

Sacred practice of being a blessing

Psalm 128

By pastor Ken Keyte

1st January 2017

1

Psalm 128

A song of ascents.

¹ Blessed are all who fear the LORD, who walk in his ways.

² You will eat the fruit of your labor; blessings and prosperity will be yours.

³ Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house; your sons will be like olive shoots around your table.

⁴ Thus is the man blessed who fears the LORD.

⁵ May the LORD bless you from Zion all the days of your life;

may you see the prosperity of Jerusalem,

⁶ and may you live to see your children's children.

Peace be upon Israel.

Psalm 128

A song of ascents.

¹ Blessed are all who fear the LORD, who walk in his ways.

² You will eat the fruit of your labor; blessings and prosperity will be yours.

³ Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house; your sons will be like olive shoots around your table.

⁴ Thus is the man blessed who fears the LORD.

⁵ May the LORD bless you from Zion all the days of your life; may you see the prosperity of Jerusalem,

⁶ and may you live to see your children's children.

Peace be upon Israel.

Eugene Peterson in his book entitled *A long Obedience in the Same Direction* writes that,

'There's a general assumption made by many people, that it's extremely difficult to be a Christian....But this is as far from the truth as the east is from the west. The easiest thing

in the world is to be a Christian. What *is* hard is to be, is a *sinner!* Being a Christian is what we were created for. The life of faith has the support of an entire creation and the resources of a magnificent redemption. The structure of this world was created by God so we can live in it easily and happily as his children. The history we walk in has been repeatedly entered by God, most notably in Jesus Christ, first to show us and then to help us live full of faith and exuberant with purpose. In the course of Christian discipleship we discover that *without* Christ we were doing it the *hard way* and that *with* Christ we are doing it the *easy way!* It is not *Christians* who have it hard [afterall], but *non-Christians!*' writes Eugene Peterson.

The first line of Psalm 128 says,

'Blessed are all who fear the Lord, who walk in his ways.'

It says the *same thing twice* but in *two different ways*, which is a common feature of Hebrew poetry called *parallelism*.

You see, '*fear[ing] the Lord*' and '*walk[ing] in his ways*' are two different ways of saying the *same thing*.

The *second part* of the verse that is to be read in *parallel* with the first part explains what it means to '*fear the Lord*'.

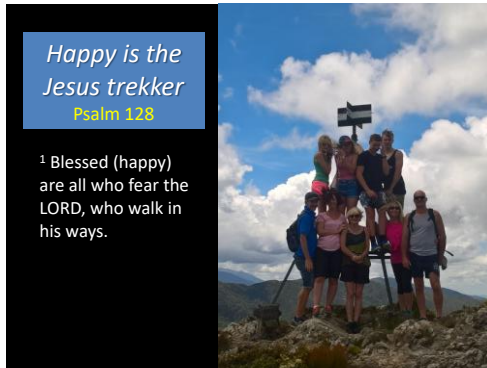
Which *isn't* about *being afraid of God*, but *is all about showing reverence* for the Lord by *walking in his ways* as someone who lives according to his will.

That's a pretty good definition of what a *disciple* does.

A disciple is someone who *walks in the ways of Lord*.

Happy is the Jesus Trekker

2



Happy is the
Jesus trekker
Psalm 128

¹ Blessed (happy)
are all who fear the
LORD, who walk in
his ways.

You'll remember (I hope) how the *psalms of Ascent* (which Psalm 128 is one of) were *sung by the Hebrew pilgrims* as they *hiked uphill* from their homes in rural Israel, to *Jerusalem* for the *annual Jewish festivals of Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles*.

So in walking up to *Jerusalem*, where the *temple / the earthly dwelling place of God* was, the pilgrims were *acting out a metaphor of journeying toward God on earth*.

For us living *since Jesus was born*, we can understand it as a *metaphor of discipleship*, of walking towards *God in person*- as *Jesus Christ*.

My eldest son Jason is in *Katmandhu Nepal* at the moment, where he's *trekking in the Himalayas* - something that Nepal is famous for.

Those who go trekking in the Himilayas are called *trekkers*.

In light of Psalm 128, I think a disciple could also be called a *Jesus trekker*, someone who *treks towards Jesus Christ*.

According to the very first line of Psalm 128, then, a *Jesus trekker*, is someone who is *blessed!*

'Happy' is another way of translating this Hebrew word that can be translated either as *'happy'* or *'blessed'*.

'Blessed', 'happy', these aren't words anyone would use to describe how hard it is walking in the ways of the Lord!

They're words you'd use to describe *how easy it is* walking in the ways of the Lord!

If it's that easy, then how do us Jesus trekkers 'walk in his way' (as Psalm 128 says)?

When Jesus was asked by an expert in the Hebrew law, *"Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?"*

Jesus replied:

“ ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” Jesus said.

With those *two simple instructions*:

Jesus explained how easy it is to *walk in his ways!*

Since Jesus has *already blazed the path* for us to walk this way, and *taken the consequences* for anyone who tries walking a different way, and has *sent his Spirit* to *fuel and guide us* for walking this way, it *should be as easy as a walk in the park!*

The only reason *it's not*, is because we keep thinking it's easier *going a different way!*

The *picture I have in my mind* of what it should be like as a *happy Jesus trekker* is from when I went trekking in the Himalayas many years ago.

The *Jomson trail* I went trekking on led us to an *icy slope* above a huge *frozen water fall*. One slip and I'd have fallen hundreds of metres to the frozen river bed below.

I was definitely *not a happy trekker* as I cautiously *inched my way down the slippery slope*, petrified that I might *slip and fall* to certain death on the rocky river bed below.

But as I *inched my way down* the slope one cautious foot step at a time, I heard the *sound of happy laughter and cheerful voices* drawing near. Then over the top of the ridge a group of *merry Nepalese sherphas* appeared.

Strapped to their backs were *huge cane baskets full of coca cola bottles*, that chinked together in time to their footsteps as they strode along. They had *no climbing gear* and wore *only sandals* on their feet, but they happily strode their way down the icy slope I was clinging to, just like it was a *walk in the park!*

How they could walk so *easily and happily*, down that slippery, treacherous slope, I can only put down to them *knowing the way*, because they'd done it *many times before!*

Happy is the *Jesus trekker* who loves God and loves their neighbour as themselves.

Jesus told his disciples a parable about what this kind of love looks like in practice. It's called *The Good Samaritan*- about the man who cared for his beaten up enemy when others wouldn't.

But surely *that's not easy to do?*

The long trek to Jerusalem must've been *difficult at first* but would've *become easier* the *more often* the Jerusalem trekkers travelled there, so too with being a *Jesus trekker!*

The more we *love others* by treating them the way we'd like them to treat us, *the easier it gets!*

Everything gets easier with practice!
Even loving an obnoxious neighbour!

Fruitful is the Jesus trekker

3

Fruitful is the Jesus trekker

Psalm 128

² You will eat the fruit of your labor; blessings and prosperity will be yours.

³ Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house; your sons will be like olive shoots around your table. ⁴ Thus is the man blessed who fears the LORD.



Psalm 128 gives a *couple of illustrations* to show *why* the Jesus trekker is so *blessed*, so *happy* when *walking in the ways of the Lord*.

In *Hebrew culture* the standard signs of *happiness* were: a wife who'd *born many children* - like a *fruitful vine* and *children* who *gathered and grew* around the meal table- like *olive shoots*.

When Psalm 128 says:

*Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house;
your sons will be like olive shoots around your table.'*

it's *not* meaning that the *only signs* of being *blessed by God* is *getting married* and *having lots of kids!*

What it *is meaning* is that these standard Hebrew signs of happiness and blessing are *illustrations* of the *fruitfulness and multiplication* that happens when we're *blessed by God*.

You see being a *blessed, happy Jesus trekker* is *not* about *keeping the blessings and provisions* of God solely to *benefit ourselves!* (that's the kind of *fake blessing* the world tempts us into going after). *No! Happy Jesus trekkers* are *blessed by God* to be a *blessing to others!*

It's a happiness that *motivates us Jesus trekkers to bless others* with whatever God has *blessed us with*, because we want *others* to become *blessed*, *happy Jesus trekkers too!*

When I read *these two illustrations of fruitfulness* in Psalm 128 and wondered *what would be the nearest equivalent in our context today*, my first thought was of the *happy Christmas dinner meal table we've enjoyed with my side of our family down at Featherston* this Christmas.

But then I thought of a *much better illustration than that!*

4



It was of the 120 people gathered around the Christmas dinner meal tables here in our church gymnasium on Christmas day.

Most would otherwise have been celebrating Christmas alone, but instead they were happily eating Christmas dinner together having fellowship with people they'd never even met before.

Which was made possible *only* because people from *our church and from other churches, and from the local community*, had *given up* their Christmas day so that others could enjoy a happy Christmas meal together, who would otherwise have been alone!

When Psalm 128 says *you will eat the fruit of your labour, blessings and prosperity will be yours*, it's *not* talking about *enjoying the selfish pleasures of consuming food and luxuries while others in the world go hungry and homeless*.

It is *talking about* the kind of happiness that comes from *sharing the fruits of God's blessing with the needy*, like *many of you have been doing* when you:

- helped out with the *Christmas dinner*,
- or bought a gift for the *Prison Fellowship Angel Tree appeal* for children whose mother or father is in prison,
- or prepared a *Samaritan's Purse Christmas Shoe Box* that our Maxchurch kids organised earlier in the year,
- or donated to the *Christmas Angel appeal* at our Christmas day service- for needy women & children in Asia whom our *Tranzsend missionaries* like the Rauhalas are working with.

Thus does the *Jesus trekker be fruitful and multiply* according to Psalm 128.

Destined for Zion is the Jesus trekker

5



Every *trekker* has a *destination* they're going to, otherwise they'd be *aimlessly* wandering around going *nowhere*!

When I did my trekking in the Himalayas, our destination was *Poon Hill*, which is a *10,000 ft high foothill* of the *Himalayas* from where there's this *stunning panoramic view* of some of the Himalayas most spectacular mountain peaks.

The Israelite pilgrims were *destined for Jerusalem* because that was where the temple of God was, located on *Mt Zion*.

The place name *Zion* is *synonymous* with *God's dwelling place* on earth.

And according to Psalm 128 *Zion* is where *God's blessing comes from*, a blessing that lasts *not just for a day or two*, or that *comes and goes* according to *whatever mood God is in*, or a blessing that's dependent upon *whether we've pleased God or not*, by *how well we've been following his ways*.

Psalm 128 says the blessing that comes from *Zion* is a blessing that *lasts a whole lifetime*!

5a

Psalm 128 says *God's lifetime blessing* from *Zion* will be upon the pilgrim *all the way till journeys end* where they'll see *the prosperity of Jerusalem*!

This is a blessing of *far greater significance* than just a *safe passage* to the city of *Jerusalem* to take part in the religious festivals there!

It's offering the *eternal blessing* that comes from arriving safely at *God's eternal dwelling place*!

For *us Jesus trekkers*, we recognise this destination as the *New Jerusalem*, the heavenly city that the book of Revelation speaks of, which will *come out of heaven to earth*, upon *Jesus' return*.

The closing chapters of the Bible identify *this Holy City* as the *Jesus trekker's eternal destination* where God will make his home among his people.

It's from here that the *life time* blessing of *Zion* comes from, for the *happy, fruitful Jesus trekker* as we walk in His *God loving, people caring ways*.

Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles were the *three major religious festivals* the Torah specifies Jewish people must attend every year. Each of these remembers a *significant historical act of God for his people in - rescuing them from slavery in Egypt*, in *giving them God's laws to live by*, and in *looking after them as they travelled to the promised land*.

Our *biggest Christian festivals* are *Christmas* (which we've just celebrated) and *Easter*.

Passover, Pentecost, Tabernacles, Christmas and even Easter, are all *religious festivals* commemorating *historical acts of God in the past*.

But there is *another* Jewish religious festival that looks *not so much to the past* but more to the *future*.

6

Destined for Zion is the Jesus trekker

Psalm 128:5-6

⁵ May the LORD bless you from Zion all the days of your life;
may you see the prosperity of Jerusalem,
⁶ and may you live to see your children's children.
Peace be upon Israel.



Hanukkah commemorates the *rededication of the Holy temple in Jerusalem* at the time of the *Maccabean revolt* in 165BC.

It is celebrated by *lighting menorah candles* over the *eight day Hanukkah festival*.

The first of the eight candles plus the centre one are lit the first night, two plus the centre are lit the second night, the and so on till finally all eight plus the centre one are lit on the eighth and last night of Hannukkah.

The reason for the Hanukkah candles is not for lighting the house within, but for illuminating the house without so that passersby will see it and be reminded of the triumph of the few over the many and of the pure over the impure.

But the lights of Hanukkah do not so much look back at the past actions of God for the people of Israel, rather they foresee a time when the Messiah would come to the temple and establish (as Judas Maccabeus had anticipated) the Jewish messianic dream of Israel once again having a descendant of King David on the throne, only this time as ruler over the whole earth!

With that background we can understand the full significance of the words in *John's gospel* where it says (in John 10:22)

²² Then came the *Feast of Dedication* at Jerusalem (the Feast of Dedication is another name for *Hanukkah*). It was winter, ³ and Jesus was in the temple area walking in Solomon's Colonnade. ²⁴ The Jews gathered around him, saying, "*How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly.*"

The thing was, *not only* had Jesus *already plainly* shown them *his messianic identity* by the *miracles* he'd *already performed*, but *also by being present* right there *in the temple* at the festival of *Hanukkah*, where he would've been *illuminated by hundreds of menorah candles* blazing out from the temple *for all passersby* to see what *should've been obvious* to everyone, that *he, Jesus of Nazareth*, was *indeed the Messiah* who'd now come to establish *God's kingdom on earth!*

But they *failed to recognise him* for *who he really was* at the festival of *Hanukkah back then*.

Just like many *still fail to recognise Jesus* for who he *really is* at the festival of *Christmas* today!

But *not so us Jesus trekkers!*

Happy is the *Jesus trekker* who walks in *His God loving, people caring ways!*

Fruitful is the *Jesus trekker* who is *blessed to be a blessing* to others along the way!

Destined for Zion is the *Jesus trekker* from where our *lifelong blessing* flows!

6a

*So may the LORD bless you from Zion all the days of your life;
May you see the prosperity of the New Jerusalem,
and may you live to see your children's children heading safely there.*

*Peace be upon Israel and for all of God's people,
through Jesus Christ our Lord!*