

A Premise For Life's Work.

Text: Psa 128:1-6

Suggested Hymns:

257, 378, 151, 621, 538

- 1) Blessedness Is Not a Matter of "Much"
- 2) Blessedness Has Existed In The Midst Of Little
- 3) Blessedness Is A Matter Of The One Thing That Counts

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Psalm 128:1-6, *¹ Blessed is every one who fears the LORD, Who walks in His ways. ² When you eat the labor of your hands, You shall be happy, and it shall be well with you. ³ Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine In the very heart of your house, Your children like olive plants All around your table. ⁴ Behold, thus shall the man be blessed Who fears the LORD. ⁵ The LORD bless you out of Zion, And may you see the good of Jerusalem All the days of your life. ⁶ Yes, may you see your children's children. Peace be upon Israel!* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

What do you make of this psalm? Is it a new formula for being a success in business without trying? Is it a workable platform for Christians who work in an unchristian industry? Is it a program for getting along in a union that is anything but a communion of saints?

It seems to say that God-fearing work pays off. *"Fear the Lord, walk in His ways, and He will make it worth your while"* — it can't be saying that, can it? And yet it does, doesn't it?

Listen again, *¹ Blessed is every one who fears the LORD, Who walks in His ways. ² When you eat the labor of your hands, You shall be happy, and it shall be well with you. ³ Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine In the very heart of your house, Your children like olive plants All around your table. ⁴ Behold, thus shall the man be blessed Who fears the LORD.*

This psalm in the Old Testament expresses to the people still under the old covenant, what they could hope for, that God takes an interest in them and in the needs of the human body and shows how much God is willing to get involved in the day-to-day providing for a living.

Our Lord said almost the same thing as the psalmist. The Gospel for today gives us the same message. Let us listen to part of the Gospel reading again, Matthew 6:33, ³³ ***“But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.”***

The “things” Jesus was speaking of were life, things to eat and drink, clothes, and money. He starts from a different point of view, but His conclusion is the same as that of the psalmist. God pays off to the person who seeks first the Kingdom of God. ***Blessed is every one who fears the LORD, Who walks in His ways.***

Do you believe it? Do you believe that those who *“fear the Lord and walk in His ways will be blessed”*? Is there a simple cause-and-effect relationship here? It is something on which to stake your life’s operating plan? Will you base your life’s work on this premise? Let us consider the question - a premise for life’s work. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. Blessedness Is Not a Matter of “Much”

Obviously the circumstances called “blessedness” do not mean having *“all that a person could want.”* In the claims to happiness made in the psalm there are no extravagant desires expressed. Blessedness will involve getting to eat what you grow. Farmers in our day and in our country think in terms of hundreds or thousands of tonnes — and they do not think of eating it all.

They will sell, trade, and exchange. Sometimes they may not receive a “fair” exchange for what they grow, measured in terms of what other workers receive for a comparable effort and a comparable work week. But there is never a question of whose it all is. It is theirs. And this is true of most people in our land. And there is much happiness in that!

In a day when invading armies or other warring groups express the forceful opinion that “might” made their “right” of ownership stronger than a mere claim based on production by “the work of one’s hands,” it is this basic and small right that the psalmist called a part of “blessedness.”

Or take the hope expressed with the words, *Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine In the very heart of your house, Your children like olive plants All around your table.* — even this is but a reach for minimal happiness. The psalmist’s hope is that his sons and daughters won’t all die in child-birth and that they will survive childhood diseases and grow up to be able to sit at the table.

The point that should hold our attention is that we must take care to recognise what our blessings are, as we ask, how blessed are the blessed? We who can eat what we grow, and grow more than we can eat, and can keep what we own, need to realise that blessedness does not consist in the abundance of possessions.

The death rate of children, the lowest in the history of civilisation, is a blessing given to us, which has not been given to all the rest of the world. The psalmist’s words should remind us that “blessedness” is not something measured by the amount of goods we possess.

Blessedness is not a static condition, not the way we would feel if we were clutching everything we could ever want. Blessedness is not a state of being, as much as a way of living. It is not a motionlessness but dynamic living.

It is life on the way, life with a purpose, life lived for God and His people. When a person knows these things and lives this way, he has found the premise or basis for his work and is blessed.

The psalm promises ‘blessedness’ — defined in terms of things, possibly not all that one could want, but things in any event, things like food and children — he asserts that that kind of blessedness comes to the one who fears God and walks in His ways.

The psalmist does use very material things to picture blessedness, but surely he was aware of the fact that “blessedness” often exists in the very absence of such “blessings.”

2. Blessedness Has Existed In The Midst Of Little

More than one verse in Psalms and Proverbs expresses this part of Israel’s “wisdom.” We read in Psalm 37:16, ¹⁶ *A little that a righteous man has Is better than the riches of many wicked.* And in Psalm 119:72 ⁷² *The law of Your mouth is better to me Than thousands of coins of gold and silver.* And in

Proverbs 15:16, ¹⁶ ***Better is a little with the fear of the LORD, Than great treasure with trouble.***

If we are to understand this premise for our life's work, we must realise that "blessedness" is not a matter of much. It can exist, and it has existed, and it does exist in the midst of little.

Hannah had no children, and then she had Samuel. But then she did not have him again, for she dedicated him to the Lord, and he grew up at Eli's table, not her own. Was she not "blessed" at all three stages? She may not have realised it, but we now see it clearly. Her blessedness was constant: while she had nothing, while she had so much, and while she had little, she was blessed.

Take the virgin Mary, for another instance. Her privilege of having the Child Jesus grow up as an olive shoot at her kitchen table was one of the greatest ever given by God. When she saw that shoot beaten, broken, and nailed to the tree of the cross, when the sword passed through her own soul also, it would have not been easy for her to quote our text, ***Behold, thus shall the man be blessed Who fears the LORD.***

And yet she is called "the blessed virgin Mary"; and she realised it and sang, ***"My soul magnifies the Lord,"*** ⁴⁷ ***And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior.*** ⁴⁸ ***For He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant; For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed.*** ¹

Take our Lord Himself. When His body hung on the cross, He took a different psalm for His own. He took Psalm 22 and cried out, ***My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?*** He did not quote our text, ***You shall be happy, and it shall be well with you.***

And yet His conduct from the time He set His face steadfastly to go to Jerusalem until He cried triumphantly, ***"It is finished,"*** and commended His Spirit into the hand of God, His Father, proved the passage from Hebrews 12:2 to be true that ***for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.***

Jesus was happy and all was well with Him, for He had said, ***"Thy will be done,"*** to a God whom He knew (for He was Himself God) to be good, loving, concerned, and able and willing to help.

3. Blessedness Is A Matter Of The One Thing That Counts

Psalms 128 repeats the theme of the preceding psalm: a contented enjoyment of the possessions and the family, which the Lord gives, is true happiness. This psalm is both a promise of blessing and a prayer of blessing.

This psalm, which is a blessing on the family, is also a blessing on the nation, because as the family goes, so goes the nation. The blessing of a nation starts with godliness in the hearts of parents. Such parents fear God and strive to keep His commandments. Their strength flows to the children through the contentment and peace it produces in the family.

From solid families strength flows to the nation. From solid, godly families come workers who will build up the nation, parents who will raise godly children, and children who are our hope for the future. Without such families the future is dark. From such families the nation and the church will find strength.

So the point is that blessedness is not an accounting of things but a matter of the one thing that counts — a relationship with God. The psalmist uses terms of “*food and children*” to describe the happiness we know when we have God as our own. It helps us think about happiness, to help us feel it the way we feel happiness when our baby hugs us, the way we feel happiness after a good Sunday dinner.

But his understanding of the real source and content of blessedness is illustrated in the words, ⁵ *The LORD bless you out of Zion, And may you see the good of Jerusalem All the days of your life.*

It was at the temple, on Mount Zion, in Jerusalem that God made it continually clear to Israel that He had established a loving relationship with them. All that He had done for them “*with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm,*”² the rescue from Egypt and the deliverance from wilderness and Canaanite enemies, all were symbolised in the religious ceremonies at Jerusalem.

And all that was behind those acts — His covenant with them in which He promised to be their God, “*showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love Me and keep My commandments,*”³ was visible in the temple. That He was a forgiving God who would remove their trespasses from them as far as the east is from the west was made clear to them in every sacrifice at the altar. That God was concerned about them was made evident in every dealing through the

prophets and priests. That God was able to help was made apparent in His constant presence in the temple.

Isn't this what made Hannah blessed? Her blessedness was that God was the kind of God He is, that He did concern Himself about her, that she knew it and was able to trust and confide in the God who helps.

Isn't this what made the virgin Mary blessed? She said so as we read in Luke 1:49-50, ⁴⁹ *For He who is mighty has done great things for me, And holy is His name.* ⁵⁰ *And His mercy is on those who fear Him From generation to generation.* She knew the God who did great things for her and for all nations, the God so concerned that He helps.

God wanted to make it unmistakable that blessedness was possible for every person in the world. He showed us what kind of God He is by taking on the human nature. He made His love as real as the psalmist's images by becoming a child. He made all the sacrifices of the temple understandable and effective by the offering up of His own life in Jesus Christ's death for sin. And He triumphed. He is God. He does rule. He can help. He is concerned about us.

All this He made as clear as the psalmist's food to eat when He appeared alive after His resurrection, ate with His disciples — a piece of fish and honeycomb — and promised to be with them always.

“Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, Whose sin is covered. ² Blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity, And in whose spirit there is no deceit” the psalmist wrote in Psalm 32:1-2.

Blessedness is available because God is that kind of God, a forgiving God, who does concern Himself about us. Blessedness is yours when you fear God — that is, stand in awe of a love so great that we need not be afraid even though we are sinful. Blessedness is yours when you realise that God can and does do all things well. Blessedness is yours when deceit is gone from your heart and you follow through on such an awe by following God's will, by *“walking in His ways,”* saying with the Lord, *“Thy will be done.”*

In that awe, in that obedience is the premise for all of our life's work and because of it we can know blessedness. Though we endure the cross, we can

despise the shame for the joy that is set before us. *Blessed is every one who fears the LORD, Who walks in His ways.* Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Luke 1:46-48

² Deuteronomy 26:8

³ Ex. 20:6