***Psalm 128***

*1. Blessed are all those who fear the Lord, and walk in his ways.*

*2. You shall eat the fruit of the toil of your hands;*

*it shall go well with you, and happy shall you be.*

*3. Your wife within your house shall be like a fruitful vine;*

*your children round your table, like fresh olive branches.*

*4. Thus shall the one be blest who fears the Lord.*

*5. The Lord from out of Zion bless you,*

*that you may see Jerusalem in prosperity all the days of your life.*

*6. May you see your children's children,*

*and may there be peace upon Israel.*

**Refrain**

Blessed are those who fear the Lord,

**and walk in the ways of God.**

Psalm 128 is a wisdom psalm, which was probably used as a blessing on pilgrims arriving at the temple in Jerusalem.

It is based on the Old Testament doctrine that righteousness brings material reward, as in Psalm 1.

In vv.1-4, the psalm states that blessing is given to those, who reverence God and are obedient to his will. In vv.2-4, the blessing will be for a group of small farmers, who will not be deprived of the fruit of their labours by failure of the harvest or too much tax! (v.2, ‘you shall eat the fruit of the toil of your hands; it shall go well with you, and happy shall you be.’)

They will have the gift of children, who will be around the table like the fresh shoots at the base of an olive tree. (v.3, ‘Your wife within your house shall be like a fruitful vine; your children round your table, like fresh olive branches.’)

The last two verses show that the prosperity of the individual depends on the welfare of the community, and also on God, who dwells in Zion. The prosperity of Jerusalem will spill out over the whole land and create its well-being.

Finally, there is a prayer that the pilgrims will live to be grandparents and enjoy peace all their lives. Peace means total well-being, rather than the absence of conflict; it is still the common word of greeting among Jewish people (shalom). In Psalm 28, the psalmist appeals against enemies, who greet him as friends while plotting his ruin. (v.3, ‘Do not snatch me away with the wicked, with the evil-doers, who speak peaceably with their neighbours, while malice is in their hearts.’)

Psalm 128 is set for use at weddings, particularly because of the picture of a family with children around the table. At weddings we pray that the couple may have children, and we also pray for their family, asking that their home may be one of love, security and truth.

But we realise that righteousness doesn’t always bring material prosperity, and that God’s blessing encompasses more than that. Nevertheless, there is the wish that people will have all they need, that there will be happiness in our families. But we know that it doesn’t happen for everyone.

The picture of God dwelling in Zion, and his love and blessing going out into all the world, reveals the purpose of God for all creation, of which we are part. We can glimpse his presence in many different ways. So, there is always hope in God, who comes to dwell with us, revealed by Jesus Christ. Jesus himself teaches in the Sermon on the Mount that we should not worry about material things, which we need. What is important is to strive for the Kingdom of God, to be aware of his love; then we shall receive the greatest blessing:

‘But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given you as well. So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today’s trouble is enough for today.’ (Matthew 6,32,33)

**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,

that they may be blessed by his presence

and united in his love.

We ask this in his name.

**Amen.**

(James M. Todd)