

Psalm 127:1-2

Psalm 127:1-2 (TLB)

“Unless the Lord builds a house, the builders’ work is useless. Unless the Lord protects a city, sentries do no good.

2 It is senseless for you to work so hard from early morning until late at night, fearing you will starve to death; for God wants his loved ones to get their proper rest.”

Psalm 127:1

Except the Lord build the house Or rather, “a house.” The word “house” may refer either to an ordinary dwelling; to the temple, as a place of worship; or to a family, with reference to its success and prosperity, as the word house is often used now. The statement is universal, and is designed to indicate a universal dependence on God in human undertakings, though it is not improbable that there may have been an allusion, when the psalm was composed, to some building which was contemplated or commenced. If the psalm was a composition of David or Solomon, the allusion may have been to the temple about to be erected. The language, however, is so general as to be applicable to any enterprise of that kind.

They labor in vain that build it literally, “In vain toil its builders in it.” The idea is, that they are entirely dependent on God. No matter what their skill, their strength, their industry may be—all will be in vain unless God shall assist them. They are dependent on Him for life, for health, for strength, for practical wisdom, for a disposition to continue their work, and for success in it. Their work might be destroyed by fire, by a tempest, by an earthquake, or by an irruption of enemies; and for the result, therefore, they are entirely dependent on God.

Except the Lord keep the city The same idea of dependence is here repeated in another form. The preservation of a city depends wholly on God, whatever care or precaution may be used. The watchman waketh but in vain literally, “In vain waketh the keeper.” The word rendered waketh means to be sleepless; and then, to watch. The allusion is to the watch or guard appointed to keep a city, and the idea is, that, whatever may be the diligence, the care, the fidelity of one thus appointed to guard a city, its safe-keeping must depend on God alone. Fires may break out in spite of the watchmen; a tempest may sweep over it; bands of armed people may assail it; or the pestilence may suddenly come into it, and spread desolation through its dwellings. There may have been an allusion in this to some immediate arrangement for guarding Jerusalem when the psalm was composed; but the remark is so general that it is not necessary to confine it to that. It is universally true that, after all the care for their own preservation which people can employ, their safety depends wholly on God.

Psalm 127:2

It is vain for you to rise up early The psalmist does not here say that it is improper to rise early; or that there could be no advantage in it; or that people would be more likely to be successful in their undertakings if they did not rise early; but that, although this was done, they would be still altogether dependent on God.

Mere early rising, without his blessing, would not secure what they hoped to accomplish, for everything is still in the hand of God. Health, strength, clearness of mind, and success, are all under his control; and though early rising may tend to produce all these—as it does in fact—yet still people are not the less dependent on God for success.

To sit up late That you may labor or study. As in the former case the psalmist does not express any opinion about the propriety or impropriety of early rising, so it is in respect to this.

He merely says that if it is done, this, of itself, will not accomplish the object; people are still dependent on God for success though they do it. As a matter of fact, however, sitting up late has less tendency to promote success in life than early rising; but in either case there is the same dependence on God.

To eat the bread of sorrows Bread of care, anxiety, or trouble; that is, bread earned or procured by the severity of toil. There may be an allusion here to the original sentence pronounced on man, Genesis 3:17. The meaning is, that it is in vain that you labor hard, that you exhaust your strength, in order to get bread to eat, unless God shall bless you. After all your toil the result is with him.

For so he giveth his beloved sleep The word “for” is not in the original, The sentence is very obscure in the connection in which it stands. The Septuagint and Latin Vulgate render it, “Ye who eat the bread of care—rise when you have rested—when he hath given his beloved sleep.” Some have supposed it to mean that God gives his people rest without toil, or that, while others labor, his “beloved”—his friends—sleep; but this interpretation is not necessarily demanded by the Hebrew, and is inconsistent with the general doctrine of the Bible. Others have supposed the idea to be, that God gives his beloved rest after labor; but though this is true, it is not true of them especially or exclusively. Some suppose, with as little probability, that the meaning is, that what others hope (but hope in vain) to get by labor, the Lord bestows upon his people in sleep, they know not how.

The meaning evidently is, that God bestows “sleep” upon his people in some sense in which it is not bestowed on others, or that there is, in regard to their case, something in which they differ from those who are so anxious and troubled—who rise so early for the sake of gain—who toil so late—who eat the bread of care. The idea seems to be that there would be calmness, repose, freedom from anxiety or solicitude. God makes the mind of his people—his beloved—calm and tranquil, while the world around is filled with anxiety and restlessness—busy, bustling, worried. As a consequence of this calmness of mind, and of their confidence in him, they enjoy undisturbed repose at night.

They are not kept wakeful and anxious about their worldly affairs as other men are, for they leave all with God, and thus he “giveth his beloved sleep.” The particle “so”—or “thus,” I apprehend, refers to the general sense of what had been said, rather than to what immediately precedes it; to the fact that all success depends on God (Psalm 127:1), and that it is always by his interposition, and not as the result of human skill, toil, or fatigue, that people find calmness, success, repose. It is only by the favor of God, and by their recognizing their dependence on him, that they find repose, success, and freedom from care.

Barnes' Notes on the Old Testament.

Personal insights:

- If we place our life and all we have into God’s hand, who is greater than God to take it away?
- Place all that we have and do into God’s hand. God’s hand is the safest place to be.
- If we believe that God is greater than anyone or anything, any situation, any circumstance and so on and believe that no one is able to snatch anything out of His hand, fear and worry will dissipate.

John 10:27-30

“My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. 28 And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. 29 My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand. 30 I and My Father are one.”

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