

Psalm 127 "Working with the Lord"

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Preacher: Guest Speaker

[0:00] Hi, my name is George Sinclair. I'm the lead pastor of Church of the Messiah.

! It is wonderful that you would like to check out some of the sermons done by Church of the Messiah, either by myself or some of the others. Listen, just a couple of things. First of all, would you pray for us that we will open God's Word well to His glory and for the good of people like yourself?

The second thing is, if you aren't connected to a church and if you are a Christian, we really, I would really like to encourage you to find a good local church where they believe the Bible, they preach the gospel, and if you have some trouble finding that, send us an email. We will do what we can to help connect you with a good local church wherever you are. And if you're a non-Christian, checking us out, we're really, really, really glad you're doing that. Don't hesitate to send us questions. It helps me actually to know, as I'm preaching, how to deal with the types of things that you're really struggling with. So God bless.

This morning, I have the pleasure and honour of reflecting on Psalm 127 together. So if you have your Bible, feel free to have that beside you and keep it as a reference.

Well, life is work. Life is work. How many of you have been told this by your parents maybe growing up? Or how many of you have told this to your children? We use this as an expression to shock our systems, to somehow come to grips with the fact that rest and leisure are but the exceptions, while work is the norm for our waking hours. Life is work. When you hear this, there's something that probably resonates as true. Everything in life that's of value takes work. And yet we resist it. We don't want it to be true.

[2:07] I think this is because, for many of us, work is defined as the opposite of rest. We feel crushed under the weight of our never-ending to-do lists, home projects that never finish, self-improvement plans that are never realized. We work for the evening, we say, or we work for the weekend, you might say, or we work for an early retirement. Work is a means to an end, and so work is done as the necessary evil.

And of course, for many of us, our work is done in frustration. Well, in Psalm 127, we read that there's two ways to work apart from the Lord or with the Lord. If we build on our own without the Lord, we can expect our projects to fail. More than this, the building process itself is filled with anxiety.

Staying up late, rising early, eating the bread of anxious toil, and never succeeding in our plans. The end is failure. The end is failure. The means is anxiety. However, if we build with the Lord, we will not build in vain. We will build fruitfully. And more than this, we will sleep soundly in the process. The good life shown in this Psalm is of a roof over our heads, a protected city, the blessing of children. This is ultimately, these are gifts from God, not anything we can achieve on our own. So there's two ways to work. One which is probably sadly familiar to many of us, that of stress and striving. And then another type of work that feels all too distant, resting, and at peace.

[4:09] So how can we participate in that greater work, that greater work to which Psalm 127 speaks to? Well, the scriptures invite us to see the world in quite a different way than we can see with our eyes, than we can see naturally. In our work, we're invited to see God as the chief builder, the master architect.

And so as we build, or probably buy our homes, as we undertake our study programs, as we raise our families, as we take on hobbies, as we grow our gardens, care for communities, as we work, the idea is that we see God as the chief worker over all these things, even as we work.

So God did not simply create the world and leave it to its own devices. He sustains the world. And more than this, he's working to redeem it. He's working through you and me. God is a worker. He's

in the nitty-gritty with us. And yet we need eyes to see him at work. Now lots of ink has been spilled over hundreds and hundreds of years over how it is that God works and how we work at the same time and in the same action. Who is ultimately responsible for each action? And do we have free will? Well, we won't get into those questions this morning, per se. However, however we might try to explain this relationship, the scriptures clearly teach two paradoxical realities, that God is at work and that we are at work. And in this mystery, we need to resist holding one of these truths over and against the other. So we're to resist the extreme that God works over and against our wills.

I don't know if you've heard a Christian who, upon achieving some great Christian feat, has said, it wasn't me, it was God. Right? That's not what the scriptures here are saying. And we're to resist also the other extreme that I am the master architect and builder of my own life. I did this, no thanks to you, God. So bringing this back to our psalm, the point is this. We're to adjust our perspectives to see that our building is to be secondary to God's building. That when we cook for ourselves and for our families, God is the true master chef. When we make a breakthrough in our work, God is the chief innovator. In the perspective of this psalm, our effort is at the periphery, while God's work is at the center.

Now, if we're honest, I don't know how many of us think like this from day to day. And I think there's a couple of reasons why we might struggle to see this. For one, many of us have been fed a certain materialistic and disenchanting worldview where we're taught to reduce everything to scientific explanation, which in no way requires the hand of God. And so, for example, you're in a nice summer evening looking up at the night sky and you see the stars. Many of us see stars that are first and foremost the product of some scientific explanation, scientific cause. And we need to remind ourselves that taking the eyes that the scriptures give to us that these are, on a very primary level, God's handiwork.

[7:55] It doesn't negate all the scientific explanation, and yet these are primarily to us God's handiwork. And so, when the scriptures teach another way of seeing our work, where God is the chief builder, many of us strain our eyes to see this. So, we need eyes somehow to see behind apparent natural processes and behind good work that there is a God who has authored these things. As the scriptures say in Colossians 1, for in Christ all things were created, in him all things hold together, that his fingerprints and workmanship are all over creation, all over the sustaining of this world, and all over the reconciling of all things to himself. So, that's one thing. I think one reason why we struggle to see God's work in our work is this materialistic worldview. Secondly, I think for many of us we've ingested a certain hyper-spiritualism where we saw where we see God primarily at work in spiritual things. Things like saving souls or making sure church services happen, and where God is somehow less concerned about the rest. But of course, the scriptures say that God is reconciling all things to himself. So, it is not just the spiritual work that he's interested in, but all things. Not just our souls, but our bodies. Not just our bodies, but our families. Not just our families, but our communities. Our institutions. Our nations. That God is at work all around us. Not just in the quote-unquote spiritual stuff. And we're invited to evaluate our work in light of his. To ensure that our work is connected to the things that he cares about. Now, probably for some of us, we can connect our work more easily to God's work more easily to God's work than others. Particularly for those of us in the provision of primary services, or those in governance and civil service. We can connect these somehow to what God is doing in our world. For others, it may be a bit harder, but it doesn't mean that the Lord is not or cannot be a part of it. The development of systems and products that will serve clients, for example, that we can invite the Lord into our work in the way that we treat others, in the way that we work as unto the Lord. As we work to be a part of steering our teams and organizations to do good, to do the maximum amount of good wherever we find ourselves. And so, our God indeed is at work, and we were made to work under him, to work for him, to work with him. And so, do we have eyes to see it?

Do we have eyes to see him at work? And of course, all this begs the more challenging question, are we indeed working with the Lord or apart from him? Scriptures warn us that when our work is disconnected from the Lord, when we work by ourselves, unto ourselves, that we build broken buildings, we work in the wrong direction, we lose our North Star, we lose the plot. In a word, we work in vain.

A couple examples for us to ground this in our lives. Consider your work, consider our work at home. Last week, a friend spoke to me about the time and effort he put into his lawn and garden, and he asked himself the question, am I doing this for the love of it, or am I doing it to impress my

neighbors?

Consider our work as parents and homemakers. How much are we driven by the work of the Lord to bring up our kids in the way of the Lord, to create spaces of flourishing, all these good godly desires?

Or how much do we turn our home building into another avenue for working on our own insecurities, for working to impress others? We're invited to homemaker with the Lord.

[12 : 22] Consider our work at the gym. An old youth pastor would like to say to young guys getting into bodybuilding, he would say, looking good. Why are you doing it? Connecting our work to God, we are working to steward the body. He has given to us a temple of the spirit, optimizing it for service and play and all the things we've been created to do. Or do we obsess over our appearance, working to impress others or working to have power over others? We're invited to work out and exercise with the Lord.

And as a last example, consider our work at work, where we're building jobs and careers. When we forget that God has given us our worth, we go out into our organizations looking to please, looking to grow our resumes. We can easily drift away from our values and become swept in whatever direction the organization goes, not necessarily for good. The extreme example here, of course, is the Nazi officers who went along with the commands given to them, playing their small part in the atrocity of the Holocaust. We too can become co-opted in some ways into the wrong building projects if we lose the plot.

If we lose the plot about what our work is for, what our work is supposed to be connected to. Our work is not simply about our own advancement in the world, but it is a means to participate in God's sustaining and redemptive work on this earth.

It's amazing to think that work, the very thing given to us to draw us closer to God, the way to connect to God's work, becomes the very thing that often alienates us from God. That when we build apart from God, at best we build projects that exhaust us, that frustrate us, and at worst we build projects that exalt us, that build up our own kingdoms over and against God's. We might call them mutinous building projects that make our name great, that make us feel self-sufficient, builders in our own right, builders independent of a sovereign God, projects that make us question our very need to be saved.

I think what's especially scary in all of this is how much of our lives are spent building, building and not completing. We put our heads down and raise our kids, we put our heads down and build our careers, we work on our papers, we work on our certifications, we work on ourselves, these never-ending projects, and we can forget to ask whether we're building with or apart from the Lord.

[15 : 17] And so this morning we're asked to reflect on this question, how do our building projects, how does our work match up against the things that God is building? What is in our hearts as we improve our homes, as we build our careers, as we choose which program to study? Is the Lord in it?

Now Psalm 127 shows us good things to work towards. If we're building with the Lord, if we're building homes, watching over the city, raising children, these three things, home, community, raising children, or the next generation, if this indeed constitutes a well-diversified building strategy, how well balanced are your building efforts? How well balanced is our work?

Do you feel the temptation to put all efforts into building up home without much priority for building community, or for building up the next generation? How might we take up the call to watch over the city? How might we work to build our communities that desperately need it?

The point is not to have a never-ending to-do list. The point is not to do everything, but it is to match up our work in building projects with what God is up to in the city, with what God is up to in this church, with what God is up to in our communities, and in our homes.

And so Psalm 127 is a warning for us. Pay attention to how you work. Pay attention to what you build.

[17 : 11] There's a way to work in fruitful cooperation with the Lord, and there's a way to work which sets us up against God's purposes for us, and will result in failed building projects. Perhaps you get the promotion.

Perhaps the building stands. But are you part of the work that will truly last? And Jesus, of course, says to us famously, he says to us who labor, and to us who are heavy laden, to us who strive in vain, to us who build apart from him, he says to us, come to me and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me.

Jesus came to us who strive, to us who create broken buildings and who become broken in the process. He came to us and died for us. He died for our sins, that we might be reconciled to him, that we might take his yoke upon us in order to join in his work.

To work differently, to work, we might say, as we were created to work. The yoke that Jesus puts upon us, a tool for pulling heavy loads given by him, is easy, he tells us, compared to the yoke from this world or the yoke of our own making. And of course, with us under this yoke is the humble and lowly Jesus, the king who shares it with us. And so rather than working on our own, we are connected to the one who supplies all that we need. Rather than fighting for our worth, eating the bread of anxious toil, we're invited to set down our work at the end of the day, entrusting it to the Lord who builds with us. In Christ, we are the beloved of God, and he gives to his beloved sleep and rest. In Christ, we are freed from our broken work so that we can join his work.

And we're told this great promise that no work done in the Lord is in vain. Thanks be to God. Please join with me in prayer.

[19 : 45] Father, we thank you for your good promises to us this morning, that in our work, as so much of our work of our life is, that you invite us to do this differently, as unto you, in partnership with you, not under heavy burdens, but under your light burden.

Not striving on our own, but connected to you and your good work with us. We ask this morning that you'd give us eyes to see your work with us, that you'd give us eyes to see where you are at work in our homes and in our communities and our workplaces. You'd help us to connect our work to yours, and most importantly, that you would call us to participate in that which you are doing in our midst. We long to see your reconciliation in all things. We ask that you would surprise us by seeing your work in our midst. Thank you that you call us to be a part of it.

We pray that we would see you glorified in this city and in all the places where you would have us be. We pray this in Christ's name. Amen.

Amen. Thank you.