

Psalms of Ascent 128 “Fortunate Fear”

Psalm 128:1-6

March 1, 2025

Psalm 128:1-6

- 1 Blessed are all who fear the Lord,
 who walk in obedience to him.
- 2 You will eat the fruit of your labor;
 blessings and prosperity will be yours.
- 3 Your wife will be like a fruitful vine
 within your house;
your children will be like olive shoots
 around your table.
- 4 Yes, this will be the blessing
 for the man who fears the Lord.
- 5 May the Lord bless you from Zion;
 may you see the prosperity of Jerusalem
 all the days of your life.
- 6 May you live to see your children’s children—
 peace be on Israel.

Psalm 128 is a wonderful psalm about blessing and prosperity.

We read about God’s goodness expressed in work, marriage, family and in the city. We’ve noticed over the past couple months working through this section of Scripture that certain psalms have within them certain words and ideas **repeated**. And when we see that it gives us way to understand that the **blessings** of Psalm 128 are expressed as those that come to us through v.1 and v.4 - the **fear** of the Lord.

There is a new connection for me as I have been studying for today and it is the connection between **fear and obedience**. It is not just any kind of obedience that God is looking for, not just any outward action but it an obedience that comes from something happening with in us.

Illus. Isaiah 1. In the book of Isaiah, Isaiah tells God’s people in chapter 1 that God is tired of all the sacrifices, offerings, New moon and sabbath observances and gatherings. That is God is interested in more than religious outward expression. Jesus said something in

similar in **Matthew 15:8** *“This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.”* So God in the Old Testament and in the New Testament is wanting our outward actions to be connected to an inner posture. Obedience flowing from something inside of us. An inward change that produces right actions. This is what verse 1 is pointing at when it says **“Blessed are all who fear the Lord.”** So before we get to the blessings that come with obedience, we have to talk about fear from which the right kind of obedience flows from.

We are familiar with fears. It's part of normal vocabulary to talk about phobias and which ones we have.

Illus. Acrophobia - fear of heights Olfactophobia - fear of smells. Frigophobia - fear of being cold. Ballistophobia - fear of missiles. Harpaxophobia - fear of robbers. Joeyphobia - fear of clowns. Genuphobia - afraid of knees.

Fears can define you, in this way. They set direction and boundaries for your life. If you are afraid of heights you will stay low. Afraid of lots of people you will stay in. If you are afraid to fly you take road trips.

When the Bible talks about fear, it talks about it in two ways and depending on the context of the passage, we have to try to understand how the word “fear” is being used. **One aspect of biblical fear is the sense of dread that something bad will happen.** It is the fear of consequences or punishment.

Hebrews 10:31 *“It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”* Hebrews explains that there is an appropriate and reasonable sense of dread for anyone who hears the truth of Jesus and does not turn away from their sins, that it is like trampling underfoot the Son of God.

Matthew 10:28 *And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.* But, the Jesus says, fear not you do not realize how valuable and important you to God. So in one sense of the fear of the Lord can mean terror or dread. It is the fear of consequences and punishment.

1 John 4:16-18

God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them.

17 This is how love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment: In this world we are like Jesus.

18 There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, **because fear has to do with punishment.**

Again, the “**fear**” is the worry of being hurt or punished. In the context of 1 John, God’s love in Christ helps us stay open to God because we aren’t worried about being condemned. Jesus has experienced the consequence of sin for us, so we have new confidence to come to God, to stand before Him. If you don’t know Christ then the fear of standing before God is reasonable one. That moment that is a rightfully scary moment is when a holy God determines eternal destinations. **God’s love is oriented towards a better future for us rather than a punitive response.** This helps get to the other aspect of fear. “***The fear of the Lord***” also means a certain **honoring** and a **reverence** for God and it is this aspect of fear that Psalm 128 is highlighting. This fear is one that leads to happiness and joy. The first fear is troublesome. This second fear makes us blessed, lucky and fortunate.

Proverbs 1:7

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.

You will not have real knowledge and wisdom without fear. You may know stuff but what you know won’t really matter.

Proverbs 19:23

The fear of the Lord leads to life, and whoever has it rests satisfied; he will not be visited by harm.

Fear that leads to life. It is a combination of holy respect, great awe and a deep joy. **Therefore it is not a fear that makes a person run away from God. It is a fear that drives us to Him.** This fear of God is an **inward condition of amazement.** It’s awe. It’s appreciation.

Illus. Putting lydia in the car. There is so much excitement that is part of your life the first time you have a child. The attention and conversations. Foods you can't eat. Smells change. As a child grows and gets bigger, clothes change, the thermostat gets set lower and lower. And then there is the birth. The involvement of doctors and nurses, the delivery and then it happens. The nurse helps you to your car. You get everyone buckled in and you start driving home. And it's just the two of you and a brand new little human. You are in charge of another person. **And joy mixes with fear.** The fear is messing up. The fear is not doing our best for this her. The dread is not one or being hurt but one of not rising to the occasion. For the preciousness and pricelessness of what we've been given.

Psalm 128 is ***not*** a psalm in which the psalmist is worried about **punishment**. "I better obey or God is going to get me." **This fear of the Lord is a fear that treasures.** A fear that wants to obey because of how good God is. To inwardly connect with who God is and what God has done and to be in awe, to want to our best in the light of God's goodness and character.

What a great distinction for us to consider. The kind of fear we have when we consider God. No fear? Fear of punishment? Danger. Consequence. Fear and wonder? Awe and reverence at what we've been given. It is the fear of not cherishing. Fear of being too casual and letting Gods love and grace becoming ordinary.

The goodness of God is woven throughout this Psalm. An obedience out of wonder and reverence sees blessing.

V.2 "You will eat the fruit of your labor;" - Fruitful labor - reverse the curse of work.

3 "Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house;" - Fruitful wife - "within your house" suggests "the inner rooms of your house" - security.

"Your children will be like olive shoots around your table." - Because this man is blessed so will be his wife and his kids. It is a running over and abundant kind of blessing. A life connected to others, to the city, to Jerusalem.

V.6 “May you live to see your children’s children—“ To fear the Lord and walk in obedience has a longevity and generational impact.

Psalm 128 is highlighting a great reminder that **the Christian life is always more, never less**. When Jesus says in John 10:10 “I have come that you might life and life abundantly.” Jesus makes it clear that the way of discipleship is not a **reduction** of what we already have, not a subtraction from what we are used to. Rather, he will expand our capacities and fill us up with life so that we overflow with joy.

Illus. When God created in the garden. God **blessed** man and woman in Genesis 1:22. In Genesis 12:1, God purposed the offspring of Abraham to be a **blessing** to the nations. Then when that son arrived, he preached blessing on the poor in spirit, the peacemakers, the pure at heart in Matthew 5. Jesus said “**Blessed** are you.....”. When Jesus give his first sermon, he opens it with lucky are you, fortunate are you, blessed are you. And in Revelation it says “**Blessed** are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.” So God’s word, truth, instruction in your life takes on new significance, it won’t be towards less life but towards more.

Illus. In the Hebrew culture, the standard signs of happiness were a wife who had many children and children who gathered and grew around the table. Jesus did say to the disciples to that if anyone would come after him, he must deny himself, take up his cross and follow. But Christianity isn’t understood best as a way of living in which we most often say “no” to life and look for ways to have less fun. Christianity is move towards life, towards freedom, towards fun that does’t degrade, towards relationships that renew and give life. Jesus said take my yoke/teaching upon you, my yoke is easy and my burden light. Christianity has always meant to be a **blessing**.

Romans 5:1-2 (The Message)

By entering through faith into what God has always wanted to do for us—set us right with him, make us fit for him—we have it all together with God because of our Master Jesus. And that’s not all: We throw open our doors to God and discover at the same moment that he has

already thrown open his door to us. We find ourselves standing where we always hoped we might stand—out in the wide open spaces of God's grace and glory, standing tall and shouting our praise.

The Biblical pictures of our future are images of weddings, feasts, banquets. Streams waters welling up in deserts. Choirs of angels. Mansions. Joy. Family. In this life and the next.

“The easiest thing in the world is to be a Christian.” What is hard is to be a sinner. Being a Christian is what we were created for. The life of faith has the support of an entire creation and the resources of a magnificent redemption. The structure of this world was created by God so we can live in it easily and happily as his children. In the course of Christian discipleship we discover that *without* Christ we were doing it **the hard way** and that with Christ we are doing it **the easy way**. It is not the Christians who have it hard, but non-Christians. Jesus said that the road is narrow, but the path to God and with God is the better one. Narrow and better.

Illus. Someone may have more money. A desirable **job**. More time off. Better **vacations**. But to live on without a reverence and awe of God is to live against the grain of creation. To trade wonder in for living wondering when will I lose all I've acquired. When will it all end? To be anxious about the future and about someone taking what we've built. *So what are we really giving up as a follower of Christ?* Separation. Being lost. A life directed by the flesh. Taking up our cross, following the narrow way isn't a move away from freedom but a move towards it.

Psalm 128 says that the right fear that leads to the right obedience is the blessed life. To know God and fear God is then to know God's good character and his good ways. Generosity. Hospitality. Honesty. Love. We live a blessed life. And it's a life that makes you feel safe because you are where you are supposed to be.

Illus. I think about those moments where you find yourself a little nervous because of your environment, a little scared because of where you are or what is happening around you, but there is a comfort

and security that can be had that dispels fear depending on who you are with. The right person makes all the difference, their strength, their knowledge, their power. **Biblical fear is a fear of what would come were we not in Christ.** Our fear is what if we had been left out, what if we didn't know Him, his strength and knowledge and power, if we weren't forgiven, weren't reconciled - to not have that is a scary thing. That apart from Christ we have no righteousness. A part from Christ our destiny was damnation.

What if the one you are supposed to fear is also good?

What if His actions in your life are towards blessing?

As we respond in worship with the Lords Supper this morning. It is interesting to me that the idea of **blessing** is also present in the meal. Paul says in **1 Corinthians 10:16 - "is it not the cup of blessing that we bless?"** Which means that if we are to understand the Lord's Supper we realize that it is conveying a blessing. As Jesus shared the Last Supper with the disciples, Jesus took the last cup of the Passover meal called the "cup of blessing" and he passed it to the disciples, at the same time saying that He Himself would not drink until he drank it anew in the Father's Kingdom.

On the cross, Jesus drinks the cup of God's wrath and judgment so that we might drink blessing. Jesus experiences humiliation and creates the an exchange so we can be secure. Jesus experienced our punishment so that we no longer have to fear God's consequences but revere His sacrifice and His his grace in our lives.

Pray