

2 Peter 1:16-21

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Date: 29 August 2010

Preacher: David Helm

[0 : 00] Please stand for the reading of God's Word.

Psalm 133, 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, on the beard of Aaron, running down on the collar of his robes.

It is like the dew of Hermon, 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. You may be seated. Good afternoon.

It's good to be here. It's good to see the students regathering and our family broadening for this season of the year. It's good to be here with you.

[1 : 15] It's good to have been able to spend time in the series as a whole, and particularly this very short psalm. Would you?

Short psalm doesn't mean short message, just in case. Let's pray. Lord, we love you. We thank you for your goodness to us and to be able to be before you in your presence.

Lord, we acknowledge with the songwriter that you indeed are the famous one, and great is your name in all the earth. We pray, Lord, that we would be those who would proclaim that name, both in our word, but also in our living.

May they see your glory in the midst of people who are indeed sharing their lives together. So we bless you here this afternoon and pray that in all things you would be glorified through Christ, in whose name we pray.

Amen. Another short psalm, but another powerful message from this short psalm. And I was speaking to David a little bit before the sermon.

[2 : 25] And this is one of the passages. It's really relatively easy to grab the concept of what is being said. It is a psalm that deals with the beauty of unity among God's people.

And we can often capture that subject of unity, and then we preach it from other places in the Bible. But to really preach it from here and basically to settle here has really blessed my heart and my soul.

I trust that it would do the same for the people of God. The beauty of unity among God's people. The word that we get from this particular psalm and the pictures are very, very fitting for us who do life together.

Either because of marriage or by birth or by faith. Boy, this really fits us, and it inspires us, and I believe motivates us to really do life together well.

Particularly, there's a message here in Psalm 133 for all who would claim Jesus as their Lord and Savior. If there's ever a sad picture, it's when people who share the same blood or the same name or the same affiliation live either as strangers or enemies.

[3 : 54] What a sad picture. It's a picture of fractured family harmony. Where those who are on the same team wearing the same jerseys like we see these sisters over here in red on this afternoon.

But they live or they function as if they're on the opposite teams. These kinds of things should not and must not be so amongst the people of God.

And that is not the picture that we see in Psalm 133. What we see in Psalm 133 is just the opposite of that. It's not one of discord.

It's not one of fracture. It's not one of frustration. But what we see here are the very things that should characterize the people of God. The very things that should attend those who share a relationship with God through his son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

As a matter of fact, look at the very first word there. It's one of those attention-getting words. Behold. It's one of those biblical stop, look, and listen words.

[5 : 07] It's if Jesus were saying in the New Testament, truly, truly or verily, verily, I say unto you. It's a crucial statement. It's like a military person bellowing out, attention.

And everybody comes to attention. I believe the officer's got a kick out of that. You know, when the officer comes in the room in the military, whoever sees him first, they shout out, attention. And everybody stands up until the officer says, at ease.

Well, the Bible is not saying at ease here. We need to listen up and hear what the word of God is saying to us from this passage. It's the teacher saying, listen up.

Huh? Huh? What's so crucial about unity that this word behold that gets the attention of the reader is placed there?

Huh? Well, because dwelling in unity, getting along as family is absolutely critical for us to function as the body of Christ.

[6 : 09] Unity is essential for us. Who share a relationship with Jesus. Huh?

Because our mission to spread the fame of Christ's name requires unity among us. If we're going to function as the body of Christ in this world, we need to be characterized by unity.

Our Lord prayed for it. The spirit of God inspires it and enables it. Our credibility as witnesses in this world demands it.

And our old fleshly ways make us really vulnerable to selfish independence rather than life-sharing interdependence.

The nature of who we are causes us to do our own thing, oftentimes at the expense of others, to our own personal hurt and harm.

[7 : 11] It's for these very reasons that you and I need to listen to and hear the word of the Lord from Psalm 133.

Here's the first thing I want to help you to see. Is that when family members dwell together in unity, first thing I want you to see, it's a very attractive thing.

It is a very attractive thing. As a matter of fact, David read Revelation chapter 7. And what a beautiful picture. Of those who, from various nations, from various national backgrounds, various ethnicities, are there before the throne of God.

And notice, though they are different on the outside, they are alike on the inside. And that likeness on the inside is pictured by everybody heads on a white robe garment.

Which pictures the righteousness of Christ. Of those who are standing before the throne of God and worshiping him. So though they come from various backgrounds, they have a common position of being in Christ before him.

[8 : 19] And guess what, brothers and sisters? That's an attractive thing. I was listening to the ensemble up here on today. And their harmony was a very attractive thing.

Didn't it make you sort of want if you had an instrument and want to sort of chime in with him in some way? It has a way. I saw David up here just sort of bobbing his head a little bit.

You may not have had those kind of expressions. But it was something that was drawing you in because the harmony that we saw here was an attractive thing.

And even so, when there is unity amongst God's people, it has a way of being so inviting and so welcoming. You want to be a part of that, huh?

Here in verse 1, unity is declared to be good and pleasant. Those are the words there. And what the psalmist in essence is doing, he is giving two thumbs up for unity.

[9 : 20] Unity is here applauded as good and admirable and delightful and desirable. It is an attractive thing. You see it there? Behold how good and how pleasant it is when brothers dwell together or dwell in unity.

The sinfulness of our hearts, brothers and sisters, make us very vulnerable to division and discord, even amongst those who share much in common.

We want what we want, huh? And we find ourselves not honoring the appropriate barriers in order to get what we want and when we want it.

And rather than inspiring and facilitating unity, it causes much discard. When greed and pride and various lusts fill our hearts, we often ignore the safeguards, the very safeguards that are meant to protect ourselves and others.

And in that process, we create tension, discard, and disharmony, huh? We didn't look very far in the Bible to see that from the beginning, family unity and brotherly harmony have been a challenge, huh?

[10 : 48] Cain became jealous of his brother Abel because his brother Abel's sacrifice was received and accepted and his wasn't.

Huh? What are those kind of feelings that arise when we see our brother getting a few accolades? Huh? Huh? Huh? We've had it in families, haven't we?

When so-and-so may be the achiever or may be doing it a little better, and so-and-so gets a little bit of praise.

I remember some dynamic, a similar dynamic in my own family, you know, where it seems like so-and-so was getting all of the applause.

And, you know, there's something within you that cries out, I'm here too. Huh? And sometimes the person not getting the praise or the applause, huh, will rise up against those who are, and the result, his family fracture and discord.

[11 : 50] Jacob took advantage of his brother Esau, robbed him of his very birthright, took advantage of him in a weak state, huh? Huh? And just sort of worked his charm or, you know, he was a heel catcher.

That's what his name means, huh? He was a deceiver. Well, and he knew how to work it, didn't he, huh? Sort of got it from him. It was in the bloodline, huh? On his mama's side.

Joseph's brothers conspired to mistreat him, and their ugliness left a family fissure that required half a generation to heal.

The Jew-Gentile divide in the church was a major problem in the early church. And even today, the church is still challenged by the ever-present racial divide.

In spite of our Lord's word, the word of the Lord spoken through Paul, listen to this, you needn't turn to it, but Ephesians. For he himself, that is Christ, is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility.

[13 : 01] By abolishing the law of commandments and ordinance that he might create in himself one new man in place of two, soul-making peace. And might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.

And he came and preached peace to those who were far off and peace to those who were near. For through him, that's Christ, we both have access in one spirit to the Father.

In spite of that very clear biblical word, we remain challenged even today in the church as regards some of these great divides, these great barriers in society.

Well, verse 1 commends and applauds unity among the people of God. But verses 2 and 3 illustrate the value of unity among brothers.

And check this out, folks. The psalmist chooses carefully two pictures to illustrate the value of unity among brothers.

[14 : 18] He takes one from the sacred realm. He takes another from the natural realm. Oil and then dew.

Huh? Two pictures carefully chosen. So, unity. When family members dwell together in unity, first of all, it's an attractive thing.

Secondly, it is a sacred thing. It is a sacred thing. The goodness and pleasantness of unity among brothers is likened to a special oil used to set apart a special person, the high priest, for his special duties.

Turn with me to Exodus chapter 30, page 71. And I want you to keep your thumb in this because I want to read about this special oil.

And again, not just any oil. You'll see the header in chapter 30, verse 22. The anointing oil and incense. That's there.

[15 : 34] And just to read a little bit of it. The Lord said to Moses, take the finest spices. Liquid myrrh, 250 shekels.

And sweet-smelling cinnamon, half as much. That is 250. Aren't you glad the Bible does the math for you sometime even there? And 250 of aromatic cane.

And 500 of cassia, according to the shekel of the sanctuary. And a hin of olive oil. And you shall make of these a sacred anointing oil blended by the perfumer.

It shall be holy anointing, a holy anointing oil. And with it you shall anoint the tent of meeting. And he goes on and speaks about this. But this is what's there.

The oil is a unique blend of those ingredients that we've already mentioned there. The right ingredients were measured according. And these were divine specifications to make this sacred oil.

[16 : 40] Which was used to set apart these certain things for special purposes that the Lord ordained for them. Now look again. Look at verse 30. Back in Exodus chapter 30.

And notice that the priests were also anointed. You shall anoint Aaron and his sons and consecrate them that they may serve me as priests.

And you shall say to the people of Israel, this shall be my holy anointing oil throughout your generations. It shall not be poured on the body of an ordinary person. And you shall make no other like it in composition.

It is holy. And it shall be holy for you. Whoever compounds any like it or whoever puts any of it on an outsider shall be cut off from his people. Aaron and his sons were set apart for priestly ministry. This picture is of unique, fragrant, pleasant, desirable oil descending.

[17 : 45] And you see that back in 131. It's running down. 133. Running down on the beard of Aaron. On the beard of Aaron. Running down on the collar of his robes.

It is flowing down on him. The oil in abundance is poured on his head. The special anointing for special persons chosen by the Lord for this special set apart purposes for the service of the living God.

Stunning in its picture. Unparalleled in its beauty. Holy oil on a holy person who has on these holy garments. God's servant being set aside for God's purposes.

God's people getting along is God ordained in its sacredness and its unique specialness. That's what's being shown here.

It's like the anointing of the priest in its uniqueness, in its beauty, in its fragrance, in its sacredness. It flows down, down, down from the head on to the beard and on to the tops of his garments, of his sacred garments.

[18 : 55] Huh? Huh? This is not just a, I have a little bottle of oil that I often take with me to, uh, to pray for sick people. This is not a little tube of oil. No, this is sort of, this is an anointing that is poured and it's just coming down on him and flowing over his robes.

Huh? It pictures what is precious and valuable and God ordained and God giving. That's what, that's what unity amongst brothers is like.

And as we see here, what here benefits the priesthood, so unity befits those who are in the family of God. Huh? Ever been exposed to the sweetness of a perfume or some kind of fragrance or even the fragrance of unity?

Unity has a noticeable aroma to it. Huh? Have you ever been around somebody that just smells good? Huh?

You may not see them, but you know when they walk through. Because they have on this nice smelling kind of perfume or cologne and you say, well, what is that?

[20 : 08] There is this beauty and this aroma, this attractiveness. This, what is that? When you see unity functioning as it should amongst the people of God.

And it's inviting and say, oh boy, I want to, I want to get some of that on. Why did you get that? Has that kind of attractiveness. On the other hand, discord and division has a stench.

And you know when that's a part of people or relational dynamics too. And rather than being drawn to it, there is an unholiness to it that you want to put far from you.

I love the story that John Piper tells of his mother when his sister got married back in maybe the 60s. Greenville, South Carolina. You can just see how this might be going.

She invited some African-American friends to his sister's wedding. And the ushers would not seat this African-American person.

[21 : 23] So Mrs. Piper ends up seating her guests herself. She takes them down the center aisle and seats them.

Well, I mean, what a bold, in this context of racial discord, you have someone bold enough to, in a sense, dull the stench of racial disharmony.

It's like spraying an aerosol spray can in the midst of this stench. And again, she was bolder. You know what she did?

She bucked the system of her day to stand where Christ would stand. God's people getting along is God-ordained coming down in its sacredness and in its unique specialness.

Such specialness consecrates us in special ways for God's work in this world as it consecrated the priest for his duties.

[22 : 32] So this God-given unity, which comes ultimately from God, prepares us, consecrates us, sets us apart for God's special work in this world.

And it is absolutely essential for doing it in a way that makes God's name great in this world. Picture number one from the sacred realm.

Picture number two from the natural realm. Yahoo what? Mountain Dew. And that's what this text talks about.

Dew on the mountain. I love Mountain Dew. I don't drink it a lot because of it. But boy, I tell you, it's a great drink. It kicks you, doesn't it?

It refreshes. It invigorates, doesn't it? Well, unity among God's family is attractive. It's sacred.

[23 : 33] But it's also an invigorating thing. Unity amongst family members is God-ordained in its power to invigorate.

And I believe that's what we see here. He shifts from the sacred realm to the natural realm, from the realm of sacred priestly service to the wonderful realm of nature, from the uniqueness of the sanctuary to the uniqueness of natural order.

That's the flow. Located on the northern boundary of Israel, Mount Hermon was there. It stood between 9,000 and 10,000 feet above sea level.

And its melting snows that was the principal source of the Jordan River. It was also known for its heavy dewfall. And the effect of unity in the midst of God's people is here compared to dew on vegetation.

Mountain dew. Naturally refreshing and invigorating and energizing. It's cool. It's stimulating. And so the communion of God's people.

[24 : 42] When God's people guided along, it is not only pictured by an oil-saturated priest. It's appropriately illustrated by a dew-saturated mountain. Like dew that drenches the mountains.

And thereby, check this out, causing growth and causing fertility and causing renewal. So when God's people behave as family, good things happen among them.

Growth happens among them. They're refreshed. They're revitalized. It's stimulating. It's growing.

And it's renewing. These are the kinds of things that happen when family functions as family.

When we, as the people of God, are functioning in unity, those are the kinds of things that have happened.

It has a goodness and pleasantness that compares to dew-saturated mountains. And the opposite occurs when there's discard and the ugliness of disharmony.

[25 : 45] Not growth. Not thriving. And rather than growing in maturity or growing numerically, people don't want to be a part of something where there is discard and disharmony.

Oh, but they are attractive to when people are loving and sharing, when we are hand in hand and heart to heart in the work of God.

Then that has an attractiveness and a refreshment of its own. The picture in verse 3 is that of a refreshing dew on the highest point in Palestine. Landing on Zion, the place of God's favor.

For his blessing, his dwelling. Zion, another name for Jerusalem. It is there that the Lord has ordered. You see that there? For there the Lord commanded the blessing.

Ordered the blessing of life. It's on the place of God's favor. The place that the Lord has chosen for himself. As a matter of fact, look at Psalm 132 and verse 13.

[26 : 55] And we'll see there. And as we look at these last three songs of ascent, there seems to be a Zion connection.

We see it in 132. And we're going to read some of that. But you also see it in 134 and 3. May the Lord bless you from Zion.

Just as the Lord commanded the blessing of life on Zion, so he has commanded the blessing of life on those who dwell in unity. Look at verses 13 through 18.

For the Lord has chosen Zion. He has desired it. Notice this. For what? His dwelling place. This is my resting place forever.

Here I will dwell. I have desired it. I will abundantly bless her provision. This is what the blessing of the Lord in Zion looks like. I will satisfy her poor with bread.

[27 : 55] Her priest I will clothe with salvation. And her saints will shout for joy. There I will make a horn sprout for David. Huh? I have prepared a lamp for my anointed.

His enemies I will clothe with shame. But on him his crown will shine. David preached about David's passion. His desire for the fame of God's name.

And to have a place where God's name would be great. Huh? And this sort of continues that idea. And it shows the Lord's choice of Zion as a place where his blessing would rest.

Huh? Attractive. Sacred. Invigorating. But also when family members dwell in unity not only is an attractive thing and a sacred thing and an invigorating thing.

It is brothers and sisters a Christian thing. Life ultimately resides in the person of Christ. He ultimately is the source of eternal life.

[29 : 02] For there Zion speaks about the Lord has commanded the blessing life forevermore. But turn with me to Hebrews chapter 12. You'll find that on page 1009.

And you will see the bigger picture of what Zion typifies in our New Testament age. Look at verse 18.

First of all the reference there is to Mount Sinai. And the writer of Hebrews is making these comparisons between Old Testament order and New Testament reality and fulfillment.

For you have not come to what may be touched a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest. Indeed so terrifying was the sight that Moses said I tremble with fear.

And you could go back to Exodus 19, Exodus 20 where that scene occurred in Old Testament history. Mount Sinai. But look at verse 22. So you haven't come to Sinai but you have come to where?

[30 : 04] Mount Zion. You have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God. The heavenly Jerusalem. And to an innumerable angels and festal gathering and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven.

And to God the judge of all and to the spirits of righteous make perfect. And look at verse 24. You've come also to Jesus. The mediator of the new covenant and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

Again, this unity amongst God's family is a Christian thing because it is ultimately centered in the person of Christ and manifest in his church.

It's a Christian thing. If life is the portion of God's people as commanded by the Lord himself, there needs to be a disposition and actions that are consistent with the life that he has pronounced upon us in and through Christ.

It needs to be a lifestyle that's consistent with that. It needs to be a disposition. If God has pronounced life, what are the things, what is it that complements life? It's the unity of the people of God.

[31 : 14] It's like fresh cut flowers in a clean house that adorn a house. It's like perfume on a clean body. Disharmony amongst the people of God can be like body odor.

But harmony amongst God's people, it's this fragrance that's there. It's the unity, it's the adornment that we need as the family of God. It should cause the world to do a double take when they see that kind of unity in and amongst the people of God.

The place the Lord chooses to dwell, his church, his people, the spiritual Zion needs the beauty of unity among God's people.

It's a song that we have sung. We haven't sung it here yet. But it says we are related to each other. You and me. We're the body.

Jesus Christ, the son. We are joined by the covenant. We walk in unity. We're family. And we are family forever.

[32 : 21] Life forevermore. We're family eternally as one. Where life resides, it is essential that unity abides there.

Unity is to adorn the house, the place, the people where the Lord dwells. The life blessing, life-giving blessing of God from above needs to be complemented by the unity of God's people. It's fitting that the dwelling place of the Almighty would have the pleasantness and the beauty of the unity of God's people. So you have an all-saturated priest.

You have a due-saturated place. And you have a life-saturated people. The church is comprised of the priests of the believers, each set aside, listen to this, for sacred service.

Each anointed with the Holy Spirit who facilitates unity in the body of Christ. Ephesians speaks of that. Eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. We are a due-saturated place.

[33 : 30] The church is the place of nurture and growth and care. Ephesians speaks about that. Until we all attain to the unity of faith, knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

We are a life-saturated people. The church is where life-saturated people having received life from God through Christ. The life-giver.

So what, you say, Pastor? Well, because unity amongst family members is attractive, sacred, invigorating, and Christian, we must subscribe, first of all, to what has been termed our missional oneness.

Like David, our goal as the people of God must be, and our goal, we must be on the same page with this, is to make not a great name for ourselves.

Not a great name for ourselves because we have three congregations and on our way to have four. Not a great name for ourselves because we have a wonderful music program.

[34 : 41] Not a name for ourselves, but we must be on the same page and seeking to make the name of God great through his Son in the neighborhoods and in the nations.

Our unity must be on the same page with our people. our unity must be a oneness in our mission to make the Lord's name great. We're the body of Christ.

We are many, yet we are one. And the reality of that oneness must characterize us. Our mission in this world needs our oneness, our unity, our functioning as brothers and sisters.

But not only that, we must labor to live out the reality of our oneness in Christ in a very polarized world. And in getting more polarized as we march forward in this particular year, the polarization that exists in the world must not exist among the people of God.

Our witness in a world polarized by race, economics, and politics needs the credible witness of those who name the name of Christ. This doesn't mean that we will be uniform.

[35 : 53] At all. But it does mean that we will be unified in Christ. Christ and loving and grace endowed and decked out for the glory and honor of God.

Our life together must be as deep as it is wide. We must share our lives with each other regularly and meaningfully.

Our community group structure can facilitate that. It allows for this. And our prayer is that everyone would be involved in a community group at Holy Trinity Church.

Because our ideal is so when you relate with a portion of the congregation, in fact, you will relate to the whole. We want community groups that eventually will look like the whole of our church.

And so you may not be able to relate to the whole loaf. But in relating to a slice, you will relate to the whole. Because the slice will be a picture of the whole loaf.

[36 : 55] Well, you're talking about older folks, not maybe the senior citizen in here this evening, or young folks, or black people, or Latinos, or Asians.

Again, we want to be able to relate to all. And from Democratic or Republican backgrounds, etc. They'll be in the groups.

And we'll live and love one another in the groups. And in the church. And there will be an attractiveness when people say, Boy, they've got all of that diversity. But my, my, my, my, they sure have unity.

See, our life together must be as deep as it is wide. So it's not just enough to gather together various people and various races and backgrounds and all of these things on a Sunday afternoon. That's the easy thing to do. It's what you do when crisis strike. And who's sitting around your table? Who's eating? I mean, who's, I mean, who has refrigerator rights at your home?

[38 : 01] Huh? I mean, that tells a different kind of tale. Refrigerator rights, that means you can come to my house and just go to the refrigerator. Huh?

Unity. It's attractive. It's sacred. It's invigorating. And guess what? It's Christian.

It's who we're supposed to be. Let us pray. Lord, we love you. And we bless you. We praise you. Make us one. Help us to live out the reality of who we are in you. One loaf. One cup.

One Lord. One faith. One. One baptism. One baptism. We love you, Lord Jesus. Thank you for this beautiful song.

[39 : 05] That attracts us. To. Go. In a more. Zesty kind of way. Toward. Being unified as the people of God.

We bless you for it. Won't you stand? We're going to sing together. Blessed be the time that binds our hearts in Christian love.

God. Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

[41 : 00] Thank you. Thank you.
Thank you. Thank you.
Thank you. Thank you. You may be seated.