

Unless the Lord Builds the House (Psalm 127)

Valleys Family Church Sermon
Stuart Wheatman, Sunday 25th Nov 2012

Intro

- I felt God put this message on my heart & at prayer breakfast yesterday someone prayed out this scripture without knowing I was going to speak on it today.
- We have just inherited a building and are about God's work, felt this scripture to be key not only to the building but all our work as we serve God.

Read Psalm 127

Background-

Song of ascents/degrees- psalms 120-34 fifteen psalms. "Ma'alot" is the plural of the Hebrew word "Ma'alah", which means "step", "degree" or "ascent". Four written by David, one by his son Solomon and other ten anonymous. What are they? Various ideas put forward:

- These are pilgrimage psalms for the festivals of pilgrimage to Jerusalem three times a year- Passover, Pentecost, Tabernacles (Deut 16:16). 'Ascent'= going up- Jerusalem is high up like Brynmawr- going up Heads of valleys road is very similar to the bus trip up to Jerusalem.
- 15 psalms- 15 steps up to the temple- steps are grouped in clusters to stop people running up. A psalm would be recited on each step going up to the Temple Court.
- Psalms chosen to rejoice in the ascent from captivity in Babylon to Jerusalem under Ezra the scribe.
- We know that these psalms were recited during the Feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem. During the water-drawing ceremony there, the Levites stood "upon the fifteen steps leading down from the court of the Israelites to the Women's Court (large semicircular steps), corresponding to The Fifteen Songs of Ascent in the Psalms; upon them the Levites used to stand with musical instruments and sing hymns" (The Mishnah, Sukkah 5.4).
- Others see the term 'ascents' as referring to the style of these psalms lifting up 'ascending' God's name or to the style of music- in a high tone, or a group of psalms sung in ascending pitch for each psalm.
- Hezekiah's healing giving him fifteen extra years- hence 15 psalms (Is. 38:5-22) and the sign of shadow shifting ten degrees on the sundial by which it had gone down- hence the psalms of 'degrees'.

I prefer the pilgrimage explanation and the reciting going up the steps as:

- They are very brief.
- They mention a lot about mountains, Zion (a mountain)- looking to the hills- Jerusalem is high up.
- They mention Jerusalem, Israel- they are very patriotic.
- They mention the word 'house' a reference to the house of God- the Temple at Jerusalem. They end with a call for those who work in the Temple to bless the Lord (psalm 134).
- They emphasise God's protection and blessing of His people- two things people going on pilgrimage would be asking God for.

1. Success in whatever we do depends upon God- God ESTABLISHES a work

- v1 'Unless the Lord builds the house'-

- **'House' can mean the Temple-** God's Temple was/is still called 'The House'- e.g. in Acts 2:2 scholars are not sure if the 'house' where they were sitting was still the upper room mentioned in Acts 1:13 or the 'House' meaning the Temple. Certainly if it was the Temple it would explain why the tongues sign at Pentecost drew such a crowd.
- This Psalm was written by Solomon. Solomon literally built the Temple of God- his father David wanted to, but because he was a man of war God said his son, Solomon, would build it (Solomon='peace'). Solomon was aware that trying to build a temple for God if He had not commanded it was futile, however he became convinced God had commanded him to do it. The result was that God built the house through Solomon and the evidence was seen in the presence of God filling the temple. Later that presence would leave due to idolatry, as witnessed by Ezekiel the Prophet in a vision. The temple would then be destroyed by the Babylonians due to Israel not desiring God's presence.
- The Temple is all about God's presence- the Ark of the Covenant was there, the Holy of Holies- His Shekinah glory manifested there. Jews were to face the Temple when praying- this was initiated when Solomon built the Temple- the key thing wasn't the Temple but the person in it- God. Even today Jews post their prayer is the only part left of the Temple- a retaining wall- the Western, 'Wailing' Wall- they are longing for the presence of God.
- We must desire God's presence above all- it is all about Him. We mustn't lose sight of God and the things God has called us to and worship anything other than Him. Buildings are great, but it is not really about buildings- it is about the manifest presence of God- Solomon realised this and so must we.
- **The Church is called God's house in the New Testament** (1 Tim. 3: 15; Eph. 2: 22)- we are the temple where God resides. Jesus said He would build His Church, but also calls us to play our part and as each part does its share so the body of Christ gets built up. We cannot build Church without God, and yet even though He could choose to build Church alone He has ordained to use all of us in the process and gifted us to play our part. Are you playing your part? It is only as we are empowered by His Spirit that we shall do so effectively. Why not ask to be filled today?
- **'House' can mean a king's dynasty-** Solomon was third and last king to rule over the united kingdom of Israel (Saul- 40yrs reign, David- 40yrs reign, Solomon- 40yrs reign). Due to Solomon's sin his dynasty was ripped into 2 pieces- the kingdom of Israel in the North (10 tribes) and Judah in the South (2 tribes). Divided for 400 years. Solomon was the wisest king in history (Proverbs, Queen of Sheba, Encyclopedic knowledge) and the most foolish- women, riches, power (chariots). Josephus on Solomon's wisdom:
 "Now so great was the prudence and wisdom which God granted Solomon that he surpassed the ancients, and even the Egyptians ... He composed a thousand and five books of odes and songs, and three thousand books of parables and similitudes, for he spoke a parable about every kind of tree from the hyssop to the cedar ... There was no form of nature with which he was not acquainted or which he passed over without examining, but he studied them all philosophically and revealed the most complete knowledge of their several properties. And God granted him knowledge of the art used against demons for the benefit and healing of men"
- Solomon has studied greatly and build a kingdom but 'in vain'- he had laboured in vain. Have you ever laboured over something in vain? Perhaps you have typed something important out on a computer and lost it all because of a power cut before you saved it- your labour has been in vain and you have had to start from scratch again. Imagine your whole life's work being in vain- destroying what you have built up- Paul speaks about a leader's life's work being tested by fire when we stand before God and the vain things we have done being burnt up:
 I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor. For we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building. According to the

grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw—each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire. Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple. (1 Cor 3:6-16)

- Builder's have to account to the owner of the house for the job they have done.
- We may not all be Kings like Solomon and may not be leaders in the Church but we all have our allocated areas of responsibility in life- let's not be like Solomon who toiled much to no avail- let's make sure what we build stands under God's scrutiny.
- We must labour (note the warnings to sluggards in Proverbs), but the labour must not become more important than God- Mary and Martha in scripture- Mary chose what was right but Martha laboured much to little avail as she had her priorities wrong. Have you become weary doing much, but spent little time lately sitting at the feet of Jesus?

2. True security is only in God- God KEEPS a work

- **v4 'Unless the Lord guards the city'**
- Walls are built around cities to protect people- Abergavenny, Jerusalem.
- As extra protection, watchmen were posted on the walls of a city- they would walk along the walls with a good view of any enemy approaching. They were also posted on the city gate to guard who came in and out- this was the weakest area of the city so needed special attention- the gates of the city were often closed at a certain time during darkness to protect the city.
- Watchmen would have had to have worked shifts through the night staying up late and getting up early in order to guard the city. God says this is in vain if God is not watching over the city. This would be true of the infamous city of Babylon, for many years considered to be impregnable, but after 70 years of keeping the Jews captive it fell just as God said it would:

Cyrus was perplexed at Babylon, they neither agreed to surrender nor could he breach their high walls. After many futile attempts a plan was devised. The Euphrates river that flowed in and out of Babylon was diverted into a basin and while the Babylonian's were at a festival the Persian poured in through the river's entrance into the city. Thus was Babylon taken for the first time by Persia, around the 29th of October 539 B.C.

- Internet security- Fraser said there are some viruses that lie undetected- the antivirus says 'all is well' and the actual antivirus itself is infected!
- We need to be wise and have physical protection as much as it depends on us, but more importantly trust in God over and above this. Where does your/our security lie? For some it is in money or house or car or possessions or a job or relationships or friends or health. When those things are shaken when they sometimes are in life is our security diminished?

'Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil for you are with me'

- What are your fears at the moment? What are the enemies who are coming against your city walls? Hezekiah had the Babylonian army taunting him around the walls of Jerusalem but he went back to God in prayer and God delivered Jerusalem from the enemy. Bring your fears to God today in prayer and receive by faith His peace: Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Phil 4:6-7. 'Beyond understanding' because it isn't based on external events we are going through but on God.
- My testimony- how God enabled me to overcome fear in my own life bit by bit by trusting Him and taking faith steps and ignoring anxiety. Yes, take anxiolytics if you need them, but trust in God. Medication helps, but God brings transformed character- often takes time.

- Who will protect our achievements, the good things we have done, the ground we have made in God? Although we have responsibilities to guard that intrusted to us: 'O Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to you, avoiding worldly and empty chatter' -1Tim 6:20
We ultimately lean on God to protect the seeds we have planted:
That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day -2Tim 1:12
- fear will cause us to control and manipulate. We can only bring about the right conditions for growth- it is God alone who causes the growth. We need to pray and share, but ultimately trust God for our loved ones.

3. Only by God's grace can we leave a lasting legacy- God **PASSES ON** a work

- **v3 'Children are a heritage from the Lord'**
- Heritage, reward- we know that we cannot earn the right to have children, but rather what Solomon is meaning here I think is that they are to be treasured as a gift from the Lord- there is great blessing associated with having children- they are to be cherished not despised:
And they were bringing children to Him so that He might touch them; but the disciples rebuked them. But when Jesus saw this, He was indignant and said to them, "Permit the children to come to Me; do not hinder them; for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. "Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it at all." - Mark 10:13-15
Jesus was indignant in this passage because he loved kids- so should we!
- According to our passage the children born in one's youth fight our corner against the enemy in the city gates. The city gates were a place the enemy would attack a city- hurling insults and threats verbally before an all-out attack- even the grey and feeble have nothing to worry about if they have a quiver full of warriors to protect them.
- The city gates were also where the law-courts and business took place. The gates were huge and had rooms in. The elders of the city would hang out there and act as judges for the people, listening to their disputes. If a person was old and forgetful and someone wanted to take advantage of them and rip them off children would rise up and defend their honour.
- In the same way as the family, within the Church we need the younger generations more than we realise. A Church is only as strong as it's ability to pass on to the next generations.
- What we are we will pass on to our kids- Solomon passed on a split kingdom to his kids- what a sad inheritance for them. What will we pass on to our kids (i.e. physical and spiritual children)? Tabor trustees have passed on something valuable to us, and it in turn was passed on to them by previous generations. Will we pass it on to the next generation? The baton is in our hands.
- Just like Abraham, we have been chosen to inherit the promises from God and to pass them on to our children, grandchildren etc. How are we doing?

Psalm 145:4-6 One generation shall praise your works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts..

Deuteronomy 4:9 Only take heed to yourself, and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things which your eyes have seen...

Deuteronomy 6:7 And you shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way...

Joel 1:3 Tell you your children of it, and let your children tell their children, and their children another generation.

Psalm 71:18 Even when I am old and gray, do not forsake me, O God, till I declare your power to the next generation, your might to all who are to come.

- Our children are to run faster, go further than us and into new areas we have not even explored in God, like the song 'I believe the children are our future...show them all the beauty they possess inside'

- We have seen here the importance of having children, but just as we cannot make ourselves fruitful in the natural (apart from doing our part) so too we must play our part spiritually in sharing the gospel but we cannot make people become Christians- we leave this work to God, but we convince, persuade and pray for people to do so, trusting the results with Him. Let's pray and believe for many children and let's give them something wonderful as an inheritance.

God wants to do a work in us today which He will watch over and cause to increase rather than decrease. He doesn't just want it to end with this present generations but to impact future generations. Are we willing to be that people?

Summary

- 1. We are dependant on God to establish a work**
- 2. Only God is able truly keep a work**
- 3. God makes provision for us to leave a lasting legacy**

Song

Your voice is like thunder (house of gold)