

**Psalm 127**  
**West Kirby URC – Sunday 17 January 2016**

I don't know if you need to hear this talk, but I certainly do!

About 12 years ago I felt that I should step down from being an active Elder – my excuse was that I needed to remember that it was not I that was essential to the running of the church – no that was God's responsibility. Then I waited, thinking that I could return to that position next year. But as each year passed I did not sense that I was being called back to that role – 8 years passed before I think that I was ready to take up that role again in the new understanding of God's leadership.

Who is in charge Colin? Is it me? I need to ask that question again today as the start of the really stressful part of the re-ordering. Yes, it is my job to be the Architect. It is my task to protect the Church, the members and the Elders from all the complexity – it is my job under the Lordship of the great Creator God. He has given me the experience, the skills and talents. But it is all under Him! And I need to keep that in perspective.

I managed that when I was building our house (mostly). Now I must do the same as we change the Church buildings in readiness for the future that God has in store for us.

But it is not just me that needs to be recognising the truth of this wonderful Psalm – Unless the LORD builds the house, they labour in vain! In every aspect of Church life.... In every aspect of all of life..... we labour in vain..... we are wasting our time. Unless the LORD – unless God! We could have the most successful life, the most wonderful children, the most fabulous house – whatever --- **but it is worth absolutely nothing. Nothing at all.**

Do we truly understand this? I don't! So I need to realign my thinking.

I want to look at 2 of my sons by way of illustration. First I love both Kyle and Lewis, with a passion. Their gifts, their strengths, their weaknesses, their joys, their own wives and children. I love them all and I want the very best for them.

First there is Lewis – a trial to me in childhood and in his teens. He and Abby have committed to live on the edge for God. We cannot imagine how they make ends meet, but God seems to sustain them on half a salary (at the most) while they seek to bring Good News and self-discipline into the dysfunctional lads through Lewis's work in Street Soccer.

My youngest son is Kyle. I always suspected that he would be the most successful of my 3 boys – he is an all-rounder. And nice with it. He and his lovely family live in Edinburgh where he works for a charity called Myloma UK as their Digital Communications Guru.

What is my point?

Who of these boys is the most successful? Clearly it should be Kyle. Lewis and Abby live from day to day,

even sharing their house with a young teaching assistant along with their 3 little girls. But no money!

But, unless the LORD builds the house, the builders labour in vain.

In my eyes the contrast between Lewis and Kyle is mighty. For Kyle has abandoned his trust in the Living God and put all his trust in his own abilities and in his own hard graft. I am deeply, deeply saddened – for no matter how hard he labours it is actually in vain. I still love him to the core; I love him hugely and hope for his return to Christendom—to faith. It does not change my love, but it does change my fellowship with him. I cannot discuss the faith issues which are so close to my heart as I can with Lewi.

There is Lewis. I could not be more proud. In my eyes there is success beyond success because this is a labour that is focussed on the will of the re-creator God. This is a ministry. This is a house built by God – and he is a door keeper.

You see, there is a very real sense in which anything done without the active participation of the Almighty is of very little (if any) worth. So why would that be? The question that needs to be considered is does it have eternal significance?

In Ecclesiastes we read:  
Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher,  
"Utterly meaningless!  
Everything is meaningless."  
<sup>3</sup>What do people gain from all their labours  
at which they toil under the sun?

We do well to ask this question of ourselves and our loved ones. If our lives are just a round of activities which take us from one day to the next with odd moments of respite for recovery, then is this really God building the house?

Let us be careful to ensure that we encourage each other and our children to work with God and not to just do as we please.

Because the treadmill of success is a very dangerous place – and that is the point. You see, I know that I am in danger of taking all the responsibility for the Church re-ordering when in the end this is God's endeavour. I have my role to play, just as we all do in the life of the Church. But it is just my small part in God's mighty plan to redeem the lost and to deepen the fellowship.

I have been astounded by the wonderful unanimity of the Church Fellowship over the period that we have been considering the re-ordering process. Ever since Liz took over leadership of this process, God has been right there at the centre. God is at work here and we are each in our own ways partners with him to bring about the changes that He is calling for. So, during the coming months I need to keep that in perspective – for I will be no use to God if I think that this is going to all happen through my skills and abilities.

And that is true of us all. We each need to take part in something which has the potential for eternal significance. Let's not find that at the end of our days we

say "What did I gain from all my labours  
at which I toiled under the sun?"  
Let's not "In vain rise early  
and stay up late, toiling for food to eat"

Our lives are so much more than that! Not that we should despair at the mundane elements of our lives, for those may be the very mechanisms for God to work through us in the lives of those around us. But it is having the vision to see each of these things as being of importance and done in partnership with Jehovah.

Unless the LORD watches over the city,  
the guards stand watch in vain.

The watchman's job is both mundane and boring – looking out for trouble that will perhaps never come. But to watch in the presence of the LORD of Hosts, with Him to prompt and encourage. With Him to inspire – did that bush just move in the darkness – or was it just a fox? Show me Lord, prays the watchman! Keep me alert to any danger – I place my responsibility in Your Hands o Lord – use me to defend this place to the best of my little ability but under the empowering of your Mighty Spirit.

Little or large, our God does not care! Each element of our service of Him and His People are equal in His sight. And He is there every step of the way. So as I work on this and every project I need to bear in mind that there is no part of this that is up to me alone – I am responsible under the overarching oversight of the mighty God who Created the Unimaginable Universe – that One is the One who is by my side.

So what am I saying – what is this verse saying to us? Is it saying make sure that you only do things that have eternal significance? Is it saying that? No!

It is saying that everything has a holy aspect to it if God is in the equation. Are you driving round a car park looking for a space – don't forget to pray! Are you chatting to your friends outside the school gate – let God be there with you. At work, at school, at home, on holiday and in Church – is the Living God there with you.? Then everything is worth doing! In your hobbies, your relaxation, in your reading and TV watching - -

But if we do not let God into all these activities (and I don't) then the horror of Ecclesiastes creeps up on us:  
"Meaningless! Meaningless!"  
says the Teacher.  
"Utterly meaningless!  
Everything is meaningless."

And there is the contrast! So let us teach this to each other, teach it to our children, teach it to our new converts to the Faith. And let us keep God at the centre of our lives, the centre of our church and be his partners as He builds the house and watches the city

Come Lord Jesus, come in Power to enable this your people to be partners with you in works of eternal worth and may we be blessed with children and teens, with new disciples of every age group as we let you lead us and as we work diligently and unceasingly for your Kingdom's extension.

A song of ascents. Of Solomon.

<sup>1</sup> Unless the LORD builds the house,  
the builders labour in vain.  
Unless the LORD watches over the city,  
the guards stand watch in vain.  
<sup>2</sup> In vain you rise early  
and stay up late,  
toiling for food to eat—  
for he grants sleep to<sup>all</sup> those he loves.

<sup>3</sup> Children are a heritage from the LORD,  
offspring a reward from him.  
<sup>4</sup> Like arrows in the hands of a warrior  
are children born in one's youth.  
<sup>5</sup> Blessed is the man  
whose quiver is full of them.  
They will not be put to shame  
when they contend with their opponents in court.

### **Ecclesiastes 1 (NIV)**

<sup>2</sup> "Meaningless! Meaningless!"  
says the Teacher.  
"Utterly meaningless!  
Everything is meaningless."  
<sup>3</sup> What do people gain from all their labours  
at which they toil under the sun?  
<sup>4</sup> Generations come and generations go,  
but the earth remains forever.  
<sup>5</sup> The sun rises and the sun sets,  
and hurries back to where it rises.  
<sup>6</sup> The wind blows to the south  
and turns to the north;  
round and round it goes,  
ever returning on its course.

### **AV**

Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher,  
vanity of vanities; all *is* vanity.  
<sup>3</sup> What profit hath a man of all his labour  
which he taketh under the sun?  
<sup>4</sup> *One* generation passeth away,  
and *another* generation cometh:  
but the earth abideth for ever.