

Prosperity – Blessed Are All Who Fear the Lord

Psalm 128 from the series, “Little Psalms for Big Problems”

Message from the Master Broadcast December 30, 2007 by Pastor Daron Lindemann

Good morning, and Happy New Year! Can I say that today or might it be a bit premature for such wishes of prosperity? I guess it's too late because I already said it – but I did so because I want you to think about that greeting. I'll say it again. Happy New Year! The greeting itself implies that A) you can have a happy year in 2008, and B) you want to have a happy year in 2008. That sounds fair, and my hope is that represents all of us. But my guess is that it doesn't. My guess is that some of you listening today don't think 2008 will be very happy at all. You squirm a little bit when you hear it, and you definitely have not taken the effort to put any New Year's Eve parties with the popping of the champagne and tossing of the confetti on your calendar. My guess is also that some of you listening today think it's a no-brainer that you'll have a happy 2008 because you are Christians and, well, Christians are always happy, always smiling, always upbeat, always, always no matter what.

Welcome to another sermon in our series, “Little Psalms for Big Problems.” Today's problem that presents itself to us is a unique one because it's kind of a good problem. The problem is prosperity. You may even be asking yourself right now how prosperity can be a problem. If so, think back to a minute ago when I asked you if it would be okay for me to wish you a Happy New Year. Some people think that's impossible. Other people think that's automatic for anyone who is a Christian. And both of those reactions indicate the problem with prosperity God's Word addresses for us today. The problem really isn't prosperity in itself, but our understanding of prosperity, our attitude about prosperity, and our behavior related to prosperity.

If you were to define prosperity with another word, what would that word be? Happiness, success, good fortune, wealth, peace, enjoyment, security, abundance, satisfaction? And then, how would you make sure you find it? You could start by planning your menu for a New Year's Eve or New Year's Day meal. Depending on your ethnic origin you would include various menu components for a happy year.

The Dutch believe that eating donuts will bring prosperity. The ring shaped food symbolizes coming full circle and lacking nothing. In the Southern U.S. black-eyed peas and greens are the choice for many. The black-eyed peas represent copper coins and the greens represent dollar bills, indicating that prosperity is the opposite of poverty to some. The Japanese eat long noodles hoping they will achieve long life, so prosperity in the Japanese culture is more about longevity of living than quality of living. Many cultures use a New Year's celebration to eat foods that are special and not eaten every day. This is one of the reasons people eat caviar and drink champagne to symbolize prosperity as being the finer things in life.

What does prosperity mean to you, and how will you find it in 2008? God's Word in our little psalm for today has the answer. Listen closely to Psalm 128 for clues about how you'll find prosperity and what it actually is. *“Blessed are all who fear the LORD, who walk in his ways. You will eat the fruit of your labor; blessings and prosperity will be yours. Your wife will be like*

a fruitful vine within your house; your sons will be like olive shoots around your table. Thus is the man blessed who fears the LORD. May the LORD bless you from Zion all the days of your life; may you see the prosperity of Jerusalem, and may you live to see your children's children. Peace be upon Israel."

Where, according to this little psalm, does prosperity come from? Not from us, that's for sure. Consider the hard lesson King Solomon learned about that. In the somber and thought provoking Bible book of Ecclesiastes Solomon sums up his lessons in life so that we don't repeat his mistakes. One of his lessons had to do with prosperity. Prosperity he thought he could make happen for himself. It took Solomon 13 years to complete the construction of his palace, as compared to 7 years for the completion of the temple. And he built an entire palace for Pharaoh's daughter, whom he had married. Solomon designed lush gardens and parks, still a source of pride and sign of wealth among the rich people of the Middle East today. Of course, he had to engineer enormous water reservoirs to furnish water for the many trees. He filled his palace with an overabundance of servants to tend his every need. He owned more livestock than anyone else before him in Jerusalem. Solomon's dinnerware was made not of ceramic or silver but of gold. But looking back at what he thought, during the moment, was a time of prosperity Solomon later reflected, *"When I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained"* (Ecclesiastes 2: 11).

Accumulating more or accomplishing more isn't prosperity. A number of years ago at Northwestern University a study of Olympic medalists proved with research that second-place silver medalists are less satisfied than third-place bronze medalists. Can you guess why? Silver medalists tend to think about what might have been if they had achieved a little more. Bronze medalists are simply satisfied that they got a medal. There's a lesson in that study for as about the sin of prosperity, or to be more accurate, our sinful viewpoint of prosperity. It's a sin to attach prosperity to needing more, to achieving more, to accomplishing what we'd like, to filling our plate, to filling our calendars with important appointments, to filling our financial portfolio. It's a sin that fills us up with self, and then empties us so that all our accomplishments, achievements, and filling up is nothing. Meaningless. Jesus judges us when he says, *"You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked ... So be earnest and repent. Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him and he with me"* (Revelation 3:17, 19,20).

Prosperity is not inside where we live, but stands just outside the door knocking, waiting, yearning for us to look outside of ourselves and into the forgiving and faithful eyes of our Savior Jesus. He doesn't demand prosperity from us as much as he didn't demand that the stinky fishermen from Galilee catch a certain quota of fish before becoming his disciples. He gave them a great catch of fish as a blessing for their bodies as well as their souls. Your catch of fish awaits you in 2008. It's a catch of fish that, indeed, is abundant but that's not where its prosperity lies. Its prosperity lies in the reality that God gives blessings to those he loves, and those blessings enrich our souls, our faith, our relationship with him.

The writer of Psalm 128 knew this. He assures us that everyone who fears the LORD – believes in him with a respect and reverence that is awed by his faithful love – is “blessed.” That’s prosperity. It is not gained by us but given by God, given to those who look to him in faith. What is your path to prosperity in 2008? “Walk in his ways,” the Psalm writer guides us, and “you will eat the fruit of your labor; blessings and prosperity will be yours.” You can labor and sweat and toil all you want, like Solomon did, and not enjoy prosperity. But labor and sweat and toil as you walk in God’s ways and prosperity is yours. The difference isn’t how or how often you labor, but whether or not you follow God in faith.

For people in the days of the psalms the most premium form of prosperity was a large, healthy family. So the psalm writer pictures a dinner table filled with children where a wife sits next to her husband like a commercial on TV today, and the psalm says, “Thus is the man blessed who fears the LORD.” The family is a blessing from God. A gift. That’s prosperity. It comes from God’s hands and we receive it by faith. To make this point clear the psalm writer emphasizes, “May the LORD bless you from Zion all the days of your life.” Blessings come not from social security or Wal-Mart or the bank. They come from Zion, the place of God’s presence in the Old Testament. We’d say today that prosperity is sent from heaven. All gifts come from God.

Jesus puts it this way for us: *“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth ... but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven ... for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also”* (Matthew 6:19-21). Prosperity, then, is a matter of the heart – a matter of faith in our gracious and generous God. Since all things are possible with God, you can have a Happy New Year. Since God keeps his promises, you will have a Happy New Year. “Blessed are all who fear the LORD.” Amen.