

“Unless the Lord...”

Introduction

From Sunday to Monday

- A. It's Sunday. That's why we're gathered together here this morning to worship our God. We are, some might say, "at church." But what happens tomorrow? How does Sunday connect to Monday? Or does it? Is it supposed to? Most of our time is spent outside of these walls. For many of us, we get busy in particular with work and family. We're not at church, we're at the office, or at home.
1. Here we have a 3 of the most basic spheres of human life: religion, work, and family. But do they interact with one another? Our culture and, at times in church history, even our churches, can lead us to separate our "sacred" duties from our "secular" ones. Religion is distinct from work and family. Sunday really has little to say to Monday.
 - a. Sadly, our experience often solidifies this separation in our understanding:
 - i. Work can, at times, feel deadening to the soul. I wish I could think about the things of God, but I'm too busy working with 1s and 0s, or disgruntled clientele, or balancing spreadsheets. I have my devotional time in the morning, but then I go to work, and my soul is sucked dry. It feels as if work is in opposition to our religious life, not an expression of it.
 - ii. The same can happen with family. Having young kids especially can really throw off your rhythms of devotion and worship. Having quiet time to pray to the Lord? I'm too tired. It's too noisy. Getting involved in the church? It's too complicated. Again, it feels as if family is in opposition to our religious life not an expression of it.
- B. This may be what we get in the culture and even from some church traditions, and it might be what we feel in our experience, but is this what we see in the Scriptures? What does God have to say about religion, work, and family...about Sunday and Monday?!

The Text

Psa 127:0–5

⁰ A Song of Ascents. Of Solomon.

¹ Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain.

² It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil; for he gives to his beloved sleep.

³ Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb a reward.

⁴ Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the children of one's youth.

⁵ Blessed is the man who fills his quiver with them! He shall not be put to shame when he speaks with his enemies in the gate.

The Outline

- A. We will progress this morning through 3 headings: (1) Work (vv. 1-2); (2) Family (vv. 3-5); (3) Christ.

(1) Work (vv. 1-2)

¹ Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain.

² It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil; for he gives to his beloved sleep.

A Unifying Factor?

- A. I must admit I was drawn to this Psalm because of these first 2 verses. They are amazing right?! Especially for the situation I'm in right now in this new position. But vv. 1-2 aren't the only verses in this Psalm! As I was studying through and came to v. 3, I found myself thinking: "What a strange transition! We're talking about work and then suddenly we're talking about kids. Why the seemingly random shift? How do the 2 parts of this Psalm fit together?!"
1. While Solomon, the apparent author of this Psalm, provides for us some sense of a unifying factor—he both built the house of the Lord (work) and was born to fulfill promises made to the house of David (family)—I think there is something even more significant situated in the background of this Psalm that accounts for its 2 parts: namely, the creation account and the commission that God gives to Adam and Eve before the fall. Do you remember?
 - a. We are told that Adam was created first and put in the Garden of Eden "to work and keep (shamar—guard/watch) it" (2:15). But it was not good for man to be alone so God made a helper for him, Eve. And then we are given this summary statement in 1:27: "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them"; followed by the divine commission in v. 28: "And God blessed them. And God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over [it all].'" The sense is that they were to work in the garden paradise and expand its boundaries into the rest of the earth until the earth was filled with His holy presence and image and glory. The earth was to be His temple!
 - i. But there it is: work and family—laboring serve, guard, subdue, and have dominion for the Lord; and bearing fruit and multiplying and filling the earth with His image in our children. It is this background that holds the 2 parts of our Psalm together!

(1) Work from, with, by, for the Lord

- A. So then, returning to our focus on work: what does this background tell us about it? Here are 4 prepositions for us to consider:
1. Work is from the Lord—God is not opposed to work. He was, in fact, the first worker. He created the earth in 6 days and on the 7th day “God rested from all His work that He had done in creation” (Gen 2:3). And He creates humanity in His image to work. Work is not an inherently bad thing. It is God’s idea and a reflection of His own being and activity.
 2. Work is with the Lord—He created man to work with Him in establishing the earth as His sanctuary and temple. He was not far from Adam and Eve but walking with them in the garden! It is not that He needs us, but like a Mother letting her toddler “help” her bake cookies, He wants to be with us, He loves us.
 3. Work is by the Lord—God gave to man His vigor and strength. He breathed life into Him. He blessed him before ever giving him work. He set Him in the garden where he could eat from every tree but one. Adam had all that He needed in God. His work was to be by the strength that God supplied Him.
 4. Work is for the Lord—Adam and Eve were made in His image. They were meant to reflect Him. They were not to do their work for their own praise, but for His. Their subduing and having dominion was not one of autonomous self-aggrandizement. They were mirroring their king and His glorious reign as they reigned on the earth under Him and for Him!

(2) Work without Reference to the Lord

- A. But, as we look more closely at the first 2 verses of our Psalm, what becomes painfully obvious is that there is now set before humanity this tragic option of working without reference to the Lord.
1. When Adam and Eve didn’t guard the garden and didn’t subdue and have dominion over the creatures but let the serpent in, work became about serving self not God. They left Him. And, hence, their work, which with God was to be fruitful, without Him became vanity.
- B. Is that not what immediately stands forth in our text? 3x it is repeated: “Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain. It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest...” What is all of our work without the Lord: vanity! Do you feel that? We work like hamsters in a wheel. We’re running with all our might but going nowhere.
1. And this working in vain without the Lord is described as “eating the bread of anxious toil” (v. 2). We are working like crazy, and we may even be eating from the

fruit of our labors, but it isn't satisfying. There's something empty about it, something unsettling.

- a. This is the man who gets that promotion he's been working so hard for. But when he gets it, he finds that he feels no different, maybe even worse. There's now a new set of anxieties because he has more responsibility, more expected of him. You're eating, but you're empty!
- C. We might consider the tower of Babel as an illustration here, where the human community comes together to work but not with God, in opposition to Him. Though they attempt to build their tower up to the heavens to make a name for themselves, God confuses their language and disperses them across the earth. Vanity! And they fill the earth with this kind of vain, self-centered labor!

(3) Work with Reference to the Lord

- A. But we are in this Psalm invited to come back to work as it was intended: with reference to God. "Unless the Lord builds...Unless the Lord watches..." He is still willing and wanting to work with us, even in a fallen and cursed context. Even in spite of our rebellion.
- B. We are told what this working with Him is like at the end of v. 2, and it's wonderful: "for He gives to His beloved sleep."
 - 1. Here is an invitation to stop striving to be God and start being truly and fully human. Sleep. Have you ever wondered why God created us in such a way that we sleep away 1/3 of our lives?
 - a. Sleep is a parable. Even the greatest CEO, athlete, celebrity, etc. needs sleep. It is an ever-present reminder that we are not God. God alone never sleeps: "Behold, he who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep (Psa 121:4).
 - b. And, therefore, sleep is a test. Can we shut off? Can we let God be God? Am I the one upholding my universe, or is he? More specifically, sleep tests my faith that I am, in fact "His beloved."
 - i. Here is the dividing line between work that is without the Lord and work that is with Him; work that is in vain and work that is eternally abiding.
 - (1) When we don't understand that we are beloved of the Lord, we strive to find that love from others. We work our careers to get the accolades to feel beloved. But it never satisfies. When we don't understand that we are beloved of the Lord, we labor anxiously trying to provide for ourselves because we don't think He will do it for us. We store up our manna in barns, but it rots by the morning.

(2) But if we know that we are beloved of the Lord (that we are valued, we are cared for), then even while we work, we rest. And at the end of the day, we can sleep (Good Night Moon).

C. Solomon knew this kind of work. He was loved by the Lord (2 Sam 12:25) and assigned the work of building Him a house, the temple, where God would put His name (2 Chr 6:20). And because God had set him to this work, God saw it to the end, bringing the materials, the skilled laborers, and eventually, even filling it with His own glory!

Our Work?

- A. Now, we must ask about our work? We live in what I've seen termed a "no vacation nation." A culture of workaholism. The work-life balance people talk about is all off, especially here. A lot of the tech companies you guys work for, plush out their buildings with everything you could want or need, so that the office starts to become your home, even your church. Why go anywhere else?!
- B. Are we working without or with reference to the Lord? Run our work through those prepositions.
1. Is our work from Him?—Has He set us to it, assigned it to us. Have we even asked?
 2. Is our work with Him?—Are we talking with Him in midst of it?
 3. Is our work by Him?—Are we trusting in Him, pressing in to His strength?
 4. Is our work for Him? Are we building a tower or a temple?

(2) Family (vv. 3-5)

³ Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb a reward.

⁴ Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the children of one's youth.

⁵ Blessed is the man who fills his quiver with them! He shall not be put to shame when he speaks with his enemies in the gate.

(1) Family from the Lord

- A. Reconsidering Gen 1-2 with regards to family, we can use those same prepositions once more:
1. Family is from the Lord—When is the last time you reflected on the wonder of family? God exists in familial form: Father, Son, Spirit. And He creates us in His image male and female—in relationship. And, just as the triune relation explodes in loving creativity, so too the oneness of flesh between husband and wife creates more—family. It's His idea, and it's good.
 2. Family is with the Lord—We were in His family, Adam is called "the son of God" (Luk 3:38). We were created to be a family within a family. My family within the family of God!

3. Family is by the Lord—He is the one who brought Eve from the rib of Adam and gave her to him. He is the one who brings forth the fruit of the womb, children.
4. Family is for the Lord—All of this was to be a part of bearing fruit, multiplying, and filling the earth with the image of God, His glory covering the earth like water the sea.

(2) Family without Reference to the Lord

- A. As with work, so now after the fall, we are so prone to do family without reference to God.
 1. Adam takes the fruit from His wife’s hand, against God’s word. God is kicked out of the family picture. They divorce their heavenly husband. “We can do this family thing on our own.” But it all goes bad. When God shows up, fingers start pointing: “The woman whom you gave to be with me...” (Gen 3:12), she made me do it!
 - a. And this self-oriented spirit is replicated in their children. Cain rises up and kills Abel from jealousy. Instead of being fruitful, multiplying and filling the earth with God’s image, they are filling it with violence, the image of their new father the devil, who was “a murderer from the beginning” (Joh 8:44)!

(3) Family with Reference to the Lord

- A. But God has not given up on humanity. In this Psalm we are invited to bring our families back into their proper context: in His family. We are to see that our children truly are “a heritage from the Lord” (v. 3a); “a reward” (v. 3b) and a “bless[ing]” (v. 5) from Him!
 1. The particular emphasis in our text is on the protection that the family provides for one another. Instead of using family for selfish gain, turning on one another, competing with one another, they are helping, covering, protecting one another.
 - a. Children are “like arrows in the hand of a warrior” (v. 4); filling the father’s “quiver” (v. 5a); and together they stand against their “enemies in the gate” (v. 5b)!
- B. This, of course, is precisely what Solomon was to be for David:

Psa 132:11, 17-18

¹¹ The Lord swore to David a sure oath from which he will not turn back: “One of the sons of your body I will set on your throne...”

¹⁷ [In Zion] I will make a horn to sprout for David; I have prepared a lamp for my anointed.

¹⁸ His enemies I will clothe with shame, but on him his crown will shine.”

Our Family?

- A. Now, what about our families? These are tragic times we are living in! We live in a culture that treats children not as arrows to be used to put to death our enemies, but as our enemies and we put them to death. The abortion culture is horrific. This devastation with

Planned Parenthood would tell us they are worth more to us dead than alive. Or I remember the cover of Time Magazine from a few months back, observing and promoting the child-free marriage. Children just get in the way of your life. They don't add to it! Family is for me, and where I don't stand to gain, I'm done.

- B. So are we doing family without or with reference to the Lord?
1. Is our family from Him?—Good thing? Might not think so when crying through night or when we hurt one another, but He is in it to bless. Maybe you don't have a spouse or child yet and you want to make it happen. Let Him do what seems best to Him! The only family that works is the family that is from Him.
 2. Is our family with Him?—Do you feel alone in raising your kids? He's there!
 3. Is our family by Him?—Can't forgive, don't know where to lead kids, etc. Press in to Him.
 4. Is our family for Him?—Are we murdering our brother or blessing our father?

(3) Christ

From Adam to Solomon to Christ!

- A. The commission of Adam and Eve in [Gen 1-2](#) gives way to the curse in [Gen 3](#). God calls us to bring our work and family back to Himself, where they can flourish. We are given symbol and shadow of such possibilities with Solomon, but even Solomon would go the way of Adam. Because of his sin, the temple he built would eventually be razed to the ground, and his family would turn on one another, and his kingdom would split in two and eventually come to nothing.

But for the sake of David, God would keep his lineage alive, even through exile, until the One came who would stand before the people of Israel and declare: "[Behold, something greater than Solomon is here](#)" ([Mat 12:42](#))! Here is the One who would overturn the curse of Adam and regain the commission. Here is the One who would build the true temple of God! Here is the One who is the true offspring of David who would sit on the throne forever! Here is the One who would sing every line of this Psalm with pitch-perfection!

- a. Jesus is called the "builder" of God's house ([Heb 3:3](#)).
- b. He is the one who watches over God's people and guards them to the end: "[While I was with them, I kept them in your name, which you have given me. I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost...](#)" ([Joh 17:12](#)).
- c. He refused to get bread without the Father's blessing. But: "[My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work](#)" ([Joh 4:34](#))!
- d. And He was so deeply aware that He was the beloved Son in whom His Father was well-pleased, that He could sleep even while on a boat in the midst of a raging sea ([Mar 4:38](#)).
- e. He was the Son of God, a child, like an arrow in the hands of His Father, the Divine Warrior.

- f. And this arrow was shot straight from the bowstring of heaven through the heart of hell. He would stand with His Father at the gate and protect His honor and glory from the slander of His enemies!
2. But though He sang this Psalm perfectly, He would have to suffer the curse for our sin and rebellion if we were to be brought back to God.
 - a. He would have to take on the vanity of our labor. What did He have to show for all of His work at the end of His life, as He hung there cursed on the tree? Nothing! Every disciple, fallen away.
 - b. The one who kept watch on all His people to the end, had no one to guard Him as He was utterly exposed to the enemies of God. When His disciples should have been keeping watch they were sleeping. He was given to our sleeplessness as he contemplated the cup He would have to drink.
 - c. Where was His family? He never married. No children. And then, worst of all, His Father, whose honor He defended at the gate, would march Him outside the gate, to the place of shame, and crush Him! The arrow of God's wrath would pierce through His heart!
 - d. And He went through all of this for us.
 3. But the resurrection changes everything! The curse is flipped on its head.
 - a. The temple of God is rebuilt in three days in Christ, and He will never die again. His work is not vanity but eternity! He's now the cornerstone of this spiritual temple, and we as living stones, are being added to Him.
 - b. And while He did not have a physical family in a wife and children, He became the firstborn of many brethren, and when He poured out the Spirit, it was a Spirit of adoption, men and woman from every tribe, tongue, and nation now a member of the family of God!

In Christ...

- A. In Christ, our work and family is reconnected back to God and reinvested with its cosmic significance. In Christ the commission given to Adam has been reclaimed. The Great Commission can be laid over the Adamic Commission—going into the world, making disciples, filling it with people renewed in His image!
 1. Now, in all our work, we are temple building, adding living stones unto the cornerstone. In all our families we are laboring to see our children and others adopted into His greater family.
- B. But in Christ, even as we serve, guard, subdue, have dominion, bear fruit, multiply, and fill...we rest! Because He has already done it, and He is now doing it in and through us...every day of the week.
 1. Sunday, the first day of the week, the day of His resurrection, changes everything about Monday.