

Psalm 133

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[0 : 00] Today's scripture text is Psalm 133. Please stand for the reading of God's word. A Song of Ascents of David. Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity.

It is like the precious oil on the head running down on the beard of Aaron, running down on the collar of his robes. It is like the dew of Peran, which falls on the mountains of Zion.

For there the Lord has commanded the blessing, life forevermore. This is the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God. Thanks be to God.

Well, having arrived, what now? Having journeyed, what should life look like upon reaching our destination?

Having set out some time to go, what will characterize the sitting down of Christchurch Chicago?

[1 : 24] For the ancient Israelites, those disparate clans who descended from Jacob, those 12 tribes who traveled annually from far and distant homes up to Jerusalem three times a year for the great feasts, those kinds of questions were answered for them by Psalm 133.

Having arrived, what now? Having journeyed, what does life look like? Having set out, what's in store now that we're sitting down?

For them, Psalm 133 provides the answer. And in an answer, the word was, verse 1, you can see it for yourself, unity.

How good and pleasant it would be for brothers to dwell together in unity. By way of word picture, not simply unity, but the oil on a head or the dew on a mountain.

If not word picture, but literary composition. Verse 1, by way of exhortation. This is what it ought to look like. Followed in verses 2 and 3 by encouragements that would stimulate you toward it.

[3 : 10] If you're joining us this morning, either in person or online, and you haven't been with us in the past, we are nearly complete with 15 consecutive songs in Israel's ancient hymn book.

The book of Psalms, 150 distinct songs. But Psalm 120 through 134, we have likened to an album within the larger playlist of their musical record.

They're grouped together, and we know this, take a look, by the heading under which they all fall. There's that word, ascents.

It's almost as if you had an album cover on vinyl, and the title of the album was Ascents, Songs of Ascent.

15 tracks laid down, perhaps 8 on side 1 and 7 on side 2. And Psalm 133 would have been played near the end of that individual collection.

[4 : 27] And it appears that the compiler of those songs took some care in the order in which you would hear them.

It opened with Psalm 120 utilizing people who dwelt in Mekesh, which was the far north end of the kingdom.

And it refers to people who are dwelling in the tents of Kadar, the far southern rim of the kingdom.

And it's almost as if Psalm 120 takes the entirety of the disparate people who dwell in their own distant neighborhoods and places by family and heritage and lineage.

And Psalm 120 has them all singing as they leave their home on the way to Jerusalem. But by last week, Psalm 132, it was clear that those people who had been singing on the way had arrived.

It spoke of the Ark of the Covenant now entering into the city of Jerusalem. It was as though all the people of God were now at home.

[5 : 45] You can imagine the commotion. Can you envision the foot traffic in the city when an entire nation would have convened on a single city?

Men and women and children, their feet now having come across the threshold of Jerusalem, perhaps to one of the 12 gates and the population swells.

Can you envision all the conversations along the way? I was young when we had a family reunion in Colorado back in the year 1982 or 3.

My mother was one of six siblings. And those six siblings had created an emerging clan. And the clan was spread out across the country.

And as we drove from Chicago to the Rockies, I remember asking my mother, and we all tried to get familiar with who was going to be who, and which kids went with which tribe head.

[6 : 59] And when we arrived, there we were. The watchword for those who arrived is unity.

That's the unique contribution to Psalm 133. Look in verse 1. They're actually called brothers. This is a familial gathering of Israel.

One family comprised of 12 distinct and different cultures, all now at home. And the call is, having come, walk in unity.

It would be good and pleasant. I don't know if you've wondered, why would that be the characteristic, the hallmark word?

The first word to be heard when the family convened in the city of God. Perhaps it's because of what's affixed to the title here.

[8 : 05] You can see it. It's the family of David. Do you see it there? The writer, for now the fourth time in this set, the song set has brought David to the mind of the one who's listening to the lyrics.

It's a song of a sense of David. It's not any family. It's David's family, which brings to mind struggles of David's own house.

They didn't call it the divided kingdom for nothing. David's house was a mess. Think of it.

It's a home where animosity rules. It's where estrangement emerged among family members. It's where sons fought sons for seats of preeminence.

And it was that way even before David's family came to its fullness and fruition. The ancestral line was one of a divided kingdom.

[9 : 17] There was Jacob at odds with Esau. There were brothers who stood against Joseph. There was Saul who hunted down David.

There's Absalom who makes war against his own father. There's Solomon who has to secure his kingdom from Adonijah.

To think of David's household is to consider a divided house. The Old Testament record shows a long history.

Here are the words. You'll know them. Of family dysfunction. Of relational division. Of familial discord.

Sound anything like what you may have experienced on your own? Certainly, those are indicators of the church.

[10 : 18] In this country. In this country. In its present Protestant state. We are a divided team.

We are brothers against brothers. Sisters against mothers. I want to put it to you this way.

Evangelicalism. Over the last 10 years.

Is in the midst of filing for divorce. We divide over everything. For anything. At all.

We rupture. Over race. We police one another over our politics. We separate over social class.

We stand off from one another over economic theory. We criticize one another over critical race theory.

[11 : 31] Even masking. We're not going to be a part of it. We'll maul the fellowship of the church. And pastors around the country are certainly not strangers to the communications of those who would force cancellation within the body of Christ.

A determination for silencing, depending upon the church's position. There is, in this country, the spirit of arrogance and condescension.

There's a disagreement with one. Then there's a disunion with the same. Truly, truly.

It's worthy of tears. It reminds me of an earlier time in church history.

Centuries and centuries ago. A controversy emerged under the name of Donatus or the Donatus controversy. There had been a sporadic persecution of the church.

[12 : 57] Church in ways where churches and ministers were asked to forfeit their scriptures in order to be in good standing with the state. And some, of course, compromised in that time.

And Donatus comes to stand for the purists who would not. But when things began to relent and life began to go back to normal, pastors began to disassociate with those that they felt had been impure in the moment of great trial.

They began to say, we will not partner with you. We do not recognize you as a valid church or minister of the gospel. In fact, we will have nothing to do with your work. For you are impure. And we, in all our moral certitude, are good with God. We're living it again. Interestingly, the purists today come from either end of the spectrum. Demanding conformity. Or A break of unity.

[14:10] Augustine preached a 10-week sermon series in the midst of that controversy. All from the letter of 1 John. And his argument was simple. That proof of being within the family or brothers was a love for the brethren.

And a love for the brethren was rooted in Christ's love of you. And so he actually asked for the church to recognize people back into fellowship with whom they disagreed on major areas in that day as related to the state.

And of course, Augustine didn't win the day in his day. And we won't win the day in others. I don't anticipate that over the next 15 years, this family will go forward under Psalm 133.1 without any break along the way.

But this is the exhortation. Having arrived. Having sat down. The word is. It is good. It is pleasant. When you dwell together in unity. Interestingly, this call for unity.

[15:29] Has been protected in our own church family. For almost a quarter of a century. And I want to just publicly praise God for that. There's a vow when you become a member of this family that says that you will promise to study the purity and the peace of this home.

Relational. And I have watched over 23 and a half years. Members who have disagreements on a host of issues.

Nevertheless, vow to study its ongoing purity and peace. There has been a protection of the peace. May it ever, ever be so. Notice the psalm that moves from this exhortation in verse 1 to encouragements toward it in verses 2 and 3.

It moves from this statement on a desired unity to two similes that begin to show what that unity might look like.

[16:48] In other words, it goes from one word to two word pictures. Do you see the way the text goes? It is like verse 2. It is like verse 3.

And these are two distinct encouragements that the songwriter wanted you to almost see to compel you to encourage you to this call to unity.

Verse 2. It is like this unbroken fellowship of familial love is like the precious oil on the head running down on the beard of Aaron running down on the collar of his robes.

It's like oil. And the oil here is a particular oil. It's this rare aromatic mix that back in the law was actually given in the ingredients that were to produce it.

It would fill the room with the aromatic pleasure of the spices. Unity is like the overwhelming sense in the air of that which is lovely and pleasant and attractive.

[18:08] Notice, too, the way the writer wants you to see the movement of the oil. It's like the precious oil on the head. The oil is running down on the beard, on the beard of Aaron, running down on the collar of his robes.

It's as though you're to picture not just precious oil, but that oil moving. And it's moving downward, almost as though it's falling in abundance.

When brothers and sisters dwell together in unity, it is the pleasantness of the falling aromatics of these spices.

You know, it's interesting. It actually says falling down on the beard of Aaron. I don't know if you know who Aaron was, but he was the first priest. And in Exodus 25, there's a scene where he is consecrated to the role of intercessor for the people.

And it actually talks about anointing him with this oil. And so it's this precious oil, rare oil, the abundance of it, the pleasure of it, but the priestly nature of it.

[19:28] Wow. Wow. This oil that consecrates one for service. You know, Aaron couldn't do his work if he hadn't been set apart for it.

It is unity is the setting apart like oil that will enable us to do all that God has for us to do. And without it, no matter how much we do, we will be of little use to our Lord.

You know, this Sunday, our youth pastor, Milton Taylor, was to preach. It fell to him today. But a couple of days ago, he wasn't feeling well.

He was sick. He tested negative on COVID, but was incapable of delivering his word. And so I'm picking it up for him. But he sent me a few lines to say, this is how I would have introduced this sermon.

And I want Milton to join me in the pulpit this morning. As I cover for him, I pray that he'll cover for me.

[20 : 37] And this is how he would have introduced it. And it makes great sense with this simile on this pervasive oil that covers the priest's garments, even with all the names of the tribes of Israel upon it, washed underneath this piece.

Milton Taylor says, think of the American experiment. The American experiment is unique because of its intentionality to bring people from all walks of life, from various nations to these shores, to make up the United States of America.

The experiment, Taylor goes on, has a pledge of allegiance to a single flag, even though their backgrounds are different, unique, and dissimilar.

And we acknowledge our differences and are not to cast them off. We annotate the original heritage of our nationalities with terms like Irish American, Swedish American, Polish American, African American, Hispanic American, Asian American.

Yet, whatever I am in regard to culture, history, background, or previous location, I am under the American banner. There was, in the experiment, an attempt to have the United States, even though people were different.

[22 : 09] And then he goes on and says, What the American experiment represents from a cultural, historical, political, and geographic perspective to this nation, the church of Jesus Christ was meant to be for the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords, people from different backgrounds, cultures, and perspectives, all pledging allegiance to the cross, to the King, to the priest, to the one on whom his pleasant aromas washed over our souls, and over our names, and over our differences, and over our cultural perspectives.

There's another friend of mine, Ralph Douglas West, pastors of church in Houston. He used an illustration once, and I loved it.

He says, Everyone's concerned in the church with all these other things, and Jesus gets put on the back pedestal. He says, But if you put everyone's eyes on Jesus, And if you start here, and I am over here, and you and I are very distant from one another on almost everything in life, guess what? He says, The closer we both get to Jesus, the closer we become to one another. That's it. The cross of Christ, the priestly provision of our Lord, the assembly of his sufferings, the global expanse of his forgiveness, the notion that there is not anyone distant from his blood.

If that is the focal point that unity is achieved, verse 3 gives you another similar, another encouragement.

[24 : 19] It's not that of precious oil on a head, it's that, verse 3, of dew resting on the mountain of Hermon.

Now, if you don't know about Mount Hermon in the Bible, this is way up north, and it actually says here that the dew that's standing on Mount Hermon has almost cascaded south, and in the verse, it now actually falls on the mountains of Zion, Jerusalem.

So, again, what he's saying, and interestingly, humorously, the first encouragement, he depicts oil. the second encouragement, he gives you the depiction of water, oil and water, things that you and I say don't mix.

They don't go together. They're too different from one another. And he says unity in the body is like a precious oil on the priest. Unity in the body is like water that gives life to the mountains, and it cascades down upon the very city of God.

things that don't mix under God suddenly do. Amen? Your background, your lineage, might be as completely different from mine as dwelling in Mechish might have been for someone under the tents of Kadar.

[25 : 53] And yet, in Christ, they come together. Interestingly, then, that first encouragement brings to mind a person, Aaron, and our Lord.

The second one brings to mind a place, Zion, that gives life. Notice the way that closes. For there, the Lord has commanded the blessing, life forever more.

And so as the dew rests upon the mountains, which waters the earth, flowing forth from Zion, so the command of the Lord will go forth from Zion, and it will water to the ends of the earth.

having arrived, what now? Having journeyed, what should life look like upon reaching our destination?

Having set out some time ago, what should define our sitting down? Unity in Christ that provides life to a world gone wrong.

[27 : 10] Let me close with this. I'm not a musician, you know that. And I might be wrong in some aspects of the analogy, but so be it.

You're used to that. I've warned you anyway. Think of an orchestra. Think of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, that wonderful little surround balcony behind where the audience is encompassing the musicians.

Think of the number of musicians. Timpani, strings, brass, brass, solos up front, booty coming out on stage.

But before he arrives, every instrumentalist tunes their instrument to a single sound.

Historically, the instrument was an oboe. And an oboe would launch out and play an A note.

[28 : 29] Because most instruments have A notes from what I'm told. And every instrument would tune themselves to the singularity of that sound.

and in doing so, they tune themselves to one another. That's what it takes. That's what it's like.

That's my prayer for Christ Church Chicago. that we would tune our hearts and our life to the Lord Jesus Christ.

That we might sit and play and serve in one accord. And if we do, we will be a blessing to our neighborhood, to our city, to our world.

And if we should fail, it would be a tragic of epic proportion.

[29 : 49] Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers and brothers dwell in unity.

Our Heavenly Father, this is the word of God that you foreordained us to hear having arrived on the threshold of the outer wall.

may we measure up to its desire and may we be encouraged to play our part well.

In Jesus' name, amen. Amen.