

Survey of the Bible part 92 Wisdom and Didactic Psalms

The last of the categories in which we've placed the psalms is what is called the Wisdom and didactic psalms. These are psalms that are intended to instruct us about God and His ways and how we should depend on His wisdom, His righteousness, His strength and any other characteristic of God that will lend itself in our ability, as His children, to walk in a way that brings glory to Him.

The most renowned psalm that fits into this category is also the longest of all the psalms, the 119th psalm. That psalm takes the law of God and instructs men to revere the holiness of God as He has revealed Himself in His word and to walk accordingly as we have been made holy in Him.

Psalm 119:1-12 ^{NAU} Aleph. How blessed are those whose way is blameless, Who walk in the law of the LORD. ² How blessed are those who observe His testimonies, Who seek Him with all *their* heart. ³ They also do no unrighteousness; They walk in His ways. ⁴ You have ordained Your precepts, That we should keep *them* diligently. ⁵ Oh that my ways may be established To keep Your statutes! ⁶ Then I shall not be ashamed When I look upon all Your commandments. ⁷ I shall give thanks to You with uprightness of heart, When I learn Your righteous judgments. ⁸ I shall keep Your statutes; Do not forsake me utterly! Beth. ⁹ How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping *it* according to Your word. ¹⁰ With all my heart I have sought You; Do not let me wander from Your commandments. ¹¹ Your word I have treasured in my heart, That I may not sin against You. ¹² Blessed are You, O LORD; Teach me Your statutes.

And so, we see in this short segment of psalm 119 an attitude of continually falling in love with our Savior as the psalmist expresses it in verses 10-12, ¹⁰ With all my heart I have sought You; Do not let me wander from Your commandments. ¹¹ Your word I have treasured in my heart, That I may not sin against You. ¹² Blessed are You, O LORD; Teach me Your statutes.

This inner longing for God's truth and delighting in that truth is expressed in other ways as well, as for instance, in psalm 42.

Psalm 42:1 ^{NAU} For the choir director. A Maskil of the sons of Korah. As the deer pants for the water brooks, So my soul pants for You, O God.

As one seeks God and His word we see a similar metaphor of longing for God and His truth as Peter uses the analogy of a hungry baby.

1 Peter 2:2-3 ² like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation, ³ if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord.

All of these passages speak to the wisdom and the teaching that points to a God who is our creator and who desires our love and allegiance. That's what a wisdom and didactic psalm is. And today we're going to look at the 127th psalm.

Psalm 127:1-5 ^{NAU} A Song of Ascents, of Solomon. Unless the LORD builds the house, They labor in vain who build it; Unless the LORD guards the city, The watchman keeps awake in vain. ² It is vain for you to rise up early, To retire late, To eat the bread of painful labors; For He gives to His beloved *even in his* sleep. ³ Behold, children are a gift of the LORD, The fruit of the womb is a reward. ⁴ Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, So are the children of one's youth. ⁵ How blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them; They will not be ashamed When they speak with their enemies in the gate.

Here we begin with a basic truth about God in relationship to people who don't want God.

Psalm 127:1 Unless the LORD builds the house, They labor in vain who build it;

Now we might be tempted to relegate this saying to a general truth about life, which is that unless God is in the middle of our efforts everything will be in vain. And this is certainly true, but what the psalmist is addressing here goes well beyond that.

The operative word here in our text is build. But the focus is not on the construction industry and man's ability to erect a building that will last.

When the psalmist addresses the building of a house what might he be addressing?

He's talking about life and the foundation upon which that life is built which will find its final expression in a Kingdom that God is building.

When a man builds his life upon himself he is acting the fool because it is a labor in vain because it always ends up being

destroyed. And Jesus Himself addresses this very issue when speaking to the crowds of His day.

Matthew 7:18-27 ¹⁸ "A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. ¹⁹ "Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰ "So then, you will know them by their fruits. ²¹ "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven *will enter*. ²² "Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' ²³ "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.' ²⁴ "Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. ²⁵ "And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and *yet* it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock. ²⁶ "Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. ²⁷ "The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell-- and great was its fall."

Here Jesus makes it clear that even religious people, unless they have a foundation firmly planted on the one true God and Savior by faith, will not stand before a holy God. Because in the end, even religious people will demonstrate the fruit of their foundation.

If their foundation is built on sand, which is to say, built on themselves and others, then their fruit will demonstrate that, as they themselves will be the ultimate rock of their lives. And Jesus says, that if you are your own foundation, you will fall.

But if your foundation is on the rock, Jesus Christ, then not only will you not fall, you will be lifted up and raised up on the last day and nothing will ever separate you from the love of your God and Savior.

Psalms 127:1 Unless the LORD guards the city, The watchman keeps awake in vain.

Again, here we must understand that there is a general truth that the psalmist is addressing and in this case it is man's thinking that he has the final word on his safety as he relies on himself to guard the city. Part of what we see here is that you can have an entire

army surrounding you in life, but it is ultimately God who is our protector.

This is why it is dangerous to depend on people or human institutions to take care of us. This doesn't mean we ignore the institutions of men that God has established for our protection. For example we know that God is the one who has instituted governments for men to help govern themselves for the protection of the people.

This is what Jesus meant when He confronted Pilate.

John 19:10-11 ¹⁰ So Pilate said to Him, "You do not speak to me? Do You not know that I have authority to release You, and I have authority to crucify You?" ¹¹ Jesus answered, "You would have no authority ¹over Me, unless it had been given you from above; for this reason he who delivered Me to you has *the* greater sin."

Notice who has temporary authority over Jesus Christ, the creator of the universe, in this setting. Pilate literally has authority over Jesus and the Lord acknowledges this. He accepts it. But He makes it clear who has given Pilate this authority and it is not other men, it is Father above.

We're told in the word of God to submit to authority, which includes the government, but we are also told there is a time to obey God rather than man.

My point is that God has the ultimate say in the affairs of men and for believers we need to put our entire trust in our God who has control over all authorities, even when those authorities seem to be out of control, or out of their minds as in the case of Pilate as he crucified the Kings of kings and Lord of lords.

Psalms 127:2 ² It is vain for you to rise up early, To retire late, To eat the bread of painful labors; For He gives to His beloved *even in his* sleep.

Is the psalmist telling us that there's no point in rising early and retiring late as you work hard for your bread?

No, again the Scriptures are abundantly clear that working to provide for you and your family is an essential element to life and for the believer an essential way of honoring your God and Savior.

2 Thessalonians 3:10-12 ¹⁰ For even when we were with you, we used to give you this order: if anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat, either. ¹¹ For we hear that some among you are

leading an undisciplined life, doing no work at all, but acting like busybodies. ¹² Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to work in quiet fashion and eat their own bread.

But working hard and eating your own bread is not an end in itself. And Jesus points this out as well.

John 6:26-27 ²⁶ Jesus answered them and said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled. ²⁷ "Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you, for on Him the Father, God, has set His seal."

And that's the point the psalmist is making as he says that if life is only about getting up early and going to bed late to put food in your stomach then you've missed the point of life. And then the psalmist adds a very interesting phrase.

Psalm 127:2 For He gives to His beloved *even in his sleep*.

Now we know that God gives to all men. It rains on the righteous and the unrighteousness. But here in our text we're told that God gives to His beloved.

Why the distinction?

Because the psalm, though it contains general wisdom and teaching for life, is directed to a particular group of people in life who are instructed not to put their roots in this world because we are told that this world is not our home, at least not in its present cursed state.

One day, we'll be back in this world that will be transformed by the purifying effect of the resurrection of all things on the last day as God raises His people to eternal life and refashions the universe into the new heavens and new earth.

But until that day we are told not to depend on the things of this world, but on God, which is why the psalmist adds, "For He gives to His beloved *even in his sleep*."

He's not saying that we can sleep our lives away and God will take care of us, rather he is saying that God is more than capable of taking care of us despite all of our efforts as He can provide for us whether we're awake and active or asleep and oblivious.

After all, He is the creator of all things including man, as the Lord formed man from the dust of the ground and gave him the mandate to work the garden and to be fruitful and multiply.

And in the multiplication process we see that God has deemed it a good thing.

Psalm 127:3 ³ Behold, children are a gift of the LORD, The fruit of the womb is a reward.

When people take a gift from God and literally throw it on the trash heap in defiance against what is holy and good from God we should not expect that to go unpunished.

Is it any surprise that this country has deteriorated in such a short time from its inception? We look at the traditions of this land that have recently been overturned like the redefining of marriage that God defined in the garden, or the calling of sin something now holy and good like the acceptance of homosexuality as normative, even being defended by segments of the church.

When mankind takes the basics of life, as the psalmist is describing here, and turns them into something unrecognizable according to the word of God, like the killing of the unborn and in some cases the born, then it should not surprise us that God would judge such a people as He did in the days of Noah and will do in a very dramatic way in the near future.

I don't think anyone could argue that this generation covering the entire globe is not doing evil continually. And we know how that turned out the first time.

Genesis 6:5-8 ⁵ Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. ⁶ The LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. ⁷ The LORD said, "I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, from man to animals to creeping things and to birds of the sky; for I am sorry that I have made them." ⁸ But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD.

That's the only hope the believer has in the midst of the madness that will be addressed by the Lord in judgment.

But, having said all that, it is still true that children are a gift of the Lord and should be treated as such as parents are commanded to bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

The psalmist continues with this subject to the end of the psalm as he writes this.

Psalm 127:4 ⁴ Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, So are the children of one's youth.

What does that mean? I mean, we've just left the previous verse which depicted children as a precious little gift from the fruit of the womb and now they seem to be depicted as instruments of war. What is this about?

An arrow in the hand of a warrior does not necessarily mean that the warrior is engaged in battle, but even if he is, no warrior will be given an arrow for battle unless he is trained as a warrior to make sure that that arrow flies to its intended target with great accuracy.

Children who have been given to parents are to be the product of a skilled hand leading and guiding that child. Like warriors who are trained and given the opportunity to engage in the fight, parents are to find their training in the presence of the Lord who has supplied them with the tools to care for this gift as they seek the Lord and depend on Him.

And as a parent takes this task on and they do their best as warriors of the Lord they can see the fruit of their labors in many cases which the psalmist alludes to.

Psalm 127:5 ⁵ How blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them; They will not be ashamed When they speak with their enemies in the gate.

Here the quiver is in keeping with the metaphor of the arrows in the hand of a warrior who has many arrows which translates into many children. This does not necessarily mean that unless you have tons of kids that you have somehow failed God.

Remember what the psalmist has been saying. Unless God is accomplishing His will in our lives we can labor all we want, whether it's building houses or rising early and going to bed late to make a living, God is the one who ultimately determines our path and what happens on that path.

This is not fatalism, especially for the believer, as we are instructed to seek and to walk according to God's ways which involve the normal processes of life, like getting a job and taking care of what you own and so forth.

The difference at the end of the day, is that when you have done everything you can humanly do to accomplish a goal, whether it's eating the fruit of your labor, raising your children if God has gifted you in that area, or anything else in life, and we still don't see the results we would like, we still have to depend on God who is in control of all things and works all things out for our good and His glory, as find our contentment in Him.

Let's finish up this psalm as children are still the subject to the end.

Psalm 127:5 ⁵ How blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them; They will not be ashamed When they speak with their enemies in the gate.

What do you suppose the psalmist is saying here and why is this parent speaking with his enemies in the gate?

When you speak with your friends they may not be as inclined to say things about your parenting skills and the results of those efforts. This is not to suggest that we don't come along side each other and offer help where help is welcomed, but your enemies don't care about tact and they'll be a lot more honest in some cases.

But what is being suggested here in our text is that even if you do speak with your enemies in the gates they'll have nothing negative to say about your kids because of the good job you've done to raise them unto the Lord.

Now, obviously the psalmist is speaking in superlatives here as he is putting forth the best case scenario that all parents should strive for, because even the best parents and the best parenting skills don't guarantee that every child of yours will pass the test of your enemies.

The Scriptures are full of examples of the seed of the godly going astray and prodigals are part of the word of God as well, with the hope that prodigals come home.

But again, even when we do our best and the best is not always the final outcome we still have to trust in the God who is our Lord our Savior and the firm foundation upon whom we stand. This is the teaching and the wisdom gained from this psalm.