

A Call to Worship

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[0 : 00] But it would not surprise me this morning if there are some of us who came this morning, but who came this morning, but who came this morning.

But most, if not all of us, have found ourselves at the point, one time or another in our lives, where the time for God's people came to gather.

And we had no desire to gather. We were not enthusiastic to do so for one reason or another. And that's not been your experience yet.

I know one thing about you. You have not served the Lord for a long time. And I would say, serve the Lord long enough. And you would find that at times you come to seasons in life when your expression is not what we saw earlier some weeks ago in the Psalms of Ascent when the psalmist says, I was glad when they said, let us go to the house of the Lord.

The reality is that we do find ourselves in that place at times. And when we do, I want to say to us that Psalm 134 has something to say to us.

[1 : 41] Psalm 134 has a message that we need to hear and heed when we find ourselves not desiring. Ask God's people to gather with God's people when the time for gathering comes.

And so this morning we are continuing our sermon series in the Psalms of Ascent. We are actually concluding the series with Psalm 134.

And if you are part of any of the sermons in this series, you would have heard that these Psalms of Ascent, 15 of them, from Psalm 120 to Psalm 134, these are the Psalms that the children of Israel would sing as they made their annual pilgrimages to Jerusalem to worship the Lord.

And as we study these Psalms, we're able to see some of the big themes that occupy their hearts as they made that journey. How they thought about God. How they thought about life.

How they thought about themselves. We get the benefit from that. We got the benefit from that as we worked our way through these Psalms.

[2 : 57] And this one, Psalm 134, has something to say to us as well. So if you have not yet done so, please do turn in your Bible to Psalm 134.

And please follow along as I read. Would you pray with me?

Heavenly Father, we bow in this moment, asking that you would speak to our hearts through the preaching of your word.

Lord, this is your word. And we are your people. Speak as only you can. And Lord, though we are here together, may you cause us to care in our particular circumstances.

I pray, Lord, that you would help me to be faithful. I desire, Lord, to serve these who are gathered today. And so would you grant me your spirit in a special way.

[4 : 27] Grant me the grace that is necessary to be your servant this morning. And Lord, would you enable all of us to hear as we should and respond as we are.

We pray and ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, 15 weeks ago, we started this sermon series. We started in Psalm 120.

And in Psalm 120, we found the psalmist crying out to the Lord, lamenting that he lived among people who were sinful. He lamented that they were those who told lies with their lips and practiced deceit with their tongues.

He lamented that they were for war when he was for peace. And what we saw in the psalm was the psalmist was longing for home.

He was longing to be with people with whom he shared a like and precious faith. And they were making that journey to that place where they'd all be together in worship of the true and the living God.

[5 : 40] And as we worked our way through the other psalms of ascents, we saw words of affirmation, of trust in the Lord as the helper of his people.

We saw words of anticipation and expectation of being in Jerusalem and worshipping the Lord. We also saw in the psalms of ascents, expressions of utter dependency upon the Lord and reflections on how he had delivered his people in the past from captivity and from calamity.

We also saw wisdom psalms. We saw in psalms 127 and 128 the importance of the Lord being the builder of whatever we are endeavoring to do.

We saw the wisdom of rest, the need for it, and the priority of children and family. We also saw in the psalms of ascents, in Psalm 130 in particular, how we can be so aware of our sin, weighed down by our sin, but also aware of God's forgiveness and his promise of full redemption.

But as we prepare to look at Psalm 134 this morning, I think the two psalms in particular that we need to reflect upon a little bit are Psalms 132 and 133.

[7 : 06] And they should be recent in our memories because we recently heard sermons on them. In Psalm 132, you'd be reminded how Brother Linden pointed us to two big themes that jumped out from Psalm 132 that focuses on Mount Zion, the place where God had called the pilgrims to gather and to worship.

How God was demonstrating his preeminence, that he is worthy to be worshipped, and also demonstrating his providence because he had fulfilled this long promise that he had given to David. And despite all of David's failures and the failures of the children of Israel, God fulfilled this promise and he created that place, Mount Zion, where they would come and they would worship him.

And then we heard Brother Clarence share from Psalm 133, reminding us of the pleasantness and the blessedness of God's people gathered together in unity.

And one of the things I think you should see is as this progression is taking place through the Psalms of Ascent, these last three, 132, 133, and now 134, they bring us within the vicinity of Jerusalem.

[8 : 27] 132, they're reflecting on Mount Zion, they're reflecting on God's promises that he would build a place for his name. And then 133, they're rejoicing in the beauty and the pleasantness of brothers dwelling together in unity.

And now we come to Psalm 134, which is the apex of the Psalms of Ascent. And what we see in Psalm 134 is a call to worship. It is a call to the pilgrims to do now what they have come to Jerusalem to do, worship God.

And the message of Psalm 134 is simply this, God's people are called to bless the Lord who blesses them. God's people are called to bless the Lord who blesses them.

That is the simple message of Psalm 134. And as we consider the Psalm this morning, I have two brief and simple points.

And they are about what is supposed to happen when God's people gather in worship. And the first point is this, we bless the Lord.

[9 : 52] That's what's supposed to happen when we gather in worship. Look again at verses 1 and 2. Come, bless the Lord, all you servants of the Lord, who stand by night in the house of the Lord.

Lift up your hands to the holy place and bless the Lord. So here the pilgrims would have made their journeys from wherever they lived.

And for some of them, it would have been months long. And they have come to Jerusalem. They have left behind whatever personal situations they were dealing with.

Some of them brought those situations with them. And now the call goes out to them, come, bless the Lord. Now to appreciate this invitation that we are considering this morning, and not only is it an invitation, it's also a command.

But I think a little background would help us to appreciate what the psalmist who wrote this psalm was thinking about.

[11 : 01] And remember that these psalms were written generally, and then they somehow were selected and found their way in the songbook of the pilgrims that they would use as they made their journey to Jerusalem.

In 1 Chronicles, this is some background to help us understand this psalm. In 1 Chronicles chapter 9, we have the genealogy of the exiles who came from Babylon, and they returned back to the land. And in verses 33 and 34, 1 Chronicles 9, 33 and 34, we read these words about the singers, those who were identified as the singers.

Now these, the singers, the heads of fathers' houses of the Levites, were in the chambers of the temple free from other service, for they were on duty day and night.

These were heads of fathers' houses of the Levites. According to their generation's leaders, these lived in Jerusalem.

[12:18] So these singers were from the, among the Levites, and their singular duty was to serve in the temple day and night. They were freed from all of the obligations that they might give themselves to this particular task.

And what was interesting about them was, they had to live in Jerusalem. Others could choose where they wanted to live, but these ones had to live in Jerusalem. And the way that the worship was offered, they obviously didn't all show up at the same time to try to worship 24-7, 365 days a year.

It was organized in a rotation. They had shifts, and there were shifts around the clock. They would have to show up for their shift, and their job was to bless the Lord.

Their job was to praise their God. Now, I think all of us who know something about shifts generally know there's something called the graveyard shift.

That's the shift that some people like it for reasons we all know. But there are some people who just don't really like the graveyard shift. And the graveyard shift is that night shift when things are quiet, there's no hustle and bustling because people are sleeping.

[13:42] And sometimes there's the tendency when you're on that graveyard shift, that night shift, to just slack off and take a nap. I heard a story about a place, a business that was broken into.

And while it was broken into, the security was there, and he slept through the whole thing. And so we know how night shifts can actually go.

And although we cannot be sure, it seems that Psalm 133 was written for that specific reason, written to those whose job it was, whenever it was, to stand at night and bless the Lord with their lips and with their hands lifted up.

They were exhorted, come, bless the Lord, you who, you servants of the Lord, who stand by night in the house of the Lord, lift up your hands towards the holy place where the ark was, and bless the Lord.

And so it's somewhat easy to see how and why Psalm 134 would have made its way in the Psalms of Ascent. The pilgrims would have just arrived.

[15:13] They would have been tired from their long journey, exhausted in many ways. And there were people just like us. There were people whose lives are sometimes interrupted by all manner of things.

There were people whose hearts were weighed down by the circumstances of life, and yet they were on their way, journeying, coming to Jerusalem, bringing all these situations with them.

Some perhaps were weighed down by sickness. There were perhaps loved ones who couldn't make the journey, and they were concerned about them.

And I want us to think for a moment that as troubling as sickness could be today, sickness was far more troubling back then when medical care was not what it is today.

Some undoubtedly would have faced death, the loss of loved ones, and yet they are called to gather. Some perhaps were making the journey that loved ones who had passed on used to make with them and no longer make with them, and they are aware of that.

[16:25] Some were perhaps weighed down by conflict, conflict in their own homes or conflicts with neighbors, and they are aware of these things. And the other general hardships of life, some weighed down, no doubt, by big questions.

You can imagine that some of them would have faced issues like an infection among the herd, and they're all dying off. Or maybe there's a drought, and the crop yield was not that much or nothing at all.

And they would come weighed down by care and weighed down by sin and the realization that if God would account iniquity, who could stand? And they all converged on Jerusalem.

They all came to Mount Zion. And the call goes out. The call is to all of them. They would sing together. The call is, come, bless the Lord.

Whatever your circumstances, whatever your trial, whatever your difficulties, whatever unworthiness you may feel, come and bless the Lord.

[17 : 39] And see, for them, it was somewhat different in the sense that it may not have been night when they were calling, being called to worship, but they were standing, as it were, in the night of their lives.

They were standing, as it were, in the darkness of their lives when they didn't want to sing, when they didn't want to raise their hands. And the call was coming to them just as it did to those on the night shift saying, come, bless the Lord.

Why? Why bless the Lord? Not because we feel worthy, but because He is worthy. And the reason that they did it 24-7 is because He is worthy of that.

God is worthy to be praised every moment of every day. And these servants who were in the house of the Lord, they were proxy for the people offering up to God the praise that He deserves, the praise that is rightly His.

And so to those who find themselves in the night seasons of life, the trials of life, the difficulties of life, the darkness of life, they're called, come, bless the Lord.

[18 : 57] It's not circumstantial. It is because God is worthy to be worshipped. And to be praised. And notice that it is as if the psalmist is saying, and don't just bring your lips.

Don't just come and mumble some words. No. Lift your hands to the holy place. Lift your hands to that place where God has chosen to reveal Himself and bless the Lord.

You bless the Lord both with your lips and you bless Him with your whole life. And truth be told, it would not have been difficult for the pilgrims to find content, to find data by which they would bless the Lord.

obviously the whole of the scriptures that they had at the time would have been open to them, but they could have started with just the psalms they've been singing coming there. Remembering that the Lord is a helper to His people.

That the Lord is a provider and a keeper of His people. That He doesn't allow the sun to smite them in the day or the moon by night. Remembering that the Lord is a deliverer.

[20 : 15] The Lord is a protector. The Lord is the one who restores the fortunes of His people and forgives their iniquities. The good and gracious God who knows everything about His people.

Nothing is hidden yet. He says, Come. Worship me. Come bless the Lord. All you servants of the Lord.

If perfection were the standard, then no one could come. But He calls all of His people in all of their brokenness and all of their sinfulness. In all of their humanness.

And He says, Come and bless the Lord. And as I said before, brothers and sisters, if you have not found yourself in the circumstances where the time has come to gather with God's people, and when I say gather with God's people, this is the primary expression of it, but this is not the only expression of it.

We gather in worship when we pray. We gather in worship when we meet in our discipleship groups. We gather in worship when we study God's Word together.

[21 : 32] Indeed, brothers and sisters, all of life is to be worshipped even when we fellowship over food together. The Bible says, Whatever you do, you are to do it as unto the Lord. And there are those seasons when we don't want to do it.

But we don't do it for ourselves. We don't do it because of ourselves. We do it in spite of ourselves. And we do it for the one who is absolutely worthy.

Brothers and sisters, as it was for the pilgrims of this day in the Psalms of Ascent, so it is for us.

Even though we don't make annual pilgrimages like they do, but again, every opportunity that comes up to gather with God's people, to share this precious faith that we have together is both an invitation and a command to worship the Lord whatever our circumstances.

And friends, we have more than enough data and content that we are able to bless the Lord and proclaim blessings for His goodness to His people.

[22 : 56] As we consider how we are to bless the Lord in answer to this call, I want to give us two particular reasons why we should bless the Lord.

And I've already touched on one of them. The first reason we should bless the Lord is because the Lord is worthy. The first reason that we should accept this invitation and obey this command to come and bless the Lord is God is worthy.

It is fitting and it is right to be blessed the Lord proclaiming who He is and proclaiming and proclaiming all that He has done as revealed in His Word.

God and again the whole Bible is before us indeed our lives are before us so we can bless the Lord for His goodness and His mercies towards us.

The second reason that we should answer the call to worship brings me to my second point and it's my final point for this sermon and it is the Lord blesses us.

[24 : 26] First reason is we bless the Lord because He is worthy but the second reason is the Lord blesses us and please don't miss this particular point. I'm not saying that we should answer the call to worship because the Lord has blessed us although that is true.

That is true. The Lord has blessed us and we should bless the Lord. What I am saying is that God bestows blessings on His people as they are gathered in worship to His name.

We saw this first in Psalm 133 and verse 3 where it says the psalmist is talking about the pleasantness and the blessedness of brothers dwelling together in unity and in 133 verse 3 he says it is like the dew of Hermon which falls on the mountains of Zion for there it is there the Lord has commanded the blessing life forevermore.

The Lord commands the blessing at the place of worship. He commands the blessing in corporate worship. So when we gather in corporate worship it is not just an opportunity to bless God it is an opportunity to be blessed by God.

He commands the blessing there. Look again at verse 3 in 134.

[26 : 18] It reads may the Lord bless you from Zion he who made heaven and earth. Again notice that the blessing is associated with Mount Zion the place that God has called his people to gather and to worship in his name.

Now it's easy for us to think that this is kind of like we scratch God's back and then God scratch our back we bless him and then he blesses us but I think we all know that that is far from the truth.

The way the Lord blesses us and the way we bless the Lord the difference is as far as the heaven is from the earth. It is light years apart.

There is no comparison between our blessing of God and God's blessing of us. Although both happen when his people are gathered.

Theologian Derek Kidna explains the difference very well. Here's what he writes. To bless God is to acknowledge gratefully what he is.

[27 : 33] But to bless man God must make of him what he is not and give him what he has not. I want to read that again.

Let's take this in this morning brothers and sisters. This is the difference between what happens when we gather. This is the difference between us blessing God and God blessing us. To bless God what we do is to acknowledge gratefully what he is.

but to bless man God must make of him what he is not and give him what he has not.

Brothers and sisters when we properly bless the Lord our hearts rightly are filled with gratitude and gratefulness because of who he is.

and before we start God is the all-sufficient God. And when we finish he is still the all-sufficient God.

[28 : 45] We add nothing to him. He needs nothing from us. God calls us to bless him and to worship him because it is right that we do that. It would be wrong that we not do that but we have nothing to give him.

We bring empty hands and if we brought anything it would be his to begin with. We gratefully acknowledge who he is and what he is as he has revealed himself in scripture but we add nothing to him.

He is complete lacking nothing. But when God blesses us when the sovereign of the universe the all sufficient one the all knowing one who knows everything about us past and present and future when he blesses us he must make of us what we are not and he gives us what we have not. Brothers and sisters this is an incentive to gather this is an incentive to be among the people of God because God does this he is faithful to do this and here's what we know about these two blessings that happen when we gather as God's people one has no defect and hopefully I don't have to tell you which one has no defect ours is shot through with defects because our best efforts to bless the Lord still fall short we do not have the full capacity to bless the Lord as we should we have limitations limitations all around and yet God is good and gracious and he doesn't deal with us the way we deserve to be dealt with he makes of us what we are not and he gives us what we have not and notice in verse three how the psalmist says may the

Lord bless you from Zion he got to stop there but he doesn't he wants to remind us who is blessing us he says he who made heaven and earth meaning he has the means and the ability and the power to bless us to make of us what we are not and to give us what we have not he is able to do that brothers and sisters and he does that I think that many of us who can testify to times of weariness in soul and discouragement of heart and we gather with the people of God and we leave with what we have not we leave with the awareness that God has touched us in the depths of our souls!

[32 : 09] and strengthened us and opened our eyes and caused us to see what we weren't seeing before he's reminded us that this life is passing he's reminded us that there's eternity in view and this life only prepares us for it but this is not it the God of heaven and earth the maker of heaven and earth blesses his people when they are gathered us know us know us know us know us know us know us know us know us know us know!

us know us otherwise. But I think one of the important truths that we need to grasp again, and I think in this season of COVID, we've lost it so much. I think one of the truths of the Christian life that COVID and the realities that it has brought has affected some of us as it has distorted our understanding and our view of the local church and the community of the saints and the people of God.

And we've forgotten that we are blessed in Christ. Our relationship with God is also with one another. God has put us in a community.

And if God's idea was that we all have personal salvation and we just live as lone rangers, he would have done that. He would not have put us in a body, but he put us in a body and he has chosen to bless us in communal ways. He has chosen to connect blessings to the gathering of his people. And you know, it's not something that kind of like, it's eerie that comes out of the sky. Sometimes God blesses us through a brother or a sister whose voice we hear, whose face we see.

[34 : 47] Just being together. And God works through them to be a blessing and a strengthening to us. And this is why I would say to those who are watching us by live stream this morning, if you're watching by live stream, whether you're part of this church or another church, and that's because you aren't able to be here or you aren't able to be there if you're not part of another church, then this is a fine and good substitute for that if you can't be here.

But friends, if you can be here, watching by live stream is no substitute for this. It is no substitute for this. It's almost like, it's like being invited to a party.

You decide to stay home, others go to the party, and they have the benefit of all that is at the party, the food, the fellowship, the outing, and all of that. They can come back and tell you. As a matter of fact, you can watch it by live stream. You can watch the party by live stream, and I think you know you won't benefit in the same way. Brothers and sisters, God meets us when we gather, and he meets us in multiple ways. When we came to the Lord's table this morning, when we partook of the elements, God met us in that. He strengthens us in that. That is a means of grace for us.

God commands a blessing. He brings a blessing, his very presence, and his goodness among his people when they are gathered together.

Notice that verse 3 is written somewhat like a benediction. And it is fitting in the sense that this may very well have been one of the last psalms that they would have sung before they made their pilgrimages back to their respective homes wherever they were. And they needed to hear, even as they were going out, may the Lord bless you from Zion, he who made heaven and earth.

[37 : 07] Notice where the blessing is from. The blessing is from Zion. The blessing is not kind of like, may the Lord bless you in thin air. No. May the Lord bless you from Zion. Bless you from that place of the gathered people of God.

And friends, I say to us this morning, if this is landing on your air funny this morning and you're not so sure about this, I said you take some time and study God's word and seek to be sure of this. The blessings, many of the blessings that God has given to us, he has given them to us in Christ Jesus with one another.

He blesses us when we gather in worship. We should not read Psalm 134 and the rest of the Psalms of Ascends without remembering how blessed we are.

No longer do we have to make pilgrimages to a specific place. We don't have to journey to a specific location anymore to worship the Lord.

Jesus said to the woman at the well in Samaria in John chapter 4, who was arguing over the place of worship, Jesus said to her in John 4 verses 21 and 23 and 24, this is what he said to her.

[38 : 38] Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. But the hour is coming and is now here when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him.

God is his spirit and those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth. That hour, brothers and sisters, came when Jesus came.

That hour came through his life and his death and his resurrection that has given sinners like you and me access into the presence of God.

The writer to the Hebrews reminds us of this as well. Although he's writing about the tabernacle of Moses, the application is still the same as it would have been for the temple of Solomon.

In Hebrews 12, 22 through 24, we read, But you have come to Mount Zion. You, the New Testament people of God, you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in 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 all righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

[40 : 23] Brothers and sisters, beyond what we're able to understand about how this happens, this is true. This is God's word. The writer to the Hebrews tells us this happens. This has happened for us in the new covenant.

We have come to the true Mount Zion. We have come to the spiritual Jerusalem. And in a way that we can't fully comprehend, we are communing not just with ourselves, but we are communing with the whole of the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven.

And while it is true of us that we are worshiping with the heavenly community in ways that we don't understand fully, brothers and sisters, scripture promises us.

John gives us a vision in Revelation chapter 7, verses 9 through 12. He records the vision as follows. After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number from every nation and all tribes and peoples and languages standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes with palm branches in their hands, crying out with a loud voice, salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb.

And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worship God saying, Amen.

[42 : 06] Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power might be to our God forever and ever.

Amen. Brothers and sisters, what the pilgrims in the time of the Psalms of the Ascent experienced in their journeys, what we are experiencing in small measure right now, we will ultimately experience in full measure on that day when we stand before the Lord and we will, brothers and sisters.

The Lord gave John a vision. It was a real vision. And although our names are not called, all of us who belong to Christ, we are in this vision that John saw.

John saw the end of it all. And John saw that from among all the peoples of all the nations, these who were clothed in white robes, standing before the throne, saying salvation belongs to our God. Brothers, it's a reminder that we're going to one day be home. We're going to one day not just be worshiping worshiping in a spiritual sense with the heavenly throne, but we will be among the heavenly throne.

[43 : 37] We will be the heavenly throne. And salvation is of our God. In heaven, there's no singing about, oh, I made it through and I made it over.

No, it is salvation belongs to our God. The salvation he starts and the salvation that he finishes. And he will bring his people to himself.

But until that day, brothers and sisters, let us avail ourselves of every opportunity to gather with the people of God, knowing that it's an opportunity to bless him, but it's a greater opportunity to be blessed by him.

And God does that when we gather together. I pray the psalms of ascents have caused your heart to long for home.

I pray that this psalm causes your heart to long for home. I pray it causes us to long for the day when the Lord returns. And brothers and sisters, we don't rightly long for that day without the awareness that we have those who are outside of Christ.

[44 : 52] As thrilling as it is to know that this is our future, though this will be a day of great rejoicing, this will also be a day of great calamity for those who are outside of Christ.

And so may it stir our hearts to proclaim the gospel and to call sinners to repentance call them to Christ, call them to join this heavenly throne where there is mercy for all and there is pardon for sin. And if you're here this morning or whether listening by live stream and you do not know Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, I say to you, come to Jesus.

I say to you, turn from sin and turn to Christ. He has promised that he will receive all who come to him.

And not only that, he says he will keep them to the very end. And this is why we can hold firmly to this promise this morning because it's not dependent on us to finish.

[46 : 08] Yes, we will persevere, but God will preserve and God will keep us in the end. So, until then, may we use this and see this as dress rehearsal.

This is dress rehearsal, brothers and sisters, for the final day when we stand before the throne.

Let's pray together. Lord, Father, we thank you that you have in your great mercy invited sinners that you know everything about to come and bless the Lord.

Knowing that we add nothing to you, knowing that we give nothing to you, we simply declare who you are and what you have done.

And Lord, you call us to bless you because in the blessing and the gathering, you bless us. Lord, I pray that this will cause us to long for the day when faith will be sight, when we will be safely home. Would you do this, Lord? Work in our hearts in this way. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Let's stand for closing song.