

* **A God-Fearing Man's Labor**
Psalm 128:1-2

* **The Blessedness of Family**
Psalm 128:3, 4

* **The Church and the Family**
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* **While They Were There...**
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* **Great Is Thy Faithfulness**
Lamentations 3:22, 23

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Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma
Missionary-pastor of
Pittsburgh Protestant Reformed Fellowship
in Pittsburgh, PA

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THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

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A God-Fearing Man's Labor

No. 3700

Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma

Dear Radio Friends,

Introduction

In the next three broadcasts we are going to examine Psalm 128. It describes for us a believing home and family. It is not my intention, as is so often the case when preaching on the family, to ignore the place and value of single men and women in the church. But the axiom of Psalm 68:6 is often the case in the church: "God setteth the solitary in families," and therefore there is indeed a need to address the subject of godly homes and families.

Before explaining the various verses of this Psalm in particular, we must first examine the Psalm as a whole. We really cannot understand properly the instruction of the various verses of this Psalm without having before us the intent and purpose of the psalmist in the writing of it. It is obvious, first of all, that this Psalm is coupled with Psalm 127. Psalm 128 follows closely upon the logic of Psalm 127. In Psalm 127 the Word of God points out to us the joy found in having children. A believing man and his wife truly view chil-

dren as the most precious of gifts given them in their marriage. Not only do our children carry on our name. Not only do our children stand for our defense and that of the church. But our children are a heritage of the Lord! They are God's children, given to us for a time to raise unto the Lord. We view them as most precious because they belong to God. He gives them to us as an inheritance.

But to experience the joy found in children, there must be a proper family into which they are born. So the psalmist takes it upon himself in Psalm 128 to sing of just such a family: a man who labors, a wife who is as a vine by the sides of his house. And now back to those children, once again, they are like olive plants around a man and his wife's table! This is what makes up a godly home and what goes on in it.

About Psalm 128 in general we must make a few observations. First, it is written to the man who is the head of the household. It is written to the husband or the father of the

family. This may not seem true from verse 1 of this Psalm, where it states, “Blessed is *every one* that feareth the Lord.” But, first of all, that term everyone can also be translated “every man.” And secondly, in the verses following we find that the man of the household is addressed. Verse 2: “For thou shalt eat the fruit of thy labor.” Verse 3: “Thy wife shall be as a vine.” Or again, in that verse: “thy children like olive plants,” and so on. In the third place, we read specifically in verse 4, “Behold that thus shall *the man* be blessed that fears the Lord.” So, this Psalm is written in particular to the man who is the head of his household.

The second general observation we make about this Psalm is that it is written to describe what makes a home a happy and spiritually prosperous one. The term “blessed” that is used in several of the verses of this Psalm literally means both happy and prosperous. In other words, we learn in this Psalm what makes up a functional family as opposed to a dysfunctional family. Our society likes to talk in its psychological jargon of functional and dysfunctional families. Truth be told, not many in our society truly know what makes a functional family. We will learn in this Psalm what does—and, as a result, what makes the members of that family happy.

A third observation concerning this Psalm is that the life and joy of a family revolves around the home. In our present society that seems to be a foreign concept. People buy their huge and elaborate houses but really spend very little quality time there. Jobs, recreation, and friends all seem to place a huge demand on our lives. They draw families out of the home. As a result, life in the home becomes chaotic and disorderly. Little time is left for each other. This Psalm speaks of joy revolving around the home and family.

Then, one last observation. The psalmist nowhere in this Psalm places before us a command or a demand. Our sinful flesh is not admonished here. The psalmist instead appeals to the new life in Christ that dwells in us. He appeals to the spiritual desires of a believer. He presents us with the way of wisdom. It is as if he says, “Look! Behold! You want to be happy, believing man? Do you want to be happy in your place in the church? Do you want God to bless you out of Zion? Then, here is the way! It is not hard to find! It does not take a rocket-scientist to discover it! It is simple: if only you are wise enough to follow in this way: live in your home with your family! And make that home a spiritual haven of rest, peace, and joy! Let the world pass you by! Live in your home with your

much within our own homes and families—sins that are not made known to others, perhaps, but are there nonetheless. But God’s mercy and compassion have not failed us there either!

They are, in fact, new to us every morning. Every day anew we witness God’s unfailing faithfulness toward you and me! Instead of leaving us in our sin and watching us fall, God pities us every day anew and preserves us in our generations. Despite the weaknesses of our households—of parents and of children—God upholds us in His great love and mercy. Every day anew that is true! It has been true throughout this old year. Every day God forgives the sorrowing saint of his sins. Every day anew God preserves that saint in the midst of his afflictions too. We are His people, the sheep of His pasture. He cares for us and leads us. Maybe the way He leads us is not known. Maybe it is hard. He does not promise us that it will not be a difficult way, but He does promise that He will be with us every step of the way. And that is what we have witnessed this past year again. Certainly we can confess with Jeremiah: God’s mercies and compassions fail not: they are new every morning. What a wonder that Jeremiah in all his

affliction and pains and sorrows could confess that! But how he experienced that in life too. Just as we have in this past year.

III. Praise

It is the end of 2013. We stand on the very eve of a new year once again. Time like an ever rolling stream. It seems as if this year has just begun, and it is over already! We have seen our share of joys and we have seen our share of sorrows and burdens. But we do not stand here discouraged! We have bright hope for tomorrow. Jesus comes. But we also have confidence in the past. We do not look at it through negative eyes today. We look at it knowing that God has again been faithful! What a wonderful God we have! How good He has been to us again.

What then shall we say tonight? “Great is Thy faithfulness, O God, my Father!” As I close my eyes on the last day of this year, that old hymn will be in my heart and on my lips: Great is Thy faithfulness! That is our confession. No, that is our song of praise to God! All praise and glory be to God in this year gone by. Lord God, we extol *Thee*, and not ourselves. Great is Thy faithfulness!

And we are not because of God's mercy. God has chosen us in His great love for us from eternity. He has called us to be a people unto Himself in this world. Yet, He knows our human frailty. He also sees what a tangled mess we can make for ourselves—and we have made for ourselves again in this year gone by. We wallow about in the misery that sin causes us. He knows we are not always happy here. He knows that when we sin we make ourselves miserable in life. And God pities us when He sees us in our sin. He feels sorry for us and what has become of us in Adam! And in that pity for us God reaches down in His mercy and draws us out of the misery of sin and gives unto us the joy of salvation in Christ. He does that over and over again!

And this is how God's mercy ties in with His compassion. God's compassion is His love, but it is His love from the point of view of His affection toward us. He is a God who is kindly affectioned toward you and me and therefore a God of tenderness—a God of kindness. He is filled with benevolence toward us, His children in Christ. That is a beautiful picture of God that our text draws for believers. We are those whom He has chosen from all eternity. He has loved us with an eternal love in Christ. That love does not change. He does not despise us one minute and love us the next. He

does not in anger over our sins seek revenge on us, though we deserve it. But God is compassionate towards us—always and ever. And in that compassion God shows to us His mercy. It is a tender mercy! So it is that in His faithfulness to you and me He is gracious towards us, loves us, and is merciful toward us. In this past year all of these were revealed by God to His dear children. How grateful we can be at the end of another year. God's mercies and compassions fail not!

Notice that these words, mercy and compassion, are in the plural. Jeremiah speaks of God's mercies and his compassions! He does this because He has in mind the different acts of mercy and compassion God has shown us in our lives. In this past year God has shown to His people countless acts of compassion and mercy. These have not failed us. God has shown that to the body of His church. God has yet preserved His church in the faith. God has given her the truth of His Word. He has given us as believers the desire to hear that truth as it is revealed to us in the Scriptures. He has worked in us faithful adherence to that truth in our lives. And in that we have found unity too as fellow saints of God. God has not failed us in our homes and families! If we were left to ourselves, there too we would be consumed. We sin so

wife and children, and you will find happiness.

Now we consider verses 1 and 2 of this Psalm. We read: "Blessed is every one that feareth the LORD; that walketh in his ways. For thou shalt eat the labor of thine hands: happy shalt thou be, and it shall be well with thee."

I. The God-Fearing Man

Here, dear friends, is the one prerequisite to a happy home environment: the members of the family fear Jehovah. And this begins with the husband and father of the home. God requires this of him, first of all. He sets the spiritual tone of his family. This Psalm is founded upon the conclusion of Ecclesiastes 12:13: "Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man."

Ah, yes, the *fear* of Jehovah. The basic meaning of this term is "to tremble." This idea may not be removed or brushed aside from the term. Here is the idea expressed in the word "fear" as it applies now to God. Number 1: God is in Himself all glorious. He shines forth in all His marvelous dignity. Terrible is He in His dignity! God dwells in a light of holiness and perfection unto which no man can approach without being consumed. God is arrayed in His majesty and sovereignty. In His hands

He holds the deep places of the earth. All the inhabitants of the earth are less than nothing in His sight. God holds the keys of heaven and hell in His hands. He has the power, and He will exercise that power in the day of judgment, to allow into heaven and to cast into hell. Who but a fool would dare stand in the presence of a raging wave of water that would swallow him up and destroy him in a moment? Who, but a fool, would dare to stand in the presence of God without trembling?

Number 2: Consider the works and ways of this God. He sent the desolations that destroyed the land of Egypt. He sent plagues upon His own people when they walked in rebellion against Him. God makes peace and creates war. God destroyed kings and nations in His just judgment over them. Who would dare stand in His venerable and august presence and accuse Him of injustice? It is easy to be defiant against a God whom we do not see or who delays His punishment over men until after death. But accuse God to His face once, oh foolish man! Bow before God and His Son and kiss their feet lest they be angry and you perish in your way. Fearing is trembling!

But the man who fears Jehovah in this Psalm is not merely a man who knows God and trembles before such

knowledge. The man of this Psalm stands before this God and worships Him. He loves this God and therefore deeply reverences Him. He clings to this God because he is assured that this God is on his side. This God loves him too. That does not change who God is, of course. He is still a God before whom we tremble. We cannot help but do that. But the man who fears Jehovah enters God's presence with the confidence that his God will hear him when he prays and that this God will turn all things to his advantage. So he highly respects and bows in reverence before God. And he does so because this God whom he fears is Jehovah.

The name Jehovah, or Jaweh, literally means "I AM." The one characteristic of God that stands on the foreground with this name is God's immutability, that is, His unchangeableness. God is forever the same. He does not change His mind. He does not change His eternal purpose for all things. What is especially of significance to us is this: God does not change His mind about His people in Christ! He has chosen them from eternity to be a people unto Himself. He has in His grace sent Jesus Christ into this world to die for them. Christ accomplished the work of their salvation once and for all time at the cross. He has secured their righteousness. At

the cross all of God's people were declared righteous.

When we believe that to be true of us, then we know too that God has sent forth the Spirit of Christ to take up His abode in our hearts. The Spirit works in us the salvation that Christ has earned. All of this is an accomplished fact! And from that God will never turn! Once chosen, once saved, once having had the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts, we can be sure that God will never, ever, ever take that from us! Never! Why? Because God is Jehovah—the I Am! That means God will never remove from us His love and fellowship. He will never leave or forsake us in our times of need or even when we sin against Him. God is faithful. His mercies are new every morning!

For that reason, we fear God. We stand before Him in the deepest adoration and love. This God who is so high in the heavens has condescended to men of low degree and dwells with us. Wow! With reverence and godly fear we fall upon our faces before Him and in thankfulness praise Him for His faithfulness to us. In that fear we worship Him. *That* fear of God is a prerequisite to happiness—even in the home and family. Live outside of that fear and to that degree we begin to lose our joy.

To this the psalmist adds: "and walketh in his ways."

there is room for them all. But when the truth is promoted, then it meets with retaliation, even anger. Apostasy and worldly-mindedness prevail in the church. Even the direction of much of the church this past year can leave us with sadness that sometimes verges on despair. Where is this world going? Where is the church going?

But God has been good to us, has He not? It is not that we have not stumbled in this past year. We do not always love God and the neighbor as we ought. This year has not always been one of joy and happiness for us. We must deal with sin as it has entered into our own relationships. We must deal with sin in those whom we love. Sin causes strife! Besides, we must deal with a sin-cursed earth in which we find sickness and even death. We struggle with age, we struggle with infirmities and illness. It all has been there in this past year. But one thing is certain for us as believers who stand now in the last few days of the year 2013: God has been faithful! He has not suffered our foot to be moved. He has not allowed us to fall away from faith. Even though we deserved it—He has held us in the palm of His mighty hand and He preserves us. And in those times when we were about ready to give up, even crying out in despair, then God has borne us up. He will not allow us to suffer above that

which we are able to bear. He never leaves us. We experience His care and presence! And when we suffer for righteousness' sake, then God also gives us a calm reassurance that it is well with our soul! Such is the faithfulness of God toward us.

II. Mercy

God's faithfulness is revealed to us in what Jeremiah says in verse 22 and the beginning of verse 23, "It is of the LORD's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning." Again, as we reflect on this past year we truly can say that God has been both merciful and compassionate toward us. In the deepest sense of the word, God's mercy is His attitude of grace and love toward His elect people in Christ, by which He takes pity on us in the misery of our sin. If there is anything that stands before the heart of a believer at the end of another year it is his own unworthiness before God. We have transgressed God's commandments every day. We have not loved Him as we should, and we have not loved our neighbor as we should either. When we look at our sin, then we see our guilt before God. We deserve to be consumed in God's justice. We deserve to be punished for sin—eternally. But we are not.

God's people in every generation hear that promise and cling to it! They need to, because believers know their own sin and their own failures in this life. And they know that they do not deserve this favor and love of God in their lives. But they believe!

They believe that God will never leave or abandon them because of what Christ has done for them! In Christ God's faithfulness is revealed to you and me, dear saint! We believe that! We believe that Christ has died to deliver us from sin, and that He has taken away our guilt. We believe that God views us ever in Christ alone and we therefore see our own worthiness before God in Christ.

For Christ's sake, therefore, we are preserved in our lives. For Christ's sake you and I have been preserved in our faith in the past year. As this year passes into oblivion therefore, we hold fast, we cling tenaciously, to God's covenant promise to us. And we rejoice in the name of our God: He is Jehovah, the faithful one!

Look at the events of 2013. Look at society. In this past

year it has become the more lawless. Mass shootings in various schools and public places. Parents murdering their children and children their parents. Kidnappings. The society in which we live has become an unsafe place in which to live. There is the constant threat of war hanging over our heads—Iran, Syria, North Korea. Terrorist strikes in various places in this world. There is corruption in big business affecting the lives of thousands. There is lack of financial security—stocks plummeting and economy faltering. Sexual promiscuity—fornication and adultery. This past year has been a year of uncertainty in this present society in which we live.

Look at the church world. More and more we find the false church growing in power, ever holding to its errors that place man above God. There is an attitude of tolerance toward—even acceptance of—false doctrine and a sinful lifestyle. There is a growing attitude of anger and resentment toward the church that strictly maintains the Word of God. Errors may abound;

*As this year passes
 into oblivion therefore,
 we hold fast,
 we cling tenaciously,
 to God's covenant promise to us.
 And we rejoice in the
 name of our God:
 He is Jehovah, the faithful one!*

Blessed is the man who fears God and walks in His ways. Now, walking in God's ways is not something different than fearing God. It is simply an outward manifestation of our fear for God. When we fear God in our hearts, then we walk in His ways in our lives. So, this is really a given here in verse 1. What is meant by God's ways is not simply His commandments. It *includes* God's commandments, of course. We are always happy when we walk in the way of God's commandments. But the ways of God referred to here are broader than simply God's commands. It refers to the wise instruction that we are given in God's Word in general. There are certain prescribed ways that we need to follow in our homes and families and in our individual lives. For example, the commandments of God do not say: "You must read your Bible at least once a day." But, certainly, reading our Bibles on such a consistent basis is a way of God in which we must follow. We are told in the Word of God: Pray without ceasing. That is a way of God. Fellowship with God's people. That is one of the ways of God. Seek the things above and not the things below. And so the list can go on. There are many ways of God.

One who fears God walks in those ways. He plants his feet on the path of God's Word and he determines that he is going

to walk in the ways of God. He does not choose to walk the ways of this world. He does not try to blend together, to synthesize, God's ways with the ways of this world. He lives the life of the antithesis, saying no to the ways of the wicked and yes to the ways of God.

But let us keep in mind the focus of this Psalm. The psalmist is addressing the life of the God-fearing man *in the home and family*. The ways, then, to which God's Word here refers are the ways of God that will lead a man's house in a godly and orderly way. It refers to a God-fearing man walking in his home and family in the ways of God. The husband and father of the house must walk in his home in a godly manner. If he does not, his house is not spiritually functional. It will become spiritually dysfunctional! The home and family will "derail," so to speak, from the track or way that leads to happiness. Blessed, or happy, is the man who fears Jehovah and walks in the ways of Jehovah in his home with his wife and children. A spiritually-functional home is founded on the prerequisite that a man fears God and walks in God's ways.

II. His Labor

Now the Psalm turns to the specific work or task of that God-fearing man in the home

and family. He works. We read in verse 2, “For thou shalt eat the labor of thine hands: happy shalt thou be, and it shall be well with thee.” We need to get the proper idea of this verse before us. Properly translated, this verse teaches us a profound truth about the place of a husband and father in the home. We would read this: “for when you eat the labor of your hands you will be happy and it will be good to you.” There is nothing better in establishing a happy home than when a father is content with the hard labor of his hands and with the provisions it provides for his household. Ask a person today: What is it that will make you happy? Without a lot of thought he would answer, money, or ease—vacations, pleasures, fun. Others might say: fame and fortune. John Calvin writes, “No sooner is the name of happiness pronounced, than instantly every man breaks forth into the most extravagant ideas of what is necessary to it, so insatiable a gulf is the covetousness of the heart.”

You know what? None of these things brings true happiness! You can fill your life with the pursuit of fame, money, ease, and pleasure. You can make yourself busy every day wining and dining, vacationing, attending this function or that, but these do not make a person truly happy. There is nothing more satisfying than for a man to

come home to a loving wife and happy children after putting in a hard day’s labor at work. There is nothing that will bring greater joy to a God-fearing man’s heart than to know he fulfilled his calling toward God and family in the work he did again that day. It is not as if the man of the home is a sluggard. He is no slouch when it comes to work. He does not simply seek to “get by,” so that he can live in slothfulness and laziness. He works with his hands. Included in this clause of our text is, of course, mental labor as well. Many men of the church are tradesmen who labor with their hands. Others are businessmen or professionals who labor with their minds. But it does not make any difference. Satisfaction can be found in this: that at the end of the day, being dog-tired at times from the work performed, a man comes home to his family knowing that he has done what he was called to do.

His family will then eat the fruit of his labors. That father and husband labors and puts food on the table and clothes on the back of his children. He labors to put a roof over the heads of his family. And when he accomplishes this, it does not matter how much money he has left over for extras, he has reason to be satisfied. A wife and children do not require of him a mansion or all kinds of toys and vacations. They are happy

This covenant that God established long ago with Abraham was accompanied repeatedly through history with an oath. God swears by His name that these elect people whom He has chosen from eternity in His unchangeable will, and that He has called to be His people in this world, He will never leave to themselves or forsake them. In other words, God swears an oath to us, His church: “By my name, I will never fail you or forsake you!” We must understand all of this if we are truly going to understand God’s faithfulness! Because, you see, God’s faithfulness speaks of His constant and abiding adherence to the oath that He swears to us. God does not forsake His people, and that, not on the basis of anything they have done to deserve this. If it were not for God’s faithfulness towards us, we would be consumed, you and I! “I am Jehovah, the unchangeable One, therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed,” God tells us in Malachi. God is faithful to you and me because of who He is and because of the oath that He swore to His church.

This oath God has kept throughout all ages. Oh, there is no doubt we find repeatedly in the Bible that God pruned many people out of

the vine of His church. These people belonged outwardly to the sphere of God’s church and covenant in this world. But they were not believers. There is no doubt about it, either, that God cut off the nation of Israel and Judah as a whole. But this was true because these nations slowly but surely began to fill up with reprobate instead of elect. These nations slowly, through the course of time, became filled with unbelievers instead of believers. They still looked at themselves as the people of Jehovah. They still boasted of that. But their hearts were not characterized by faith. For this reason the reprobate in the church are cut off. Or when the church institute itself is filled with them, then the institute is cut off. But this does not mean that God is not faithful to the covenant that He established with believers.

The elect, who are characterized by faith, are always preserved by God’s almighty hand.

*God is faithful
to you and me
because of who He is
and because of the oath
that He swore to His church.*

God’s promise is still sure to the seed—the true seed of Abraham—I will not leave you alone in your lives and I will not fail you or for-

sake you in your needs. I am your Father and you are My children whom I love with an eternal, unchangeable love!

church slowly crumbling and falling apart, we can say: God is faithful! And His mercies toward His saints have been new every morning of this year gone by! That knowledge gives us confidence and joy as we stand at the close of this year and look back across the year. It is that confidence we consider today, using the confession of praise raised in these verses.

I. Faithfulness

Looking back across the year 2013 every believer certainly can confess God's faithfulness to him. When we in our weakness have so often strayed from God, He has again in His faithfulness towards us preserved us in our faith. Even in those times when we were the least deserving of it, God has held us in His mighty hand and led us.

But we ought to understand fully what is implied in this concept of God's faithfulness if we are really to appreciate its beauty. Only when we fully understand everything that is included in God's faithfulness towards us are we able to stand on this old year's night and exclaim: "Great is thy faithfulness!" You see, from eternity God has established His decree. In that decree He has chosen a certain people unto Himself in Christ. God did not leave that choosing up to man. He is God who determines all things. God

chose to Himself out of the human race a certain number of individuals who together would make up His church, the body of Christ in this world.

As these individuals are born throughout the generations of this world, God, by His sovereign and free grace, calls them to faith and repentance. He sends forth the Spirit of Christ into their hearts and works in them faith with its fruit—true repentance over sin. He then unites them to the body of Christ in this world so that they stand together in this world with other elect believers, the church. With these believers in their generations God establishes His covenant with its promises. God enters into an intimate bond of love and fellowship with them—a bond in which He becomes their God and Father and they His people—the very children of His family.

That is God's covenant. With that covenant God has made a promise to His church and through her to every believer: I will not fail you or forsake you. We read of that promise of God's covenant in many different places in Scripture. In His great love toward His people, in His covenant blessing toward them, God makes a promise to them: no matter what way I might lead you in this world, you need never fear because I will never leave you alone. I will always be there for you.

with a husband and father that fears God and walks in his ways, laboring hard to provide them with the necessities of life. This will be good to you, men! This is enough to give happiness to you so long as you and your family are living in the fear of God.

Wives and children, how often do you thank God for that kind of a husband and father? How much do we take time out to thank our husbands and fathers for the hard work they do on our behalf? A man is happy when his family is happy. If wife and children are always in his face about buying them more—a wife nagging in discontent for what she has and children always complaining that their friends have this and that and they don't—it is a slap in the face of the provider of the home. When we are content with what God has provided and praise our husbands and fathers for working hard every day, then this is his reward.

All of this is true, of course, provided the proper foundation of the family is there—provided husband, wife, and children fear God. This is the home that is described for us in this Psalm. When a man walks in God's ways, fulfilling his calling to labor with his hands to provide for his family—then there will be happiness.

II. His Blessedness

That is what the term blessedness means—happiness. In fact it is translated in this way in verse 2. But the happiness this term refers to is not the outward, frivolous, superficial laughter that can be heard from the bar rooms and the sports arenas of our world. It is not the smile, playful banter, and joking that people assume when they are around others. It is not the fake joy portrayed in the movies of today. An outward smile, or loud raucous laughter does not mean a person is happy—neither ought we to mistake these things to mean we are happy. The happiness of the God-fearing man is truly blessedness. It is a joy and peace that is found in the heart. It is a joy that is ours even when we are sad and tears stream down our faces. It is a happiness that is stable and sure because it is rooted in the God whom we fear. It is rooted in Jehovah, the ever-faithful, ever-sure God who dwells with us and loves us.

Truly, that man who fears God and walks in His ways in his home and family, that man who labors with his hands the thing that is good—that man is happy. He is blessed. And he will find that blessedness in his home.

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

*December 8, 2013 The Family of the God-Fearing Man
No. 3701 Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma*

Dear Radio Friends,

Introduction.

We continue today our study of Psalm 128. This Psalm teaches us of the joy a God-fearing man experiences when he establishes a home and family. When we considered verses 1 and 2 of this Psalm we focused our attention on two matters. First, what it means to be a person who fears God. And second what the function of a husband and father is in the family, that is, to labor with his hands in order to feed and support his family. Today, we are going to consider in the next two verses of Psalm 128 the beautiful setting of the home and family itself. This we find in verses 3, 4 of this Psalm: “Thy wife shall be as a fruitful vine by the sides of thine house: thy children like olive plants round about thy table. Behold, that thus shall the man be blessed that feareth the LORD.”

Bear in mind, once again, that this Psalm is written from the perspective of encouragement. The psalmist does not lay down for us a set of rules and regulations and then command us to follow every one of them. The establishment of a godly

home varies from one family to the next. There is a certain measure of latitude in the way that different godly homes conduct themselves. The approach of the psalmist is very positive and is meant to incite us to holy service in the home. He sets before us a thing of beauty. He appeals to our sanctified hearts. “Here,” he says, “is a beautiful picture of the home. Do you see how desirable it is? Covet after it! Seek after it! Because if you do, you will be truly happy and satisfied in this life. Why will you be happy? Because God has ordained this kind of life to fulfill His purposes in establishing His church and people in this world. He has chosen this way to carry on His covenant in your generations. Establish a God-fearing home and you will see your children’s children and peace upon Israel.”

I. A Godly Home

There are in our text two comparisons the psalmist draws for us to direct our attention to the family and the home. The first of these is that of the wife. Notice: “Thy wife shall be as a fruitful vine by the sides of thine

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

*December 29, 2013 Great Is Thy Faithfulness
No. 3704 Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma*

Dear radio friends,

Introduction

Why speak on Lamentations at the close of another year? To lament means to mourn aloud with grief or to express one’s complaint. And this is exactly what the prophet Jeremiah does in this book of the Bible. He mourns over the desolation and destruction that had befallen Jerusalem and Judah. He raises his voice of grief over the captivity of Judah in Babylon on account of her apostasy. In chapter 3 he laments his own personal affliction that he suffered through all of this. Jeremiah writes in verse 1 of this chapter, “I am the man that hath seen affliction by the rod of his wrath.”

Jeremiah mourned in this way because God had sent many painful events in the life of His servant. He tells us in verse 14 that he was a derision to all his people and that they mocked him with their song. This was true, and more—he was even cast into a pit for days, standing in mud up to his knees. This prophet had been beaten and imprisoned because he spoke the

words that Jehovah had placed upon his lips. He spoke words of condemnation and destruction upon Judah for the sins she had been committing before the face of God. The people and the rulers hated him for that. Not that Jeremiah delighted in speaking such harsh words. He was commanded to do so by God Himself. He could not help but speak these words. He was Jehovah’s mouthpiece. So he was persecuted for the sake of the truth—and in this particular book of the Bible he raises his lamentation to God.

Why consider a lamentation at the end of this year? Because in the midst of his mourning Jeremiah brings to mind a blessed truth that gives us joy as the old year passes away. It is the truth of God’s faithfulness. Here are the verses we are going to consider, Lamentations 3:22, 23: “It is of the LORD’s mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness.” In this past year God has proved Himself faithful to His church and people. Even though we see society and the

lehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting." God had purposed the birth of His Son in Bethlehem from all eternity, and now in time God saw to it that His Son was born at this time and in this place.

But there is more to the question, why were they there. Not only did all this happen according to God's decree and His providence. It happened according to God's grace! Already at the beginning of time, after man fell into sin, God promised a Savior. Throughout the old dispensation God promised that Messiah. He promised this because it was only by means of this Savior that His people would be delivered from their sin. If Christ would not be born into this world, then there would be no salvation—plain and simple. That is why nothing was left up to chance by God. Christ would be born, and Christ would die on the cross, and Christ would save God's people from their sin. And all of this would happen because God is gracious toward His people. God in His eternal love for His

elect people would not leave them to perish in their sin. He willed our salvation in Christ. Christ was sent into this world because our God, dear believer, is a God of grace toward you and me. Christ was born at this exact moment in history in order that we might be delivered from sin.

And that now is an accomplished fact. We are saved! Salvation was made possible by the birth of the divine Son of God into our human flesh! He is able to replace us before God's bar of justice being himself a man, and He is able to bear our punishment being almighty God. All that was made possible in the birth of Christ.

That is the reason we rejoice in this day. That is the reason we commemorate the birth of Christ. Rejoice today—Christ the Savior is born.

That then is what happened in Bethlehem. Mary was delivered of her Son, our Savior. No wonder the angels sang on that day! We have received good tidings of great joy! Our salvation has been secured. It is ours! It is finished. All accomplished. How gracious God is toward you and me, His people!

house." The second picture is that of a man's children: "thy children like olive plants round about thy table." We need to consider these two comparisons if we are going to understand what the psalmist is trying to say in our text as a whole.

The first comparison that is made for us directs our attention to the wife. A man's wife, we are told, is like a fruitful vine by the sides of thine house. The picture drawn for us by this is that of a house plant—a plant that was planted inside of the house. That is not a strange matter. Many of us have our house plants too. But this plant was unique in that it was a vine. And the vine was allowed to grow up and cling to the sides of the house. Some say this vine grew on the inside wall. Others say it was common that though the vine was planted in the house it grew through a hole in the wall to cling to the walls on the outside of the house. It really makes no difference as far as the meaning of this verse is concerned. We would, perhaps, not conceive of that in *our* homes, but the homes of the Israelites did not have fancy wallboard or plaster walls. Their walls were, no doubt, rough and more ragged. A vine on the wall would help beautify the wall.

There are a couple of characteristics of this vine that are brought to our attention by the

psalmist. First, it was a vine that indeed clung to the side of the house. It was tender and weak and needed the walls of the house to uphold and strengthen it. Secondly, this vine was a fruitful vine. It was not merely an ivy, but a plant that brought forth fruit. In fact, that was, in part, its purpose—to bear fruit. This figure the psalmist applies to a godly wife—a wife found in a covenant home and family. She is as this vine, the psalmist writes.

Before proceeding to explain this figure let me issue a warning: the picture we are about to view is not appealing to most today. It is considered old-fashioned and out-of-date. It is deemed to be a relic of the past and ought not to be applied to a modern woman. Many will say that this Word of God is downright offensive! These forget, however, that this is indeed God's Word and that God's Word always transcends time and culture. It applies as much today as it did then. But the content of our text may contain material that is offensive to our sinful flesh. So, beware!

The wife in a believing home and family must be like a vine that clings to the side of her house. In other words, a wife and mother must be a keeper of the home. Her task in the family is not to go and eke out a living for the family. It is

not to be constantly on the fly, coffee klatching here and there or pursuing her own pleasures and activities. Her place is in the home. She is as a vine that grows by the sides of her house. This is the Word of our text and elsewhere in Scripture. To put it positively, the wife and mother of a family must understand her inestimable value to her family! She fills the home with her beauty and presence. She *makes* the home! Her husband and children find their joy in her. Much of the success of the family unit rests on her shoulders. What a glorious place the wife and mother has in the home! It is far more glorious than any career she may find in this world. Her work is not menial, as unbelief tries to make it out to be. On the contrary, her work is invaluable to her home and therefore to society at large.

That is the principle of God's Word that governs a wife and mother in the home. Does that mean that a wife may never leave the house but is a slave there? Does that mean that a wife may never visit another in the church or be seen in the city? That is not what God's Word says here. The Word of God sets forth a solid principle of a wife who fears Jehovah: she is central in importance to her family. "For this cause ought

the woman to have power on her head because of the angels!" Now the Word of God comes to you, wives, and it says, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling!" Here is the Word of God. You have the grace of the Holy Spirit in you. Take this Word of God and apply it to the utmost of your power! Use your liberty as godly women not to fulfill the flesh but to obey the Spirit! Follow the principle of God's Word in your lives.

The same goes for the next truth that is set forth in this picture of the vine. The wife shall be a fruitful vine! One

||| *What a glorious place
the wife and mother has
in the home!* |||

aspect of her calling in the home, according to the Word of God before us, is to bring

forth children, as well as raising those children in the fear of the Lord. That is a full-time job. And God views the place of the wife in the home in this way too. I Timothy 2:15 tells us that she shall be saved in child bearing. I refer you back to Psalm 127.

That is one part of the Christian home and family. The second is described for us in this way: "thy children like olive plants round about thy table." Here is a description given of God-fearing children. They are as olive plants round about a man's table. Here we have another picture of plants—this

no longer handle them all. There was a small inn in the town, but this already was full. The only place of shelter they could find was a cattle stall—probably a small shed or cave that housed someone's animals. And it was here in this cattle stall that Mary gave birth to Jesus. Having just entered into Bethlehem, Mary must have gone into labor. Joseph must have helped his wife deliver their baby. They did what was proper and necessary to bring Jesus into this world. They wrapped Him in linen clothing and then laid Him to rest in a feeding trough. That, then, is why Joseph and Mary had come to Bethlehem.

Well, that was the earthly reason they came. We must look beyond all of this and see what was really happening here. We must understand the divine reason for all of this. All this was taking place in order to fulfill the divine will of God as regards our salvation. In eternity

God planned everything that would take place in time. In His divine counsel God foreknew and planned in

every detail, the creation, the fall, the entire history of the Old Testament. In that same counsel, God had determined from eternity exactly when and how He would send His Son into

this world to secure salvation from sin for His people. What was happening here in Bethlehem was not taking place by chance. We read in our text that while they were there, "the days were accomplished that she should be delivered." Now, obviously, what is meant here by these words is that she was due to give birth at this time. The nine months, or the certain number of weeks, as they figure it today, were accomplished that she should at this moment have her baby. But in the science of it all, we tend to forget that a woman has a baby exactly at that moment that God wills her to have it. According to the laws of nature, it is approximately nine months, but we well know that it can go longer, and certainly, if God so chooses, it will come earlier. God is in control. It was at this exact moment therefore that God had willed from eternity that His Son would be born into this world.

||| *All this was taking place
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And it was at this exact moment in time that God in His providence caused Mary to go into labor and bring forth

Jesus Christ, our Savior. *Christ had to be born in Bethlehem!* This was a sign that He indeed is heir to the throne of David. This is why it was prophesied in Micah 5:2, "But thou, Beth-

made their way eastward in order to travel the route of the Jordan River and then turned westward through Jericho and followed along the main road that led to Jerusalem and then south once more to Bethlehem. They had now arrived at this town, and they looked for a place to reside for a little while.

II. Why They Were There

But why travel to Bethlehem? Did Joseph and Mary have relatives there? Probably not. There was no place for them to stay when they arrived in this town. Then why travel to Bethlehem—especially since we learn from our text that Mary was largely pregnant and about to be delivered of her Son. The answer is found in the first few verses of Luke 2. Evidently the great emperor of Rome, Caesar Augustus, had sent out a decree throughout all of his empire. He needed revenue to run his empire. The decree therefore went out throughout all the empire that everyone needed to register for this taxation. In Palestine everyone was ordered on a certain day or within a particular period of time to travel to the city of their lineage. They then would have to write their names down in a register in order that Caesar could carry out his taxation in an orderly way. Mary and Joseph traveled

to Bethlehem because Joseph was of the lineage of David.

Mary traveled with him probably because she was too close to being delivered of a child to be left alone. Why not leave her with relatives in Nazareth? Let us not forget who it was that Mary was carrying! She was going to be the mother of the Messiah! But she was found with child *before* Joseph and Mary had married. Few in Nazareth would have believed that their Son was legitimate. There was no way that Joseph was going to leave Mary behind. Besides, in those days people did not know as exactly as we know now when their child was going to be born. Mary and Joseph knew their son was soon to be born, but exactly when was outside of their scope of understanding.

So, here are Joseph and Mary alone in this small city of David called Bethlehem. They had made the journey. The next day, or maybe even that very day, Joseph would register for the tax. Then they would return home again. But there was a problem. They could not find a place to stay. There was nothing available because Bethlehem was but a small village—certainly not able to accommodate all the people that were there at the moment. The number of visitors to Bethlehem, all there to register for the tax, had swelled, and the city could

time specifically an olive plant. The olive plant was considered one of excellency and worth. It was praised for its fruit and oil. In Scripture the olive plant was oftentimes used to denote royalty or victory. The olive plants of our text here are also young, tender shoots. Such is the picture that is drawn of children. Our children are seen to be plants of vigor and strength—of victory and therefore of excellency and worth. At the same time, they are live shoots—young, tender, easily-influenced, needing care and attention, love and discipline. Notice again the high value that the Scripture places on our children. They are of great worth to the home and family. And notice too that children make up an important part of home and family. These are born and raised up in a home where there is the husband and his wife and their offspring. So we have the second picture drawn for us by this Psalm.

II. Life in the Home

But there is more that these two verses teach us. These figures present to us a picture of the life and fellowship that go on within the home and family. It is this life of fellowship that a man and his wife must seek to establish in their home if it truly is going to be a God-fearing home. It must be a

covenant home, that is, a place where there is shared between family members an intimate love, concern, and fellowship. A home where members of the family seek to share every day in a type of communion and love that cannot be found anywhere else.

Notice the figures of our text. The wife is as a vine *by the sides of the house*. The children are *round about the table*. These are places within the realm and confines of the house. That is where the covenant family lives: in the house. The wife is found there. The children are found there. And it is there that the husband returns after his day's labor. Why? To carry on the covenant fellowship that God has intended for the home and family. Now, what does that say to us as far as application is concerned? This: that the family ought to be found in the home!

That stands in direct contradiction to what the world desires and what Satan is working to inculcate in the hearts and minds of young people today. The home and the family are the last place many a young person wants to be found. But then this is far too often true of parents too! No one cares to be home anymore. Home is no longer where the heart is. No longer is it said: "There is no place like home." Now we find that family

members want to be anywhere *but* home! Husbands and wives are so busy fulfilling their own agendas, that they have little time for one another, much less their children. Already when their children are small, parents are shipping them off to different places. Friends seem to have taken the place of family and home. Children today do not know what it is to stay at home and find their pleasure with parents and siblings. Because they are being taught otherwise when children grow up they do not even know how to establish a home and family. Everyone in our society is always on the fly. And the upshot of it all is that the family is destroyed! This has been an effective tool of Satan in his battle against the church.

In fact, when Satan sets out to destroy our homes and families, the first thing he attempts to do is to destroy the fellowship that we find around our tables. I do not bring this up arbitrarily. The psalmist speaks of children round about our table. What is it about a table that makes it so special to the home? It is around the table while we eat that we share most intimately in fellowship with each other as members of the same household. That surely is a scriptural concept to. When God came down to fellowship with the 70 elders at Mt. Sinai, God prepared a table for them. The Passover feast culminated

in the eating together of the Passover feast. We find Jesus and His twelve supping together in this way. Believers fellowship with God when they come to the Lord's Supper. That is true of our families too. When we have company from the church to visit us, then we set out food and drink. Gathering around the table for food and fellowship go hand in hand.

That is true in the home especially! There is nothing more beautiful than to sit back after we eat and enjoy good conversation around the table. Sometimes it is silly. Sometimes it is serious. Sometimes it is joking, sometimes it is a heated debate. There are tears shed and laughter shared.

But what makes all this fellowship worthwhile is when the family all quiets down and we listen to God speak to us out of His Word. The Bible is read, and together we as a family fellowship with almighty God. And then we together respond to Him by speaking to Him in prayer. We share in fellowship with the God of the covenant. And it is in this that we find the importance of family dwelling together in the home. It is there that a child's spiritual priorities are developed. It is there that quiet study in God's Word can be spent. It is in the home that parents are able to shape and mold their children

from captivity, was divided. Those who returned from captivity returned to Jerusalem and the area around it, in what was once the inheritance of Judah. That region of Palestine became known as Judea. This is where most of the spiritual elite lived, since it was where the temple was. Bethlehem therefore was a part of this region too.

Just to the north of Judea lay the land of the Samaritans, or Samaria. Here dwelt a people of heathen origin. These people had come to settle in Palestine when the ten tribes of the nation of Israel were taken captive. It was settled by people of various origins in order that the land might be tilled there. These people had opposed the Jews who returned to Jerusalem. They had attempted to thwart the building of the walls of Jerusalem and the building of the temple. The Jews therefore despised the Samaritans. But, to the north yet of Samaria, but still in Palestine, was a third region known as Galilee. This region was made up for the most part of Jews, but the Jews that had settled in this region were poorer and less educated. Besides, it was said, that the Jews in this area were not pure in their bloodline. They had a mixed origin. Not all of them, quite obviously, but many of them were either themselves married to one who was not a Jew, or were descended from

those of mixed origin. It was for this reason that the Jews in Judea looked down on the Galilean Jews with some contempt. They said, "There is no good thing that can come out of Galilee." When they looked at Christ, they did so with disdain because He was born of poor parents from Nazareth, a small, insignificant village in Galilee.

So, Nazareth was in Galilee, the north region, and Bethlehem was in Judea, the south region. And it was while Joseph and Mary were in Bethlehem that the events of this chapter occurred. We know Bethlehem well enough from the fact that this was the city of David. It was the birthplace of king David. When Samuel went to anoint this son of Jesse, he traveled to the town of Bethlehem, where David was a shepherd. This was the city of David's lineage, therefore, and because it was, it was also the city of both Joseph's and Mary's lineage. Though these two now lived in Nazareth, though they lived in the despised region of Galilee, the town of their ancestors was Bethlehem.

Joseph and Mary had now made the long trek from Nazareth to Bethlehem. We say that it was long because the Jews refused to travel through Samaria. And though, as the crow flies, Nazareth was relatively close to Bethlehem, Mary and Joseph

tion in Scripture. And even if one believes, as I do, that Mary was of the royal line of David, to say much more than that is to go beyond what we are told in the Bible.

However, we ought not to forget Joseph in all of this either. He too was of the line of David. Whether it was by means of Solomon or by means of David's son Nathan really makes no difference. We say this because the line of David was viewed and counted in light of the men of his line. It did not matter if Mary was of the royal line of David or not. Once she was married to Joseph, she was to be accounted in him.

We say this because of the testimony given us in verse 4 of this chapter. Joseph and Mary traveled to Bethlehem not because Mary was of the house and lineage of David, but because Joseph was. In Luke 2:4 we find that Joseph had to go to Bethlehem to be taxed because *he* was of the house and lineage of David. Mary merely went along with him. You see, Joseph and Mary were married at this point. I know verse 5 speaks yet of her as being Joseph's espoused, or engaged, wife. But we read in Matthew 1 that when Joseph found out that Mary was expecting a child, he was ready to put her away for sin. At that time an angel appeared to him and told him that Mary's

conception was miraculous and that he should marry her. We read in Matthew 1:24, 25, "Then Joseph being raised from sleep did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife: And knew her not till she had brought forth her first-born son." There is no reason to believe that Joseph did not marry Mary until after Christ was born. The only reason it is mentioned in verse 5 of Luke 2 that Mary was his espoused wife is to emphasize that Joseph had now married that young virgin to whom he had been engaged. So, Mary and Joseph were both of the line of David and together, as husband and wife, they traveled to Bethlehem.

Now, that is another question our text leaves open. "While they were there," we read. But the question is where? Again, we know the answer to that question: Joseph and Mary had traveled to Bethlehem. Why they traveled there we will consider in a moment, but the fact is that the two of them had journeyed to go to the town of Bethlehem. Mary and Joseph, though both of the line of David, did not live in Bethlehem or even in Jerusalem, which was about five or six miles north of Bethlehem. They lived in a country village named Nazareth in Galilee, a region that was many miles to the north of Bethlehem. You see, the land of Palestine, after the nation of Israel had returned

for their place in the church and in society at large.

It is often argued that there is no longer so much a need for this when children become teenagers. Their spiritual values have already been shaped. But do you realize, parents, that the teenage years are some of the most difficult years in a person's life? Some of the weightiest decisions of their lives take place then. And

these decisions will affect them for the rest of their lives. Whom they will marry, what and where will be their future work, to what church will they belong. If young people are seldom at home, when do they spend time discussing these all-important aspects of their lives with mother and father? Are we, parents, going to allow the peers of our children to give guidance in these all-important areas of life? If we are busy with our own lives, when will our children approach us with their questions? If you have never been there for them, do you really expect them to come to you for answers? If you do not make time for them now, do you really think they will turn to you for advice on whom they should date, or when they should make confession of faith, or what

vocation to pursue? Life in the home and around the table is vital for their spiritual lives!

Even unbelieving sociologists and counselors conclude that the only way to maintain a marriage and family is communication. When communication breaks down between

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husband and wife or parents and children, what becomes of these relationships? Communication is possible

in the family only when there is time spent together as family in the home. Not because it is just a convenient place. It is the *God-ordained* place for such fellowship and communion. We do not simply receive good advice in this Psalm. This Word of God has everything to do with the establishment of God's covenant in the line of our generations! We will speak more of this in our next broadcast, the Lord willing. But let us not forget, God is a God of means. He does not simply save arbitrarily in the line of generations. He does not preserve His church when we are careless about the ways He has established for us in the home. God preserves His church in the way of good sound homes and families. Why is a father required to labor by the sweat of his brow? In order that he might

maintain his home and family. Why is a wife and mother called to be a keeper of the home? In order that her family might be instructed and cared for. Why are children round about the table? Because they are tender shoots that need to be cared for and nurtured carefully by father and mother.

Is such a family only an ideal? Is it one that only a few are capable of attaining? Of course not! We are called by God's Word to sit back and take serious inventory of our lives. Nothing is going to cure the problems and heartaches that go along with a dysfunctional family. The church cannot cure them. Worldly psychiatrists and counselors cannot cure them. Parents must cure the problems! That is done by repentance and a return to the Word of God. The family that prays together stays together. That may be a quaint little phrase, but it is so, so true. Life and love and fellowship in the home produce the most wonderful of fruits! All this produces happiness—a blessedness that is beyond description.

III. Blessed Satisfaction

“Behold, that thus shall the man be blessed that feareth the Lord.” There is a certain emphasis in verse 4 here of this Psalm. Here is the emphasis: “*Behold*,” that is, take a hard look at what I am about to say! Take note of

it because it ought to be of vital concern to you. Behold! That *thus* shall a man be blessed. In this way, by means of such a family and household shall a man be blessed. Do not deceive yourself into thinking that satisfaction and joy will come in some other kind of way. Do not think that you have better answers than God to what will create happiness in your life. Do not think that life outside the home and family will give you that kind of satisfaction.

When and if the Lord chooses to give a man a wife and children, then *this* is the way God will fill his life with satisfaction and contentment. Not another way. This way: Behold, that thus shall the man be blessed.

That does not mean that there will not be hard knocks along the way. Neither does it mean that life in the home is always exciting and fun-filled. Life in the home is work! Life in the home can become hum-drum at times. Life at home can even become quite trying. Sin is always there threatening to rob us of our happiness even in the home. But we speak of a family that fears God. Of a man but also of a wife and of children that fear God. May that fear of Jehovah be found in our homes. And may we discover the joy that is found in home and family.

There are certain churches that refuse to gather in worship to remember the birth of Christ exactly because of the secularism of this season. And that is okay too. But the event of Christ's incarnation and birth is special. By means of the birth of our Savior, God became man and dwelt among us. Christ was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of Mary, so that He is very God and very man. It was a Mediator of this sort alone that is able to deliver God's people from their sin. That incarnation of Christ is a miracle—the wonder of all wonders! And it is this that we commemorate today. We consider Luke 2:6, “And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered.”

I. Who Was There

If taken by itself, this short verse out of Luke 2 leaves open all kinds of questions. I mean, “while they were there,” does not say all that much. Who was there? Where is there? Why there? What happened? All questions to which we would not know the answer if it were not for the fact that this verse does not stand alone. The context in which it is found fills in the details for us. And so well do we know the story of Christ's birth that we perhaps do not even have to look at Luke 2 to find the answers.

The first question we ask in connection with this verse is: “Who was there?” The answer is on the tip of our tongues: Joseph and Mary were there. We read of this in verses 4 and 5, “And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:) To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child.” Joseph and his espoused wife Mary traveled together to Bethlehem. But there are a couple of important facts that we ought to know about both Joseph and Mary. Both of them were of the house and lineage of David. Some contend that Mary alone was of the royal line of David, that is the line of the kings. She was born out of the line of Solomon, Rehoboam, and so on down the line. With this it is also said that Mary was the very last person in that royal line, that there was no one else alive who would be able to carry on the kingly generations of David. In other words, the line of David had come down to this: one, lone, virgin girl in whom, if she did not bring forth a son, the royal line would disappear completely. Jesus had to be born right now, it is said, or salvation would never be possible!

How much of this is true cannot be known. Much of this does not have a firm founda-

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

*December 22, 2013
No. 3703*

*While They Were There...
Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma*

Dear Radio Friends,

Introduction

I heard it repeatedly again this holiday season. In fact, it seems it is voiced more than ever, almost as if no one really knows what it is. This is the “spirit of the season,” it is said. This person or that person has discovered the true meaning of the holidays.

But what is this spirit of the season or the meaning of the holidays? When we sit down and give an honest evaluation of what is meant by this in the world it comes down to humanism and materialism. A person gives something to someone, and that is the spirit of the season. Acts of charity, kindness, love for one’s fellow man—that is the true meaning of Christmas. The warm glow that a Christmas tree produces, passing out gifts, the more expensive the better, family and friends—this is the true spirit of the holidays.

Some of this is not in itself wrong, of course. Charity and kindness are Christian virtues we must show. Getting together with family and friends is never wrong. Even the giving of a gift to another is not a wicked act.

Yet, for some reason, the Christian church of today seems to think that these have something to do with the birth of Christ. There is this strange and unholy mixture between the sacred and the worldly. But since this is what is always emphasized by the unbelieving world and has now also become the emphasis of the nominal church, the believer, too, in weakness can be taken in by this way of thinking.

In contrast to this, the Christian church simply takes an hour or two on a certain day for worship, and that in order to remember the birth of Jesus Christ. God’s saints come together to rejoice in the salvation that God has made possible for you and me by means of the incarnation of our Savior. They set aside a time to remember that out of a world that has been plunged into the darkness of sin, God in His grace towards us chose to deliver us by means of the sending forth of His only begotten Son into this world. We use this season of the year for that. All the rest has nothing at all to do with the birth of Christ.

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

*December 15, 2013
No. 3702*

*The Church and the Family
Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma*

Dear radio friends,

Introduction

With today’s broadcast we have reached the third section of Psalm 128. In connection with the first four verses we have addressed the place of husband, wife, and children in the home. Although more can be said on this subject, the psalmist does not pursue this anymore. Instead he pursues a different avenue of equal importance. In verses 5 and 6 of this Psalm, the psalmist addresses the believing family as it stands intimately and inseparably connected to the church. We read: “The LORD shall bless thee out of Zion: and thou shalt see the good of Jerusalem all the days of thy life. Yea, thou shalt see thy children’s children, and peace upon Israel.” It is this relationship between family and church we wish to explore today. God-fearing families are what make up the church of Jesus Christ in this world. God-fearing families cannot do without the church. Neither can the church exist and continue to exist without such families. With no exaggeration, that is exactly the point of the passage we consider here in Psalm 128.

I. Blessed out of Zion

There is that word, “blessing,” again. It shows up throughout this Psalm: in verses 1 and 2, again in verse 4, and now in verse 5. What we may not realize is that there are two words used in the Hebrew that are translated as “blessed.” The first term actually means “happy,” as we noted in connection with verses 1 and 2. The psalmist uses a different Hebrew term, however, in verse 5. That word literally means “to cause to prosper.” So, the idea expressed here is this: Jehovah will *cause you to prosper* out of Zion. Now, the first question that arises in connection with this is: *How* will God cause this God-fearing man to prosper? What will God give him to cause him to prosper in Israel? Will God make him rich because he lives a quiet life in his home and family? Will God give him luxuries and comforts? Will God make everything go easy for him?

We all know that is not necessarily true. That a man follows the Word of God in this Psalm does not guarantee prosperity and ease. The blessing

spoken of here is the blessing of God's covenant. God's covenant is that relationship of love and friendship God establishes with His people in Christ. Well, the *blessing* of the covenant is that God gives us the assurance of the friendship that He shares with us.

Now, we must realize that the psalmist describes a *God-fearing* family. The man, his wife, and children all know who God is and love God. But let's face it, fellow believers, there are many times in life that we run up against hardships and trials. There are many other times in life that we become so busy and caught up in this life and its pursuits that the assurance that God is our God and we are His people is not before our hearts and minds. In fact, how often our sin can rob us of that assurance and joy freely given us by God.

Well, the more we share properly in the life of the home and family and the more we achieve the goal presented in this Psalm, the more intimately we live with our God! When a believing father comes home at the end of the day to enjoy his family, when the believing wife labors hard in the home caring for that family, when believing children are under the care of father and mother, *God dwells in that home!* God is a part of the intimacy being shared in that family. They are assured

of His love and care, His favor and protection. And *that* is a blessing! The finest blessing a man and his family can ever discover!

But there is something else that we must understand about God's covenant and its blessings. God administers that covenant *out of Zion*. "The Lord shall bless thee out of Zion," we read in verse 5. Zion was the mountain on which the city of Jerusalem was built. The very next phrase in verse 5 is "and thou shalt see the good of Jerusalem." Mt. Zion and the city of Jerusalem refer to the same place. Now, it was *out of Zion*, or *out of Jerusalem*, that God would send His blessing upon godly families. This means that a believing home and family stood in close connection with Zion, or Jerusalem. The blessing they received as members of the family would come to them out of Zion. Obviously, the city of Jerusalem, or the mountain of Zion, could not dispense any kind of blessing on anyone. They were inanimate objects: a mountain, a city. Still, it was *out of Jerusalem* that God's blessing would be bestowed on a believing family.

How was this the case? Well, what was in Jerusalem? The temple was there. The place where God had chosen to take up His abode. Also found there was the palace of David—out of whose royal line the Messiah was to be born. And further,

the church that has existed from the beginning of time until now. Always and ever it was gathered in the line of generations. But then look at the homes where God performs such a work in the midst of His church. Where the God-fearing family is busy in the home experiencing the life of the family, and when that family lives and enjoys its life in the midst of the church and its worship, God will preserve His church! We need to see that for ourselves. We must always be deeply aware of this while we are busy in the midst of our families. There is a purpose of God in the way He does things.

III. Peace Upon Israel

The result of a God-fearing family? Peace upon Israel. Notice: not just peace on your family. A family that lives apart from the communion of the church and other believers soon reaches a dead-end. The children are scattered, the grandchildren even more so. Within a generation or two they are absorbed by our corrupt society and world. Many who see no need for church in our society today were, only a generation or two ago, loosely affiliated with the church but became lax in home and family and in church attendance. The family alone in itself is not the end-all. It is not

the goal. It is not the purpose of God for the family. The purpose of God for the family is that it be a part of Israel. And Israel today is indeed the church of Jesus Christ. The purpose of God today for the family is to be a part of the church. Godly families are the building blocks of the church. Families exist for the church of Christ. So it is that the conclusion of this entire Psalm is wrapped up in the few sweet words: and peace upon Israel! Peaceful homes make for a peaceful church. The reasons for this are self-evident.

Peace in Zion! There is nothing like peace, is there? No one enjoys attending a church filled with contention and strife. Fathers and mothers who are always complaining about the church and their fellow saints defeat their own purpose. They serve only to drive their children away from the church. Such parents may think they are doing their children a service. They may think they are going to keep themselves and their children pure. But that is not what happens in these homes and families, sad to say. The way of peace is prescribed for us: pray for the peace of Zion. Happy is that people where there is peace. Behold, that thus shall the man be blessed who serves the Lord. Peace—blessed peace.

home in the fear of God will go out into the streets of Zion or Jerusalem and find a God-fearing wife or husband. Your son and daughter will go out into the church to look for other believing daughters and sons who will be their friends. They will then find a believing man or woman whom they will marry and with whom they will begin families of their own. Then the cycle begins anew. They will pattern their families after the Word of God in this Psalm.

But we may not overlook the truth that God fulfills this promise *by way of* God-fearing families. That God continues His covenant in the line of the generations of the church is inseparably connected to what goes on in the homes and families of the church. We may not simply assume that our children are automatically saved on account of their being born into the generations of the church. When that is assumed, then it will be true that children will take a complacent and lazy attitude toward things spiritual. They will begin to think that by walking in the traditions of the church and belonging to this exclusive social club their salvation is secure. Believing parents who fail to nurture their children, instructing and disciplining them in the fear of God, will merely raise up children who float along in the church because that is where they were

born and all their friends are there. Then the church falls apart too. This happened in the nation of Israel.

But when a man fears God and his wife fears God and they raise their children in the fear of God, then God will bless them out of Zion. This is true because fearing God, as we already noticed, keeps them on their knees in prayer and always looking for forgiveness in the cross of Jesus Christ. When father and mother fear God, then they are careful to teach their children about sin—not just about sin in general, but about specific sins children commit. Then they will teach their children to take their sins to the cross of Jesus Christ in true sorrow over sin. In other words, Christ will be at the center of that home and family. Parents will instruct their children on the basis of God's covenant and its promise. Parents will take comfort in—especially when everything seems to go wrong—the truth that God remains faithful to us and our children for Christ's sake. They will then push on, they will persevere in their labors to make their home fit the description given in this Psalm.

God remains faithful to His promise in the way of godly homes, and He will save His people in the generations of the church. For proof just look at

the people of God, the children of Jacob, believers lived there together enjoying the life of the covenant found in worship and community. The blessing of God's covenant and the riches of salvation were not given by God to just one family and household. God's covenant was established with Zion, with Jerusalem, and that as a whole. God's covenant and its promises were given to the church at that time. And it was out of that church that God dispensed the blessing of His love and fellowship. It was only as a family dwelt with other families together in the confines of the church that they could enjoy the intimacy of God's fellowship. *Out of Zion* came the blessing. Out of Zion God commanded His blessings of grace, even life forevermore, to shine on His people and the families of Israel.

Today, too, it is in the church that God blesses families as they sit under the Word of God and the preaching. They are given the fatness of God's house as they sit beneath His feet listening to Him as He addresses them as His children. That is how the man who fears God together with his family is blessed—always and ever in connection with the church.

Again, I cannot help but quote John Calvin on this verse, "It would be a very unreasonable thing for each member to desire

what may be profitable for itself, while in the meantime the body is neglected. From our extreme proneness to err in that respect, the Prophet, with good reason...mingles together domestic blessings and the common benefits of the Church in such a way as to show us that they are things joined together, and which it is unlawful to put asunder." In other words, the God-fearing family, just as the individual, may not exist apart from the church! God commands His blessing on our families out of the church.

There is a huge trend today that sees no value in the church institute and the worship that is held there. Just as many homeschool, they feel they may home church too. Worship in the family is all that is needed for them and their children. They look at the apostasy that reigns in many of the Christian churches of today and think they can do without the church. Well, that is not true. The church institute and her ordinances are necessary for the life of a family. Where a true church is found, families will find the official preaching of the gospel that is vital for spiritual life and growth. They will find the rule of Christ over them through officebearers. They will enjoy the sacraments that are given to the church alone. Further, they will enjoy the communion of the saints. All these are the bless-

ing God gives to a God-fearing man and his family. And this will truly prosper such a man and his family spiritually!

But there is yet another aspect of this relationship of a family to that of the church as a whole. This is expressed in the next phrase of verse 5, “and thou shalt see the good of Jerusalem all the days of thy life.” Here is the idea of this phrase: the God-fearing man, his wife, and his children shall see the beauty and the welfare of the church throughout their life. A believing family will view the church and its place in it as a beautiful thing! Not a curse, not something they have to belong to, even if it is grudgingly. The church will be a blessing to the believer, but the believer will also see his need to be a blessing to the church. The church is a beautiful place in which to spend one’s life. A God-fearing man does not need to find friendships with other men at the bar. He will not need to join a lodge or a union to find brotherhood with other men. He will not have to hang around with unbelieving men (and women) at work. His spiritual home and family is found in the church. The church is all glorious to him. And he will contribute his time and talents to the church. He with his family will make a life for themselves in the church. He and his wife and children will find their friendships in the

church. The church will become a place in which to look for a wife or husband. In other words, the church and God’s covenant implies a fulfilling communal life together with fellow believers and their families.

Do you understand the picture that that psalmist is drawing for us here? I know it is oh so foreign to many in our modern church world. But that is the good, the beauty, the prosperity, the welfare of Jerusalem.

And this will be seen all the days of our life—as long as believing families live in such a way in their home. Not just one family, mind you, but all the families of the church will see the good of Jerusalem. They will have a lifetime of joy in the church where they are members. But when we begin to lose what we have already described in the former verses of this Psalm, when husbands spend their time away from the family, when wives do not see the important role God has given them in the home, when children would rather be on the fly with friends than in the home, then the good or welfare of the church will begin to wane. It is more than likely, then, that a man will not see the good of Zion all the days of his life. On the contrary, he will begin to see it crumple or fray and perhaps even disappear. The church

of Jesus Christ in any given place will be only as strong as the families that make it. If families are weak, so also will be the church. If we are not faithful in our homes, we cannot expect God to cause us to flourish in our church. Such is the reality. The God-fearing home and the church are intimately joined together by God.

II. Saved in Generations

It is this truth, too, that ties what the psalmist writes in verse 5 to what we now read in verse 6: “Yea, thou shalt see thy children’s children and peace upon Israel.” “Yea,” that is, of a surety, you will see your children’s children—your grandchildren. Another generation is not mentioned because not all would live long enough to see great-grandchildren—although that is certainly not an impossibility. But why mention this? What is so special about seeing grandchildren? It all comes down to God’s church and covenant again. You see, there was a promise given to Abraham when God established his covenant with him. God said that He would be a God to Abraham’s children in his generations. In other words, God would gather His church from one generation to the next in the generations of believers. And with that church God would establish His covenant in gen-

erations. He would establish His love and friendship with the children of believing families in the church.

What a beautiful truth! Oh, there are those who would claim that God does not save in the line of generations in the church. They will ignore the gospel message of Scripture and say that with each new generation God begins a new work. The promise of God’s covenant, they say, is not in effect anymore today. With this, they also refuse to acknowledge the work of regeneration in the heart of an infant or to view the children of believing parents as heirs of heaven. What a sad way to raise children!

Neither does a denial that God saves in the line of the generations of the church acknowledge what the psalmist teaches us here in our text. God does promise the God-fearing man that he will see his children’s children. Not just live long enough to see them before he dies. Even the unbelieving man lives long enough to see his grandchildren. No, the idea here is: You will see your grandchildren believing in the God of the covenant too and enjoying the same blessing that you do! Your children will believe and your grandchildren will believe! What a beautiful promise we receive here. The children that you have carefully raised in your