

Prosperity and Progeny

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Preacher: Shawn Woo

[0 : 0 0] Psalm 128, a song of ascents. Psalm 128, a song of ascents.

A favor of his superior for the sake of self-advancement. You guys can probably think of a few words just off the top of your heads, right? A fauner, a suck-up, a toady, a yes-man, a sycophant, a flatterer, an apple polisher, a bud licker, a cow tower, a brown noser, a groveler, a lick spittle.

Have you guys heard that before? It's really graphic. A lick spittle. And in other terms, that should not even be mentioned in polite company. And there are so many expressions for this kind of thing, I think, because it's so common.

And because so many people in all kinds of cultures have used their own imagination and creativity to describe it. And because I think we'd admit that we all like a good blessing.

You know, we all like a good blessing from our superiors. And the word bless is really the main blessing. The idea of blessing is the main theme of this psalm. The word bless occurs four times in this short psalm in verses 1, 2, 4, and 5.

[2 : 1 0] And this psalm reminds us that there is only one true superior who imparts blessing. And biblically speaking, it's only God and his representatives who impart good things from God, who bless in this technical sense that is in view here.

The Bible does describe us as blessing God at times, but that's merely to recognize that he is the blessed one. And it is when God blesses his people that he actually imparts good things, actual blessings come.

And so that's why Psalm 128 teaches us that above all else, we should seek to please the Lord. And that's the main point of this psalm is that those who fear the Lord are blessed by the Lord with prosperity and progeny.

And first we see the promise, this promise in verses 1 to 3. And then we see the blessing in verses 4 to 6. So first we see the promise of blessing in verses 1 to 3.

It begins, Blessed is to everyone who fears the Lord, who walks in his ways. So this tells us that God's not stingy or discriminatory in his blessing. It says, Blessed is everyone, blessed is everyone who fears the Lord, who walks in his ways.

[3 : 2 5] To fear the Lord, according to this verse, is to walk in his ways. What you fear determines how you walk. And so that's a helpful diagnostic question to ask ourselves.

Because human beings pay attention to and obey what they fear, what they revere. Whether it's parents or peers, whether it's governing authorities or scientific experts, whether it's diseases, demons, or even death itself, people are preoccupied with and pay attention to and obey what they fear.

And so then what are we paying the most attention to in our own lives? What do we listen to most of our lives? Is it who God is and what God says?

Or is it someone or something else? Because how we walk is determined by what we fear. So those who fear the Lord, those who live in the presence of God, those who live under the authority of God, those who live for the glory of God, they are those who walk in his ways.

And it is they who fear the Lord, who are blessed by the Lord. And then the psalmist unpacks more specifically what this blessing entails in verses 2-3. You shall eat the fruit of the labor of your hands.

[4 : 42] You shall be blessed. And it shall be well with you. Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house. Your children will be like olive shoots around your table. Now I can't hear that phrase, you shall be well with you, without thinking of John.

John shows one of his favorite expressions is be well, right? He says it to us a lot. It's a great greeting, a very specific, but a good greeting.

And so that's what he's talking about. It will be well with you if you fear the Lord. And more specifically, he says, in verse 2, he promises prosperity, the fruit of your labor, the fruit of the labor of your hands.

And in verse 3, he promises progeny. Your wife will be like a fruitful vine. Your children will be like olive shoots around your table. These images of fruit, fruitful vine, and olive shoots would have been very evocative for people who lived in Israel during this time because agriculture and viticulture were just such a huge part of their livelihood and culture.

So imagine just this tightly packed, scrumptious clusters of grapes all hanging from different parts of the vine. And he's promising that, hey, that's what your wife will be like with all her children in her arms.

[6 : 16] And then imagine new olive shoots kind of springing up. Olive shoots spring up all around where the roots of the main olive tree is. So they all kind of spring up all around it. And then they soon grow into full olive trees.

So imagine, he's saying, that's what your dinner table is going to be like with all your children shooting up all around you. And that's the promise, the prosperity and progeny. And then in verses 46, the psalmist transitions from speaking of the promise to the actual blessing.

He repeats the same themes, but this time it's not a promise. It's actually an impartation. It's a bestowal of blessing. So it says, Behold, thus shall the man be blessed who fears the Lord. The Lord bless you from Zion.

May you see the prosperity of Jerusalem all the days of your life. May you see your children's children. Peace be upon Israel. So the blessings that he mentioned in verses 1 to 3, he now personally imparts to God's people.

Prosperity and progeny for those who fear the Lord. Those who fear the Lord are blessed by the Lord. And this promise of blessing does, however, admit exceptions.

[7 : 25] It's a generalization, not an absolutization. It expresses what is generally true, much like the proverbial sayings that we have in English. We say things like, Honesty pays, which means if you're honest, you're going to get rewarded.

And then we also say things like, Cheats never prosper. It expresses a truism that is generally true, that people who cheat and try to get by that way are eventually going to get caught.

They're not going to prosper for a while, for long. And so even though these are generally true, there are exceptions in life.

And even the Old Testament speaks of these exceptions. The book of Job is an entire book full of exceptions to this promise. He feared the Lord, but he lost his prosperity.

He feared the Lord, but he lost his progeny. He feared the Lord, but he got sick. He lost his health. And then Habakkuk 3, verses 17 to 18, also qualify this promise.

[8 : 27] It says, Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail, and the fields yield no food. The flock be cut off from the fold, and there be no herd in the stalls.

Yet I will rejoice in the Lord. I will take joy in the God of my salvation. It's especially helpful because it uses the same imagery of the vines and the olives.

Yet he says, Even when that fails, I will rejoice in the Lord. These exceptions exist to remind us to love the Lord who blesses more than the blessings that he bestows.

Because the ultimate blessing that this psalm points to is not the things he gives us, but it's the Lord himself, the God of our salvation. And so in the famous Beatitudes that Jesus taught Matthew 5, 1 to 12, he lists different kinds of people who are blessed by God.

He says, Blessed are the poor in spirit, blessed are those who mourn, the meek, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake.

[9 : 33] And finally, he says, those who are reviled and persecuted for the sake of Jesus, on account of Jesus, he says, they are blessed. And so the summary of the Beatitudes might be that those who follow Jesus are blessed.

And this is the absolute truth that the general truth of Psalm 128 points to. This is the substance that the reality, that the shadow of Psalm 128 points to.

This is, Christ is the fulfillment of it. And he is how we receive blessing. He is how we have peace. Romans chapter 5, verses 1 to 2, it says, So then the benediction of verse 6, peace be upon Israel, was fulfilled in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Because Jesus has died and Jesus has risen victoriously, because Jesus has ascended and is seated at the right hand of the Father interceding on our behalf, that's why we have peace with God.

We have been made right with God. We have an invincible hope in the glory of God. And in the eyes of the world, we might not look blessed. And that's the mistake that the prosperity gospel preachers make, is that they think that to be blessed by the Lord always means that we'll be blessed in the eyes of the world in the same terms as the world.

[11 : 09] But that's not necessarily the case as we've been talking about. But we are the most blessed ones. And we should not lose sight of the eternal blessedness of which we are co-heirs with Christ.

And so that's what Psalm 128 is about.