

## **Psalm 127, A song of ascents. Of Solomon.**

### **Introduction**

- Air of uncertainty hangs over the world just now:
  - the war - how will it go? what will come in its aftermath?
  - other world threats - the lurking anxiety over terrorism, Al Qaeda, etc
  - what about the economic situation? Are things slowing down again towards some kind of recession? Are house prices so high that the balloon must burst?
- Admittedly the current situation is perhaps one of high anxiety:
  - we're worried now, but can cope - we know this level of uncertainty won't last!
  - indeed, some of the upward shifts in stock markets in the first couple of days of conflict were put down to the fact that one uncertainty was gone - there **would actually be a war!**
- But, **we are prone to be anxious:**
  - anxious about **the world situation**, about our national security, about the wider social context in which we live
  - anxious about **our personal prosperity**, our own job or source of income, our own house, our own physical security
  - and anxious about **our family**, our parents, our children, our siblings....
- In each of those broad and significant areas of our lives, it is very easy to be anxious
  - **and understandably so!!**
- But this Psalm speaks to us in each of these important areas of our lives, saying: **rest in the Lord!**

### **Exposition**

#### **(1) Unless the LORD builds the house, its builders labor in vain. Unless the LORD watches over the city, the watchmen stand guard in vain.**

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- This first verse speaks of the first two areas of life we mentioned above:
- First, the **building of a house** speaks of all our concern for **personal prosperity**, our job, our source of income
  - an Israelite of 3000 years ago wouldn't have had a bank account, a monthly salary, nor even a weekly wage packet
  - quite possibly a large part of society was still operating without coinage, on a largely **barter and self-sufficiency system**
  - folk would have built their own houses, they would have worked very directly for their own prosperity; their house would have been a significant part of their personal security and prosperity
- Mingled in with that thought, the Psalmist also touches on bigger issues, the **world scene** for his context:
  - world events to an early Israelite consisted of whether there was a threat from a neighbouring state!
  - no long distance communication; perhaps no chance to be fore-warned of danger!
  - and so the watchmen on the walls wasn't the last line of defence, the one watching out in case something else was missed - **no, he was the first-line of defence, the forward listening post, the intelligence gathering operation**
  - a good watchman could, quite literally, save a city!
- In both cases (**personal prosperity & world events**) the Psalmist's emphasis is:
  - **the Lord rules**
  - the thought that stands behind the repeated "**unless the Lord...**" is the assumption that the Lord is in charge, has the ultimate authority
- In football, its the **manager who picks the team:**
  - a player who wants a regular first team slot has to impress the manager

- he may be fit, he may be in form - but unless the manager says so, all of that counts as nothing - he won't be on the pitch!
- the fans could be clamouring for him, the opposition could fear him - but **unless the manager picks him, his labours are in vain**
- Take the Lord out of the equation in any aspect of our lives, and it is without ultimate meaning, ultimate value:
  - he is the one who made us, who created every ability and talent, every capacity for love and relationship, every opportunity, every concern that we have
  - he is the one who sustains our life moment by moment
  - he is the one who loves us with an undying and passionate love
  - he is the one who died in our place!
- Without the Lord, all of life is meaningless
- And the flip side of that is equally true:
  - **with the Lord, all of life is filled with purpose and meaning, with significance**
- So, to use Jesus' illustration, the cup of water given in his name will not be without reward, without significance (Mark 9:41)
  - even the smallest detail of life has its place as God is allowed to be Lord, ruler, number one in our lives

**(2) In vain you rise early and stay up late, toiling for food to eat - for he grants sleep to those he loves.**

- Second verse returns from the international stage to the sphere of personal prosperity, work & labour
  - often good to remember what a passage is **not teaching** as well as what it is!
  - here, this passage is not about laziness or diligence
  - it does not declare that working hard or studying hard are pointless in themselves
  - rather it condemns that attitude of restless striving, of frantic scrabbling that can lie behind the actions
- For the second great truth about God that the Psalmist reminds us of, as a counter to the anxiety the so often drenches our lives, is this:
  - **the Lord gives**
- Note what the Lord gives:
  - **sleep**, restfulness, peace - the very opposite of anxiety
- In the context of the Lord being in charge, we are able to be at peace:
  - his grace extends to us the possibility of his gift of rest
- Return to football manager analogy for a moment:
  - the good manager delights to give opportunities to his young players, to bring them on, to give them their chance on the big stage
  - he is not capricious, remote from his charges, but shows an intimate concern for them and their well-being;
  - indeed, his success is ultimately dependent on his charges
- Recently on the TV there was a series, "**Raploch Stories**"
  - very poor scheme in Stirling, all the social problems
  - one kid who was taken on as a pro-footballer;
  - signed up by a side down south
  - first clip of him visiting home afterwards, resentful of the apparently harsh discipline of the training regime, of the youth team coach, etc
  - second clip, weeks later, he'd realised the motivation for the regime - a deep concern to get the best out of him, a commitment to give to him security, clear expectations, guidance on how to raise his fitness and skill levels....
  - and as he understood the motivation, this rough diamond of a laddie from Raploch was able to make his peace with the coaches!

**(3) Sons are a heritage from the LORD, children a reward from him. (4) Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are sons born in one's youth. (5) Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them. They will not be put to shame when they contend with their enemies in the gate.**

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- Sovereignty and grace; the Lord rules, the Lord gives
  - these are the two great truths that run through this Psalm, in answer to our anxiety
- They are present too in the last 3 verses, which turn our attention to family life, to children:
- Again, worth remembering what this Psalm is **not** about!
  - is not implying some kind of greater value to those who have children, and a lesser one to those who do not (childless couples, those who are not married, whatever)
  - is not saying that kids are always easy to raise, that they cannot themselves be sources of anxiety
  - is not saying they always turn out the way you hoped!
- Rather, in the cultural context in which the Psalm was written, where sons in particular were regarded as and practically brought blessing:
  - they could work (**prosperity**), they could look after you when you were old (**security**)
  - but, children remain a gift - you can't simply decide to have a child, the Lord is still sovereign, and yet often he gives in this way, and so they are truly a heritage from the Lord

## **Conclusion**

- Job OK? House OK? Pension OK?
- National situation looking like it might work out in the end, despite the war?
- Family OK?
- Without the Lord, it is meaningless, and has no purpose:
  - yet with him, even the weakest, smallest blessing, the tiniest gift is transformed into something glorious!
  - in him is the potential for sleep, for restfulness, for peace in the midst of whatever turmoils the world may stir up