

Acts 17:16-34: A Speech for Gospel Work

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[0 : 00] Song of Ascents. Please stand for the reading of God's Word. A Song of Ascents. Blessed is everyone who fears the Lord, who walks in His ways.

You shall eat the fruit of the labor of your hands. You shall be blessed and it shall be well with you. Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house. Your children will be like olive shoots around your table.

Behold, thus shall the man be blessed who fears the Lord. The Lord bless you from Zion. May you see the prosperity of Jerusalem all the days of your life.

May you see your children's children. Peace be upon Israel. This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. You may be seated. Thank you, Scott.

On a couple of accounts, number one, for reading and for your ministry on last week, thanks to our young preachers like Scott and Kevin. Dave and I have had two weeks that we have not had to preach this summer, so we're glad for the opportunity to have young men in the saddle to assist in gospel ministry.

[1 : 24] And what a joy. And not only that, thank you for your ministry and the things that you do at Holy Trinity. We have the privilege of being pastors and ministers of the Word.

But there is an engagement of all the body of Christ. And we're not in it alone. We are in it together for the glory and honor of God. And we praise God for each of you.

Would you join me in prayer, please? Bless the Lord, O my soul. All that is within me, bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul.

Forget none of your benefits, which are many. As the psalmist has written in another place, daily you load us with benefits.

And we receive that. Thank you because all of the blessings of the Lord are yea and amen in Christ, our great God and Savior, Lord. And we thank you this afternoon.

[2 : 21] So may these words be your words, Lord, that you have prepared for our hearts from your word. We give you praise even advance for it in Christ's name.

Amen. Amen. There's probably not a one of us here this afternoon who has not dreamed of having some kind of dream house.

Remember those dreams that you've had of yesteryear when you wanted a house that had certain specs, certain specifications, X number of bedrooms, big this, big that.

Huh? Financially, most of us cannot afford the houses of our dreams. Huh? Because dream houses require green money.

A dream home, however, and note the distinction between house and home, a dream home is very much within your reach.

[3 : 25] Huh? A house may be filled with things that money can buy. Conveniences, gadgets. You punch a button and it does this.

You punch another button and it does that. Huh? Gadgets and toys. All of those things can be a part of a dream house.

But a dream home, friends, is within the reach of those who live in relative poverty. Our absolute extreme wealth.

And what that means that it is within the reach of every one of us here on this afternoon. The Psalm 128 home.

You're not going to see it featured in Better Homes and Gardens. Or Good Housekeeping magazine. Or those more male or masculine type of magazines.

[4 : 29] But ultimately, the Psalm 128 home is the kind of home that you and I want. Huh? What we see in this particular passage is great for those who have not even begun yet to build a home.

Huh? It is good for young married people like June and Rochelle. Huh? It's good. And you even may be a veteran of marriage. Or perhaps you've run into tough times in your marriage. This particular Psalm can help put that which is topsy-turvy. It can help to turn it aright again. Huh? It's not too late. Here we have a home of what I would call extreme domestic beauty. Huh? And this particular passage helps us to see the following thing. The favor of the Lord abides where the fear of the Lord resides.

[5 : 43] The favor of the Lord is the Lord. Resulting in fruitfulness from the Lord for the individual. And you'll see that. For the family. But not only for the individual and the family.

But also for the community. Because it is centered in all of those particular entities. The center is right within the person who fears the Lord.

Notice it's not too difficult to see that there seems to be a relationship between Psalm 127 and 128. While both of them certainly are songs of a sense. There seems to be an overlap in content. In rhythm. As well as in tone.

Look at a couple of things there with me. Look at Psalm 127 and 1. And it says unless the Lord builds what? The house. Those who build it labor in vain.

[6 : 48] Look at verse 3. Behold, children are a heritage or an inheritance from the Lord. The fruit of the womb, a reward. Look at 128 and 5.

May the Lord again bless you. It's showing the Lord as the blesser and the builder in both of those Psalms. We notice the prominence of the home in both of those Psalms.

128, 2 and 3. You shall eat the fruit of your labor, of your hands. You shall be blessed and it shall be well with you. And then he goes on to speak about your wife and what she's going to be like.

And the children, what they're going to be like. But of course we see in 127 and 3. Children. The inheritance. The inheritance. Of the Lord. Both exalt the Lord as the one who is near and dear to people of faith in this world.

Those who are faced with the everyday realities of faith in family. Child rearing in community. The Lord is near in those situations.

[7 : 56] He's not far removed. But very close. Very near. Very dear. They point to the Lord Jesus as the blesser and builder of his people.

The one who cares for and sustains his own. Both in the present as well as in the future. Look at the first word in 128.

It's one of those grand biblical words. Blessed or blessed. Oh, don't you just love the song that we sang regarding the Beatitudes?

And really as I've looked at this, the Beatitudes are a great definition of what it means to be a God-fearing person.

A great definition. Explore that. Of what does the God-fearing person look like? Check the Beatitudes out. I believe it helps to put meat on the bone.

[8 : 58] It helps to fill in some of the contours that may be a little strange in our hearts and minds. Oh, but it helps. It's the Bible being a commentary on the Bible.

Helping it to open our eyes and to see further. Notice four of these six verses have a blessed or blessing related word.

You see it in verse one. Don't you? Blessed is everyone who fears the Lord. You see it in verse two. You shall be blessed and it shall be well with you.

You see it in verse four. Behold, thus shall the man be blessed who fears the Lord. You see it also in verse five. May the Lord bless you from Zion.

Though there are two separate words used in the original. Both are translated blessed. There's a measure of overlap in them.

[10 : 02] Blessed. Blessed. To be blessed. To be blessed. It's to be the recipients of the Lord's great and generous favor. That results in the fulfillment of his people.

That's what it means to be blessed. It's the approval. It's the smile of God. I was out running this morning a little bit. And there it was. All of that fresh sun over Chicagoland with those bright rays. And I thought about the smile of God. The rays of the smile of God that provide a measure of health for all of those who are recipients of those rays.

But then the favor of God is just like that. God's favor will give you a suntan, folks. You don't even have to have any blocker on when it comes. Receive it.

It's good for you. Who is it that gets the Lord's approval here? It's quite clear. Blessed. Notice everyone who fears the Lord.

[11:09] Notice it is absolutely without exception. Everyone who fears the Lord qualifies for blessing from. The Lord.

We want to look at three characteristics this afternoon of this Psalm 128. Dream home. You'll notice in verses 1 and 4 that they have the right characterized by the right kind of fear.

You'll see in verses 2 and 3 that it's characterized by the right kind of fruit. And then in 5 and 6 you will note also that it's characterized by the right kind of fulfillment.

You see the fear factor in chapter verses 1 and 4? Blessed is everyone who fears the Lord.

The first thing we note that the words who fears the Lord, they appear in verses 1 and 4. You see it in verse 4? Behold, thus shall the man be blessed who fears the Lord.

[12:21] This structure marks these verses off as a unit. And everything in between verses 1 and 4 concerns fearing the Lord.

That's the key principle in these verses as well as in the entire Psalm. Psalm 128 is what's known as a wisdom Psalm.

And one of the key things about wisdom Psalms is that they promote the fear of the Lord as a key ingredient for skillful living.

That's living life with skill. That's wise living. The fear of the Lord is right at the heart of that. If you're ever going to be a wise person, a person that knows how to work their way through life, fear of the Lord is absolutely essential.

Proverbs chapter 1 verse 7 speaks about it being the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge. It's the starting place. It's where you begin. If you're going to be a wise person, the fear of the Lord is also the beginning of wisdom.

[13:31] But check this out, folks. Because the right kind of fear is a faith-based fear. It's faith-based.

It is a reference for God that causes one to stand in all of his sovereign might. And to embrace his promises and obey his word.

The reference is to a healthy, holy reverence for God based on knowledge and experience of him. It's reverence and respect that absolutely takes God at his word.

Classic, the Pilgrim's Progress. You know the story. Christian takes on this journey. I mean, he's like us. I mean, that's what it is. It's an allegory of the Christian life.

But he addresses the question from hope. He says, how will you describe right fear? Christian responds.

[14:37] True or right fear is discovered by three things. By its rise. It is caused by saving convictions for sin.

It is faith-based. That's my addition. Christian didn't say that. It driveth the soul to lay fast hold of Christ for salvation.

And then it says, it begetteth and continueth in the soul a great reverence for God. His word. His ways.

Keeping it tender and making it afraid to turn from them to the right or to the left. To anything that may dishonor God, break its peace, grieve the spirit, or cause the enemy to speak reproachfully. Approachfully. That's what it means. To fear God. Is that at the core of your soul? Of your life?

[15:38] Huh? It should be. Huh? One writer knows that the fear of the Lord is that affectionate reverence for him by which the child of God bends himself humbly and carefully to his father's laws.

Huh? The right kind of fear is a faith-based, God-centered, heart-gripping, and feet-guiding.

Huh? Fear that grips the heart within, but it also guides the feet. So in this one verse, 128 and 1, you see both the fear factor in the first part, but also the feet factor.

Who walks in his ways. Here you have one of the key features of Hebrew poetry. Parallism. The second part of the verse actually explains or amplifies what it means to fear the Lord.

It means to obey him. It means to walk in his ways. And the writer of Psalm 128 picks up what was begun in Psalm 1. Huh? As a matter of fact, let's turn over to it.

[16:47] Get you busy here in your copy of Scripture. I'll give you a page number momentarily. 448.

448. Blessed is the man. Psalm 1.1.

Who, and there it is, walks not. I mean, it speaks about the path of his life. Who walks not in the counsel of the wicked.

Nor stands in the way of sinners. Nor sits in the seat of the scoffers. He goes on down and speaks about what his delight is actually in the law of the Lord.

And in that law, he meditates day and night. Back to the text. But love for God, respect for God is demonstrated, friends, by how one walks and also where one walks.

[17:53] Moses wrote to the children of Israel in Deuteronomy chapter 10 and 12. And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you but to fear the Lord your God?

To walk in his ways. To love him. To serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul. That's what it means to walk with the Lord and to fear him.

In essence, we see a Christian in verse 1 because that is what a Christian does. He fears the Lord and walks with the Lord.

Demonstrated by the way that they work. The right kind of fear, friends, is a holy, faith-based, God-centered, reverent, heart-gripping, and feet-guiding fear.

Huh? We have a principle for the blessed life in verses 1 and 4, fearing God. In verses 2 and 3, we have a picture of a blessed family.

[19:00] The right kind of fear is in view in verses 1 and 4. And what we see in verses 2 and 3 is the right kind of fruit.

The right kind of fruit. Note, it refers to, first of all, verse 2, you shall eat the fruit of the labor of your hands. You shall be blessed and it shall be well with you.

Huh? You don't see it right there clearly. But what he's doing here, he's referring to the man in the home. You'll see it because it goes on down to speak about your wife and your children.

Notice the reference to the fruit of the labor of your hands there in verse 2. Huh? In verse 3, the reference is to the wife of the home and the text refers to her as a fruitful vine.

Right kind of fruit. It's characteristic. The Psalm 128, home. It shows itself in one's personal life in verse 2. The genuinely happy person, the person the Bible speaks of as blessed, will be both fruitful and fulfilled.

[20:17] Isn't that what living is about? Being fruitful in life and for the glory of God, for the advance of the kingdom. And that kind of living brings a certain amount of fulfillment.

Huh? To be able to partake of the labor of one's hand is a sign, a sure sign of the Lord's blessing. Now, this contrast with the one who works and works and works and doesn't see anything, nothing to show for it.

Huh? If such is the case, one needs to search and see what might be out of place in one's life if there is not the kind of fruit that should be there.

That was the case when the prophet Haggai challenged the people in post-exilic times of his day. Turn to Haggai 791 in your Bible, chapter 1, verse 5.

Yep, 791.

[21:26] Look at verse 5. Now, therefore, thus says the Lord of hosts, consider your ways.

You've sown much and harvested little. You eat, but you never have enough. You drink, but you do not have your fill. You clothe yourselves, but no one is warm.

And he who earns wages does so to put them into a bag with holes. Lots of work. Drought, no fruit. Or the fruit may have come, but the fruit left as soon as it came. Huh? Not being fruitful. But the text in Psalm 128 speaks about that you shall eat the fruit.

Shirley and I are eating of the fruit of basically her hands from her gardens. It seems like we are here in the promised land in Woodlawn because she comes home with cucumbers that just about look like watermelons.

[22:34] Eating of the fruit of the fruit of one's hands, whether it is in a garden or in the marketplace or wherever it is that you invest your labor.

Text speaks about the one who fears the Lord being fruitful in one's labor. Not only the general sense of well-being will characterize this person.

You see the next phrase that you shall be blessed and it shall be well. With you. But then he goes on down from one's personal life.

He begins to look in the broader circle. And again, that's what it's going. It's going from person, but it broughtens out to one's family life.

Marital life. The first part of three. And parental life in the second part of three. In both, the psalmist pictures the fruitfulness through images of agriculture.

[23 : 43] You notice that there? It says your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house. And your children will be like olive shoots around your table.

What great pictures. Blessed families need quality marriages. And unfortunately, there are too many marriages that are bad dream kind of marriages.

They needn't be. Marriages suffer because people do not work at them. Marriage is not for wimps. It's for those who have a mind and need a mind to work at it. It's hard work.

It's everyday work. I sat this conference on yesterday, the legacy conference. And one of the speakers, I got in on the tail end of it. He was talking about kind of godly man and what he does.

[24 : 49] He's speaking about his going out and working 10 hours. But when he comes home, his work is not over. Because he, the wife, passes the baton of child responsibility on to him.

And then his work is not over until the kids are down. Y'all can say amen if you want to on that one. But again, it speaks about, and again, the God-fearing person takes his responsibilities as leader in the home quite seriously.

Praise God for those who are doing that. And one of the things I love about Holy Trinity is the value of the significance of family.

That looks good on as values, doesn't it? It looks even better in life. It translates into work and hard work within the marriage.

[25 : 53] Not only for the men, but also for the women too. This is a great picture. The image is that of a fruitful wife.

Notice here, notice what's absent. And this doesn't talk about her external beauty. That's okay. But it talks about her being fruitful, fertile, productive on the one hand, but attractive and luscious and satisfying on the other.

That's the imagery that is there. In Palestine, the four most important branches of agriculture were growing grain, vineyards, olive, and raising flocks.

And you've got two of those pictures in this one verse. The readers of this psalm would have been well acquainted with what the psalmist was saying. Israel was a land of vineyards.

Vines produced grapes, and grapes had many usages. Matter of fact, I had two of those usages even today. I had raisins in my breakfast, and I had grape juice.

[27 : 01] Many, many usages for the fruit of the vine. Wine that gladdens the heart. Many usages, one product.

Wives, you recognize that description? Multitasking. How fitting an illustration for the wife and all of her roles and responsibilities.

A productive man. Verse 2. A fruitful wife. In verse 3. Marriage-wise, the fruit of the vine pictures attractiveness and sexual enjoyment.

Song of Psalms gives us a good example of this. Men, Song of Psalms is a great Valentine's Day text. It describes the physical beauty of a woman, and the man anticipates enjoying himself in marital relations.

And again, one of the places that he describes pictures divine imagery there. But notice the next part. Not only is it marriage life, but parental life. Blessed homes need parental nurture.

[28 : 16] And that's the picture that we see in the next part, 3B. Children are pictured as olive plants. Olive shoots. Beautiful and valuable.

But guess what's required? Cultivation. Cultivation. Cultivation of olive trees required lots and lots of time and toil and patience.

And it takes a surprisingly, in our estimation, an inordinate amount of time for trees to produce olives. You don't get any fruit on the olive tree for at least four years, and you don't get a plentiful harvest until 17 or 18 years later.

It's a long time. Sounds like the teenage years, don't it, huh? You begin to move 17 and 18 years. They're getting to be shaped just right for fruitfulness for the rest of their lives.

But guess what? The trees required careful, careful attention. The soil had to be plowed. The land had to be fertilized.

[29 : 23] Each spring, faithfully watered. But guess what? When properly cared for, a full-sized olive tree would produce, check this out, a half a ton of oil a year.

And continue to do that for a long, long, and incredible age. Because of the right kind of nurture and attention that was there.

Picture in verse 3 is that of shoots plants that are just right for attention. That lend themselves to growth. Not trees, the shoots.

But they have all of the potential that's there. That potential that needs to be brought out. Parental nurture can do just that.

In both cases, vineyards and olive yards were protected by walls. Some other kind of protective barrier.

[30 : 26] Such is needed in the home for growth and development. Both as it concerns our wives as well as children.

Notice verse 4, what we have. The principle is restated. Behold, thus shall the man be blessed. Who what? Who fears the Lord.

Verse 1 anticipates verses 2 and 3. And verse 4 looks back on verses 2 and 3. A blessed home. The dream home pictured in 2 and 3.

It's the heritage. The inheritance. Of God. Freeing people. Their homes look different. Because of where the Lord is.

In the home. Right at the core. Honor and reverence for him. Rules and reigns. There.

[31 : 24] The nature of wisdom literature is that it states general principles. Things that are generally true. Not without exception. And sometimes there often is this kind of nurture.

But there's not necessarily. The kind of fruit. Picture could look different. We must make sure that we do our part though. Faith based fear.

That labors for. Family focused fruit. It's what we must. Give ourselves to. As those who fear God. Right kind of fear. Faith based fear. God focused fear. The right kind of fruit. Family focused attention. That lends itself. To fruit bearing. There's one more characteristic.

In the text. Don't see the words. As you did. With the other points. But. Concept is certainly there. And that's the right kind of fulfillment.

[32 : 23] In verses five and six. Verses five and six. Amount to a prayer. Or a pronouncement. For a blessed. Future.

A blessed. Future. The right kind of fulfillment. Is that which. Is far. Reaching. In its. Focus. It considers the future.

As well. As the present. And to notice the shift. In verses five and six. It's quite clear. It goes. It ceases to make.

These. Declarative. Kinds of statements. But. Can you imagine. At the end. Or just before. These pilgrim families. Begin. To. Go back.

Into their homes. Their. Their places. The priest. Stands up. And he gives a blessing. After they've sung. This first part. Gives a blessing. The Lord.

[33 : 19] Bless you. From Zion. May you see. The prosperity. Of Jerusalem. All the days. Of your life. May you see. Your children's children.

Peace. Be upon Israel. The shift. Goes. From the present. To the future. There's also. A shift. In people. Focus. From the home. To the community.

There. Pronunciation. Of the. Of the blessing. Is clear. As to the source. Of the blessedness. That's the Lord. Who's chosen.

Zion. Is the dwelling place. Of his king. His earthly. Regent. But then. It helps us. To think. Family. Well-being. But also. Community.

Well-being. It reaches. Beyond. The home. In 5b. May you see. The prosperity. Of Jerusalem. Huh? Breaches.

[34 : 14] Beyond that. Huh? Think. Family. But also. Community. A family. First. Mindset. Must not be. A family. Only. Mindset.

Because we live. In. A community. Even. As we think. About our community. Of faith. And then. Our broader communities. That we live in. Huh? But also.

We need to think. Present. But we also need to think. Future. Huh? Also. And we see that. All the days of your life. Not just now. But all the days of your living.

The blessing of the Lord. Is to be there. But then. Also. Also. The future. Think children. But also. Think. Grandchildren. It's made you see. Your.

Children's. Children. That's there. Huh? Or we're families. We're a group of families. We're the body of Christ. Collectively. Parts of neighborhoods. And communities.

[35 : 09] And boy. As we see. The fear of the Lord. In the person. The fear of the Lord. In the family. The fear of the Lord. In the community. Of faith. And may that spread. And spill over.

Into. Places. Where. We live. It's not enough. To secure our individual. And family well-being. Now. We must look ahead.

And look around. We must live for the present. But we also must. Live for those. Who will come. Behind us. The best legacy. That you and I can leave.

Is not real estate. And bank accounts. And material things. You do need a will. But that's. Those are not the best things. That you and I.

Can leave behind. The best legacy. Is the legacy. Of being a person. Who honored the Lord. Fully. A blessed individual. Blessed families. Blessed communities.

[36 : 04] These concentric circles. But at the center. Of them all. Are God. Fearing people. Individuals. May God help our homes. And our lives. To demonstrate this.

A few weeks ago. As you know. I had the. Opportunity. To go back. To Judson Baptist Church. I ran into a young man.

After service. And he would. Begin to share. What was going on. In his life. We prayed for the Lord. Some time ago. To open up. A job opportunity. For him.

But the Lord. Saw fit. To close the door. But in that. Closing the door. The Lord has created. Opportunities for him. On his job. Where he has been. Able to.

Bring. Young men. From the church. And two of them. Are employed. And he has a. Discipleship. Relationship. With them. But also. Has helped to secure. Employment.

[36 : 58] For them. Those young men. Represent. Discipleship. Opportunities. Yesterday. I was there. And this young man. And one of his. Disciples.

Was there. And I've worked with. This family. At Judson. And this young man. Has been taken. Under this other. 30 something.

Year old. Kid. Yeah Dave. I know what you're talking about. You were with the kids. If that's for you. Just think about me. I've got a few mileage. Beyond you. But he's taken him.

Under. But I. Took the opportunity. To sit down. Across from this younger kid. And he was. Lamenting. The fact. That.

He really had not. Gotten. What he needed. From his father. In the home. Who is not an. Alcoholic. But he's certainly. A workaholic. A white collar.

[37 : 53] Executive. On the other hand. When he entered. Into the home. Of this young man. Who was discipling him. He saw. A different environment. This young man.

Has given him. The discipler. Has given himself. To manual labor. We would call him. A blue collar. Kind of worker. But here. In this home. This young man.

Saw. This man. Who loved his wife. And loved his children. And there was absolutely. A different atmosphere. In the home. A home. That was characterized. By.

Faith based. Fear. And family focused. Fruit. And fulfillment. That considered. The future. One of these young men. He was being. Discipled. By a.

Psalms. One. Twenty. Eight. Man. Who was building. A Psalm. One. Twenty. Eight. Home. Blessed is the man.

[38 : 49] Who fears the Lord. Who delights greatly. In his commandments. That's what this. Disciple. Was. There are different. Races. Different backgrounds.

But. This kind of man. Is colorless. Classless. Characterized by. The fear of God.

Huh? The key to home building. Building a dream home. Is not a matter of what's in your hand. It's a matter of what's in your heart. Fear of the Lord.

A holy. Reverence for the Lord. That guards and guides. The whole of our living. While my dear friend.

Possesses. The qualities of a God. Friend man. And we applaud that. But in thinking. Of. The fulfillment. We must go beyond. Human examples. Of what it means.

[39 : 45] To be. A God. Fearing person. We go to the one. Who exhibited. The fear of the Lord. Perfectly. None other than the Lord.

Jesus Christ himself. In Isaiah 11. Isaiah spoke prophetically. Of the Christ. Who would come. Who would be characterized. By certain qualities.

He speaks this. In 11 and 2. He says. And the spirit of the Lord. Shall rest upon him. The spirit of wisdom. And understanding. The spirit of counsel. And might. The spirit. Here it is. Of knowledge. And of the fear of the Lord. And his delight. Shall be in the fear of the Lord. You and I. Ultimately. Must look to Jesus. Who fulfills this perfectly.

The God fearing man. The model. For the kind of fear. That you and I. Should have. In living in this world. A faith based fear. That loves the father. And seeks to do the father's will. Above all things. [40 : 40] Jesus said. My food. The way that I get my energy. And my nourishment. Is to do the will of him. That sent me. And finish his work. He said. I can do nothing on my own. As I judge.

I hear I judge. And my judgment. Is just because. I seek not my own will. But the will of him. Who sent me. For I've come down. From heaven. Not to do my own will. But the will of him. Who sent me. Jesus. The perfect. God fear. Those of us. Who would like to come. That characteristic. We're faulty. And frail. And trying. And striving. But Jesus. Dotted the I's. And crossed the T's. And he did it perfectly.

He is the blessed. King of kings. And Lord of lords. He came. He came. He came. From heaven. To earth.

[41 : 36] To show the way. We're going to change. The last song. Musicians. Won't you come. Because we're going to celebrate. The one. Who.

Did. This. Perfectly. And we're going to. Lift his name. On high. And you're going to help us. This one. That everybody's not in the. We assume that mostly. Everybody knows it. Right. Lord. I lift. Your name on high. And we're going to help. To provide a little. The rhythm section. On this afternoon. Because our. Rhythm person. Is not here. But you're here. Stand with us. As we sing.