

Romans 8:26-30

And the Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness. For example, we don't know what God wants us to pray for. But the Holy Spirit prays for us with groanings that cannot be expressed in words. And the Father who knows all hearts knows what the Spirit is saying, for the Spirit pleads for us believers in harmony with God's own will. And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them. For God knew his people in advance, and he chose them to become like his Son, so that his Son would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. And having chosen them, he called them to come to him. And having called them, he gave them right standing with himself. And having given them right standing, he gave them his glory.

Psalms 128

How joyful are those who fear the Lord—
all who follow his ways!
You will enjoy the fruit of your labor.
How joyful and prosperous you will be!
Your wife will be like a fruitful grapevine,
flourishing within your home.
Your children will be like vigorous young olive trees
as they sit around your table.
That is the Lord's blessing for those who fear him.
May the Lord continually bless you from Zion.
May you see Jerusalem prosper as long as you live.
May you live to enjoy your grandchildren.
May Israel have peace!

Dialogue Talk **by Michael Palmer**

Everyday life is full of surprises.....

A visitor. A freak wave. A virus. A fragrant. A smile. A lump.

What surprises stand out for you in the week past.

(Receive news of some surprises and pause to pray or praise.)

We would love all surprises to be welcomed!

'What a Surprise' is our theme today.

I take it that this theme is to remind us of the good surprises of God - The blessings of God.

Surely, in the midst of life we hope for God's blessing.

Generally speaking blessing is understood as something bestowed on you by 'the Divine'. Even if we credit another person as being a blessing to us, we are somehow saying that behind 'them as blessing' is the benevolent 'hand of God'.

Psalm 128 has a bit to teach us about Blessing.

On a first read it may be an offensive sort of Psalm. Offensive if you have been a person who has tried in all earnestness to walk in the ways of the Lord but have never-the-less experienced pain, hardship or fear in life. For such a person they may read Psalm 128 and wonder if God has ever been there for them!

They may question what they are doing wrong if blessings is bluntly measured by the like of:

- Enjoying the fruit of your labours.
- Happiness and wellbeing
- A loving spouse and flourishing Children
- Prosperity
- Peace

If this is understood as exclusively an earthly checklist then many feel a poverty about the blessing that God has given them! BUT lets try and dig around a little are there some truffles nestling on roots of this nondescript hazelnut tree?

1. Verses 1-2 - Are not well-doing and doing well somewhat interdependent. Is walking in the ways of the Lord a receptivity to the blessing of the Lord?

(Discuss)

2. The Psalm is one that was traditionally ‘sung’ as pilgrims made their way to Jerusalem in this setting the pilgrims recognise that their core everyday needs and hopes are somehow linked to God. The pilgrims recognise that they are not independent autonomous individuals. Their lives are bound up with Zion and their hope for blessing is bound up with the good of Jerusalem - as that was the place where God had chose to be palpably present.

Hence Psalm 128 links the good life not to luck or effort - or even to ritual or place - BUT on ones attitude to God! - ‘Blessed is the one who fears the Lord, who walks in his ways. Or more importantly, to God’s attitude to us (see vs 5) *Discuss - how do we as Christians understand God’s attitude to us?*

As Christians we are now approaching a truffle that we can happily dig up and consume! **For God’s attitude to us has been a surprise! GRACE - for Galatians 4:4-7** - But when the right time came, God sent his Son, born of a woman, subject to the law. God sent him to buy freedom for us who were slaves to the law, so that he could adopt us as his very own children. And because we are his children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, prompting us to call out, “Abba, Father.” Now you are no longer a slave but God’s own child. And since you are his child, God has made you his heir.

Romans 8:28-30 - And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them. For **God knew** his people in advance, and he **chose them to become like his Son**, so that his Son would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. And having chosen them, he **called them to come to him**. And having called them, he **gave them right standing** with himself. And having given them right standing, **he gave them his glory**.

Here is the surprise - God knew God’s people in advance
- God’s image bearers - the son & us as heirs because of HIM
- We called ‘to come to him’ a gift of receptivity - Faith!
- Right standing - counted as without sin - forgiven
- Glorified - Even now given a place with God!

What is our job now in the light of such wonderful surprise? In the light of Jesus let us re-read Psalm 128..... Discuss our walking? Is this walking not also a gift? What a surprise! *So are you blessed? What helps when we feel underwhelmed by God’s blessing? Discuss and then pray.*