

Psalm 127

1. *Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labour in vain.*
2. *Unless the Lord keeps the city, the guard keeps watch in vain.*
3. *It is in vain that you hasten to rise up early
and go so late to rest, eating the bread of toil, for he gives his beloved sleep.*
4. *Children are a heritage from the Lord and the fruit of the womb is his gift.*
5. *Like arrows in the hand of a warrior,
so are the children of one's youth.*
6. *Happy are those who have their quiver full of them;
they shall not be put to shame when they dispute with their enemies in the gate.*

Children are a heritage from the Lord
and the fruit of the womb is his gift.

Psalm 127 is a wisdom psalm, in which there are two sayings like proverbs, probably used at the birth of a child.

No product of purely human effort can survive, either a person's house (family) or the city in which it stands. The first part of v.2 'Except the Lord keep the city' forms part of the coat of arms of Halifax.

Labour from dawn to dusk brings no lasting result, as the Lord can give more good gifts to those whom he loves during a night's sleep than they could accumulate in a life of anxious toil.

Nothing is really done unless God does it. Children are God's gift, an inheritance, but also a reward for righteousness. Through them the house, which God has built, is continued, and the name and memory of the father is kept alive. To have children was one of God's greatest blessings, as it was thought that the only immortality, which could be hoped for, was the continuation of the father's name and memory in the family, as in Psalm 113:

'He gives the barren woman a place in the house
and makes her a joyful mother of children.'

Many people work hard and long hours, and many are preoccupied with family matters and children. Having a child changes the whole dynamic of a family; a new person comes into the household. There are many demands, but children are often seen as gifts; it is really exciting when a baby is born! It can also be seen as co-operating with God in creation, God, whose love brings life.

So, we can see our work and our family life as working with God to make the world as God wants it to be.

As children grow up, they learn from their parents, and as they become older, they protect their parents. When parents become elderly, their children support them, take over and look after them. So, in Psalm 127, children, when they are young, protect their father like the arrows of a professional soldier. (The Five Arrows at Waddesdon

Manor refer to the five sons of the Rothschild family, sent out all over the world.) So, it was as well to go into battle with a quiver full!

The law courts, at which the elders presided at the gate of the city, were often corrupt, but enemies would not dare to bring a case against someone who had a strong son to back him up!

For us today, this stresses the importance of looking after one another in our families, taking responsibility for one another at all stages of our lives, realising that in so doing we work with God in revealing his love to the world.

Prayer

God our Father, whose Son Jesus Christ lived at Nazareth as a member of a human family: hear our prayer for all homes and families, and especially for our own, that they may be blessed by his presence and united in his love. We ask this in his name.

Amen.

(James M. Todd)