

Trusting God for Your Family

Psalm 127:1-5

Halifax: August 17, 2008

Introduction:

Over the last couple of weeks, in our Ephesian Sermon Series,

- we have been looking at the way God has ordered the family.
- We have seen that when He has instituted that by marriage, a husband and wife become one... one household, one family.
 - We have seen further that God appoints the man to be the head of the household.
 - As such, he bears the responsibility for the state of his household before God.
 - It is a huge responsibility...
 - There is a lot more to say about it as we continue in Ephesians.

But this morning, I want to introduce you to a new Psalm of Focus.

- For you who don't know, every few weeks we break from our regular sermon series and I preach a sermon from a Psalm that in some way relates to our regular series...
 - Then, we sing from that Psalm each week until we take up another Psalm of Focus.
 - The Psalm I have chosen to go along with a husband's responsibility to lead his family is Psalm 127.

I. This Psalm opens with a clear declaration that all your efforts to build a house are worthless unless the LORD builds the house.

- Look at verse 1-2
 - Psalm 127:1-2: Unless the LORD builds the house, They labor in vain who build it; Unless the LORD guards the city, The watchman stays awake in vain. It is vain for you to rise up early, To sit up late, To eat the bread of sorrows; For so He gives His beloved sleep.

A. There is a sense in which every man is building and preserving.

1. God made us to do these things.

- When He first created us, He placed us in a garden that He had cultivated for us and commanded the man to tend it.
- He blessed the man and his wife, commanding them to fill the earth and to subdue it for the glory of God.

- The idea was that as Adam and Eve had children, they and their children would go into the world and make gardens—
 - that is, that they would build things for each other's blessing and that they would maintain those things.
 - This would involve every sort of enterprise—music, crafts, horticulture, government, science, technology, and so on...
 - The Lord made us to do what we are still doing...
 - And of course, we were to do it all for God's glory and for the blessing of each other.
2. Now, of course, man has fallen.
- Even if you are not familiar with the Bible's account of how Adam rebelled against God,
 - you can see the results of the fall...
 - There is still a lot of enterprise going on,
 - but the idea of subduing the earth for God's glory and for your neighbour's benefit has been largely forgotten.
 - Now you see a lot of greed and a lot of selfishness...
 - You see war and you see behaviour that is altogether destructive.
 - And not only that, but you see the results of God's curse upon the earth...
 - There are storms and famines and sickness and death that all interfere with our building.
 - None of this was in the original creation, but all of this came about because of the wrath of God against our rebellion soon after we were created.
3. But still, everyone is doing the two things that Psalm 127:1 speaks about...
- a. We are building and we are guarding (or trying to preserve) what we have built.
 - The Psalmist gives us lively images that represent our work...
 - Building a house would speak of all our enterprises...
 - Guarding the city would speak of all of our efforts to keep what we have built...
 - the watchman of a city would sound the alarm say, if a fire broke out in the night or if enemies came to attack.

TRANS> This building and this preserving of what we have built is the work of the world in which all are engaged.

b. Now I will grant that there are some who, in bitterness to God or in despair, have withdrawn from this work as much as they are able...

- They are bummed out with it all and are just surviving...
 - But even they will still go about gathering food or making some sort of shelter for themselves...
- But indeed, the great majority of mankind are still going about their labours.
 - You have men running here and running there to do their work—
 - some are managers and some are labourers and some are guards and some are devoted to fixing what has gone wrong...
 - All are involved in the work of building and watching over what has been built.

B. But Psalm 127 boldly declares that all of their building and watching is vain—

- It is worthless—
- It is useless...
 - unless the Lord is doing the building.
 - “Unless the LORD builds the house they labour in vain...
 - “Unless the LORD guards the city the watchman stays awake in vain...

1. A man may even have many successes...

a. He may build empires,

- he may build knowledge,
- he may build magnificent cities,
- he may build rockets and all sorts of great things...
 - There are many great houses and great dynasties that have been built, but unless the Lord builds the house and keeps the house,
 - it will all come to naught.

b. A man may be very diligent...

- In fact, he may work very hard—
 - He may pour his life into his work...
 - He may rise up early and work until late at night...
 - He may be very busy and he may be very productive...

- but still it will all come to nothing—
- His labours will all be lost...
 - He can make a great name for himself,
 - He can acquire vast sums of wealth,
 - He can leave many things to his children,
 - And his children can carry on the work that he began...
- But unless the Lord builds his house,
 - It will all turn to dust...

TRANS> But what does it mean for you to build something that God does not build?

2. This can best be illustrated with the tower of Babel.

- Perhaps you are familiar with the inspired account of what happened at Babel.
 - You can find it in Gen. 11.
 - I invite you to turn there—
 - Keep your place in Psalm 127,
 - but take a look at Genesis 11 to see an illustration of what it means for man to build something that the LORD does not build...
- a. The nations of the earth had come together in a great enterprise!
 - They had come together to build a house—
 - to make a great name—to build a great city—to make themselves secure.
 - Look at what they did according to Gen. 11:1-4:
 - Genesis 11:1-4: Now the whole earth had one language and one speech. And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar, and they dwelt there. Then they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks and bake *them* thoroughly." They had brick for stone, and they had asphalt for mortar. And they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top *is* in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth."
 - There was no shortage of enthusiasm, no shortage of diligence, no shortage of skill, nor shortage of vision, no shortage of confidence!
 - You see that they were going to build something great and they hoped to make themselves secure by their united enterprise.
- b. But you see that God was not at all pleased with what they were doing...

- Look at Gen 11:5-9 and you can see what He did.
 - Gen 11:5-9: But the LORD came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built. And the LORD said, "Indeed the people are one and they all have one language, and this is what they begin to do; now nothing that they propose to do will be withheld from them. Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech." So the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they ceased building the city. Therefore its name is called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth; and from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth.

- What is going on here?
 - These men were subduing the earth,
 - They were working together in harmony—
 - Why did the LORD react like this?
 - Why did the LORD react like this?

- c. We can't understand this until we come to Genesis 12 and see the calling of Abram (or Abraham as he was later called).
 - 1) Abraham was (in all likelihood) from one of these families or nations that had been scattered.
 - a) There are some 70 nations or families that populated the earth that are listed in Genesis 10... and Abram's family is among them.
 - b) But in Gen 12:1-3, you see that the LORD comes to Abram and promises to do for him exactly what the nations at Babel were trying to do for themselves...
 - Gen 12:1-3 says: Now the LORD had said to Abram: "Get out of your country, From your family And from your father's house, To a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you And make your name great; And you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you; And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

- Do you see how parallel this is to what we had in Gen. 11:4?
 - They wanted to make a great name for themselves,
 - God tells Abram that He will make Abram's name great.
 - They wanted to be united so as not to be scattered...
 - God tells Abram that He will make him secure by blessing those who bless him and cursing those who curse him...
 - And that in time all the families of the earth will be blessed in him.

- c) You see, this is a house that **God** is going to build!
 - God is going to build the house, God is going to keep the city!
 - Unless the Lord builds the house, they labour in vain who build it.
 - Unless the LORD keeps the city, the watchman stays awake in vain!

 - d) My brothers and sisters, that is what makes the difference!
 - This is what the fall was about.
 - We decided that we would build our own house.
 - We decided that we could be like God—
 - that we could bless ourselves apart from Him...
 - That on our own, we could build a great society and could make ourselves secure and blessed.
 - That is essentially what Adam and Eve did when they ate the forbidden fruit...
 - They cut themselves off from God.
- 2) Now you can see why the Lord reacted the way He did to the men at Babel.
- a) Their wickedness was even greater than Adam's in one respect...
 - Because God had already brought down His curse upon mankind and sentenced him with death...
 - Now we not only need what we always needed—God to build our house—God to bless us and keep us...
 - We also need Him to deliver us from our sin—to provide for our forgiveness and to reconcile us to Himself...

 - b) The men at Babel were defiantly, vainly, acting as if they could get on fine without God!
 - Even though they were all sentenced with death and had the testimony of death before them...
 - They were going on as if they could build a great house for themselves!
 - They were acting as if they could still bless themselves without being reconciled to God!
 - This was the height of defiance and rebellion!

- c) We are not struck with the folly of what they were doing because this is what the whole world continues to do!
 - (i) We go on about our business as if we can somehow bless ourselves even though God has cursed us!
 - We build and we guard as if nothing is wrong.
 - We glory in our achievements and we rise up early and stay up late as if we can really do something that will stand!
 - (ii) My friends, you must be reconciled with God...
 - Don't get on with the vain building of the friends of Babel...
 - Don't join yourselves with the made delusion that you can get on without God.
 - (iii) You must have the God of Abraham's blessing...
 - Unless He builds the house, all your labour is worthless!

TRANS> But now there is a huge question that arises...

- If it is vain for you to build a house unless God builds the house,

II. How do you get the LORD to build your house?

A. Does it mean that you “get out of God's way” and “let Him do the building?”

1. That is the way some people understand it.
 - They have the idea that “either I do it or God does it”
 - In their minds, those are the only two options.
 - But this is not what Psalm 127 says...
 - It says,
 - “Unless the Lord builds the house they labour in vain who build it.”
 - The opposite of that is,
 - “If the Lord builds the house, they labour successfully who build it.”
2. What is being taught is that our labour is not in vain if it is in the Lord.
 - a. The LORD everywhere calls us to be very active in serving Him and in building a house for His name.
 - Indeed the very occasion for this Psalm may have been the building of Temple at Jerusalem by Solomon...
 - The Lord had told David this very thing:

- 1Ch 22:9-10: ‘Behold, a son shall be born to you, who shall be a man of rest; and I will give him rest from all his enemies all around. His name shall be Solomon, for I will give peace and quietness to Israel in his days. ‘He shall build a house for My name, and he shall be My son, and I *will be* his Father; and I will establish the throne of his kingdom over Israel forever.’
- Solomon was to build the house, but it was God who would establish the kingdom.
 - The Lord was the one who would build this house, but Solomon would simply be his earthly representative.
 - As Paul later put it,
 - 1 Co 3:6: I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase.
 - Ultimately the Lord is the builder and we are the underbuilders.
- b. You must never get the idea that it is you or the LORD who does the building.
 - The idea is that you are building under the Lord...
 - It is His project and you are serving under Him rather than ignoring Him.
- c. The building in view is the building of Christ’s kingdom in all areas of life.
 - It is serving your neighbour in your daily calling for the glory of God...
 - We are taught in Matthew 25 that everything you do to serve your neighbour will have eternal consequences if it is done in the Lord.
 - All the building, all the caring, all the providing, all the preserving that is done for Christ will be rewarded...
 - The Lord calls us to be very active in serving Him, in business, in art, in science, in cooking, in cleaning, in medicine—
 - It is not just about church work, but in everything you do that you are to build the city of God as one who is following God...
 - following Him as a priest in your calling.

TRANS> So you see that when we speak of God building,

- we are not saying that you are to be passive...
 - We are saying that you are to serve under Him rather than independently of Him.
- But I have still not told you plainly how you are to go about doing that...
 - Okay then, here it is:

B. You are to build your house by faith.

1. You are to realise that apart from the Lord you can do nothing...
 - nothing worthwhile—nothing lasting—nothing that will not turn to naught.
 - a. Come on now!
 - You are a fallen human being!
 - Unless you are reconciled to God, you can't possibly bless yourself!
 - If you are under God's curse (and we all are apart from forgiveness in Christ), it doesn't matter how much you labour or how many people you join together to labour with...
 - all your labour will turn to dust.
 - b. You are a mere creature!
 - Even if you were not fallen, you would still need God's blessing.
 - God made a you to be a dependent creature!
 - c. It is the height of presumption and folly to suppose that you can bless yourself if God does not bless you...

TRANS> Therefore...

2. You must believe God's promise to Abraham...
 - that He will build you a house that will be blessed and that will last forever...
 - a. Abraham had a raw promise when that call came to him...
 - and he believed that promise.
 - He did not know all that God was going to do to build this house of blessing for Him,
 - but he believed God.
 - And that was what God asked of him and what He asks of you.
 - b. And for you, there is more to believe now than there was for Abraham to believe when God's promise first came to him!
 - 1) Now the God has sent His Son Jesus Christ...
 - And He has told us in His word that Jesus came to bear our sins on the cross so that we could be forgiven...
 - forgiven and brought under God's blessing again!
 - And we have seen how Christ poured out His Spirit upon His church so that we were given new life...

- His Spirit enables us to see our need for salvation and then shows Christ to us and what He has done so that we embrace Him for salvation...
 - And God's Spirit causes us to delight in God's law and He enables us to put off the old man and to put on the new man so that we become more and more like Christ!
- 2) It is for you, who live in these times, to have faith in what the LORD has done in Christ.
- You come to Him and He grants you everlasting life.
 - Through faith in Christ, you become a part of the house that God is building for His name...
 - The house that God promised to Abraham...
 - A house of blessing where righteousness dwells...
 - A house where we receive the complete pardon of sins...
 - A house where all the members love God with all their heart, soul, mind and strength, and where they love each other as Christ has loved us.
 - The house is not complete, but God is building it and your labour in this house will not be in vain in the Lord...
 - Because it is in the Lord!
 - That is what makes the difference!
3. When you believe the LORD, there will be two things that will make it evident that you have believed...
- a. First, that you will submit to God's counsel.
- This is obvious, isn't it?
 - If you are trusting in the Lord to build the house, you will follow His directives.
 - When Abraham believed, he obeyed God's call to go to the place that the Lord had directed him...
 - And he began to command his household after him to keep the way of the Lord, to do righteousness and justice, so that the Lord might bring on them all that He had promised.
 - The Lord's people have a heart that delights in His commandments because they believe that the house he is building is the only house where true blessing is to be found.

- You don't want to follow the directives of another house, but of God's house.
- b. Second, that you will pray.
- There is, of course, a struggle because we are coming out of a fallen rebellious estate.
 - The Lord changed your direction when you believed,
 - and you delight in His ways... you want to walk in them...
 - but you find there is still a struggle in you...
 - and that you come short of His glory...
 - But you see, it is God who promises to build the house!
 - He is the one who is doing the work—
 - and so you look to Him to do it!
 - You pray!
 - This is why Psalm 127 says you are able to sleep...
 - Instead of endless labour that seems to be useless,
 - you can know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain.
 - You can sleep because you know that you are going somewhere by God's grace.
- c. And all this believing obedience and believing prayer is what you will do as the head of your household...
- You will build your individual house according to God's directives with ardent prayer to Him...
 - You will earnestly command your household in God's ways...
 - You will teach them about the forgiveness of sin in Christ...
 - You will teach them about how He is to be worshipped...
 - You will teach them how to love Him and how to love their neighbour...
 - You will teach them to observe all things that He has commanded.
 - When you see your household coming short and not walking in God's ways,
 - you will drop to your knees and cry to Him who promised to build the house and to bless the house!

- And you will call them to repentance.

TRANS> So you see then,

- The house that the Lord builds is the house that looks to Him in faith for His salvation and blessing.

III. What is the result when the Lord builds your house?

- The results are given in verses 3-5

A. You see first of all that children are said to be a heritage from the Lord... and the fruit of the womb to be His reward...

1. I tell you, that is only true when He builds your house!

- If the Lord does not build your house, your children are **not** an inheritance from the Lord and a reward,
 - they are a curse!
 - Nobody likes to say that about their children, but it is still true!
 - Oh yes, there is a measure of happiness that children give,
 - but if they are partners in building Babel, they are doing a great work that will lead to destruction...
 - And the greater the work, the greater the destruction will be!
 - When your house falls, it is no advantage that it was a great house!
 - In fact, the greater the house, the greater the loss...
 - Children who help to build a house that the Lord does not build are no a heritage from the Lord!
 - They are children that are preparing for destruction.

2. They are a heritage (or an inheritance) from the Lord when they continue the work that you are doing for God's kingdom...even long after you are gone.

- a. If you are a Christian, then you are busy doing your part to build God's kingdom—
- You are seeking to do all to the glory of God...
 - You are desirous to see all things brought under Christ because that is what God is doing...
 - Christ is going to reign at the right hand of the Father until all He has brought all His enemies under His feet...
 - He is gathering all His elect into His kingdom until it is complete and you are serving as a co-labourer in His kingdom.

- b. And when the Lord gives you a heritage of children—as an inheritance from Him—then those children go on doing the same work that you are doing...
 - I mean, they go on labouring in this world to,
 - by the grace of God,
 - bring all things under His feet...
 - They may even be called on to fill up the measure of His sufferings...
 - but you are delighted because they are joining you in service to Christ.
3. You need to think about how important this is!
- a. You need to understand that what your children do in the kingdom (I mean future generations) they do for you
 - for all of us who are in Christ...
 - even for all who have already departed this world to be with the Lord...
 - Noah and Abraham are not dead—
 - Moses and David are not dead—
 - They are no longer on earth, but they are alive with Christ and they are waiting for the work of the kingdom on earth to be complete.
 - They are watching as each generation does the work that God has given it to do...
 - Each generation builds on what has been done, but each generation is also dependent on the work of the next generation.
 - b. Just think about Abraham...
 - God made that promise to him to make his name great and to bless him and to make him a blessing to all the nations...
 - Abraham was given certain things to do that were all a part of making that happen...
 - He had to leave his homeland and go to the place that God had promised...
 - He had to circumcise himself and his household and train them in the ways of the Lord...
 - But obviously, Abraham was not capable of blessing all the families of the earth or even of blessing Himself...
 - The LORD was the one who promised to do it, and Abraham believed Him.

- Yet, for this to happen, there had to be a child given to Abraham—a child of promise—a heritage from the Lord...
 - Isaac had to be born, and to him a whole lot of other people had to be born who were God’s people,
 - and these all had to do work in God’s kingdom that was integral to the house that God was building...
 - And then at last, **the** child of promise had to come—
 - Jesus Christ who is the true inheritance of us all...
 - The Son the Lord gives to us who blesses us all!
 - And the Lord Jesus is the one who went to the cross for us all and bore the curse for us all...
 - And His righteousness is the righteousness that was accepted for us all...
 - And it is His judgement that will destroy the last enemy...
 - And it is by His Spirit and grace that we are all transformed from selfish sinners to the servants of God.
 - If the Lord had not given Abraham an inheritance—a heritage of children—
 - then all that He promised would have failed.
- c. But this is true of us also, in a certain way...
- I don’t mean that each one of us must personally have children...
 - But I mean that God has a plan for His house and it will not be complete until every generation has done its work...
 - The Lord is the builder and He will see to it that everything is finished,
 - nevertheless, we are called by Him to train up our children (if we have them) so that He may bring to us what He has promised.
 - What the Lord said to Abraham applies to us also...
 - That He will bless us and our children after us if we keep His covenant...
 - That the promise is to us and to our household...
 - Genesis 18:19 says: “For I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the LORD, to do righteousness and justice, that the LORD may bring to Abraham what He has spoken to him.””

B. When God builds your house, your children will be, as it says in verse 4 & 5, as arrows in the hand of a warrior...

1. With an arrow, you can inflict damage upon the enemy from a distance...
 - The arrow reaches beyond where you can go...
 - And parents, it should be your desire and your prayer that your children will go on in the work of the kingdom of Christ after you...and beyond you...
 - That even while you are still alive, that they will be such children as go forth from you to serve the Lord...
 - That rather than growing up to fight against you, and make you ashamed,
 - they will (as verse 5 puts it) speak with the enemies in the gate!
 - That is, they will contend with them...
 - That even when you are in the grave, the work of God's kingdom will still go on through your children and through their children!

TRANS> That is what you are to aim for, that is what you are desire...

2. And that is what happens when the Lord builds the house.
 - a. What a blessing it is for you—and for the whole church—
 - Even for all those who have already died and are waiting for the work on earth to be complete...
 - How they rejoice to see your little ones grow up as arrows for the kingdom to continue your service to Christ.
 - b. Now of course if God does not build the house,
 - It doesn't matter how much you may strive—you can rise up early and go to bed late—and it will all be in vain...
 - If the Lord does not do the building, it will all come to saw dust.

C. Now my brothers and sisters—and especially my brothers who have households...

1. I know that you who love the Lord want to build a house that will stand for all eternity...
 - You don't want to build a house of children who receive honours in school and in the arts and in sports and all the rest,
 - but who are not built by the Lord...
 - because all those honours—no matter how diligent they may have been and how successful—will come to nothing...

- If you love the Lord, you yearn for your children to go on in the work of the Lord that will last forever—
 - the work that is not in vain...
 - You long for them to go on beyond where you have gone into the next generation as faithful servants of Jesus Christ,
 - empowered by the grace of God.
 - You earnestly pray that they will go on as God's house, building God's house for His glory.
2. I hope Psalm 127 is a huge encouragement to you when you look at your responsibility as the head of your home...
- a. It has frequently been my experience that whenever I show men about the responsibility God has given them,
 - There is often a look of numbness that comes over them...
 - Sort of an empty look as though everything has been drained out of them...
 - it's like they know it is true,
 - but they realise that they have not really taken this responsibility very seriously...
 - and they feel overwhelmed at the prospect of taking it up.
 - It's one of those moments like Moses had when the Lord told him to go and tell Pharaoh to "let my people go,"
 - or like Gideon had when God told him to lead Israel in battle against the Midianites...
 - "Who, me?"
 - "I think you must have made a mistake.
 - "I'm just one of the trembling Israelites here."
 - "Don't you think someone else would be better for the job?"

TRANS> And its true—what God calls you to do you cannot do!

- You can't build a house that will last forever...
 - That's the very point!
- b. But you see the encouragement here in Psalm 127!
- It's not about you and your labour, it's about believing the Lord...
 - Yes, your faith will be expressed in obedience and in prayer,
 - but the blessing upon your house will come from the Lord.

- He is the One who builds the house.
 - He will be the one who gives you the faith and the obedience and the heartfelt prayers to lead your house.
 - He does not leave you to do this work alone.
 - It is His work and it is for you to believe His promise.
- c. Psalm 103:17-18 declares:
- “But the mercy of the LORD *is* from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him, And His righteousness to children’s children, To such as keep His covenant, And to those who remember His commandments to do them.”