

Psalm 128
5/15/2011
Lynchburg, VA

EXHORDIUM

The man who fears Yahweh is a blessed man.

St. Augustine explains this Psalm as the man being Christ, his wife the church and the children, the offspring of the Church. Christ, Himself, is blessed in them, the faithful one producing other faithful ones. It is a beautiful picture to think of Jesus as a happy man with His wife and children around His table. But this is exactly what happens here each Lord's Day. Jesus gathers with His Church and He is happy that you are here.

We do need to cultivate this happiness. There is plenty of trouble in the world and even in our own lives. We need to constantly remind ourselves that the Lord's blessings are also all around us. This is something we men should do at every meal that we sit down to eat with our families. Look around the table. See what a blessed man you really are. This is one of the reasons that we look around at communion. We want to see all the people that we are blessed to be a part of. Jesus is happy about them being here and so should we be.

This way of looking at this Psalm also helps us to get our minds around Paul's admonition in Ephesians 5 that we are to love our wives as Christ loved the church. And that she is to respond to her husband, submitting to him and obeying him, even as the church submits to Christ.

This even helps our children grasp their responsibility as they grow up in the Lord. They serve father and mother, even as they would serve Jesus and His Church. As they grow older, that allegiance that is given explicitly to mother and father is transferred to Christ and His Church.

EXEGESIS

Ps 128 128:1 Blessed is every one that feareth the LORD; that walketh in his ways.

There is great promise for those in Jesus Christ. The Lord speaks a pleasant word, a word of blessing. This is a great need in the household of faith. Our lives are not always full of promise, full of blessing. We, too, are under the sun. The vanity of life, as proclaimed by the wisdom of Solomon, arises to the good and wicked, the just and the unjust. There are most certainly times of sorrow, times of want, times of doubt, times of trouble. And this is not foreign, neither to the sinner nor to the saint. We are born for trouble as the sparks fly upward. That is to say, it is the most natural thing

in the world. So, a word of blessing from the Lord ought not to be taken lightly. We need to receive it, remember it, relish in it.

Furthermore, those of us in the reformed faith have an interesting heritage. We know that we have come from the fallen Adam. We are very aware of our total depravity and have gone so far as to confuse this with utter depravity. We think that we are horrible and awful and that we are always dangling over the brink of destruction by the tiniest thread. By God's grace, we are saved, but for some, their view of depraved man is so depraved, that God's grace is but a gossamer's web, blown loose and drifting about, in every conceivable direction, by the brisk October winds. God hangs over us, like Damocles' sword, ready to drop upon us for any and every transgression. In this harried state of mind, in this misunderstanding or mis-emphasis on our depraved condition, we need a sure word of blessing.

God desires to bless and bless He most certainly will. This blessing is internal. There is peace and joy, way down in my heart. But the blessing of God is more than that. It is tangible. It tastes. It feels. It is looks beautiful. It sounds good. It has a pleasing aroma. We must not retreat to our inner Gnostic sanctum, hoping against hope, that God will somehow fill our pantries and clothe our children, in the next life. It is odd that we think this way because our thoughts of heaven are just as Gnostic as our thoughts of earth. Why will need any blessing from God, then? We will be the perfect disembodied spirits who really have no needs. We think that we will not need food or clothing or houses. It is not just that all of our needs will be met but, rather, that our needs will disappear. But God is not like that. His blessings are real. It is not a blessing to say be filled and not give food. It is not a blessing to see children's children, but not to have any.

Blessing, fruitfulness, full pantries, good wine, fat things, are what the Lord promises us. Who could not fail to rejoice at such news?

But wait! There is a condition. It is blessing. It is grace and yet, it is still conditional. God requires something of us to get and to maintain this great blessing. We do not get it on our terms. We must read the fine print before we subscribe. If we sign up too quickly or too carelessly, we may find the Lord of Heaven will come to us when we least expect it, when we are enjoying His fruits in His vineyards, without any concern for the owner of the vineyard. There is a condition.

FEAR MEANS FEAR

What is this condition? We must fear the Lord. What is it to fear the Lord? We do not like this term at all. We want it to mean reverence such

that we give honor, we wave our hands and say, “That man over there, He is the leader. He is the grand poopa.” But that is not what it means to fear the Lord. The word has to do with fear, like, being afraid. We are to be afraid of God. But not necessarily a cowering, run away kind of fear.

It should be the kind of fear we have for our own fathers. We love them but they are scary. Because we love them, we want to do their will. We do not want to see the scary side of father. It brings us pain, not only on our backside but also in our hearts. We love and so we obey. But we also know that if we disobey, there are consequences for that disobedience.

We understand that there are also consequences when we disobey our friends who want us to join them in some riotous living, a potential bed-mate who is not our wife or husband, a pastor or elder who is teaching a wrong view of Scripture. The friends may ridicule us or disown us. The adulterer may mock us or leave us with unmet desire. The false teacher may shame us as earthy, stupid, or unenlightened. In all of these, there is a cost and we often feel the weight of it heavy upon us, influencing us in the wrong direction. But there is a real weight. It has often been called peer pressure, or simply temptation.

But if we fear the Lord, His pressure is even more heavily upon us. We are brought back to the realization that He sees. If we love Him, this is a motivator for us to do right. But we also have this intense understanding that if we forsake His way and seek the way of fools, of fornicators, of false teachers, then we also must face the frowning countenance of our Father. This is scary, it is fearful, and it causes us to do right. This is what it is to fear the Lord.

To receive this blessing, we must walk in His ways.

This blessing is not just for some. But blessed is everyone that feareth the Lord. That is, everyone that fears the Lord is blessed.

2 For thou shalt eat the labour of thine hands: happy shalt thou be, and it shall be well with thee.

There is goodness and fullness in the Lord. You shall work hard and your labor shall produce bounty. Through your hard work, God will provide a full table and full bellies. This is the blessing of God. This is the promise of God. But there is more. You shall not only be provided for and be full. You will also be happy. But what does it say in Hebrew? Maybe it just means Christian joy, which we like to think includes our dour countenance. But, it does not mean this. It means, happy, how happy, with an exclamation mark. And more than this, even. You are happy and it is well with your soul. Your soul is full and fat and content. You are not needy. All is well

with your soul. I know it is a stretch for some of you to be truly happy in the Lord. If you were that happy, you would feel really miserable. But the Lord wants you to be happy.

Eat not just the fruit of your labor but your labor. The labor itself is pleasant to us.

Happiness is for now. The wellness of our soul is the promise of the future. It is as if our labors produce happiness and the fruit of our labors will produce assurance.

This, too, as we speak of our children. They are our labors but our children's children, our fruits. Our children produce happiness in us but if our grandchildren are found in the Lord, it is well with us.

3 Thy wife shall be as a fruitful vine by the sides of thine house: thy children like olive plants round about thy table.

The wife's place is by the sides of the house, being fruitful. The vine both ornaments and supplies the house. A good wife is like this. She is hard to find. A vine needs support and is sometimes in need of a great deal of work to make it fruitful. But when the produce arrives, it is useful in many ways. It produces necessities, that is, food. But it also produces luxuries, fine wine and dainty fruit, grapes.

Your children are like olive plants around your table. The olive plant is useful in many ways. It produces oil that is used for many things and makes like joyful, pleasant, well tasting. It requires a lot of work to get good oil out of olive but what great benefits come from the work.

Men, we have been greatly blessed in our wives and our children. When you sit down, look at them, appreciate them, savor the moment, reflect, give thanks, rejoice in them. You have no greater treasure than your fruitful vine and your blessed olive plants.

4 Behold, that thus shall the man be blessed that feareth the LORD.

Augustine, "For it is not happiness to have children, but to have good ones."

A man that feareth the Lord shall not just have a wife and children. He will have a good wife and good children. He will have faithful helper in his spouse, a helper and a friend. His sons will be arrows in his quiver, a danger to enemies. His daughters will excel all other daughters. His children will love the Lord, his God and their God.

5 The LORD shall bless thee out of Zion: and thou shalt see the good of Jerusalem all the days of thy life.

This blessing is seen by all as God's blessings flow to his beloved children. Such a man is blessed among the people of God, in the Kingdom of God and in the Church. His work is blessed. His ministry is blessed. His influence is blessed. And his wife and children are blessed with him. Thus, a man that fears the Lord.

He shall see the good of Jerusalem all his days. He shall see to the good of Jerusalem. Jerusalem shall be blessed because of him and he shall do all in his power to bless Jerusalem. As we think about this in our context, such a man desires that God be honored as He expands His Kingdom throughout the Earth. Because He loves and fears God, his aim is always to the glory of God. God honors and blesses such a man.

6 Yea, thou shalt see thy children's children, and peace upon Israel.

This is promise of long life such that a man may grow old enough to see his grandchildren. That is a great blessing. But it is more than that. It is not enough to see our grandchildren but that we see them in the Lord. This promise is to you and to your children, and to their children for a thousand generations. This is eschatological hope and the reason we sing this song every time we do a baptism. We remind ourselves of God's promises and our need to continually fear the Lord.

Prov 17:6 6 Children's children are the crown of old men; and the glory of children are their fathers.

The olive harvest was after grape gathering was over. Take care of your wife and your children will be harvested in due season.

Here are the promises of God. They are to you and to your children and even beyond that, to your children's children.

EXHORTATION

Fear the Lord and believe God for His promises to you. Then, when He grants them, as He has, look around, give thanks and be exceedingly happy.