

The Blessing of Unity

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[0 : 00] I believe that before this series on the sounds of ascent began, I had the record, maybe I'm the only one who was keeping track, but I had the record for the shortest sermon ever given in Kingdom Life Church.

That might be correct, I don't know, it might not be, but I believe that whoever had the record before today, it's in serious jeopardy today.

I've already had a request for a 10-minute sermon, so if you were praying hard, that might happen. So today we're in Psalm 133.

And there are just three verses in this psalm. But as we've seen with similar passages, although this is a very short text, it is filled with profound truth.

So while this turns out to be a short message, or a not-so-short message, that's why I'll pay very careful attention because there is rich truth in this for us, and it has special significance to church life.

[1 : 10] So let's begin by taking in Psalm 133. Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity.

Let's pray.

Father, we look to you this morning. And we pray that the words that are spoken will be your words.

And we pray that the message that is given will be your message. Lord, we pray that you will open up our eyes to see the blessing of unity.

and may we live in a way that's pleasing to you. And may blessings fall. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

[2 : 31] It was a chaotic scene when the police were called to St. Michael Baptist Church in New Orleans. This was in 2012. What they should have seen was a congregation that was joining their hearts together in song and in prayer.

But instead what the police saw was a mill of confusion. When the police arrived at the church they made a fight going on in the pulpit. And there was yelling in the sanctuary.

And the whole time the organist just kept on playing despite all the confusion going on about. Then the media showed up and they interviewed some church members.

The church members told them that the dispute began over questions about the church's finances. He said, this is church.

One member referred to the pastor. He said, he built this. Him and his family. And there ain't nobody gonna question him about what he do.

[3 : 46] Reporter Gina Swanson covered the story and she put it this way. She said, this house of worship has become a house divided.

That reporter for WDSU News was exactly right. The scene that unfolded at St. Michael Baptist Church is exactly the opposite of the text that we have come to this morning.

That unfortunate scene in New Orleans is clearly evidence of a house divided. But in contrast Psalm 133 shows us that unity brings blessings to the body of Christ and glory to God.

So I want us to look at the blessing of unity on the two main points. One is the good and the pleasant blessing. That's the good and pleasant blessing.

And two the source of the blessing. So we first see the good and pleasant blessing in verse one. David begins this Psalm with an exclamation.

[5 : 09] He says Behold! So he's making an exclamation. He's drawing our attention and saying this is something that's worthy of an attention grabbing introduction.

And then he goes right to the point. He says that it's both good and pleasant when brothers dwell in unity. J. Stephen Yule in his book Longing for Home points out that good and pleasant are not necessarily the same.

Something can be pleasant but it's not necessarily good. and the same is true for the reverse. Something can be good but not necessarily pleasant.

And one of my sisters taught me this. I have many sisters. I'm going to talk with one of them now but I'm not going to call the name. I'm not going to tell you who it is. But one of my five sisters taught me this when we were very young because my mother had this thing that she would do.

she would deworm us. And to do that she would always have some concoction. You know it might be cord liver oil or something else that we call bitters. And she would line us up and feed this to us.

[6 : 28] Well this particular sister it was always funny to me because my mother had to literally run her down and feed her the cord liver oil.

And sometimes my mother would actually forget to do it. And I found this to be so entertaining that I would sometimes remind her that you know you have to deworm us. But my sister taught me that although that thing was good for her it wasn't pleasant to receive.

But this blessing of unity is special because it is both good and pleasant. sometimes something is pleasant but not good as we said.

But in this particular instance we're talking about unity and without unity there's strife. So when there's strife and disharmony even if you are the person who is getting your own way you might feel like you're getting something good but that can't be pleasant.

so we can see that unity is a true blessing. And the picture that David paints is not just a picture of people who are physically together.

[7 : 53] That's not the type of unity that he's talking about. They're not just together because they're standing in the same congregation. Instead David speaks about the brothers dwelling together.

it's not just one moment in time. It is how they live. You see this picture of their lives being knit together. And one of the beautiful things about kingdom life in particular is how interested our members are in each other's lives.

members. And you see how much members enjoy the company of other members. I'm going to get myself in trouble now but Sunday after Sunday it's a wonder to see how it often takes us a while some of us men to separate our wives because they enjoy the company of each other.

And through the week they're talking on the phone with each other and they're having meals together and they're praying for each other. And likewise with the men. They are talking about personal issues and sharing business matters and getting advice from each other and praying for each other.

And even this past week we saw so many examples of how the lives of members are knit together. We saw people in our group chats just freely sharing what's going on with their lives and requesting prayers for various situations.

- [9 : 35] And due to their relationships with the community they feel comfortable doing that. And they rightfully expect that people are going to respond and their requests for prayers are going to be answered.
- So people were actually praying and that only comes about when there is unity, when there is living together, dwelling together in unity.
- So I'm grateful for kingdom life in that aspect. And this was a wonder to David because he had seen his fellow countrymen go through a bloody civil war.
- When he was king of Judah, he was at war with Ishbal, Saul's son after Saul's death. So the kingdom was divided and David literally had to kill his brothers.
- Christians. And I want you to get a true appreciation for what David must have been thinking at this time because in his time, it wasn't like today with modern technology where we could have what I call long-range warfare.
- [10 : 53] You know, today people could sit in one city and just press a button and a missile is released and it will fly hundreds of miles or even thousands of miles.
- And when it strikes its destination, people die. But the person who pushed the button never saw the carnage. They don't have to walk among that. They don't have to see the lives that are broken and the lives that are taken away.
- That wasn't true for David. In his time, warfare was up close. It was personal. You literally had to stand next to someone, maybe inches away, and drive a sword, drive a spear, drive a dagger through them.
- You have to look into someone's eyes and see them die. And this is what David endured. David was at war with his brothers. He looked into his brothers' eyes and saw them die during the Civil War.
- So he knew very well what it was like to war with his brothers. And he knew very well how much of a blessing it was to live at peace with them.
- [12 : 04] So David, let us know what this unity is like. He says in verse 2, it is like precious oil running down on the beard.
- But then he emphasizes it is the beard of Aaron. And that gives us a better understanding of how precious this oil is.
- because that is a reference that we see in Exodus chapter 30, beginning in verse 22, where God commands Moses to anoint Aaron and his sons as priests.
- And he gives special instructions on how the oil for their anointing was to be prepared. And the passage describes a rich mixture of fine oil and aromatic spices.
- It was soothing and it was sweet. And the scripture says it was to be a most holy mixture, a precious oil that was only to be used on God's priests and their instruments.
- [13 : 15] And that is the richness of the oil that David is speaking of, this most holy oil. And in the third verse he says it is like the dew of Hermon that falls on the mountains of Zion.
- Now several commentaries have identified that Hermon was known for being very moist due to the dew that fell and other precipitation. And because of that the land was rich in trees and plants.
- So what David is saying is that unity is to be productive. It is a blessing that springs life. So God intends for our fellowship to be fruitful and not barren.
- It is our unity that accomplishes that. But these same two verses, verses two and three, not only show us the good and pleasant blessing, but at the same time they show us the source of the blessing.

That's considered the symbolism of the oil flowing down the bed of Aaron. David not only wants to speak to how pleasant and how good the oil is, but he wants to use the person, the person and the mission of Aaron to symbolize the people of God.

[14 : 51] That's why he specifically picks the beard of Aaron. This is God's priest. This is the person who is being used to minister to others.

So Aaron is used to symbolize God's people. And so he symbolizes today the church. And since the oil is running down, it's clearly coming from above.

We see the same thing in verse three. The dew that is falling on Hermon is falling from above. It begins above and it falls down on the mountains of Zion and Jerusalem.

And so if we're still missing that point, David gets to the end of verse three and he just plainly says, for there the Lord has commanded the blessing.

Life forever more. So the Lord himself commands this blessing. The Lord himself commands us to unity.

[16 : 01] So when we are not dwelling in unity, then we are living in disobedience to God. Unity is not only for our good, but it's also to glorify God.

Because the world sees him through us. And as a church body, we're supposed to reflect God's glory to the world.

So what is the world seeing when they look at us? Are they seeing this precious oil running down the bed of Aaron and onto his robes? And are they seeing the dew of Hermon falling and rich trees and plants springing from that?

Are they seeing the fruit of Hermon? And we do some very good things as a church body when it comes to unity and glorifying God.

I've already mentioned some of them as regards to Kingdom Life Church. But there are some things that we do that do not reflect unity and they do not reflect the glory of God.

[17 : 16] And I'm not just singling out Kingdom Life here. I'm speaking about many local churches. I'm speaking about the church in general. It's easy for us to look at St.

Michael Church and point the finger and we could turn our nose up and say, look at those people. They're disgrace. It's dishonoring God's name.

But that's an easy example of disunity. It's like ancient Israel and Judah when they were in civil war.

It's easy for us to know there was war because it was open warfare. It's like looking at David on one side and Ishmael on the other and they come together and they clash we can easily see the strife.

But sometimes in churches we have cold wars going on. It's not open warfare but it's warfare nonetheless. We could see disunity in some of the things that people say.

[18 : 24] They may mutter it under their breath or they may disguise it slightly by sanitizing the words they use. or maybe their actions are just divisive.

But these cold wars are usually rooted in things like jealousy or envy or pride. Have you ever heard this?

Why do you ask her to read the scripture? I can read better than her. You don't want to just remember again? You heard a solo?

Man, they may as well ask me to sing that. Man, this message is so boring. Why don't they ever bring no fire in the pulpit? I mean, some of you might be saying that now.

I don't know. But the point is we form these little cliques around these issues and their clear divisions that are formed.

[19 : 36] This group over here who wants this thing and another group over there who wants another. But let's be very careful because usually in these comments we see the condition of our hearts that's buried underneath.

are we so much concerned for the glory of God? Let me make these comments. Are we concerned for our own glory?

Is it that we want to be seen doing something and doing something well? Do we want to be praised? And if we think about those questions, shouldn't we also ask ourselves, who deserves praise?

Is it me? Or doesn't all glory and all praise belong to God? That kind of thinking is worldly thinking.

It's not fit for the body of Christ. And that's why I'm going to refer to Romans 12. We've been Romans quite a bit recently, especially in verses to remember.

[20 : 57] So it's quite familiar to you. Sean Bue is led by the Spirit this morning to actually pray Romans 1 and 2. But this is what Paul says, Romans 12, beginning in verse 2.

do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

for by the grace given to me, I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.

For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members, one of another.

So the scripture points us to examine ourselves. We ought to examine ourselves. Do we have pride and envy in our hearts? We have to put away pride, because Paul makes the point throughout this book of Romans, over and over again, that we have, we absolutely nothing to boast about.

[22 : 32] He says that even saving faith is not from us, but our saving faith comes from God himself. It is God who is doing the work in us.

So what is there to be proud about? What is there to boast What is there to boast about? Why do we think of ourselves more highly than we ought? do we think we should be in charge of this or in charge of something else?

Is it pride? Do we have an inordinate desire to do something in church that we think we're just not being allowed to do?

Then we ought to consider it and even speak to other brothers and sisters about it. And we ought to pray about it. Because we want to be very sure that this is a desire that's coming from God.

And it's going to be used to build up his church. we should not want to do it for our own glory.

[23 : 48] If that's our motivation then no good will come from it and God will not be glorified. And we run the risk of actually dishonoring the name of God.

listen to what James says in James 3 beginning in verse 14. Actually James here the context is really about wisdom from above but I want you to see it in the context we're speaking about.

See it in the context of unity and how we must apply wisdom to how we live with one another. This is what James says in chapter 3 of his epistle.

But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts do not boast and be false to the truth. This is not wisdom that comes down from above but is earthly unspiritual demonic.

For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist there will be disorder and every vile practice but the wisdom from above is first pure then peaceable gentle open to reason full of mercy and good fruits impartial and sincere and a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

[25 : 21] peace. We have to soak in these words because in a very real way we are on a pilgrimage.

This whole series is on the psalm of the ascents the psalms that the people of God sang as they made their way up to Jerusalem during three festivals of the year.

So they were pilgrims on their way and we like them in many ways. Like the pilgrims who sang these Psalms of Ascent we are moving together through life on a journey together and we are linked in that journey.

We are knitted together in this local church. And just as they walk together up to Jerusalem we are literally marching to Zion we are marching to our spiritual Zion the heavenly city and we ought to move together through life peaceably and in fruitful service to the Lord.

So let's not live in disunity whether it's a cold quiet disunity or whether it's open bloody civil war.

[26 : 45] Instead we must find true unity in Christ because true unity is coming together for the gospel of Christ. It's agreeing in Christ and working together for his kingdom.

Christ is our common cause and he is our common calling. it's Christ in him we find the blessing life forevermore.

That's life in unity and oneness of heart. So let's dwell in unity. It's for our blessing and it's also to show the world the glory of God.

God, may all glory and honor be to the name of our God forever. Let's pray.

God and Father, we pray that you would cause us to search our hearts, that we would search out jealousy, that we would search out envy, that we would search out pride.

[28 : 00] Lord, we pray that you would cause us to seek to live lives that are peaceful one in each other. We pray that you would cause us to value the unity of the body of Christ, that you would cause us to think of ourselves as we ought, not more highly than we ought, but to put service to you first, and to remember that we are saved only through Christ, through faith in Christ alone, due to the work he's done for us on the cross, that we've done nothing in of ourselves.

help us to think of each other, so that we may live with each other in unity. We especially pray for those who have had loved ones taken away from them through illness.

We pray for those who are still ill. We pray for those who have asked for prayers for new jobs that they're starting. We pray for those who have asked for prayers to just be steadfast.

We pray Lord that you would indeed lead our lives together and the world will look on us and see your glory and you will be praised for it.

In Christ's name we pray. Amen. Amen.