

Oh, How Good it is

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[0 : 00] Good morning. Please turn your Bibles back to Psalm 133. Can you hear me? Yep, good.

Psalm 133, it's page 619. Well, December has passed.

And in December, there's usually an increased amount of family gatherings, isn't there? I wonder how you would describe your family gatherings.

Because in my experience, peace or shalom is usually not the word that most people use to describe their big family gatherings.

Either there's a grandpa who is grumpy at anyone or anything. That's probably going to be me. Or an auntie whose comments hurt everyone's feelings.

[1 : 04] Or an awkward cousin who can't connect to anyone. Or a spoiled child who likes to scream and take and destroy. That used to be me. Or there's someone coming late and stressed out.

Or there are broken plates, burnt food, spilled wine. So when we read this passage here in verse 1, How good and pleasant it is when God's people, literally it says brothers or family, live together in unity.

Some of us might wonder whether that is true or possible. And some others among us who are of Asian backgrounds, for example, who are used to living together with a bigger family, They know that it's not possible.

When my bigger family gets together, even just for a few hours, Pleasantness is usually a few hours of family drama, gossips, emotional baggage, unresolved conflicts, resentment poured into one.

Pleasantness is usually not a characteristic of a family living together, especially a big family. And David is talking about God's people as a family living together.

[2 : 26] Yes, there can be something nice about it. It's got its moments. But it's usually also draining. And yet, the opposite is also true.

When a family is broken apart, it can be unpleasant. There's loneliness. Both are true. Living together with a big family can be unpleasant.

But living apart can be unpleasant. So what is this psalm talking about? How good and pleasant it is when God's family living together.

Well, although we will see later that what this psalm describes is a peculiar reality for Christians, it is, first of all, in this context, an ideal.

An ideal scene. Let's read it again. How good and pleasant it is when God's people or family live together in unity.

[3 : 29] That last word there, in unity, has the connotation of togetherness. No one gets left behind. And so it's good and pleasant when God's people as a family live together, not in conflict, not with everyone fighting for their own rights, but in unity.

It is an ideal scene where everyone loves everyone, serves everyone, agrees with everyone, sacrifices for everyone's needs.

Unity. And indeed, if we imagine an ideal scene like that, we would agree that, yeah, it does sound good and pleasant.

There is a sense of shalom, peace. You see, in Eastern culture, peace is usually more about harmonious relationships, isn't it?

Within the family and among neighbors. In Western culture, in Western modern culture, on the other hand, shalom or peace is more usually seen as an internal thing, especially these days, internal peace, internal quietness.

[4 : 46] Well, the Bible uses the word shalom to encompass both of these dimensions. And here as well, in this psalm, even though the word shalom is not used, but the concept is there.

It's good and pleasant, which is a subjective internal feeling, experience, experience, when a family, which the people of God are, live together in unity, which is social.

There is a sense of peace and shalom, both internally and externally, in that ideal picture. So, how good and pleasant is it when God's people live together in unity?

Well, David gives us two imageries, images, in verse 2 and 3. It is like precious oil poured on the head, running down on the beard, running down on Aaron's beard, down on the collar of his robe. It is as if the dew of Hermon were falling on Mount Zion, for there the Lord bestows his blessing, even life forevermore.

[6 : 02] Now, we're going to look at these two images together first, and then later we're going to look at them separately. Together, these two images form a pattern of downward motion.

You can see in verse 2, the word down is used twice, down on the beard, running down on Aaron's beard.

And then in verse 3, the dew falls on Mount Zion. But the original word there is the same, the same word, down. And so, there are three downward motions, highlighting that unity is a blessing that comes down from above.

From God. And indeed, everyone in Israel would have known that both Aaron's anointing as a priest and dew came from above, from God.

And so, unity is a blessing that comes down from God. And how does God give unity? Well, there's a nice picture here, if we remember that this is a song of ascent.

[7 : 16] The Israelites sang this song as they were walking up the Temple Mount to go together as God's people to the Temple, on top of the hill, on top of Mount Zion.

And as they were singing this song, they got reminded that true unity could not come from themselves from below as they were walking up, but only from God from above.

And thus, meeting them as they were walking up, and God gives the unity from above, meeting them in the middle, on Mount Zion, in verse 3, through the anointed priesthood, in verse 2.

True unity, therefore, is not achieved through political or social means or anything that comes from below. True unity is achieved through worship in the Temple, by worshipping the same God.

And so, together, these two images form a very nice pattern that reminds the Israelites that true unity is given from above, given by God as His people worship Him together.

[8 : 41] And then, separately, the first image tells us that unity is a priestly blessing. David says that the beauty of unity is like oil flowing down Aaron's beard, down to his priestly robe.

What does that look like? We don't know. And I'm pretty sure David did not know either, because he wasn't there when Aaron was consecrated. Now, this image should remind you of Leviticus 8, which we studied last year, in which Aaron is consecrated as the high priest of God's people.

So, this image highlights priestly goodness, meaning, meaning, when God's people live in harmony and unity, it enables them to be God's priests to the world.

Instead of quarreling with each other internally, they can be united and go out and spread the good news of their God and invite others to worship Him.

And the watching world might be enticed to come and worship their God because they see unity in God's people. They see people who actually love each other.

[9 : 55] So, again, here, it's not just political or relational unity. It's unity achieved by worship and unity for the sake of worship.

In fact, in the New Testament, Jesus says, as Annette quoted, everyone will know that you are my disciples if you love one another.

Or Jesus' prayer in John 17 echoes this picture. Jesus prays for the disciples. My prayer is not for them, the disciples alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message.

That all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

I've given them the glory that you gave me that they may be one, united as we are one, I in them and you in me so that they may be brought to complete unity.

[11 : 02] Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. Unity of God's people enables us not only to tell the world about the good news of Jesus, but it enables us to show them what the gospel looks like when it works in the community.

It works. I think I've told you earlier last year about a friend of mine who got baptized last year.

She first came to my previous church as an atheist a few years ago, but she stayed in the community week in, week out. Joined us every Sunday, joined every Bible study, joined us in singing worship songs, and for years, she wasn't ready to become a Christian until last year. But during those years, I got curious and I asked her why she kept coming back to church if she wasn't ready to become a Christian. And she said, I just like the community. I like seeing how people in the church serve each other without being asked and befriend everyone. I don't believe in Jesus yet, but this church community makes me want to believe. [12:31] And last year, she finally decided she did. Unity of God's people is a priestly blessing. The second image provides a similar idea.

The beauty of unity is like the dew of Hermon, which is the highest mountain in Israel, going down to Mount Zion, which is where the temple is, and thus watering the place where they worshipped, making the land fertile.

Unity blesses the land, especially the land where God's people worship. And that is because, in the last two lines, where the people gather, there is where God gives His blessings, even everlasting life.

The idea here is similar. Through being united, God's people can bless the land where they live, thus spreading that priestly blessing, inviting people to come and worship God.

Perhaps it's possible to bless this land of Australia if the people of God, the various churches in this country, unite in the gospel under Christ in worship, rather than competing with each other.

[14:00] So, it is good and pleasant when God's people unite in worship, so that they can bring God's blessings both to themselves and to the land where they are, bringing everyone around them to join in worship of God.

But, of course, as I've said before, this is an ideal picture, isn't it? The irony is that this is a son of David.

And we know that David's rule was far from peaceful or united. There were sibling rivalries. There were civil wars.

And that reminds us that true unity and peace are not achievable in this world through political or social means, even though they are good things.

But true unity is not achievable by them. History has shown us that. There are always wars, conflicts.

[15:10] Even at home, there's no real peace, isn't there? Inside, psychologically, there's no real everlasting peace. So, the picture in this son of unity coming down from above is fitting.

It can only be given by God and indeed He did give it to us. No, He gave Him to us when His Son came down from heaven to us.

He is the Prince of Peace, the Lord of Shalom, the one whom the prophets were waiting, the one whose reign is characterized by the complete elimination of wars.

Just as Isaiah 9 says, every warrior's boot used in battle and every garment rolled in blood will be destined for burning.

There will be no more need for them. There will be no more wars and will be fuel for the fire. For to us, a child is born, to us, a son is given, and we know the rest.

[16:19] It's a messianic prophecy that Jesus fulfilled. And under Jesus' reign, relational peace is restored as well. As Isaiah 11 says, when the Messiah comes, the wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together, and the little child will lead them.

I'm imagining a scene, a very peaceful scene where there's no conflicts that even my son, two-year-old son Kai, can actually lead a country.

Jesus truly is the Prince of Peace. People had expected for him to come with military might to establish his rule of peace by force, as the other emperors did, and yet he came to die instead, absorbing all those conflicts and injustices and violence into himself and then left them in the grave when he was resurrected.

Unity and peace have indeed come down to us from above, like oil down Aaron's beard and the Jew of Hermon down Mount Zion.

Unity and peace have been given in Jesus. And yet, in the New Testament, true unity is presented as both a done, finished, achieved victory that we can claim when Jesus returns, and also something that we need to work towards.

[18 : 08] In our New Testament reading, for example, in Ephesians 4, the church is presented as both Jesus' united body, and also we need to, as verse 3 says, make every effort to keep unity.

It's achieved, and yet it's something to work towards. and so our perspective when we read this psalm is different to David's.

Even though it's still an ideal that we're striving towards, we know that it is possible. It's no longer abstract. It is possible. It has been achieved by Jesus.

We know that we will reach it because it will be given to us in Jesus when Jesus comes back. it's no longer an abstract idea.

It's already achieved, and occasionally we can see that realized in church when people sacrifice for each other, serve each other, and love each other, just as my friend saw in my previous church and what I see here in this church.

[19 : 27] But it's also something that we constantly have to work for as a part of our worship to God and as a part of our priestly duty in witnessing to the world.

As Jesus says, we pray for unity so that people might know the love of Jesus and the love of the Father in us so that we don't just talk abstractly, hey, God loves you.

Show them! So how do we strive to keep unity and peace in this life while waiting for Jesus to return and establish true unity and peace?

Perhaps two points of application. And like Andrew said, this is the hard part. First, we can keep unity and peace by realizing that we have the same head, just as unity and peace are achieved through worship.

So we keep unity and peace by realizing that we have the same head. We belong to the same body as Ephesians 4 says. We all belong to the same body of Christ.

[20 : 47] By realizing that we have Jesus as our mutual head, we gain a greater perspective than just what we see physically. when we just see people physically, we might think, this person is different to me.

It's really hard to connect to them. I don't want to talk to him. It's really easy, isn't it? Even if we see someone who looks very different to us, speaks a different language, eats different food, does church in a different way, acts in a different way.

But if we have that greater perspective and if they believe in Jesus and we believe in Jesus, we are of the same family. So how do we keep unity and peace?

We need to constantly remind ourselves to see beyond the material when we realize that those people and we have the same head.

We both love Jesus. Jesus saved us both, even though we are different, we do things differently, we ought to love one another.

[22 : 02] And this is the case especially when we get annoyed by the different things that people of other cultures do. We need to remind ourselves we belong to the same body.

That's hard for me too. And by reminding ourselves that unity exists in Jesus, we can also fight the temptation to pursue unity at the expense of truth.

Because unity is achieved not through superficial means, but in Jesus, through the truth of the gospel. Second, we can keep unity and peace through submitting to one another.

as our New Testament reading says, be completely humble and gentle. In Philippians 2, Paul also tells us to value others above ourselves.

That's extremely hard for me as well to do. But I believe it is one of the keys to peace and unity. being ready to lower ourselves and say, I might be wrong.

[23 : 25] And even be ready to apologize. Perhaps we can take the time now to remember the conflicts. If we have some unresolved conflicts, we can plan to initiate reconciliation.

reconciliation. Just as Jesus, who is the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords, he came to lower himself to death on that shameful cross for us so that we might have peace, in Jesus we can do the same. Let's serve each other by lowering ourselves and regarding each other as better than ourselves. that goes to me too.

Lord, help me. It's really hard. So, it is good and pleasant when God's people unite in worship.

Because it allows us to bring God's blessings to others around us and share to them the eternal life that we have in Christ.

we ought to strive for unity now. And at the same time, we look forward to completion, to the completion of that reality.

[24 : 49] When Jesus comes down again the second time, as Revelation 7 says, there's a great multitude that no one could count from every nation, tribe, people, and language together in unity, standing before the throne and before the Lamb.

They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands, and they cried out in a loud voice, salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb.

What a great image. And we're looking forward to that time. Let's pray. Amen. Father, we thank you for giving us the Prince of Peace, the Lord of Shalom, in whom we can have unity and peace.

But we pray through your Holy Spirit, work in us, enable us to strive for unity in the church, among each other, so that other people around us might see that you love us and that you love them just as we love each other.

Help us to help us.