



Lesson 9: Work

Psalm 127 (The Message)

¹⁻² If God doesn't build the house,
the builders only build shacks.
If God doesn't guard the city,
the night watchman might as well nap.
It's useless to rise early and go to bed late,
and work your worried fingers to the bone.
Don't you know he enjoys
giving rest to those he loves?

³⁻⁵ Don't you see that children are God's best gift?
the fruit of the womb his generous legacy?
Like a warrior's fistful of arrows
are the children of a vigorous youth.
Oh, how blessed are you parents,
with your quivers full of children!
Your enemies don't stand a chance against you;
you'll sweep them right off your doorstep.

I. Babel Or Thessalonica

The Psalm first gives us a warning about work in verses 1-2. Some misunderstand these verses and think that work is foolish since God is doing everything that needs to be done. Paul had to deal with this type of thinking with church in Thessalonica. They were saying that since God had done everything in Christ there was nothing more for them to do.

For we hear that some among you are leading an undisciplined life, doing no work at all, but acting like busybodies. Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to work in quiet fashion and eat their own bread. But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary of doing good. (2 Thessalonians 3:11-13)

Even Paul an apostle worked himself to the bones to support himself and those who ministered with him.

For you recall, brethren, our labor and hardship, how working night and day so as not to be a burden to any of you, we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. (1 Thessalonians 2:9)

The work of Babel is the opposite of the lack of work with many in Thessalonica. We have both these cultures still with us today. Western culture takes up where Babel leaves off by defying human efforts. The machine is the symbol of the way of life which attempts to control and manage. Technology promises to give us control over the earth and people. But the promise is not fulfilled. If we want simple solutions in regard to work, we can become workaholics or dropouts. If we want to experience the fullness of work, we will do better to study Psalm 127.

II. In The Beginning God Worked

The premise of the Psalm is that God works: “If God doesn’t build the house...If God doesn’t guard the city...” The condition “if” presupposes that God does work: he builds, he guards.

Genesis begins with “In the beginning God created” not “sat majestic in the heavens.” The days are described not but their weather conditions and not by their horoscope readings: Genesis 1 is a journal of work. God is still working:

For this reason the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because He was doing these things on the Sabbath. But He answered them, “My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working.” (John 5:16-17)

We live in a universe where God is working. The work of God is defined and described in the pages of scripture. The curse of too many is not “work,” but senseless work, vain work, work that takes place apart from God, work that ignores the “if.” Christian discipleship connects us with the work of God and what He is already doing.

III. Effortless Work

The Psalm not only posts a warning, it gives an example: “Don’t you see that children are God’s best gift? The fruit of the womb his generous legacy? Like a warrior’s fistful of arrows are the children of a vigorous youth. Oh, how blessed are you parents, with your quivers full of children! Your enemies don’t stand a chance against you.”

In contrast to the anxious labor that build cities and guards possessions, the psalm praises the effortless work of making children. By joining Jesus and the Psalm we learn a way of work that does acquire things or amass possessions but responds to God and develops relationships. People are the center of Christian work. We are to invest our energy into people. Among those around us we develop sons and daughters, sisters and brothers even as the Lord did with us.

For it makes little difference how much money a Christian has in his pocket. It makes little difference how our culture values and rewards work...if God doesn’t. As Christians do the jobs

and tasks assigned to us, we learn to pay attention to and practice what God is doing in love and justice, in helping and healing, in freeing and cheering. We connect to others in work. Psalm 127 insists on a perspective on which our effort is at the border and God's work is at the center.