

Disciples for Life: The Power of the Spoken Blessing Psalm 128

preached @ Hawkwood Baptist Church
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Today's Text

Psalm 128:1 How happy (blessed) is everyone who fears the Lord, who walks in His ways! 2 You will surely eat what your hands have worked for. You will be happy, and it will go well for you. 3 Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house, your sons, like young olive trees around your table. 4 In this very way the man who fears the Lord will be blessed. 5 May the Lord bless you from Zion, so that you will see the prosperity of Jerusalem all the days of your life 6 and will see your children's children! Peace be with Israel.

A Song of Ascents

Psalm 128 is one of 15 psalms known by the general heading, "songs of ascents," or, if you are using an older translation, "songs of degrees." We cannot be certain what this means, but the majority of Biblical scholars have considered that these songs were sung as people made their way up to Jerusalem to attend each of the three annual festivals that God laid down back in Deuteronomy 16:16— (1) the Passover, or the feast of unleavened bread, (2) the Festival of Weeks, or Pentecost, and (3) the Festival of Tabernacles or Booths.

All three of these festivals celebrated God's goodness to His people. The Passover celebrated the night God rescued the Israelites from Egyptian slavery. Pentecost celebrated the first fruits of the harvest season and was a time of thanksgiving to God for a year of blessing, and finally, the Festival of Booths celebrated God's faithfulness to His people during their years of wandering in the wilderness. All of these festivals were accompanied by feasting, celebration, joy, laughter and worship!

How do the songs of ascents fit into all this? These 15 songs were sung in anticipation of the blessings that would be experienced as the people gathered to celebrate in the Holy City. Most of these psalms are cheerful, and all of them are hopeful. Both attitudes (cheer and hope) should characterize our own walk through life as we tread the path of our own pilgrimage to the eternal "Mount Zion, to the city of the living God (the heavenly Jerusalem), to myriads of angels in festive gathering, to the assembly of the firstborn whose names have been written in heaven, to God who is the Judge of all, to the spirits of righteous people made perfect, to Jesus (mediator of a new covenant), and to the sprinkled blood, which says better things than the blood of Abel" (Heb. 12:22-24).

The meaning of Psalm 128

1. God is a God of blessing. He loves to bless the people who fear Him, who walk in His ways. I think I can say the following without fear of contradiction; No one who fears the Lord and walks in His ways has ever reported a life without blessing. Those who judge by worldly

standards may deny that such lives are blessed, but I challenge you to ask anyone who truly walks in God's ways, man or woman, what they think. They will tell you of blessings beyond measure, and they will likely do so while shedding tears of joy.

- a. Some translations interpret God's original language in verse 1 rather than translate it. They take the phrase where the actual translation is, "walk in His ways," and interpret it as, "obey His commands." That's a bad translation, not just because the Hebrew clearly says something else, but because "obey His commands" stops far short of what God has in mind.
 - b. There is something far deeper here than merely obeying commands. Of course a true disciple of Jesus Christ will obey God's commands. But he or she won't stop there. The true disciple has a heart that beats in rhythm with God's heart and thus the true disciple lives by the law of love (Romans 13:9-10). The law of love will never contradict God's commands, but it always goes beyond anything that can be described in legal language. It takes each of us to the cross, it leads all true Christians to become "living sacrifices, holy, acceptable unto God, which is our reasonable service (and our spiritual worship)" (Rom. 12:1).
 - c. In short, we can paraphrase the first verse of this psalm by saying, "How blessed is everyone who fears the Lord, who denies himself and takes up his cross to follow Jesus."
2. After the first verse the Psalmist lists all the ways God blesses those who walk in His ways.
 - a. Your work will be blessed (v.2). Not only will it benefit you, it will add meaning and purpose to your life—this is the meaning of "You will be happy."
 - b. Your inner being will be blessed with joy (v.2).
 - c. Your family life will be blessed, right down to your children's children—and beyond (v.3).

Exodus 20:4 I lay the sins of the parents upon their children; the entire family is affected—even children in the third and fourth generations of those who reject me. 6 But I lavish unfailing love for a thousand generations on those who love me and obey my commands (NLT).

- d. The blessings of God are extended beyond each godly family in such a way that the world beyond the family is blessed, not just for now, but for generations to come (v.5).

Psalm 128:5 May the Lord bless you from Zion, so that you will see the prosperity of Jerusalem all the days of your life.

How to be a blessing to your family and beyond

For parents and grandparents.

3. **Principle:** God is a God of blessing. He begins all relationships with words of blessing!
4. So should we.

First Adam

Genesis 1:27 So God created man in His own image; He created him in the image of God; He created them male and female. 28 God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it. Rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and every creature that crawls on the earth.

Second Adam

Mark 1:9 In those days Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized in the Jordan by John. 10 As soon as He came up out of the water, He saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending to Him like a dove. 11 And a voice came from heaven: You are My beloved Son;
I take delight in You!

5. Jesus’ spoken blessings were used to transform Peter.

John 1:40 Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, was one of the two who heard John and followed Him. 41 He first found his own brother Simon and told him, “We have found the Messiah!” (which means “Anointed One”), 42 and he brought Simon to Jesus. When Jesus saw him, He said, “You are Simon, son of John. You will be called Cephas” (which means “Rock”).

Matthew 4:18 While walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter) and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. 19 And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you (create you) fishers of men” (ESV).

Luke 5:8 But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.” 9 For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish that they had taken, 10 and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, “Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men” (ESV).

Matthew 16:15 He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” 16 Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” 17 And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. 18 And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it (ESV).

John 21:15 When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” He said to him, “Feed my lambs.” 16 He said to him a second time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” He said to him, “Tend my sheep.” 17 He said to him the third time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, “Do you love me?” and he said to him, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep” (ESV).

Principle: Just as Jesus used spoken blessings to transform Peter’s life, so our spoken blessings

can be used of God to transform lives around us—our children, our grandchildren, and so on.

6. Three critical elements of spoken blessings.¹

- a. Blessings make the blessed one feel valued. It is significant that a world that does not know God or His Word has substituted self-esteem for blessing. Self-esteem is an attempt to think highly of yourself, and all such attempts tend to fail. Left to our own devices our self-esteem will either be too high or too low. But in being blessed we learn that God considers us people of great worth, and that is always just right.

Daniel 9:21 while I was praying, Gabriel, the man I had seen in the first vision, came to me in my extreme weariness, about the time of the evening offering. 22 He gave me this explanation: “Daniel, I’ve come now to give you understanding. 23 At the beginning of your petitions an answer went out, and I have come to give it, for you are treasured by God. (See also 10:11)

- b. Blessings picture a special future. The one being blessed will hear, “God has a higher purpose for my life.”

Jeremiah 29:11 For I know the plans I have for you”—this is the Lord’s declaration—“plans for your welfare, not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope. 12 You will call to Me and come and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. 13 You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart. 14 I will be found by you”—this is the Lord’s declaration—“and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and places where I banished you.”

- c. Blessings declare that the one doing the blessing is committed to the one being blessed. When you bless you promise to stand with that person and lend them what strength you can. The knowledge that you are not alone is of untold importance.

7. Opportunities for communicating blessings

- a. On regular or formal occasions.
 - i. Milestones: Birthdays and anniversaries
 - ii. Turning points in life such as starting school, salvation, graduations, new job or career, promotion, getting engaged, married, at the birth of a child, buying a first house, etc.
 - iii. When meeting, when departing, etc.
- b. When spontaneity strikes and it just feels like the right thing to do. Deut. 6:7 says talk with your children about things when you sit in your house, when you walk along the way, when you lie down, when you rise up, whenever it seems right.

Content of a blessing

Numbers 6:22 The Lord spoke to Moses: 23 “Tell Aaron and his sons how you are to bless the

¹Much of the rest of this message is based on principles found in the book *Courageous Grandparenting: Unshakeable Faith in a Broken Word*, by Cavin Harper.

Israelites. Say to them: 24 May Yahweh bless you and protect you (God's protection); 25 may Yahweh make His face shine on you (God's pleasure) and be gracious to you; 26 may Yahweh look with favour on you and give you peace (God's peace). 27 In this way they will pronounce My name over the Israelites, and I will bless them."

The purpose of speaking blessing is to serve as a conduit through which God's grace can flow. We do this so the person being blessed can understand who they are before God, and how precious they are to Him. They need to know that God is there to protect them, that their very existence makes God happy, and that God's complete attention is focussed on them. When you speak words of personal blessing to your grandchild, or to anyone, you become the channel through which God's almighty, transformational, blessings flow.