

Psalm 127.¹⁻⁵

Grace

Background

The compact manual on discipleship which the 15 'songs of ascent' comprise now moves on in this next psalm to explore the way in which the whole life of discipleship is shot through with *grace*: we are saved by grace – and we *serve* through grace as well.

It's important as a follower of Jesus to retain that clear perspective. You're given the privilege of sharing in the work of Christ: but it is emphatically *His* work to which you apply yourself, rather than your work in regard to which you seek His help.

The psalm helpfully highlights the two main features of the work of God, which expressed very simply are 'construction' and protection: Jesus is committed to building His church, and to shielding His people – and it's to that work of the Lord Jesus that as His follower you're called.

There's a balance required in your thinking. Failing to see that it's the Lord's work will see you gravitate towards a sort of 'legalism': but failing to recognise that you're called to share fully in His work can lead to a certain laziness (you can see how Paul rather 'lambasted' that sort of 'idleness' in [2 Thess.3.6ff](#)). You get a flavour of this balance in the manner in which Jesus ministered (see, for instance, [John 5.17](#)), and in the way that Paul himself exercised his ministry ([Col.1.29](#)) – *his* striving, the Lord's *strength*.

Genesis 11 provides a fascinating 'mirror' of this psalm. The opening verses provide a telling illustration of the truth of vv.1-2 of the psalm, describing the way in which the men of Shinar were intent on building a city and a tower (without reference to or reliance on, the Lord), as much as anything to 'safeguard' themselves: and just how much 'in vain' that proved to be is the familiar story of the tower of Babel.

The second part of the chapter mirrors vv.3-5 of the psalm, with its record of the genealogy, and then the childlessness of Abram and Sara – children are a miracle, a gift from the Lord, emphatically *His* doing. Raising up succeeding generations of the house or 'household' of faith is always the challenge faced by the church, and the work to which God's people are called. It's *His* work, but He bids us share in it with Him. Notice, too, how that 'next generation' of believers is described – "*like arrows in the hands of a warrior*": it's through that next generation that the battle is fought and victory won – for there is a battle (as Psalm 124 underlined), but the victory has already been secured and given to us in Jesus (see [1 Cor.15.57f](#)): when that truth is grasped then our labour is never in vain!

Start, again, with '**days** (1) and (2)' which relate to the psalm itself: and for a third set of questions perhaps '**day** (4)' is as good and profitable as any. Additional questions have been included, accordingly, for each of these 'days'.

1) Monday 21st February – work

Read [Psalm 127.1-2](#)

“Unless the LORD builds the house, its builders labour in vain ..” (Ps.127.1)

God’s the great worker. Jesus didn’t come to help you in what *you’re* doing: He bids you follow Him that you may share in what *He’s* doing. *He* will build His church: it’s *His* great enterprise. Don’t get in His way by doing your own thing!

At the start of a new ‘working’ week, what is (a) the challenge and (b) the encouragement of these verses for you?

Note the two pictures – constructing and protecting: in what ways are you seeking to be involved with the Lord in ‘building’ and ‘safeguarding’?

In what ways can you see the Lord Himself building His church in these days?

What are the ‘dangers’ against which the church today (‘the city’) needs to be on her guard?

Paul speaks about our ‘labour in the Lord’ not being in vain (1 Cor.15.58): how can you ensure that your hard work is indeed ‘in the Lord’?

Prayer: *Lord, how grateful I am for Your promise that our ‘labour in the Lord’ will never be in vain: help me today to direct my energies wisely as Your co-worker.*

2) Tuesday 22nd February – grace

Read [Psalm 127.3-5](#)

“.. Sons are a heritage from the LORD, children a reward from Him ..” (Ps.127.3)

In building His church, the Lord raises up succeeding generations of His family: life is emphatically *His* to give. Nothing you do can impart life – but by His grace His people are privileged to share with Him in the miracle of new life.

Are you seeing people being ‘born again’ into God’s family in the life of the fellowship and are you right to look for that?

If regeneration is a miracle of grace, in what ways are the Lord’s people His ‘co-workers’ in that work?

What does the psalmist mean by stating that ‘sons born in one’s youth’ are ‘like arrows in the hands of a warrior’?

In what ways have you been finding that sharing in the Lord’s work involves *battling* as well as *building*?

Prayer: *Rise up, O Lord, and contend for Your people in the battle raging around us in these days: raise up that next generation who will be bold and strong in Your service.*

3) Wednesday 23rd February – Babel

Read [Genesis 11.1-4](#)

“Then they said, ‘Come let us build ourselves a city ..’” (Gen.11.4)

Babel was an object lesson in building apart from the Lord. It was a 3-dimensional statement of an independent spirit – the city and tower of a thoroughly secular society. But where the Lord Himself isn’t doing the building, such projects are in vain.

What parallels to the spirit exhibited on ‘the plain of Shinar’ do you observe in contemporary society?

To what extent is every ‘project’ to which people apply their energies characterised as either *construction* or *protection* – as this project was?

Prayer: *Forgive me, Lord, that too often and too easily I take matters into my own hands. Give me grace today to seek only Your glory, and to trust You for my safety.*

4) Thursday 24th February – vain

Read [Genesis 11.5-9](#)

“.. ‘Come, let us go down and confuse their language ..’” (Gen.11.7)

The best endeavours of those intent on making a name for themselves are found finally to be in vain. What the people sought to build on (their ‘cohesion’) became instead confusion: and what they most feared (being scattered) became the reality.

What examples of people ‘not understanding each other’ are you aware of today?

Pentecost was the reversing of Babel – understanding instead of confusion, gathering instead of scattering: are there broken relationships the Lord means you to be addressing?

How are you seeing (and how should you be expecting to see) the effects of Pentecost being repeated in and through the life of the fellowship?

Prayer: *Help me, Lord, to understand where those with whom I differ may be coming from and to build bridges through Your Spirit as and when occasions to do so arise.*

5) Friday 25th February – building

Read [Genesis 11.10-26](#)

“.. When Terah had lived 70 years, he became the father of Abram ..” (Gen.11.26)

Genealogies can be a 'switch-off'! Over against the vain efforts of the men of Babel to perpetuate their name, this genealogy underlines that "sons are a heritage from the LORD" (Ps.127.3). Rejoice in the assurance that the Lord is building His church!

In what ways does this genealogy provide a deliberate contrast to Babel?

How are you seeing the Lord 'building His house' through the generations of your fellowship?

Prayer: *Build Your kingdom here; let the darkness fear. Show Your mighty hand, heal our streets and land. Come set Your rule and reign in our hearts again [Rend Collective]*

6) Saturday 26th February – life

Read [Genesis 11.27-32](#)

"Now Sarai was barren, she had no children .." (Gen.11.30)

It is the Lord who generates life. What the genealogy has presented in general terms is now made clearer and more specific. Generating life is the prerogative always of God. Unless the Lord builds the house, Sarai will remain barren.

What circumstances do you see in the narrative of these verses which might prompt a person to start turning to the Lord?

In what ways have you seen the Lord using your circumstances to make you more dependent on Him?

Prayer: *Sometimes I get troubled when circumstances seem to be conspiring against me, Lord: help me to trust that in all the seeming mess You are wonderfully at work.*

7) Sunday 27th February – promise

Read [Genesis 12.1-3](#)

".. 'I will make you into a great nation ..'" (Gen.12.2)

The Lord is always true to His promises. Here He declares that He will do for a couple what is now humanly quite impossible: He will birth from their barrenness a nation! Talk about 'building a house'! "I will make you .." is a keynote of the gospel. Rejoice!

The Lord's dealings with His people are well expressed here – 'You go, I give': how has this found expression in your experience?

What has the Lord been calling you to do which involves you stepping out of your 'comfort zone'?

Prayer: *How great You are, O Lord! Wonderful in all Your ways and able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or think. Glorify Your name in my life!*