

May 11, 1997

*Sermon: BOOBY TRAPS FOR THE FAMILY*

*Scripture: Psalm 127:1-5*

Psalm 127 is a very brief Psalm, but it's one of the most beautiful in the Bible concerning family. On this special day, I want to read it for us.

*Unless the Lord builds a house, its builders labor in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchmen stand guard in vain. In vain you rise early and stay up late toiling for food to eat for he grants sleep to those he loves. Sons are a heritage from the Lord, children are a reward from him. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, are sons born in one's youth. Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them. They will not be put to shame when they contend with enemies in their gate.*

Last week law enforcement officials in Texas were in a confrontation at an embassy called Free Texas. This was a small group of militants who came to believe that Texas ought to be a separate state. And the police were there because these men had broken laws concerning kidnapping and evasion of tax laws. As law enforcement officials began to approach the embassy, they began to realize that the entire place was full of booby traps. A trap gets the adjective booby when it looks very simple, but it has very dire consequences. What these police officials found was that if you tripped a wire that was in the trees there were containers of gasoline that would fall on your head and explode and would cause a fire.

Now in the Bible, it talks a lot about booby traps. Life is full of them. It looks like things are simple. It looks like they don't matter too much, but when you become involved in them, then you begin to understand that it has very deep consequences. The bible in the book of Proverbs says that there are ways that seem right unto men, but the end thereof is the way of death. And so it looks like it's not very much and it looks like it doesn't matter too much, but when you become involved in it, then you understand that it is.

There are two of them that I wanted to read for you out of the book of Proverbs to illustrate the point. In the book of Proverbs, Chapter 23, it says, "Do not gaze at wine when it is red when it sparkles in the cup because it goes down smoothly. But in the end it bites like a snake and poisons like a viper. And you begin to understand that with all of the problem we have with

alcohol and with all the problem that it brings to people who become alcoholics. You begin to understand that alcohol is a booby trap.

Listen to the other one in the book of Proverbs. Be careful about adultery. Its lips drip honey. Its speech is smoother than oil. But in the end it is bitter as gaul, sharp as a two-edged sword; a booby trap. Now families always face booby traps. We all approach experiences where it doesn't seem like it's very dangerous, but it always leads to a deeper problem. And what we need to be aware of this morning are some of the booby traps that all of us confront as we deal with our family. Now some of you this morning when you hear what I am going to say will not necessarily agree. And the reason for that is because booby traps are so innocuous that it doesn't seem like that there is any danger to them at all. But that's the very purpose of them. The very purpose is to lead you along and then when you get too far in it then you realize that you are in dangerous territory. Booby trap number one.

We need this. We need it now so let's borrow and get it. At the end of the second World War a poll was taken of Americans to ask them to list the number of things they thought were essential. It was an interesting list. There were only 11 items on it, things like somewhere to live and something to eat and something to wear, very simple. The interesting thing about that poll is that it has been taken every 10 years since. Today that list of 11 has gone to 93. There are things that did not even exist in 1945 and we think today that they are absolutely essential. I find it strange the list that is on it: a microwave, air-conditioning for a car. And the tragedy when all of us stop to think is that most of the world will never even have the 11 and would never even consider the 93.

And what it makes us recognize is that we have believed our own press reports. We have come to believe that we are the most materialistic nation in the world and that therefore these things are very essential and we have a right to have them and we have a right to have them now and if we don't have the money to get them now then what we do is that we go out and borrow.

Now I think all of us understand that we live in a very unique society. We live in what is called a consumers' society. Consumers' society simply says everybody has to buy. The reason everybody has to buy is because then we have to hire people to produce. If people don't buy then people can't produce and then we go into recession. And so what you keep hearing all the time is buy, buy, buy. Now there is a big problem with that. We don't have enough money to buy and to buy as

fast as our society demands for us to buy. And so that's the reason we have to borrow. The latest way to get us to borrow is that plastic people eater that you get. Every week an offer is in the mail. You might have seen in the newspaper not long ago one family had saved all of them and found that even though they are people of very modest means they had offered to them a credit line of five hundred and seventy five thousand dollars. And you also recognize that many people who go into bankruptcy have on their credit cards an indebtedness of over a hundred thousand dollars. Now if you live in a consumers' society and if people have to buy because people have to produce and you don't have enough people buying to buy what people produce and you have to get people to borrow, then you understand the merry-go-round that we are on. And people have to continue to reach out and to get money so that they can have it and if you put the two together, if you put... I need that and I need it now... and here is an easy way to get it... then we begin to reach out and to get things that we find. But then we get into a problem. The problem that we begin to run into is that we get too much month at the end of our money. The problem is that we have him and her debating over the little pot and he wants this and she wants this and then all of those little things together and so we go out and we try to get it. And that's the reason that we understand that possessions are different than food. When you have an appetite for food and you get enough then your body says stop eating, but with possessions and money it's never the same. It's somehow the more you get then the more that you want and there's never a sensation of your appetite and we are caught in this vicious cycle people get into and that's the reason that Jesus who spoke to a group of people who made less than a dollar a month and gave them 39 stories 16 of them have to do with the danger of possessions. In fact it was Jesus who said that possessions could actually become equal to your God. You cannot serve God and possessions.

Think about it for just a moment. When do you get your biggest kick. You get your biggest kick when you are reading the Bible. You get your biggest kick when you are helping somebody. You get your biggest kick when you are worshiping God. Or when you get that new Buick and it smells good and everybody says, "Boy, aren't they successful." And you drive home in that nice suit and have that nice meal and you get a spiritual high that church can never even match. Then you begin to understand what Jesus is talking about. It comes to the point where all of a sudden we want it and we want it now. Someone said

Jesus taught us to pray in the Lord's Prayer, give us this day our daily bread and Americans want the whole bakery and we want it now. And we will do whatever we need to do to get it now. It's not surprising then that the number one problem in families is money, money.

Second booby trap. We can be happy even though our values are different. Let me take you as a person and kind of show you the layers. Layer number one are your actions. That's what all of us see. Behind your actions are your beliefs. Those are the things that govern and guide you. But back of your beliefs are a thing called values. Values are those things that you think are absolutely worthwhile. Values are the things that drive you. Values are the things that you think life consists of. So here you have two people who want to form a marriage and you try to put them together and what you have is that the core of their basic conflict is because their values are different. And they come and they say, "Well you know we agree on certain things. We agree that the kitchen ought to be yellow". But you understand that what you get in marriage, whether the kitchen is yellow or blue is not really is the issue. The issue is what do you feel is absolutely essential. And that's the reason the Bible says that a believer should not be yoked together with an unbeliever and that's the part some of you don't agree with. Because the Bible says that what's going to happen is that this person will have one set of values and you have another. And I know what you are going to say, "Well we agree on a lot of things", and that raises another question. How can a person who is not a believer have the values of a person who is a believer and how can a person who is a believer not have any other values than a person who is not a believer. So the Bible warns it all the time--be careful. Now I am not talking about whether a Baptist ought to marry a Methodist or a Catholic ought to marry an Episcopalian. What I am talking about is, do you have the same basic values of life?

One of the largest churches in America today is *The Willow Lawn Community Church* in Barrington right outside of Chicago. Dr Bell Hibells is the pastor, fifteen thousand people go there every Sunday. It was designed for people who are 25 to 45 and that's the kind of people who usually go there. I would commend to you his book that is entitled *Fit To Be Tied* and in it he tells the story. After the service one day, one of these 25 to 45 year olds came to one of the ministers and said I have a problem I think. And I would like to get your advice. I am living with a man and we are not married and then she coyly said, "I don't think maybe that's right. And he is an alcoholic and then once a week he

gets high on cocaine. And when he gets high on cocaine he becomes very abusive, physically abusive and we kind of put off marriage and I wanted to ask you if you think I ought to marry him.”? To which the minister responded , absolutely not! In fact, don’t even go back to your apartment and get your clothes. Get one of your friends to go back and get your clothes out of the apartment. Don’t put yourself through that. But the question that was raised in the book is the question I raise to you. Why would she ever consider it? And the answer is because something is lacking on the inside. And there is such a hunger for love and such a hunger for permanence and such a hunger to be accepted that sometimes people will put themselves through hell just to find a little bit of love.

The booby trap is that once you get into thinking that because you feel so deeply that you want love then you open yourself up for hellish experiences. Deep booby trap is people who have different values feel like well we can get together and be happy.

Third booby trap. We can live together and be happy even though we don’t spend much time together. Most of you recognize this morning that money is not your problem, time is your problem. And if I had to ask you to give money you could give me money. If I asked you to give me four hours next week you would say let me check my daytimer. I know families where 12 year olds have daytimers. They can’t figure out where they are going to be on Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday. We are absolutely so busy going that most of us don’t have time and that’s the problem with family. We have the fact that sometimes we never even spend time with each other.

One man and woman who came to me for counseling said we are like ships in the dark. We just see each other and say hello.

In Chicago, three hundred people were tested and they found that husband and wife talked to each other eleven and a half minutes a day and most of it had to be who’s going to pick up the kids when. We hurry home so the wife can go to her thing and the husband to his thing and we never do anything together. We just don’t spend time together. And we have the booby trap experience that somehow we think we are all going to be happy. In our family I always laugh when we are in such a big hurry and I ask if she is going to thaw the pizza or put it on a stick and lick it like a lollipop. It is kind of according to how quick we have to be.

You are aware that the rest of the world does not do this. This is our sickness. If you live in Europe for example. When Judie and I lived in Germany, if a

German invited us to come over, you came at six o’clock and did not leave the table until ten. If you went out to eat you just spent the night. I mean you just spent all the evening there.

When I had my illness back in the winter I collected jokes about sick people. I started to say sick jokes. I love the joke about the man who got sick , really didn’t know what was wrong with him but was very seriously ill. Went to a specialist and the specialist asked that they would come in for a special counseling period. He said, let me speak to the wife. And of course, the husband said, well he was trying to prepare her for my demise and he went in and he said, your husband is very ill but he said, let me tell you he can live a very normal life. This is the prescription. You must cook for him from scratch three home cooked meals a day. Now if you will do that his allergy will not get the best of him. He will live a very normal life. The wife walked back out to the lounge and the husband was there and he said, it’s bad isn’t it? She said, sure is, You are getting ready to die.

Now ladies I am not saying that you have to become a Martha Stewart. I am saying you and your mate, you and your children must have time together if you are going to build a happy home life. And the greatest thing you can do if you are running faster that you can run is to call up and say, why don’t you and I go on a date tonight? Why don’t I come home this afternoon early. Why don’t we go somewhere. If you give your time they will understand you have given one of the greatest relationships that you can give.

Next booby trap. I am unhappy. But if I marry you I will be happy. There is a basic law of life that simply says if you are not happy in yourself you will never be happy with anyone else. And many people who are so miserable inside bring that misery into a marriage relationship and that’s the reason marriage fails. And many times when people come to me for counseling in a relationship, the say , I am unhappy in our marriage. And I say, you jumped about three questions too far. The first question is, would you be happy anywhere? And the problem is that many times a person is never satisfied with themselves and miserable about his life. He comes into a relationship and spreads his sickness all around. And that’s the reason as you know the statistics that while a large number of families in a divorce when people remarry. Listen, when they remarry, the divorce rate of people who remarry is fifty percent higher than the people who get a divorce the first time. And the reason is they never found satisfaction with themselves and what they are doing is just bringing

their unhappiness from one family to the next. So you need to understand mates are wonderful mates but mates are not Gods. And mates cannot cure this inner reality in your life when you are just miserable.

Last booby trap. I will love you and stay with you as long as I feel like I should. Americans have a unique definition for love. It is, love is a feeling. And what we say is, love is the sole basis for marriage. And as long as I feel like I love you, then I will stay married to you. It seems like non-refuteable logic. It simply says marriage is based on love. But I have a deeper question. What is love based on? Now listen to me carefully. Love is the sasses for marriage, but commitment is the basis for love. And what you did when you stood at the alter was you did not say I will love you as long as I feel like it. Because let me tell you your feelings will always get messed up. What you said was I will love you as long as I live. That’s commitment. And as long as you get in the feeling game there will be somebody always out there who will attract you feelings. Some circumstance will always attract you feeling and that’s the reason you must come back to commitment.

When I was pastor in Memphis, we had a very unique couple who were members of our congregation. Let me tell you about her.

When she walked into a room, everybody, every man would turn and look because she was a professional model. She also was a commercial airplane pilot. She also was a professional scuba diver. A most unusual brilliant lady. Her husband was a fairly well off young man, handsome, out going. One day she said to me, as she was flying an airplane , she looked over and began to have feelings about her co-pilot. She came to me simply to say I don’t know whether I love Bryan anymore or not. I have feelings for somebody else. Se we spent the entire time talking about feelings and commitment and what I am talking to you about. At the next appointment, she told me that after she left my office she went down to the Catholic church where she had been married and asked the priest if he would close the sanctuary for a while. She went up to the altar and she said, I got down on my knees and I said, Dear God, I am in a mess. My feelings are being all pulled and I don’t know what to do. But dear God, I stood at this altar and I made a commitment and today I come back and I make that commitment today and I say again to you, I will love Bryan for as long as I live. Now dear God, I make the commitment. Listen to what she said. I make the commitment. Help me to love him.

You see Americans would turn it exactly around. We would turn it around and say because I don’t love him I will make the commitment. She made the commitment and said I will love him. When she came back I said, shat would you like to talk about today. And she said nothing. She said because I wanted to talk about commitment. Now listen to me again. You live in a world today the devil has put all kind of little trick wires, all kind of booby traps and we are just likely going along tripping over them and gasoline is coming out of trees and we are wondering what is wrong. The question is how do you get past booby traps? Booby traps usually have a little wire so you have to see it. You have to realize that it’s hooked onto something else. And the scripture says, Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path. What this simply means is that you need somebody, something else to illuminate that little thin wire to help you to avoid the pitfalls of life. The person who thinks that they can go through life and be aware of all the pitfalls in their own strength is setting themselves up for a disaster. You simply cannot do it. That’s the reason God came in Jesus Christ. That’s the reason you must trust in him. That’s the reason you must know his word. That’s the reason you must live every day and the light unto my feet and a lamp unto my path. And if you try to do on yourself by yourself, watch out. Here comes the gasoline out of the trees.