

"The Unifying Power of Worship" Psalm 133

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[0 : 00] We'll be in Psalm 133. This morning is a short psalm, but before we get into it, let's take a moment and ask the Lord's blessing. Father in heaven, help us to have the heart of the tax collector. Lord, recognizing who we are in light of who you are.

We have nothing to stand on. Lord, we are in need of your mercy. Lord, we are in need of your grace. We are in need of your love. Would you please shower us with your mercy and love and kindness and your peace this morning as we open up your word.

Give us soft hearts, hearts to grasp and understand and then to live out your words and commands.

We pray this in Christ's name. Amen. Feel free to grab a Bible if you do not have one with you.

They're at the back welcome table. It would do me a great service if you could follow along.

I know some of you guys' story. Others, I do not at all. If you've been in a home lacking unity, where everyone walks on eggshells and there's a constant sense of potential conflict, you'll know that such a home is not a peaceful home. Even when things were okay in your home, they were never truly good.

It's difficult to imagine life without the tension, let alone a life filled with peace and harmony at home. There's a significant difference. I think you'd agree with me. There's a significant difference between being civil and being at peace.

[1 : 45] A fragile peace is certainly not the same as the unity and joy that come from true peace, true harmony. Maybe this hasn't been your experience. God has blessed you with a very peaceful home you've grown up in or are currently in.

Maybe you've experienced just a few times or you know a family that has really struggled growing up. You know that family. Maybe it's a cousin. Maybe it's a friend.

But even if you don't have a very acute personal experience, if you zoom out and look at the hundreds and thousands of years of human history, you will know and it's really undeniable that humanity has been characterized not by unity but actually by division.

Not by harmony but discord. Not by peace but by conflict. Israel. The history of Israel is a history of division.

Family members could not live together. Tribes would go to war against fellow tribes. Fathers would be pitted against sons and brothers against one another. It's not just one instance in scripture.

[2 : 56] It's all throughout Israel's history. From the earliest chapters of Genesis, unity was elusive because peace was absent. The desire for unity and peace.

If all of that, we take that and we agree. We can also agree that the desire for unity and peace is a universal. We seek something much greater than just the absence of conflict or just the lack of walking on eggshells.

But what the scriptures call shalom. A peace that describes fullness, blessing, joy, harmony and love across all our relationships.

That's what we desire. And this brings us to our final week in the Psalms of Ascent. Our Psalms of Ascent in Psalm 120, if you remember from a few weeks back, began with Israel divided.

With not harmony but deceit that marked the nation of Israel. The people are not close. They are distant from themselves.

[4 : 07] And even more importantly, they're distant from the Lord. There is conflict and deception everywhere. I'll just read just a couple verses from Psalm 120. It's been a few weeks, you might not remember it.

Psalm 120 verses 1 and 2. In my distress I called to the Lord and he answered me. Deliver me, O Lord, from lying lips, from a deceitful tongue. And then in verse 6 and 7, the Psalm ends with this.

Too long have I had my dwelling among those who hate peace. I am for peace, but when I speak they are for war. This was the beginning of the pilgrimage up to Jerusalem.

Israel's divided. Israel's at war. There's deceit. There's backbiting. There's conflict. Yet here at the end of the pilgrimage, we see them in Jerusalem.

These people that were at war now are together at the temple worshipping the Lord. Last week we were in Psalm 132. It was, I described it as really the climax of the Psalms of Ascent.

[5 : 09] And in it, if you were here, you remember, or if you weren't here, just a bit of a refresher. Psalm 132 envisioned God's very presence marking the covenant people of God.

Marking God's people. God made promises, but he kept them. God made covenants that he then remembered. And the promises he made to Israel was to bless them for his presence.

And then in this Psalm 133, we will see the fruit of that blessing, which is unity born out of peace. So we'll break this up.

It's only three verses. We'll break it up into three parts. We'll look first at the nature of unity. Second, we'll look at the origin of unity. And finally, the blessing of unity. So look with me at verse 1.

A song of a sense of David. Behold how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity. David opens this up with behold. I mean, we can read it really, like, robotically.

[6 : 15] But David is declaring everything that is coming. He is saying, listen, pay attention, focus, all eyes on what's happening here in Jerusalem.

This is to be noticed. This is like a front page of every news website. I'd say newspaper. Do they exist? News website.

Focus. This is something excellent, David says. And it's excellent because in the history of Israel, it's rare. It's a rare and joyful moment for him and for the nation.

The people are at peace. They are united in one spirit. It is something both good and pleasant. I think this is a remarkable thing. It's good and pleasant.

There are many things that are good but not pleasant. If you have had surgery, not pleasant, very good, especially if it's successful. There's a lot of things that are pleasant but not good.

[7 : 17] Eating multiple pieces of pizza. Washing it down with your choice beverage. Very pleasant but not very good. Okay, here we have something that is both pleasant and good.

Which means we see this image of something that is absolutely beautiful. It's delightful. It deserves to be praised. Not just praised but highly praised and recognized for its benefit and blessing.

And what is this good and pleasant thing? King David says, It is when brothers dwell in unity. So in the immediate context, again, with keeping Israel's history in mind, This is specific to relatives, extended family, kin, living on a shared plot of land.

Both respect and share boundaries. Both respect and share resources. They are part of each other's lives. They are a community. They follow the same calendar. They take part in the same economy.

They fight on the same side when enemies come. And they worship the same God without conflict but mutual growth. This is this image of dwelling in unity.

[8 : 34] And again, this is not Israel's history. It's very uncommon because earlier in Genesis, There are two specific instances where it is talked about where brothers do not dwell in unity.

The first, we have Abraham and Lot. They are not actually brothers but they are kin. And in Genesis 13, it says that the land, They could not dwell together because the land could not hold their growing resources.

A similar thing was said of Jacob and Esau who were actually brothers. Now, again, it's in the scriptures, The initial reading just seems like there's not enough grass for their flocks.

There's not enough resources to keep their houses, so to speak, alive. But there's something more at play here. Instead, it paints a picture of what should be a together communal life, A family life is severed.

It's separated. There's some issue at hand. And like I said, there's a pattern here. It's the norm in Israel. And if we've reflected on a bit of what I talked about at the beginning in the introduction, It's a pattern in our lives as well.

[9 : 51] Humanity is terribly atomized. We are terribly atomized. From the family structure, You kind of just go out to the next circle, to the next circle, to the next circle.

Humanity is incredibly atomized. And yet we were created to be in community, To be known and to know, to share, To spend our time, our talents, our treasures for the sake of others.

And this communal life, The biblical picture of it is to be centered around worship and praise of the one true God. However, instead of this unity, Our success and enjoyment is not contingent on my neighbor doing well, But me doing better than my neighbor.

Jealousy and envy become the hallmarks of humanity, right? It doesn't matter that I have \$100. I don't have \$101. It doesn't matter that I have two excellent serviceable vehicles, But mine doesn't shine like his.

It doesn't shine like hers. I got promoted, but listen, This person's been here, you know, two years, I've been here two years longer than them, And they're promoted ahead of me.

[11 : 07] Constantly we are gauging our success and our well-being, Not by God blessing us, Or rejoicing in the success of others. It's always me.

This is the atomization of our lives. Our focus is inward, constantly bent inward. As this atomization continues, The worship of the one true God becomes rare, Or even non-existent in our lives.

So you see that there's a deep connection between Being united to one another in community, And properly worshiping the Lord. But how, where is that connection found?

So here's, just take a step back. Worship, it shifts our focus. If we are worshiping God properly, Again, interestingly that the gospel text, Coincidentally, or maybe not so coincidentally, Is Jesus in Luke 18, Talking about the tax collector and the Pharisee.

There is good worship and bad worship, okay? The good worship is what I'm talking about here. A worship that shifts our focus away from ourselves, And towards the triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

[12 : 15] It affirms that life itself is a gift. All the good things come from God that we have. He grants salvation, Purely out of undeserved grace, Because He loves us.

Not because He's compelled to, Or not because He needs an object to love. But simply, out of love. And when we recognize and cherish Who God is, Above all else, Our desires begin to change.

Our affections and our loves began to shift. We no longer seek more for ourselves, But rather we are about glorifying the Lord. And that really frees us up then to celebrate other people's victories. It's like an antidote to jealousy and envy. As we worship. It's not an overnight thing. But our affections, Our loves, Our...

The things that we desire, They begin to shift. So you see, As the Lord draws us closer, We find ourselves living rightly ordered lives. That are at peace with Him.

[13 : 24] And because our lives are at peace with Him, They are at peace with one another. So let's consider this in light of the Psalms of Ascent. And the Israelites are in the valley.

In Psalm 120. Right? We read a couple portions from Psalm 120. They are at war with one another. But as they are called by God, But as they are ascending to Jerusalem, To worship the Lord, All of a sudden, They cease to war, But become united.

They are ushered into the presence of the Lord, Being at peace with Him. And all of a sudden, They began to worship with one another. So much so that David, He says, Behold.

Behold. Look at this rare and glorious thing. These warring tribes have come together. And they are dwelling in unity. They are at peace.

It is completely, This unity is completely inseparable from the worship, That they have been called to. I'll just say this as a congregation. And maybe this is, again, A very timely thing, That we land on Psalm 133, Going into a new season.

[14 : 34] There's been some new people that have joined us. Let this be a challenge to us. That we would seek to worship the Lord, On His terms, Recognizing that all the gifts that we have, Are from Him.

And then, Let us dwell in unity. Let us grow in our self-sacrifice, To one another. Seeing that this is the very attitude of Christ Himself.

One of the reasons why we, Every single week, Without fail, Affirm our faith in the words of either the Apostles' Creed, Or the Nicene Creed. Because it is a wonderful act of unity.

It is a calm, Many voices, But with one voice, Declaring who God is in worship. It is a picture of our unity.

Let us then extend that reality to our relationships. Again, not overnight, But let us grow into it. Let us have our desires and our affections Shift away from ourselves, Up to the Lord, And then to each other.

[15:46] So you see, With Israel, And with the church as well, As warring tribes, Completely not unified, Come to the Lord in peace, We start to see a restored humanity.

A fractured humanity begins to be mended back together. As we are united to Christ through faith, We are also then united to other people that are united to Christ by faith.

We are restored, And we begin to see just the richness of a Psalm like 133. How blessed it is, Good and, How good and precious, Sorry, How, How good and pleasant it is, Rather, When we are dwelling in unity.

So, The nature of such unity cannot be achieved through our own efforts. Nothing can give God's peace, Which we need, Apart from God himself. So our best efforts, They produce satisfactory results.

I'm not one to be super down on, You know, Kind of solidarity movements, Or, Or the UN, Or anything like that. But I mean, At best, It produces satisfactory results.

[17:07] Maybe, Maybe good results, But it's never great results. And it's never long lasting, Eternal results. So, We know that it's from the Lord, But then, How, How does it look?

How does it play out? This explains to us, Why David calls it good and pleasant, Because it comes from, From God himself. And the next section explores this.

Look with me, At verses 2, And then the first half of verse 3. This unity, That David is talking about, It is like, The precious oil on the head, Running down, On the beard, 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. Two images are presented here. One might appear strange, The other, It uses terminology, That might be unfamiliar to you.

How should we interpret this? How should we understand this passage? How does it connect with verse 1? I'll just take two minutes to wax about, About the church, And the importance of church.

[18:23] Some of the pushback against the Bible, Could be that it is a bit archaic, A bit hard to understand. A lot of terminology, A lot of cultural references, A lot of things that are just, Extremely foreign to, The Canadian modern sensibility and mind.

I'll say, I'll say, Two things about that. And this passage falls in that category, Potentially. The first is that, There's tons of the Bible that is understandable. Almost 50% of the Bible is narrative.

And the narrative follows, A coherent and a cohesive story. Even though it's written over, Centuries by numerous authors, It has a unified story.

It's the same with a lot of, The epistles of Paul, Some of the poetry, Some of the wisdom literature of the Proverbs. But, You know, On the flip side, There's a lot of the Bible, That's very difficult to understand.

What was the last time you read through, Revelation? Or, Or, Or, Or, Or, Or, Or, Or, Or, Isaiah.

[19:33] There's some very bizarre, Difficult things to understand. Next week, We're going to be getting, We'll begin a series in Ecclesiastes. And that's also a very difficult book.

And this is by design. It's by design. Why is it by design? God has, Throughout the history of his people, Has, Allowed for some people to be supported by the community, To, To, To, To spend their time, Understanding the scriptures.

Not to say that, Other people can't, But that there's a, A unique, Office, For people to know, And then communicate the scriptures. So, To, To really understand, God's word, Is to, Understand it together, In the context of, Something like this.

A church service. Now, It, It, It might be a bit of pushback for this. Again, We're very atomized people. We're very, Uh, Self, Uh, Focused, Um, Self-reliant people.

And I'm not trying to say, Listen, Don't do your own devotions. But, I will say this. If the Bible, In your mind, Is, Is really just for you. For your own devotional life.

[20:47] And there is not a category, In your thinking, About reading, And learning the scriptures, Communally. Then you are, Missing out on something, That God has designed. So, I would say, Come to church.

Be attentive. Dig into the scriptures. Participate. Learn. Uh, Read. Mark. Uh, Learn. Run. Inwardly. Digest. One of our colleagues, Say, Uh, A colleague in Advent.

Okay. A bit of a digression. We'll go back to the scriptures. Uh, Let me read this section again. And then we'll, Try to answer the question about, What is happening with Aaron.

Uh, 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.

Aaron was Israel's first priest. Uh, If you know the story of the Exodus, With Moses and the Israelites, Uh, Prince of Egypt, Maybe. Uh, The Ten Commandments with Charlton Heston. [21 : 46] Uh, Aaron was, Moses' brother. He is the first priest of Israel. And he was consecrated to, Mediate God's presence to the people of Israel.

Uh, The anointing oil was poured on Aaron's head, To set him apart for his special role as priest. It was a sign that he was set apart.

That he was holy. And it was precious, Fragrant oil, Expensive, And associated with joy, And acceptance, And gladness, And bounty, And really God's blessing. Most importantly, It symbolized the very spirit of God resting on his servant.

Uh, If you remember a couple weeks ago, We did a baptism. Uh, Unlike the anointing oil that I, Uh, Signed the cross, On the heads of the children that were baptized, This oil was, Was poured out, With outrageously, Generous, Uh, Uh, Amounts, Over Aaron.

It's being poured out so liberally that it cannot be contained upon his head, Or his beard, But it flows, Just, Into his garments, Onto his body, Over top of everything he is wearing.

[22 : 54] And what makes this very unique is that Aaron as priest, A part of his, Uh, Uh, His, I mean, His outfit, His uniform, Whatever you would want to call it, Was this breastplate, Breastplate with the twelve tribes of Israel.

Israel. And as God's blessing, This oil, Pours down over Aaron, And it goes, Uh, Through his beard, Into his, His, His robes, Into his, Like all over his body, It would extend to the entire nation. Symbolically, The blessing of God would rest, Not just on Aaron, But on all of Israel. As God's blessing flows down, It symbolically doesn't just stay with the one individual, But extends to the entire nation, United together as they are also set apart.

Uh, One of Israel's, Uh, Commands, Or one of their calls by God, Is that they would be a nation of priests. That they would mediate the Lord's presence, Not just to themselves, But to all nations. The second picture, Is of the dew of Mount Hermon. Uh, Mount Hermon is situated in the very far north of Israel. Today on the border of, Of Syria, And close to Lebanon.

[24 : 10] It's very, Um, Very northern, Uh, Part of, Of, Uh, Of the land. It is a snow-capped mountain, Much higher than Jerusalem.

And, Uh, The picture here is that, The precipitation of this mountain, Would flow, From the top down, Into the arid valley, Bringing life, To an otherwise dry land.

The moisture would flow down. It wouldn't necessarily be rain, But this, These streams, And these rivers, That would nourish the land. The dew of Hermon then, Becomes this idiom, Or this picture, For a heavy fall of life-giving precipitation, A blessing from a high place.

Uh, So we have two pictures. They represent, One image, But in two parts. So we see the blessing of unity, That, David is describing, One, With oil flowing from the top, Or the crown of Aaron's head, And also the precipitation flowing down, From Mount Hermon.

They are describing blessings, That are flowing down from the Lord. That, That God is the, The, The origin of all the blessings, In this life that we could ever want.

[25 : 25] Uh, Such blessings that unite, Otherwise warring people together. He is the source of unity. The people, They live fruitful and holy lives together, In devotion of the Lord, Because it is him that has willed it.

And such unity depends entirely, On God's divine plan, And action. He is the source of the blessing. So as Israel ascends to God, God is pouring down his blessings, Upon the people.

And unity is the result. And this brings us to our, Third and final point, The second part of, Verse three. For there, That is Jerusalem, The Lord has commanded the blessing, Life forevermore.

After centuries of disunity, Israel is now, At peace and united. It's a beautiful picture. Remember, It is good, And it is pleasant. However, The blessing does not endure.

Okay, The, The, There's a really sad irony here, Because the there, In, In verses, The second part of verse three, Verse three B, The there, Referring to Jerusalem, Where unity's blessing, Shall come to pass.

[26 : 40] It is also the place, Where, Through David, Israel would fall into, Complete discord and war, Once again. Okay, The peace, The unity would be short lived.

The place that was, To be the place of blessing, Becomes the very, A seat, Where discord and war, Spread. And Jerusalem is still, I mean, It's called the city of peace, But it is a city full of conflict, To

this day.

You remember, At the beginning of the Psalms of ascent, We talked about, The immovable ladder, On the second floor, Of the church of the holy sepulcher.

That is this picture of disunity. Even today, It's been sitting there for hundreds of years. So what does this tell us, About this psalm?

Well, It tells us that, This psalm was short lived, But more importantly, It tells us that this psalm, Points to something far greater. And something, That is eternal, That will endure forever, It is a call, To remember Christ Jesus, How he hung, Also, On a high place, On a cross, On a hill.

[27 : 51] Okay? And from him flowed down, Not oil, Not precipitation, But blood. And that blood, Doesn't just fall to the ground, But it is shed for you, And for me, And for all of humanity, So that, If we put our faith, In what Christ has done, We are united to him, United to one another, And humanity begins to be mended.

Okay? The blood, Is a source of blessing, That marks us out, Like the oil, That we might be holy, That gives us life, Like the dew, So that we might flourish, But it is so much greater, And grander, Than Aaron's oil, Or Herman's dew.

This is also a challenge, If we consider how, Short lived that piece was, That we must strive, To preserve, The unity within the church. From the great schism, In the 11th century, To the numerous, Instances of local congregations, Fighting over, Anything and everything, We must be vigilant, And heed the words, Of the apostle Paul, In Ephesians chapter 4, And this is what he says, Starting in verse 1, I therefore, A prisoner for the Lord, Urge you to walk, In a manner, Worthy of the calling, To which you have been called, With all humility, And gentleness, With patience, Bearing with one another, In love, Verse 3, Eager to maintain, The unity of the spirit, In the bond of peace, There is one body, And one spirit, Just as you were called, To the hope, That belongs to your call, One Lord, One faith, One baptism, One God and father of all,

Who is over all, And through all, And in all, We need to heed these words, I'll just kind of brush over them, When we're, Getting that check mark, In our bible reading plan, Do the bible reading plan, But we can, We can not meditate, On the call, Of us, To live, And walk out, In a manner, Worthy of our calling, We must dedicate ourselves, To the humble, And submissive worship, Of the Lord, We should be quick, To confess our sins, Avoiding, Covering up the truth, To strive to, To think soberly, And highly, Of one another, To give people the benefit, Of the doubt, To, To be more like, The tax collector, And not the Pharisee, Our aim should be, That of Christ, To love, To love one another, Because we, Love the Lord, For he first loved us, With all our heart, Soul, Mind, And strength, And we must look, To Jesus, Again, For that life giving flow, From that high place, Of the cross, So let us turn our gaze, To Christ, Let us look to him, As the one, To which true blessing, Comes from, Not for a moment, But for eternity, I'll close with this, The Psalms of Ascent, Don't end with Psalm 133, It would be, Very convenient for me, If they did, Because it would be a nice bow, To wrap up this summer series, But they end with, Psalm 134, And, What we have in Psalm 134, Is, Really the picture, Of, The eternal reality, Of worship, Of God's people, With God forevermore, And this is what it says, Come, Bless the Lord, And I'll just say this, Before I read it, If you're following along, In your Bible, You will notice, The covenant name, Of the Lord, Is used, Over and over,

[31 : 40] In just these short, Three verses, Let me read again, A song of ascents, 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, May the Lord bless you, From Zion, He who made heaven, And earth, Amen, Let us pray, Father, Thank you that you do not, Leave us in the valley, To war, And to steal, And to cheat, And to lie, And to kill, And to maim, And to rot in our sin, But instead, You call us up, To yourself, Lord, We thank you, That as we, Are called by you, And we put our faith, And trust in what you have done, Through your son Christ, That you are, Mending us, As individuals, But also as a community, Repairing what has been broken, Mending what has been torn, Lord,

Help us to be very, Mindful, Of how we, Live our lives, That we may, Heed the apostle Paul's words, That we will live lives, That are worthy of our calling, In Christ Jesus, Lord, Thank you for unity, Thank you for this church, We ask your blessing upon it, And we pray this in Christ's mighty name, Amen, Amen,