

Psalms 133

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[0 : 00] And this week in preparation for this sermon I read a few commentaries on Psalm 133 and to see what different people said about Psalm 133.

A few minutes later I was reading another commentary which I think proves the first writer's point. And this is what I read in the second commentary. The first verse is the main clause of the whole to which all the other clauses in the psalm are attached.

The clause attributes the compound predicate good and pleasant to a social situation of unity. Two similes follow to add the reality of specific experience to the general adjectives of the predicate. Verse 2b is an appositional phrase identifying the beard of the first simile as the beard of Aaron. Verse 3 is an explanatory subordinate clause that makes a specific theological assertion.

[1 : 20] And I could go on couldn't I? But I'd have to wake you up. There's something very wrong about that second quote isn't there? It is certainly inflicted on this psalm a slow death by dissection.

Psalm 133 is a beautiful poem. There's something isn't there about poetry. There's something about poetry that can capture an idea or a moment or an experience that analytical prose cannot.

And there's something about poetry that connects with our imaginations and our hearts in a way that is much harder for prose to do. And when it comes to the praise of God it's no accident that when we think of the praise of God the first book that comes to our mind is a book of poems.

A book of poetry. A book of songs. The psalms. And it's usually true that poetry beats prose for praise. And if the analysis of that commentary is anything to go by I reckon it's true here for sure. Psalm 133 is a beautiful poem. It is simultaneously vivid and very obscure. Isn't it? But it is a very simple point.

[2 : 44] And I want to reflect on it just for a few short moments this morning. I do not want to analyse it to death. But I do want to make sure that we as a church have caught its main point.

And felt its power. Essentially Psalm 133 is a poem about the unity of God's people. It's original context was a song of worship.

And the people of Israel they sang Psalm 133 as they marched through the temple. As they ascended Mount Zion which was not really that much of a mountain. But as they climbed that little hill to worship God in the temple.

That's why it's called isn't it? The song of ascent. They sang. To worship God together. And so what is this psalm?

It is a travelling psalm. This psalm is an attempt to capture what a rich blessing it was for the people to be going to worship God together.

[3 : 47] The worship of God is richer for people doing it together. That is why public worship of God is more important and better than the private worship of God.

Because there is a oneness of heart and minds that people express and experience. When they worship God together that is something beautiful. And so the poem captures something of the experience.

We know that as well. Because we know don't we to worship God in one another's company. We know something of the richness of coming together. Of being called to worship.

We have tasted the delight of Christian oneness. As we've handed the bread and the wine to one another. As we've heard the forgiveness of sins.

The delight of Christian oneness. The unity of heart and mind we experience and we express Sunday by Sunday morning and evening. As we gather as a church family.

[4 : 53] And this is a psalm about that. And this morning I want to simply point out four things. Firstly that the unity of God's people is good and pleasant.

The unity of God's people is good and pleasant. The psalm it does indeed. It begins in a kind of prosaic way. It's a bit of a statement of fact.

When God's people live together in unity. It is both good and pleasant. There are some things out there that are good. Without being pleasant.

Aren't there? How you go to the dentist. And you get a filling in the dentist. That's good. But not pleasant. How you pay your taxes.

It's a good thing to do. It's not pleasant there is it? For many of us. Tomorrow morning. Or on Tuesday morning. We'll go to work. And that's a good thing to do. But it's very often not pleasant.

[5 : 55] But the unity of God's people is both good and pleasant. It's like a meal with friends. It's like a walk in the moonlight.

Or a holiday by the sea. It's like freshly mown grass. Unity in the church of God is a righteous thing. And in and of itself. But it also brings pleasure. To those who enjoy it. Good and pleasant. We see this in the book of Acts.

Acts tells the story doesn't it. Of the infant Christian church. In those days. Just after Jesus had ascended in heaven. And we see that people were devoted to the apostles teacher.

And they were devoted to the fellowship. They were in and out of each other's lives. To the breaking of bread together. And in prayer. They were all together. And they had everything in common. They cared for the needy.

[6 : 56] And Acts says when they met together. They did so with glad and sincere hearts. Praising God. It was good. But it was also pleasant. There are so many ways we know the same experience.

We enjoy the blessing of belonging to God's church. To God's people. And from there David in the psalm.

Turns from that statement of fact. To two very colourful images. Two of the letters. The first is found there in verse 2. Psalm 133. He says it's like precious oil.

Poured on the head. Running down on the beard. On the beard of Aaron. Running down onto his collar and his robes.

And to begin with it just sounds like. A man being anointed with oil. Oil being poured over his head. A picture maybe of God's blessing. But we quickly discover as we look at that verse.

[7 : 59] It's not just the anointing of any old man. It's the anointing of a particular man isn't it? This is oil poured down on the head of. Who is it? Aaron.

And whose beard is the oil running down on? It's running down on Aaron's beard. And the background to this is in Exodus chapter 29 and Exodus chapter 30. Aaron.

You'll recall. What do you? He is the right hand man of Moses. Moses' brother-in-law. And he ends up serving. Doesn't he? As spokesman.

In the court of Pharaoh. But he went from there. To become Israel's high priest. And in Exodus chapter 29 and 30.

It speaks of how those priests were to be ordained. How they were consecrated. How they were set apart for their ministry. I'm not going to read to you from those chapters.

[8 : 56] But if you go back and you read them in Exodus 29 and 30. If you like. When you read those verses. It's really clear that the oil running down Aaron's beard. Has got a specific purpose.

It wasn't like oil that some other men might have used to freshen up. Or to improve their appearance. It wasn't just general beard oil. It was the oil of consecration.

It was holy. That's the second thing. It made Aaron holy. And his sons who were consecrated with him.

Were set apart. Or ordained with him. They were being set apart. For a really very important role within Israel. And that anointing was a symbol of their holiness.

And so this is part of what Psalm 133 is trying to convey to us as well. That the unity of God's people is not only good and pleasant.

[9 : 55] But it is also holy secondly. The unity of God's people is something special. Something set apart. There is a secretness to this gift from God.

And when God's people enjoy this blessing. When God's people are united. It is like they are Aaron standing under the pouring oil.

They are like Aaron being consecrated. They are being made holy. They are being set apart. Christian unity is part of our holiness.

That's the second thing to say. The third thing to point out is that it. Christian unity. Is a blessing. Christian unity is a blessing.

And it's a rich blessing. That comes from above. I think the ESV is not brilliant in verse 2.

[10:55] You'll notice that when I read it. I slightly changed the translation. Because it misses out a repeated word. It's there but it's kind of not explicit. So let me read it to you.

In the NIV as it should be. There's a word that's repeated three times children. Okay. Work out which word is repeated three times. It says it is like precious oil.

Poured on the head. Running down on the beard. Running down on Aaron's beard. Down upon the collar of his robes.

You see the words? Down. Three times. It's like precious oil. Poured on the head. Running down the beard. Running down on Aaron's beard.

Down on the collar of his robes. And the repetition is deliberate. It couldn't be clearer. Where does the oil of consecration come from? Comes from above. And it runs down.

[11:52] It first blesses the head. And then the beard. And then it trickles down onto the collars and the clothes. And it blesses all that it touches. And it's a blessing that comes to us.

Comes down to us from above. From the hand of a generous God who pours it out. The second image that David uses.

It works in exactly the same way. It's verse three. It is like the dew of Hermon. Were falling on Mount Zion. Hermon was at the tallest mountain in Israel.

And Zion was one of the shortest. And so again. The point is really simple. The point is that the blessing of God in unity. Flows down.

To all. Not only to the leaders. Like Aaron. They enjoy it.

[12:56] But all they lead enjoy it too. And benefit. As well. And once again. This is a blessing from above. The dew that descends.

Which falls. From the summit of Mount Hermon. And it's also the moisture. That comes down to the top of Mount Zion. I think that's important.

I think it's important for this reason. Because people often talk to me. And they speak to me about Christian unity. As something that we Christians create. And we are to work hard to form it.

Because in the first place. Christian unity is the gift of God. Christian unity. Is more blessing than achievement. Christian unity is not an obligation.

placed upon us. As much as a grace that is granted to us. And when you think about it. That makes sense doesn't it? Think about it for a moment. We are one in Christ.

[14:04] Because Christ has saved us. Christ has saved each one of us. As his people. He hasn't just been merciful to me.

As an individual. As an individual. And I am totally unique. No. He has drawn us. Into a family. He has given us.

Look around you. Brothers and sisters. And what we have in common. Is that we are all sinners. Saved by grace. So the unity.

We enjoy. Is part of that grace. Jesus. And that's why we read from Ephesians 4. Earlier on in the service. Because Paul is very clear. Doesn't he. In what he says. He says.

Keep the unity. Of the spirit. He says. Maintain. The unity. Of the spirit. Through the bond of peace. That's a really interesting word. Isn't it?

[14:59] We are part of. One body. He says. We share in. One spirit. There is one Lord. One faith. One baptism. One God.

And father of all. And that is our gift. That is our gift. In Christ. So unity. Is not something. That we have to work hard. To create. It is something.

That we work to maintain. Paul says. We are to keep. The unity. Of the spirit. In the bond of peace. Because our unity. Is a rich blessing.

From above. Fourthly. And finally. And shockingly. I think. Unity. Is also eternal life. That may sound.

I'm like. Strangling to say. But I'm reflecting. On verse three. For there. The Lord. Has commanded. The blessing. What is the blessing? Life.

[15:56] Forevermore. It's a very. Very. Playful. End. To the poem. It stretches. The imagery. Of the poetry. And.

It adds. To the obscurity. Of it. I think. But David. Is making. Another point here. As he looks. The stretch. Strangling. Just a little bit further. He asks us. To imagine. This dew.

Of Mount Hermon. Also covering. The ground. Of Mount Zion. And as he does that. He is reminding. You and I. When we hear that word. Zion. That that is where.

God bestows his blessing. That is where we go. To meet with God. For the sun. Zion. Was the place. Wasn't it? That they most. Associated.

With God's presence. And God's purposes. For the Lord's people. For the people. That the psalmist. Is writing this song for. Zion.

[16:50] Was the focal point. Of all of God's good gifts. And all of God's purposes. And then he says. That the chief blessing of God. Found at that point.

Where God. Meets his people. His life forevermore. It's eternal life. But remember.

This is a poem. About the unity. Of God's people. And so. You see what the psalmist is doing. He's seeming to. Collapse. This blessing. Of unity. Into the blessing.

Of life forever. Of eternal life. And when I finished. Study this song. This week. It seemed. Really strange to me. But the more that you.

And I think about it. The more. It makes sense. I think. Because. What is our eternal life? Life. What is our eternal life?

[17:44] Life. If not. The beautiful unity. That we enjoy. With God. And with all his people. What will heaven. Be like.

If not. The good. And pleasant. Reality. Of worshipping. God. And his son. Our Lord Jesus. Alongside. Our brothers and sisters.

Forever. And ever. And ever. The eternal kingdom. Of God. Is the fulfillment. Of the pictures. That this psalm paints.

Heaven is the realization. Of everything. That this psalm. Esteems. And that's why. We read Revelation chapter 7. Early on. In the service. Because in Revelation 7.

What do you have? You have there. A wonderful description. Of a good. And a pleasant company. 144,000. The total people of God. United in love for God.

[18:41] And for the land. Worshipping together. Enjoying the eternal blessing. Above. And it will be a holy company.

Won't it? We will know then. In heaven. As they do now. How richly blessed we are. It will be like.

A dew soaked. Heavenly Mount Zion. It will be like. That precious oil. That's poured over the head. And runs down. Onto the beard. And then down. Onto the collars. Of our white robes.

And of course. Revelation chapter 7. Expresses. Doesn't it? The hope. That you and I have. For the days to come. United together. That's what we're looking forward to.

Revelation 7. Expresses our hope. But Psalm 133. Expresses our reality now. The blessings.

[19:39] We enjoy. Right now. We might use. Different imagery. I guess. I've tried to think of some of the imagery.

You'll be better at it than I am. We might use different imagery. We might say. That the good and pleasant unity. Of God's people. Is like the waters. Of baptism.

That. Pour over the old life. Submerge the old life. And they bring us up. Out of death. Into new life. Dripping from head to toe. In Greece. We might say.

The unity of God's people. Is like the spirit of God. Descending on us. In all his holiness. To breathe into us. Obedience. And hope. And joy. We might say.

That the unity of God's people. Is like the moisture of a tree. Like a weeping willow. With water. Pouring off it. Soaking into the arid ground. Underneath.

[20:40] Bringing life to dry ground. We want to say many things. I guess. But however we express. The truth of the psalm.

We should find our own words. Of praise. To tell God. Just how wonderful. We think he is. It is wonderful.

Isn't it. That IPC. Is marked. In so many ways. By this precious gift. Of God. In our church family. As I thought about it. This week. We really do enjoy. A very rich unity. It is nothing to be proud of. But it is something.

To work to keep. For sure. And it is the gift of God. To us. And he deserves all the praise. How good and pleasant.

[21 : 38] It is when God's people. Live together in unity. 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. As if the dew of Hermon. Were falling on Mount Zion. For there. The Lord. The Lord. Bestows his blessing.

Even life forevermore. I'm going to read. A prayer to you. From the Scottish Psalter. Of 1595.

95. So let's bow our heads. Let me read it to you. Pitiful Father.

Who is full of mercy. Gracious Lord. You are not the God of confusion.

[22 : 49] Or discord. But the God of concord. And of peace. Join our hearts. And affections.

In such thoughts together. That we may walk in your house. As brethren. In brotherly charity. And love. And as members.

Of the body of Christ. Let the oil. Of sanctification. That is. Your Holy Spirit. Enflame us. And the dew.

Of your blessing. Continually fall upon us. That we may obtain life. Eternal. Through the same Jesus Christ. Amen.

I want us to continue in prayer. To pray together. The prayer of thanksgiving. It's on your sheets. It's on page 6. It's on page 7. Let's pray.

[23 : 53] For that second paragraph. Let's pray for your creation. Preservation. Of all the blessings of life. But above all. For your immeasurable love. In the redemption of the world.

By our Lord Jesus Christ. For the means of grace. And for the hope of glory. I want us to be thinking. Of ourselves corporately. As the Lord's people. As we join together in prayer.

Let's not think for a moment. Just of ourselves. As isolated individuals. As the people of God. Let's pray together. Almighty God. Father of all mercies.

We your unworthy servants. Give you most humble. And hearty thanks. For all your goodness. And loving kindness to us.

And to all people. We bless you. For our creation. Preservation. And all the blessings of life. But above all.

[24 : 51] For your immeasurable love. In the redemption of the world. By our Lord Jesus Christ. For the means of grace. And for the hope of glory.

Give us. We pray. Such a deep sense. Of all your mercies. That we may be. That we may be. Sincerely thankful. And praise you.

Not only with our lives. But by giving up ourselves. To your service. And by walking before you. In holiness and righteousness.

All our days. Through Jesus Christ. Our Lord. To whom with you. And the Holy Spirit. Be all honour and glory.

Forever and ever. Amen.