

"1 Except the LORD build the house, they labor in vain that build it: except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain. 2 It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows: for so he giveth his beloved sleep. 3 Lo, children are an heritage of the LORD: and the fruit of the womb is his reward. 4 As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth. 5 Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them: they shall not be ashamed, but they shall speak with the enemies in the gate." (Ps 127:1-5 AV)

I preached on this text a year ago when Jacob Savage was baptized. But the baptism this morning is Genevieve Smith and this is a different sermon. There are more than one sermon in a text, and this little Psalm has a lot of sermons in it.

Last year, I said that there are at least two horrible sins that are committed by godless men, sins so commonplace that we might think they are virtues and get snared by them, because our sinful hearts have an affinity for them: (1) We think that good things come to us because of our diligence and labor; (2) the second is very like the first: we are not thankful for our blessings. That is a good sermon, but not the one I intend to preach today. I have three different things to say about this Psalm this morning, and some applications to make.

1. The good things of God thrive in the soil of grace and trust. 2. An illustration is children, as the heritage of the Lord. 3. Justification is the reward of grace and trust.
- I. The good things of God thrive in the soil of grace and trust.
    - A. A man's house is built only if it has the blessing of God. "House" and "city" here are figurative terms, and apply not only to literal houses and cities, but to every endeavor of man. Man can only do by his will and effort what God as willed beforehand.
    - B. Man's life is but a vapor that appears for a little time, and then vanishes away; but how self-important he is, rising up early, sitting up late, denying himself comforts, but all is in vain if God's blessing does not rest upon his labors. This is the reason that God gave us the Sabbath Day, to remind us that we do not live by bread only, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.
    - C. This does not mean that God does not require labor of man, but it does show that God's labor goes before, and without the work of God man's work is vain and empty, full of frustration and misery, failure and sorrow. He gives us a day to draw apart from our ordinary labor, to rest with our families, attend church and give thanks. Because of this, the church is commissioned by God to speak the truth of man's true rest, the Sabbath of faith and trust, the grace and mercy of God.
    - D. It is God alone who gives rest to men, He gives His beloved rest:
      1. Solomon speaks of the frustration of those who labor without faith and the grace of God: Ec 2:26 "For God giveth to a man that is good in his sight wisdom, and knowledge, and joy: but to the sinner he giveth travail, to gather and to heap up, that he may give to him that is good before God. This also is vanity and vexation of spirit."

2. We also read of this grace and trust in James 3: 18 and 4:1 "And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace. From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?"
3. This is also described in Philippians 4: 6, " Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."
4. We are therefore to pray always and trust the Lord always for all things, as James again tells us: James 4: 13-15 "Go to now, ye that say, Today or tomorrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that. But now ye rejoice in your boastings: all such rejoicing is evil."
5. Most of all, we are to pray and trust the Lord for His blessed Holy Spirit, who will teach us faith and trust and rest. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and cannot receive the kingdom of God; It is the Spirit that quickens us to life and faith and trust, and He alone can teach us to rest and trust in Him. As Jesus said when He promised us the Spirit: John 14:26, 27 "But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you. Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."

## II. Children, especially, are an illustration of this great truth.

- A. Children are an heritage of the LORD. How pregnant is that statement! How rich, and how backwards we think: of this and everything else about the Lord's Kingdom.
- B. The most precious heritage that your family has is not the one that you give to your children, as important as that is, and not to be denigrated; but this passage says that the children are the heritage that the father receives from God. You receive your precious heritage, not from your father, but from your children.
- C. Now, this is not the only heritage you receive, for the text says "an heritage" not "the heritage." God does not give children to everyone, but He has a heritage for everyone. John Calvin had no children who lived after him. He had one son who died while still a boy, so John Calvin's physical family died out with him. But what an heritage God gave John Calvin in the Reformed churches, evangelical doctrine, and republican governments! But that is a different message.
- D. Abraham was promised a numerous seed and he believed the promise that in this seed all the families of the world would be blessed. This was the gospel that he believed, according to Galatians 3: 8 "And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed. So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham." It was this gift of faith to Abraham that set him apart from all the families of the earth,

and he received circumcision because of this faith, and circumcised his children because of this faith. Abraham knew that the children of the flesh would not inherit with the children of the spirit, for the son of the bondwoman and the second wife were sent away.

- E. But it was distant many years before the seed came that the promise spoke about, but Abraham by faith saw the day of Christ and was glad, and became heir of the world, not in his own right, but in the right of his son, the Lord Jesus Christ. And circumcision testified through all those ages that the blessed seed would come, but would not be born of the flesh, but would be born of the promise, for Christ was not born of physical seed, but of the power of the Holy Spirit, as circumcision testified. The unclean would be cut off, but the children of the promise would be counted for the children of Abraham.
- F. But even the physical seed would be blessed because of the presence of the spiritual seed among them. Because of the promise of Christ, Israel received many, many, blessings, even those who did not have the faith of Abraham and did not receive the gift of eternal life.
- G.I would give a personal illustration. I don't tell many stories and very few about my own family. I have never told this story before, except to my wife. Not to my sisters or any of my relatives or my children. It is very personal and concerns my father, and he told me this a few years before he died. My father was a very complicated man, filled with many contradictions and paradoxes. I do not judge his soul for that is way beyond my wisdom and ability, and I know that God will be right in all that He does. I loved my father very much, even with all his contradictions and inconsistencies.

Dad had a very tempestuous and troubled youth, and this event took place when he would have been in his teens, I suspect. He attempted to rob a man a gunpoint who was either sitting alone in a car or carriage. The man looked at my Dad and laughed at him, seeing that he was just a youth. Dad said that he looked the fellow in the eye, a feeling of rage came over him, and he was about to pull the trigger, when something stopped him. Dad said something to this effect to me, "It was a strange feeling that held me back from being a murderer. I cannot explain it, but I was prevented from doing it. I don't understand it." Years and years later, I think I understand it. It has to do with the covenant God has with His elect, those appointed for salvation.

After that incident my father would go to prison for other crimes. When he got out he married my mother, and they had three surviving children, my two sisters and myself. We all confessed Christ. The majority of our children are at this time believers, as are many of our grandchildren. If Levi could pay tithes in the loins of his father Abraham, then my sisters and I could be preserved in the body of a would-be murderer, who would be restrained from the act because we had not yet been born or even conceived.

Dad did not die as a convicted murderer because of the purposes that God had for his family in the years to come. These purposes were through nothing that we or he did, but completely because of the grace and mercy of God. Many sons have died for the sins of the fathers, but God had mercy on me and my sisters even before we were born. I be-

lieve that God restrained my father on that awful day, because of the many believers in his ancestry and the believers that were yet to come. My family and I have many, many blessings that come to us by His grace alone. And Dad was spared the sin of murder and lived to the age of 88 instead of being executed before he was twenty.

- H. It was because of the election to life that Abraham circumcised his sons, because of the promise of God, not because of the glory of the flesh. It was an election of grace and mercy, that is not yet completely fulfilled, because the Scripture appears to teach that even yet in the end of the world a generation of Abraham's fleshly children will come to Christ and be added to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven.
- I. Jesse and Cathy, this is the reason that you bring Genevieve to the waters of baptism today; because of the promise of God, that there will always be a seed of the faithful, born in the church, who are the elect of God. You are promising to bring her up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, and you will pray with us that God will give her His spirit according to His own purposes, not only to her but to her children after her, and to their children for generations to come. That she will truly be a mother in Israel, whose children arise and call her blessed because of the grace given to her in Jesus Christ. For as Peter said on the Day of Pentecost, "The Promise is to you and your children, and to all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God shall call."
- III. Finally, The blessing of God includes this: "your children will not be ashamed, but shall speak with the enemies in the gate."
- A. What a joy it is when your children bear witness to the gospel of Christ and know that they are justified by faith and no enemy can destroy them.
- B. The "gate" of the city was the place where judgment was rendered. Your enemies might bring a suit of law against you, or accuse you of a crime. It would be tried at the gate of the city. But your children will be able to quiet the charges against them, because God has given them grace as He has given you grace.
- C. This truth is expressed in Isaiah 59:19-21, with the promise of the Redeemer.
- 19 So shall they fear the name of the LORD from the west, and his glory from the rising of the sun. When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the LORD shall lift up a standard against him.
- 20 And the Redeemer shall come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob, saith the LORD.
- 21 As for me, this is my covenant with them, saith the LORD; My spirit that is upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed's seed, saith the LORD, from henceforth and forever.

Amen and Amen. May God bless you.