

Our Daily Bread

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[0 : 00] There's a Latin phrase, which is probably not the way you were hoping any sermon would ever begin, called Nisi Dominus Frustra.

And it's engraved, actually plastered onto a bus this morning. It's engraved into many buildings and doorways, and about everything that you could imagine throughout the United Kingdom, you'll be likely, if you just keep your eyes open, to see that Latin phrase plastered somewhere.

And the phrase, as you probably know, is taken directly from Psalm 127. And it simply means, as all you Latin scholars know, without the Lord vanity.

Without the Lord vanity. And that phrase has been adopted as the motto of schools and military regiments and watchtowers and wells and apparently buses and clergymen and even our own very city of Edinburgh in 1647.

And I think one of the reasons this Psalm is so popular is because it describes daily life, if you just look at the Psalm. It describes, it speaks of builders and it speaks of watchmen and it speaks of parents and children and waking up and going to sleep and it just feels, that's what our day is made of.

[1 : 17] And it not only speaks of our lives but it speaks of our pains as well, if you look at the Psalm. Rising up early and retiring to bed later than you may have wished and laboring and toiling and the pains of raising children and the joys of that and after all of that, somehow trying to sleep at night.

And if you look at the actual Psalm, if you have it in front of you, you'll kind of see three main verbs that describe our daily lives in the Psalm.

If you look at verse one, you'll see that of building and that of watching. And in verse two, that of sleeping, building, watching, sleeping. Rising up early, returning to bed late.

And I think building here doesn't just describe those of us, if we were to raise our hand, who work in construction here. It's the idea of creating, of creating something beautiful where there once was nothing.

Turning an empty lot into a school or a craggy hill into a castle or a few trees into a house or a stranger into a friend or a broken relationship into one of trust, of creating something.

[2 : 28] And watching isn't just for those of us here who currently or have worked as a security guard somewhere, I don't think. It's the idea of preserving and watching over what you've created, of what has been created.

We see we all put locks on our doors. We're all going to go home and lock our doors tonight. And those of us who have children are vigorously trying to child-proof your houses, or at least I am trying to learn to do that.

And we spend all of our days trying to build a good reputation in the days of our life. And then we try to protect that reputation that we've built. And we watch over the marriage vows that we've made to our spouses.

You see, all of our days are spent creating with our hands and our minds. And then to the best of our ability, watching over what we've created. Whether you're an engineer, whether you're a student, whether you're a pensioner, whether you're a mother, whether you're a father, this is what you do.

This is what your life is made up of. You create and you protect. And then you do this crazy thing that God has made us all do, which is to spend a third of your entire life in bed asleep.

[3 : 37] And no matter who you are here this evening, what your life situation is, where from the globe that you are from, your life is a never-ending cadence of creating, protecting, and then sleeping for a third of your life.

But this Psalm just doesn't, if you look at the Psalm, it doesn't just describe what you do, it describes how we feel in life as well. As we crawl into bed after a long day, and maybe how many of us have come here this evening feeling.

A good idea when reading the Bible, and it's in this Psalm as well, is to look for the word that's repeated. What's the idea that keeps being repeated? And if you look at Psalm 127, what's the word that keeps being repeated?

In vain. In vain. I think the fear that probably haunts many of us, or all of us at some point, as we wear ourselves thin with working day after day after day, is that all of this might actually just be in vain, and sometimes it feels like it's in vain.

Vain, what is that? It's the idea of emptiness, it's the idea of meaninglessness, of toil without end, of pain with no meaning or no purpose at the end of that pain.

[4 : 53] The biblical word is often used to describe storms, and what a storm would leave behind. You've all seen the news, you've seen villages and seaside towns wrecked by storms, and schools and gardens and cars and memories just have it by wind and sea.

And you look at it, and everything's torn and tattered, and it just feels meaningless, it's sad. And that's what the Psalm says your entire life can become.

You wake up early, you create and you protect, and you create and you protect, and you fall asleep exhausted thinking and dreaming about what you've created and you've protected, and the tragic thing is that this Psalm says it can all be meaningless.

It's like for those of us students here writing a 90,000 word thesis on Hermann Bovink, of course, laboring on it for years, sacrificing family vacations and sleep and date nights, and then after the last word has been written, selecting that shortcut, control all on your keyboard, hitting the backspace, deleting it all, closing your computer and going to bed.

Just give me a shivers thinking about it. Meaningless, right? That's terrifying, it's a terrifying reality. And the rye of this Psalm says that that's what life can so easily become.

[6 : 20] Decades of work and sleeplessness for nothing. And so the question we have to ask ourselves here this evening, if we've ever felt that, are we worried that that's true of our lives, is are we laboring in vain?

Are our labors in vain? Do we bury the burdens on our schedules in vain? Are they empty? And so if there's going to be an outline, the first heading would be are we laboring in vain?

That's just that simple question, are we laboring in vain? And if you look at the Psalm, it's very clear about what the vain life actually is. If you look at it with me at verse one, it's one where you build a house, but God isn't building the house with you.

Whatever it is you're building, God isn't building it with you. It's where you're laboring, but whatever it is you're laboring, you're doing it alone. And my guess is that if someone were to ask, how do I not live in vain?

How do I make sure that I don't spend my life in vain? The first answer that person would probably get is something like what they should do with their lives.

[7 : 28] If you don't want to live in vain, you should be a missionary, or you should be a pastor, or you should go work for the church in some way, or you should give more to the poor.

And those things are right. I don't want to come across saying any of those things are wrong. They're all right. But I think if the psalmist were here and he got that question, he would answer it a little bit differently.

He would give his advice in a little bit different of a way. And here's why, because the psalmist says, if you look at the verses, he tells you that you can be a builder or you can be a watchman, and the Lord can be with you.

And at the same time, you could be a builder or you can be a watchman, and the Lord cannot be with you. So it's not primarily about what it is you do, because the Lord can be with you or not be with you either way.

But how you do it, but how you do it. So how do we know if we're living in vain? If you look in verse two, you look at the phrase, there's a little phrase there, eating the bread of anxious toil.

[8 : 33] You see that? Eating the bread of anxious toil. And notice those two words, anxious toil. Anxious toil. He says that the vain life is one where you wake up early, you go to bed late, and every moment of that is nothing but another bite of the stale bread of anxious toil.

Anxious toil is your daily bread. And that word that you see in your Bibles that's translated as anxious toil, it's actually just one word in the original language.

And it's kind of a tricky word to translate it, which is why they use two words. And if you just look at anxious toil, it kind of makes sense, because it's the idea of anxiety, inner pain, and toil, outer burden.

So you have both physical and emotional happening in the same concept. It's both physical and emotional sorrow and pain.

And the Rady is trying to tell you that there is a way to spend your whole life getting up early, going to bed late, creating and preserving in both internal and external anguish.

[9 : 44] And that feeling right there, if we're wondering how do we make sure we don't live a life in vain, that feeling is the indicator light that should pop on your radar that you might be living this life in vain.

And I don't really need to describe that feeling, my guess, as in this room, because we've all felt that at some point, because we're humans. And so the question we have to ask is not just what does that feeling feel like, because we know that, but why is that feeling there?

Why is that anguish there? This complicated word that I talked about is also in First Kings. And it's used in that context to describe a father who neglected his son.

And the result was that the son felt that internal and external anguish, because his father neglected him. And the same word is used in the book of Isaiah to describe Israel.

And it pictures Israel as a forgotten and forsaken wife in the book of Isaiah. And the picture is of a wife who should be paid attention to, who should be nurtured, who should be loved, but isn't.

[10 : 52] And the pain that creates in a son who should be cared for by his father, and a wife who's created to be loved by her husband, but who's forgotten and left unloved, it's that internal and external pain that that creates.

You see, this is a pain you can't get no matter how hard you stub your toe or hit your thumb with a hammer, you don't get this kind of pain. It's a soul pain. And here's the point, here's the point of all this.

Just like the son in First Kings might work to be noticed by his father again, and the forgotten wife might work to be noticed by her husband, we can all work really hard to fill this deep void within ourselves, to calm the anxious feeling that we aren't loved.

And we might look, we might search far and wide for that approval, and all of us could do it, and as many people as there are in this room, we could do it in different ways, but we might look for that satisfaction in our bosses, our coworkers, our own sense of self-accomplishment and traveling and whatever it is.

And so you spend all your waking moments trying to be loved, trying to be noticed, and as Psalm says to you, you were made to be loved, but you're going about getting that in the wrong ways, because you can't ever get that love, not that way.

[12 : 13] That's not how that way, that's not how love works. And my guess is that somewhere deep down we know that, we know that's a vain pursuit. So what do we do? How do we not live in vain?

If that's what the vain life is all about, how do we not live that way? And the Psalmist tells us that as well, and that's our second heading, how to live meaningfully.

If you look again at the actual first two verses of the Psalm, just look at the actual words that are in the Psalm. We have building, we have houses, labor, vanity, watching cities rising up early, going to bed late, eating, anxious toil.

And then there's this one little word that seems like it doesn't belong. It's like looking for the where's wall though. What's the one word that doesn't belong in this Psalm? And it's that word, beloved.

It's like a rose poking up through cracked concrete. In the midst of toil and work and sleeplessness and anxious toil and labor, beloved.

[13 : 22] He gives his beloved rest, or he gives his beloved sleep. So what's the difference? What's the difference between a vain life and a meaningful life?

It's the difference between a loved wife making dinner for her husband as he sits after a long day warmly talking to his wife. And a servant girl making dinner for her tyrant master.

They're both making dinner, and that's about the only similar thing that's happening in those two scenarios. And this is where we begin to see the gospel intertwining with the way we actually live our daily lives.

You see, the gospel is, it's more than a list of points you need to believe, or a choice, or a decision you need to make, or something you sign. The gospel is a view of the heartbeat of God for you.

It's an actual view of God himself. That's what sits behind the gospel. And so we have to ask ourselves, how does this psalm present the heart of God to you, the person of God to you?

[14 : 23] And look at verse one. God builds the house as we build the house. The Lord watches over the city all through the night right beside the watchman.

And as we rise up early, as the one who rises up early to work, the Lord rises up early right alongside of him, and he makes sure he isn't alone. And as that person yawns and stays up late to finish the project or watch whatever he's watching, the Lord sits beside him or her lovingly.

And the Lord gives sleep, it says. He holds us as we fall asleep. And I wonder if we think about that as we fall asleep. Do you have a view of God that says, sleep is a gift that he's just giving to you, as you fall asleep at night?

And do you see the picture this psalm is presenting for you? It's of a God who says, I will never leave you. And my guess is if you've been in the church or read your Bible, you've heard those words before, but the way this psalm paints that picture for you is so beautiful and tangible.

I won't leave you as you build relationships and homes and careers and marriages and dreams and not only will I not leave you, but I'm building along with you. And not only am I building along with you, I'm doing it for you and through you.

[15 : 43] And as you watch over what you've created, as you tidy your homes and steward your finances and pray for your marriages and raise your children, I'm not only with you, I'm doing it for you.

And I'm the God who says at the end of the day, please sleep now. And you can rest because you know that even while you sleep, why the Lord will keep watch over your little ones and over your house and over your city and over your family and your marriage.

And I'll be right here when you wake up. In other words, you're beloved. And that's what the Lord does for His beloved. And I just would ask all of us here this evening, do we have a view of the world that lets us think about God like that?

And actually, you know, we might not. I might not. You might not all the time. We might have a view of God that says, you know what, God doesn't really want anything to do with me.

Or God isn't that interested in that area of my life. He doesn't really care that much about my friendships or about my work or about my jobs or my family. Or maybe it's even more extreme and you're saying God doesn't actually want to be near me.

[16 : 50] I'm unclean. And you would understand that feeling if you just knew what I did, if you knew what I thought, if you knew it was in my head. And when you think like that, you're just slicing off another piece of the loaf of anxious toil.

And you're having, that's your daily bread for one more day when you think like that. And here's what we need to remember when we have thoughts like that.

When we find ourselves eating that bread of anxious toil. If you want to draw near to God and you want to be with Him and you want Him to be there through the watch of the night with you.

He's already come in the person of Christ. And if you trust your whole life, everything, if you say, I'm throwing it all in and I trust on the person and work of Christ on my behalf.

Then if you were to, if any of you were to stand before God right now with those feelings, He would say to you, but I don't see any sin in you.

[17 : 52] He would say, when I look at you, I only see the righteousness of my son. I only see his life and his death and his resurrection as I look at you. And He would say, I love you. I want you to rest from this daily bread of anxious toil in your life.

Why? Because you're my beloved. And if you're like I am, and there's probably something in you that says, that seems too backward.

I don't deserve that. I haven't earned that. It's backward. It's too good to be true. But if you probably haven't got the gospel right, if it doesn't feel backward to your mind and your soul, because it's the truth, the work has already been done.

And do we actually live like that is what God says about us? In ancient Rome, when a general was victorious in battle, he would ride into Rome in a chariot with his troops in the booty from the battle and the prisoners of war behind him.

And interestingly, they would put one other person in his chariot with him. They would put a slave in the chariot with him. And that slave had one job as the whole procession came down.

[19 : 11] And that job was to repeat the words to the general over and over and over and over again. Homo es, you are but a man, is what that slave would repeat to him over and over again.

Because why? Because the general had won the battle. He had troops behind him. He was coming into the city. The crowds were cheering. And it would be easy for that general just for even a moment to maybe think, maybe I'm a little bit more than a man.

He needed to be reminded he was just a man. My guess is that's probably not most of our problems here when we hit Monday morning.

We feel sinful and tired and weary and probably a little bit unlovable and unworthy if you're anything like I am. Which is why the father sent someone else to ride along the chariot with you.

And that person is the Holy Spirit and that person repeatedly says to you as you ride through life in your chariot, you're a son or a daughter of the king. You're a son or daughter of the king.

[20 : 19] You're a son or daughter of the king. And guess what? You're loved. He loves you. You're beloved over and over and over and over and over and over. And Satan would do anything but let you listen to that voice your whole life.

How would your life change if you listen to that voice? And the reason that he does that is because everything in your life is going to tell you other than that reality. Just like that general coming in would be tempted to think by everything around him, maybe I'm a God even just for a moment.

Everything in your reality is going to convince you God wouldn't love you. There's no way you're his beloved. And if you don't listen to that voice, if you don't listen to that voice and the chariot with you, life will be both excruciating and meaningless.

And look what the psalm also tells you. It's a life that's not only meaningless, but it's a life that is lonely. It's a life where you're building a house without God. It's a life where you're staying up late to watch a city or watch over your finances without God.

It's a life where you fall asleep without God. And I hope there's something in me. I hope there's something in you that says, I don't want to be without the Lord.

[21 : 27] I don't want to do any of those things without the Lord. I've been alone too many nights, too many early mornings. And the crazy thing is, if that's what you're saying in your heart this evening, you've just uttered your side of the covenant.

What do I mean by that? God's made a covenant with mankind and it's all over the pages of Scripture. And he says, I will be your God and you will be my people. You've surely read it if you've read your Bible.

And he says that over and over and over again, I will be your God, you will be my people. And if your heart says, I want to be his, then you can trust his word when he says, oh, I want to be your God, I would love for you to be my people.

I want to give you peaceful rest, beloved. And as we transition to the final three verses of the Psalm, if you're still looking at it, it seems that we've almost turned to an entirely different psalm as you look at the last three verses.

Most sermons that you'll hear will either preach the first two verses or the last three verses. Because it's now about children, it's about arrows and quivers and enemies and gates. What's this all about?

[22 : 42] And many have thought over the years that these are actually two separate psalms that have been stitched together to make one psalm. But I think if we actually understand what those first two verses are saying, then the final three verses will make all the sense in the world.

And just look at what's happening then. It says, children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb, a reward.

Notice the words from the Lord and a reward. You see this? The Lord gives us children. He gives us a reward.

And we all know that, but think about it. The Lord creates children. The Lord is building families. He's building generations. The Lord is creating anew in each of our homes.

And then look at verses four and five. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the children of one's youth. Blessed is the man who fills his quiver with them. He shall not be put to shame when he speaks with his enemies in the gate.

[23 : 49] Again, notice the language of arrows, warriors, quiver, enemies, gates. That is battle language, right? This is the language of someone who protects, someone who guards.

We might even say stands watch on a city gate, maybe. Remember verse one. And do you see the themes emerge again of creating, building families, and protecting, watching over, guarding the same themes carried from the first two into the last three verses.

The Lord not only creates and builds our families, but he protects not only our families, but us through our families. He guards us through what he has created in us.

Do you see, this is an example of the Lord creating and protecting us in one of the most mundane, quiet, unnoticed areas of our lives, in our homes.

And the Psalmist is saying, don't you see the Lord caring for you, even in your little ones, even in your living room? Mothers, fathers, do you want proof that I'm still creating in your lives and caring for you?

[24 : 55] Look at your children, look at the children. And how would one of those little children know that the father loves her? All she has to do is look into the eyes of her mother, who stays up with her late at night, and when she can't sleep.

Or that little girl would just have to look at her father, who builds little houses of blocks with her and who locks the door at night. And that is God's subtle, strong way of saying, I love you to that little girl.

God is saying, I couldn't be more involved in the fabric of your homes or of your lives or of your living rooms. I am always, always creating and protecting for my people.

And God wants to press into the place where you, parents, might feel the most forgotten. Where your work goes the most unnoticed. Where you lose the most sleep and nobody else will ever know and you never get a promotion for that.

Where you might feel the most alone, where you might feel the most anxious over the little souls of your children. And the God who says, I see in secret, says, I see you, mothers and fathers, I see your homes, and I'm there with you.

[26 : 04] Though you won't be given awards or promotions for parenting, I'm giving you this Psalm to remember that your labor isn't in vain. And it's not only not in vain, but it surely isn't alone.

Because you aren't just given buildings to build or cities to watch. You're given little eternal souls. And God lets you create habits in these little holes and these little souls and teach them to sing and to read and to be a good friend and to pray.

And this passage promises you parents that he is involved in your work. That as you rock that screaming baby to sleep, God is right there with you singing this little baby to sleep.

And as your child sleeps, God says to you, mother or father, please rest. I will protect this little soul with my strong hands. And as you teach your little boy or girl to pray, God is right there sowing seeds of faith in this little soul, protecting the little hearts with his strong hands.

In conclusion, Nisi Domines Frustra, without God, vanity. In 1964, another university in Edinburgh wanted to use that same motto for their university.

[27 : 18] But they changed the wording just slightly. They changed just one word in it. And they changed it so their motto is Nisi Sapentia Frustra.

Without wisdom, vanity. And the ironic thing is that's the least wise thing anyone could have done. They've gone against everything that Psalm 127 has to say about life.

Psalm 127's unmistakable cry is, unless the Lord is the one building, unless the Lord is the one creating, it is all meaningless. It's all in vain.

And the one word they've decided to remove is Lord from that picture. And in his place, they've put the word wisdom. And by doing so, they've condemned themselves to vanity and to meaninglessness.

And it's easy to see, I don't think any of us would probably make that decision, but how often do we make similar decisions in our own lives in more subtle ways? How often do we say, unless I have this one thing, then my day is meaningless?

[28 : 28] Unless I'm liked, unless I'm respected, unless I get that promotion, unless I get the family that I want, or my kids turn out the way I want, or they marry the person that I want, or I go on the vacation that I want, then life is meaningless.

And on and on and on and on and on, we spend our whole lives putting new words into that little blank. And we could probably all in some way put our own words into that. Without blank vanity.

And we're just like that university. What would happen if you actually lived as if God loved you, as if you were his beloved? What would happen? How would you respond differently to your anxious toils?

And I think of the Gospel of John as he describes himself as the one Jesus loves. That's how he writes the Gospel of John.

What would happen if the love of Jesus so imprinted itself upon our lives and our minds, that we lived as if we were the one that Jesus loves?

[29 : 31] And in the Gospels, Jesus says, you know this, come to me and I will give you rest. My yoke is easy and my burden is light.

And notice that Jesus says, I will give you rest. But then he uses the language of working, of labor, of toils, of burdens, of yokes. You see, the labors of life don't go away.

But when you have Jesus, you can rest because you are his, even while you work in labor. And life doesn't become easy, but it does become peaceful. Let me pray for us.

Lord, thank you that you are building here, that you're creating in our homes and in our lives and each of us in different ways.

I'm sure I know that you're creating and building in each of these people and you're preserving them and you want us to rest. And I pray that each person in this room would go home with the imprint on their mind that they are the one that Jesus loves, that they are beloved, and that you would take that anxious toil, that daily bread that we eat for ourselves and you would place your work over it, you'd place your calming hand, and mostly you'd place your love over it, and that we'd listen to the Holy Spirit as he says, you're a son and you're a daughter of the king and he loves you.

[31 : 06] I pray this truth would become real. And I pray that would change the way that we interacted with each other and our families. We wouldn't need things from people and use people for things and try to fill meaningless holes in our life, but we would love each other because we know that we are loved.

And I pray that that would take over the way we love each other as a church community, the way that we love our city, and every corner of our lives. That we are beloved would change the way we lived our lives.

And I pray that you would assure us of that, help us to dream of those truths and think about those truths, and I pray the Spirit would apply them to our hearts and our minds as we go back out into the week starting tomorrow. And I pray for all these things in Christ's name, amen.