

# LECTIONARY COMMENTARY

## FATHER'S DAY

**Sunday, June 20, 2010**

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**Lection - Psalm 112:1-9 and 1 Timothy 5:8** (New Revised Standard Version)

### **Psalm 112:1-9**

(v. 1) Praise the LORD! Happy are those who fear the LORD, who greatly delight in his commandments. (v. 2) Their descendants will be mighty in the land; the generation of the upright will be blessed. (v. 3) Wealth and riches are in their houses, and their righteousness endures forever. (v. 4) They rise in the darkness as a light for the upright; they are gracious, merciful, and righteous. (v. 5) It is well with those who deal generously and lend, who conduct their affairs with justice. (v. 6) For the righteous will never be moved; they will be remembered for ever. (v. 7) They are not afraid of evil tidings; their hearts are firm, secure in the LORD. (v. 8) Their hearts are steady, they will not be afraid; in the end they will look in triumph on their foes. (v. 9) They have distributed freely, they have given to the poor; their righteousness endures for ever; their horn is exalted in honour.

### **1 Timothy 5:8**

And whoever does not provide for relatives, and especially for family members, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

### **I. Description of the Liturgical Moment**

We applaud fathers today! Father's Day illuminates and distinguishes fathers as positive role models predicated upon the influence they have on their children and families. Over many years, Father's Day has become a significant event within the African American community. It is an opportunity for us to celebrate and salute men who are, as the kids say, "handling their business." There is a clarion call across America for African American men to step up and lead. Many of those who have answered the call are beginning to acknowledge the necessity of having a relationship with God as part of their quest to be good fathers.

Numerous men are now supporting their families and communities with renewed vigor and enthusiasm. For godly men, our first responsibility is to serve God, and this includes serving and financially providing for our families. We are also called to be priests in our homes, churches, and communities. Finally, we have an obligation to mentor children and young men, thereby spreading a positive paradigm of African American fatherhood.

## **II. Biblical Interpretation for Preaching and Worship: Psalm 112:1-9 and 1 Timothy 5:8**

### **Part One: The Contemporary Contexts of the Interpreter**

Fatherhood is an awesome responsibility, and very meaningful and fulfilling. In Hallandale, Florida, we have witnessed a resurrection in fathers standing up and being counted. We have recognized an increase in family continuity, greater attendance of children in schools and lessening of the negative stereotypes often attached to black fathers with the increase of mentoring programs that sought out men and after school programs for children and teens.

We have more godly fathers participating in leadership ministries at the church I pastor. These men are viewed as role models and change agents. Because of their talents, gifts and skills, these men have galvanized our ministries through their work within the church and by being involved in the community in which our church is located. We launched the creation of a new male usher board and youth ministry entitled *500 Role Models* that is designed to attract young men ages 14-18 years old. We no longer have to ask the question, “Adam where are you?” Adam is now present within the sacred walls of this community and beyond.

### **Part Two: Biblical Commentary**

We are living in times when we need strong, influential and powerful fathers. Psalm 112:1-9 and 1 Timothy 5:8 provide us with the actions by which we can identify these types of men, whether they are operating in the home, church, or community. They can be defined through the use of three related terms: reverential, rich, and righteous.

#### **Reverential**

The Psalmist commences by sharing his theology in acrostic form as spiritual teaching. This Psalm takes up where Psalm 111 leaves off, with the man who fears the Lord and practices wisdom; this man is reverential. In other words, he understands that he must be a new creature in his relationship with God. In other words, his past life that was not devoted to God is replaced by one which places God at the center. This man is happy not based upon what he earns, drives, or the extent of his physical prowess. He is happy because he fears/reverences the Lord; part and parcel of reverencing the Lord is delighting in his commandments.

The Psalm provides fathers with encouragement or motivation to reverence God—“their descendants will be mighty in the land and blessed” (v. 2). All caring fathers want their offspring to be happy and contribute usefully to the world. Fathers can go a long way toward ensuring this by the behavior they model before their children. If this behavior is reverential toward God and the commandments of God, this Psalm promises that God will bless such living. The author implies *distinguished posterity* for the descendants of godly men. Our immediate family and our extended family will reap a godly heritage. This manifests itself in material and spiritual blessings. Furthermore, godly men are the progenitors who produce

eschatological benefits for their offspring.

### **Rich**

The theology of the Psalmist now moves to verses 3-4 with the elucidation of rewards for reverencing God. We know that obedience to the ways and Word of God saves men from waste, destruction and poverty. However, this Psalm also speaks of another reward for those who reverence God—wealth and riches. Yes, says the Psalmist, those who reverence God will have riches in their houses and their righteousness will endure forever. In other words, these men will not only do well financially, they will have great admirable legacies—their righteousness meaning the desire to emulate their lives, carry on their traditions and engage in similar behavior will continue through others. These are rich men indeed.

American culture is grossly materialistic. Fathers need no instruction on how to suggest to their children that they should earn money lots of money. However, one hopes that what has been learned by fathers through the financial crisis that closed the first decade of the twenty-first century is that children really need to be taught to save, to live according to different standards than those promoted by advertisers and American society and to live so that their lives not just their bank account balances matter. Such children will be rich.

### **Righteous**

The theological concept most stressed in this Psalm is righteousness: For those who fear the Lord “their righteousness endures forever;” they are “merciful and righteous;” the righteous are “not moved” from acting justly. These are familiar lines about the righteous. However, I am struck by a line in this Psalm that receives little homiletic attention: “They rise in darkness as a light for the upright.” These are dark days in the African American community for so many reasons: poverty; illiteracy, HIV/AIDS, violence and hopelessness seem, on some days, to cover the entire sky, and black people seem to be carrying the weight of the world on their heads, to quote from an African proverb. But godly fathers rise in such darkness “as a light” for the upright: babies, children aging elders just struggling to make it and those who have no advocates. These are men of courage, “they are not afraid of evil tidings. Their hearts are steady,” and they will triumph. They work indefatigably to bridge the gulf between hopelessness and hopefulness. No wonder the Psalmists says that the righteousness of such a person will endure forever!

Such righteousness creates in godly men honesty, diligence, leadership, and generosity. Things go better for the man who is generous and who does not refuse to share his blessings with others. When godly men demonstrate generosity and kindness to others their leadership is respected.

In our second text for Father’s Day, Paul admonishes Timothy in chapter 5, verse 8 to instruct Christian men that it’s a serious matter when we fail to provide support for our relatives (especially those in our family and household). Paul implies that this type of mentality constitutes a denial of the faith. A father whose actions are contrary to this precept is worse

than an unbeliever! Yes, being a godly father is more than paying bills and providing food and shelter. Fathers also embrace the biblical mandate established by Joshua when he stood and declared “as for me and my house we will serve the Lord.” However, children and families also expect men to shelter the tangible responsibilities of fatherhood; the rubber also meets the road here. And, unfortunately, this is where too many men get off the bus too soon. Some will not pay child support. Others will not consistently work. This behavior is not acceptable to God. This behavior will not gain for men a seat among the righteous whose legacies will endure forever.

### **Celebration**

Today, I thank God for fathers who day in and day out take on the heavy load of standing for their God and their families. They teach lessons that only men can teach. These men are precious jewels. They shine in darkness; their worth is immeasurable and they are adored by their children. A few are famous but most are not. Their legacies are unique treasures passed from generation to generation. We stand on their shoulders; we owe them a debt of gratitude and emulation. Thanks to almighty God for godly fathers.

### **Descriptive Details**

The descriptive details prompted by this passage include:

**Sights:** Children running around the neighborhood, the church and schools rejoicing at the presence of men who reverence God and delight in the commandments of God, brave men who stand against the foes of righteousness, homes that are wealthy, the exalted horn of godly men;

**Sounds:** A multiplicity of sounds from cheering, crying, joy, anger, to laughter, to confusion in the voices of children and families depending upon whether a godly father is present physically or at least in memory; and

**Smells:** The smoke from gunfire in neighbors without godly men, the smell of barbecue on a grill as dad leads a cookout; and the odor of a dad’s favorite cologne.