Psalm 128: “Blessed is Everyone Who Fears the Lord”

Light and Life Class

July 7, 2019

Summary: The person who fears the Lord will experience blessing from God.

Context: Psalm 128 is a wisdom psalm, which means it sets forth for the reader the nature of a wise life, that is, a life lived to the glory of God. Its companion is Psalm 127, because not only are both psalms wisdom psalms, but a primary focus in both songs is on the family.

Explanation

A. vv. 1-4: The one who fears the Lord will experience blessing from God.

1. Note the concept of the “fear of the Lord” at the beginning of v. 1 and the end of v. 4. This is a literary device called an “inclusion,” which means the theme of the four verses is the fear of the Lord.

2. What exactly is the fear of the Lord (Hebrew for “who fears the Lord” in vv. 1 and 4 is *yerē YHWH*)? The verb phrase “fears the Lord” or the noun phrase “the fear of the Lord” appear more than 100 times in the Bible.

a. The fear of the Lord is the “beginning of knowledge” and the “beginning of wisdom” (Proverbs 1:7; 9:10; Job 28:28; Psalm 111:10; etc.).

b. Isaiah prophesied concerning Messiah that “his delight shall be in the fear of the Lord” (Isaiah 11:2).

c. The fear of the Lord comes from experiencing God as he truly is (Jonah 1:9-10, 16). It has to do with awe of the Lord who has made all things (Psalm 33:8).

d. The fear of the Lord is related to hope in the Lord (Psalm 147:10-11).

e. The fear of the Lord is part of the covenant relationship with God (Psalm 103:17-18).

f. Perhaps the clearest picture of what the fear of the Lord looks like in practice appears in Deuteronomy 10:12-13. See also Psalm 128:1b.

g. However, note that the Apostle Paul summarizes his indictment of humanity in Romans 3:10-18 with the phrase, “There is not fear of God before their eyes” (quoting Psalm 36:1). Perhaps the archetype person who did not fear the Lord is the pharaoh of the exodus (Exodus 9:30).

h. The fear of the Lord is characteristic of the New Testament saint too (Acts 9:31).

3. Proposed definition: The fear of the Lord is a stunned apprehension of God in his glory that drives a repentant sinner to live a life of righteousness, that is, to live for God’s glory and by God’s grace.

4. What are the blessings the psalm promises to those who do walk in the fear of the Lord? Cf. Jesus’ Beatitudes in Matthew 5:2-12.

a. “eat the fruit of the labor of your hands” (contrast Deuteronomy 28:38-40)

b. a “fruitful” wife

c. many children (cf. Psalm 127:3-5)

5. Is this psalmist simply naïve about the suffering of those who do walk in the fear of the Lord?

B. vv. 5-6a: pronouncement of an individual blessing (cf. Numbers 6:24-26), perhaps as the pilgrims prepare to leave Jerusalem (the “you” in vv. 5-6 is singular)

1. the blessing of the prosperity of Jerusalem (also a concern in Psalms 122:6)

2. long life

3. Note how the psalm seems to connect the welfare of the family (v. 3) with the welfare of the nation as a whole (vv. 5, 6).

C. v. 6b: a final pronouncement of blessing on the whole nation (cf. 125:5)