talk about happy families and usually when we talk about happy families in conversation, we're being sarcastic. We talk about playing at happy families, playing because the reality is often not that happy.

That's this world. sin. And the reason for that is sin and it takes us all the way back to the beginning of the Bible. Think about Genesis chapter two in the Garden of Eden.

[32 : 08] In that chapter we have a scene of happiness, we have a scene of the most pure blessing. We see husband and wife, Adam and Eve. We see God's design for the family.

We see them walking with God. We see them at peace with each other. We see them seeking to be fruitful and to increase in number. It's a happy blessed scene in the Garden of Eden because there was no sin.

And then as Adam disobeyed God, sin came in. And that first couple went from a status of being blessed to be under sin's curse.

So what happened next? Well we see very quickly that Adam and Eve, they didn't walk with God. But when they became aware that God was close, they hid from him.

And they weren't at peace with each other anymore. They actually blamed each other for the sin that had come in. And when children came, Cain and Abel, they turned on each other in violence.

[33 : 20] So the fallen family was not a happy one. And yet here in this psalm, we have a contrasting picture with that. We see a happy family.

So what do we see in this picture? We see two elements within this. We see first of all work and then second we see family. At work you will eat, verse two, the fruit of your labour.

Blessings and prosperity will be yours. We see a man here in Psalm 128 who is not labouring in vain, which is the theme that they go into in Psalm 127.

We see a man who is at work, at productive, fruitful work. One commentator, I can't remember who it was, said, God is the God of labourers.

We are not to leave our worldly callings because the Lord has called us by grace. we are not promised a blessing upon romantic idleness or unreasonable dreaming, but upon hard work and honest industry.

[34 : 27] when lockdown hit and many people were put out in a furlough for three or four days, people were delighted about that.

But after four or five days or one or two weeks and now, I don't know, 12 weeks, 13, 14 weeks, whatever it is, people start to feel low.

Why is that? Well, the reason for that is because God made us to work. There's few things less attractive than lazy Christians.

Jesus, when we think about his life, was far from lazy. He was up and doing. He was industrious. He was working whilst it was day and our calling is to be like him.

There's blessing, there's happiness in being like him. We are called within the family scene here, we're called to work.

[35 : 34] The second thing we see within this is actually the reality of the family, the members within the family. Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house, your sons, will be like olive shoots around your table, your children.

Thus is the man blessed who fears the Lord. So we see in verse 3 the husband and the wife, and then Spurgeon says in relation to verse 3, to complete domestic bliss, children are sent.

I have to admit, I chuckled slightly when I read that last line. It's true, we know it's true, but we may not always in the heat of the moment describe family life as domestic bliss.

Sometimes in a family, we look at each other and the first word that comes to mind is not blessing. blessing. And yet the reality is that the family that God has put us in, the wife, the children, and maybe grandchildren, verse 6, that God may have given us, are a huge blessing and not a burden.

And we need to keep remembering that. so when the children aren't sleeping, and when your husband doesn't put his socks in the washing basket but leaves them to the side of it, when the grandparents make some repeatedly helpful suggestions about how to bring up your children

properly and not how you bring them up presently, let's try not to roar in frustration.

[37:27] let's remember Psalm 128 and let's remember and be thankful for the blessing of family.

Now does this mean if we don't have a wife, if we don't have children and grandchildren that we don't and we can't know God's blessing? Well no, that's not what it means at all.

I think what we're being shown in this Psalm, I think what's happening in this Psalm is that we're being taken back to God's original design, we're being taken back to Eden, we're being shown how as we fear the Lord, as we trust him, as we obey him, we're being shown that he is able to undo the curse that sin brought in and bring his blessing to bear upon our individual lives, upon our family lives, and finally upon the life of the nation.

That's the final thing we see and I'm just going to mention it and no more, the happy nation. May the Lord bless you from Zion, verse 5, all the days of your life, may you see the prosperity of Jerusalem and may you live to see your children's children, peace be upon Israel.

We saw, I think it was in the Trump campaign some years ago, one of the straplines was to make America great again. We've seen similar types of things in campaigns here, putting the great back in Great Britain.

[39:09] Now, the question is how can that be done? And we touched on this in the morning. How can a nation that has become sad and spiritually poor become prosperous spiritually?

and happy blessed? Well, the answer to that question is not by chasing the blessings.

No, that's like chasing the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. And we don't become happy and blessed and prosperous by trying harder to become happy and blessed and prosperous.

the key to unlocking this is the fear of the Lord. And that's the main message.

It's the closing message as well of this psalm. That's the application. It's an encouragement. It's an exhortation to fear the Lord.

[40:18] That's the inner ring of this psalm. It's a call to fear the Lord. And rippling out from the center is the happy man and the happy family and even the happy nation.

we'll pray. Our heavenly father we thank you for this psalm. We thank you for the fact that you are a God who who does love to bless us.

We thank you for the fact that we can know your blessing. And we realize Lord that that came at great cost.

not to us but to you. We thank you for Jesus. We thank you that he is the one who came to this world to take sin's curse upon himself.

Cursed is everyone who hangs on the tree. We thank you that Jesus went to that tree. He went to that cross. to take the curse from us to become a curse for us so that we can know the blessing of God.

[41:45] We thank you that the promise of your word is that if we are trusting in Christ there will come a day when we will know perfect blessing, perfect happiness, perfect peace.

and we recognize that that is the day that we will be in heaven. As long as we are in this world, we pray Lord that you would help us.

Help us to have that constant fear of the Lord. Help us to follow the Lord in all the ways of life that you mark out for us.

And we pray that as we do so that you would bless us in our own hearts, bless our homes and our families. And we pray once more for that blessing of God upon our nation.

Give us again that fear of God that we may know the blessing of God in your time. To hear our prayers, take away our sin, we ask this in Jesus' name.

[42:57] Amen. We close by singing to God's praise that great hymn, O For A Closer Walk With God.

O for a closer walk with God, a calm and heavenly frame.

A light to shine upon the road that leads me to the land.

Where is the blessedness I knew when first I saw the Lord?

Where is the soul refreshing view of Jesus and his world?

[44:09] What peaceful I once I once enjoyed how sweet their memories still but they have left an aching void the world can never fill.

Return, O holy dove return, sweet messenger of rest.

I hate the sins that made me mourn and drove thee from my breast.

The dearest idol I have known what e'er that idol be.

Help me to tear it from thy throne and worship only thee.

[45 : 30] So shall my walk be close with God come and serene my friend so pure a light shall mark the road that leads me to the land.

And now 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 forever more. Amen.