

## **Life Together in Jesus's Family**

Psalm 133:1–3

September 27, 2015

This morning we begin a six-week series called Life Together. It's intended to focus on what life can and should look like in the local church. It complements the series we just finished on the church and it is intended to instruct and remind us of our calling to be members one of another.

Romans 12:5 says "so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another."

Whether you are familiar with the "One Another" commands or not, this series will provide insight into how Christians are to live out their faith in the household of God. If you're a believer, this series will show what Life Together should look like. If you're not a believer or not sure where you stand with God, this series will help you because it will show how Christianity is different from every other religion.

Christians aren't a group united by things you can see but by the One God you can't see. God hasn't brought us together because we have similar likes and desires but because we all have been rescued by the same Savior and worship the same King.

This is the foundation of our Life Together, and in the next five weeks, we'll look at five different One Another passages, showing how they all flow from Jesus' command to Love One Another. However this morning, we're going to look at a passage from the Old Testament. It doesn't have the words "One Another" in it, but what it has is the cornerstone for our life together, namely the unity God gives us in the person and work of King Jesus.

### **Psalm 133**

"Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity! 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! For there the LORD has commanded the blessing, life forevermore."

In college I spent a summer in Virginia Beach with Campus Crusade for Christ with 80 other college believers. It was filled with Bible studies, personal discipleship, beach-side evangelism, and lots of deep conversations about God. It was, to use an overemployed

cliché, a mountain top experience. Yet when it ended, many of us experienced Post Project Depression – PPD.

I remember one friend lamenting over her PPD and how she wished we could just go back because the community was just so wonderful. I, too, vividly remember the difficult return to school because of what it taught me: God alone satisfies. Seasons change; only God remains the same.

I learned in that experience God brings us from mountains to valleys so that we'd draw closer to him. And one way God often brings us low is through disappointment with God's people.

I had imagined life together in the body of Christ as forever-sweet, but as we all come to learn—sometimes to our horror—is not automatic. That's why the New Testament is filled with One Another commands. We need the One Another's because:

- They press us to do what our self-directed hearts don't want to do.
- They call us to deny ourselves and to live life in community.
- They challenge us to leave behind our make believe utopias.
- We live in the real world where the church is both a *refuge* and a *rash*.

Yes, the church as a *refuge* provides comfort, encouragement, and manifold joy, but it also grates against our flesh like a bad case of Poison Ivy. In the church, God unites sinners in order to make us chafe against sin and against one another. He commands us to Love One Another. Sinful as we are and sinful as our fellow Christians may be, he commands us to do the impossible—to dwell together in unity, unity that comes from God himself. So before wading into the One Others, we must take a long look at what Psalm 133 really means to see *if* it is possible to live together in unity, and if so *how*?

## **How Good and Pleasant It Is When Brethren Live in Unity**

Psalm 133:1 begins “Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers live in unity.” More exactly: “Behold, *how* good and *how* pleasant it is when brothers *sit* [lit., dwell] together.”

David says that unity among God's people is objectively good and subjectively pleasant. In other words, it's like God's words of approval in Genesis 1. When God creates Christian community he calls it “good” and “very good.” It's also like the Song of Songs. Christians who experience Spiritual Community will sing for joy from the subjective pleasure it brings. If you've experienced true, Spiritual community, you know there is no higher pleasure—it is a taste of glory!

*So how can we enjoy God together?*

The answer lies in the strange similes of Psalm 133:2–3,

“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!  
For there the LORD has commanded the blessing,  
    life forevermore.”

While verse 1 is clear in its meaning, though difficult in its application, verses 2–3 are tricky to understand. What’s the deal with Aaron’s beard? How do the large volumes of dew on Mt. Hermon help me get along with others?

To answer we need to put Psalm 133 in a series of four contexts, a series of four frames that help us clarify the picture of Christian unity.

1. We need to see the original context of David’s Psalm.
2. We need to see how it fits in the Psalter as it was compiled and organized during the exile.
3. We need to see how this song finds its fulfillment in Jesus Christ.
4. We need to see how in Christ, this Psalm relates to us.

### **How to Sing Along with Psalm 133**

Psalm 133 is a chorus that repeats throughout redemptive history. Thus depending on where you are in history, the reference—i.e., the brothers in view—changes. Don’t misunderstand: *the meaning doesn’t change, but it does enlarges.*

Let me illustrate: When the Star Spangled Banner was written in 1814 it was only a poem penned by Francis Scott Key. Seventy years later (after he died) it was adopted for official use by the US Navy. Woodrow Wilson did the same thing with it in 1916. Finally, in 1931 it was made the national anthem, 117 years after its writing. In all those years, the meaning didn’t change, but its use and significance did.

So it is with Psalm 133. By tracing its history from David through the Exile to Christ to us, we come to grasp how good and pleasant life together is and how to experience it. Let's call these four stages of development *Key Changes*.

*Psalm 133 in the Key of D(avid)*

Psalm 133 was written in the Key of D for David. The Superscription identifies David as the author. Therefore we know a little bit of the background of this Psalm.

We know David treasured his friendship with Jonathan. While his brothers looked down on him and threatened him (see 1 Samuel 17:28), he knew with Jonathan what verse 1 describes. This could be the backdrop, but it could also relate to his kingdom in which he longed to see the twelve tribes of Israel united under his reign. Judges tells how those tribes had scattered when they entered the Promised Land and David had a vision for uniting them in worship at Jerusalem. With his passion for building the temple, setting up priests, and writing psalms, we can see him singing, "How good and how pleasant it is when brothers (of Israel) dwell together in unity."

To illustrate the goodness of this fraternity, he draws on history and geography. In verse 2 David recalls the anointing of Aaron, recorded in Leviticus 8–9. But interestingly, the imagery isn't meant to draw our attention to the hair on Aaron's face. He has the whole anointing ceremony in mind (see Leviticus 8:5-13). The KJV helps us get the sense, "It's like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard: That went down to the skirts of his garments."

By putting it in the past tense the King James helps us see the imagery is something of a metonymy. A metonymy is the substitution of one part for the whole. So here, he's emphasizing the blessing the priests experienced. When the high priest (Aaron) received God's blessed anointing, all the other sons benefitted. In service to Yahweh, Israel's priests enjoyed unity. And, in fact, all Israel benefitted from the priest's anointing. Like the sweet perfume wafted from the priest's garments, giving all near the priest a pleasing aroma, so the blessed unity of God's people brought pleasure to God and man.

Moving from history to geography, verse 3 indicates the blessedness was like the dew of Mount Hermon. David takes this second word picture from the Mountain that marked the Northern border of Israel. Mt. Hermon was the largest mountain in the area, and it was renowned for the way it provided refreshing water to all those regions under its shadow. The Jordan River draws much of its water from Mt. Hermon, and so David likens God's blessing on Israel to the way the larger Mt. Hermon blesses Zion. The high priests' blessing meant blessing for all the priests, so the heights of Mt Hermon meant blessing for the smaller Zion.

There is a principle here. All blessing comes from on high (cf. John 3:27). Or as James 1:17 puts it, “every good and perfect gift is from above, coming from the Father.” This previews the source for Life Together, not something man created but something God gives!

Tragically, David would himself ruin this blessing. When he had Uriah murdered to cover his adultery, he invited the sword to enter his household. David’s kingdom would never be the same. In fact, to follow the course of Israel’s history is to watch brothers dwelling in disunity.

David’s sin was followed by Solomon’s idolatry and the downgrade of the throne. From the headwaters of David and Solomon’s sin, Israel’s kings eventually navigated their nation into exile and the total loss of living in unity together.

At the same time, the priesthood was also lost. Whereas the priests were appointed to be a sweet smelling aroma, their sin made them a stench before God and man. Instead of smelling like sweet perfume, they smelled like an overflowing latrine. Speaking of the priests, Malachi 2 says God would smear dung on the faces of the priest for their covenantal disobedience. Without a righteous king or a holy priesthood, the nation couldn’t expect to enjoy the dew of heaven, and it didn’t. Drought plagued Israel, which leads us to our first key change.

### *Psalm 133 in the Key of E(xile)*

Coming at the end of the Exile someone, Ezra or someone like him, put the Psalms together in order. What we find in Psalms 120–134 are a collection of 15 Psalms that show signs of intelligent design. Just as you can find intelligent design in creation you can find it in Scripture.

As O Palmer Robertson observes,

[The Songs of Ascent] are grouped around Psalm 127, which was composed by Solomon [and focuses on building the temple]. Psalm 127 stands in the middle [of the Songs of Ascent] between the first and last of the pilgrim poems. On both sides there stands a [grouping of seven] pilgrim songs, consisting of two psalms composed by David, and five new ones, which have no name. Each heptade contains the name Yahweh twenty-four times. The themes of the Aaronic Blessing—I will bless you and keep you . . . — are found in 12 of the 15 songs.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> O. Palmer Robertson, *The Flow of the Psalms: Discovering their Structure and Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2015), 212.

Those details are more than just a bit coincidental. They are designed and inspired. Just as David was inspired by the Holy Spirit to write Psalm 133, so Ezra (or someone like him) was inspired by God to arrange the Psalms. Which means when we read Psalm 133, we do so in the light of the Exile.

What might have David's words meant to those coming out of the Exile? At least three things:

**1) A New Covenant.** The exclamation of how good and how pleasant it was speaks to the reunification of Israel and Judah. As the prophets anticipated a New Covenant, one of the promises God made was the reconstruction of David's House. As Amos 9 indicates, the reconstruction of David's house is a sign of the new covenant.

**2) New Priesthood.** Going back to 1 Samuel 2:35, the people of Israel had the promise of a new priesthood. In the exile, the temple was razed and the priesthood was ruined. However, as the prophets returned from the exile, they began to foretell of a new priesthood. This priesthood would not come from Levi, however, but from David, just as Psalm 110 declared.

**3) New Blessing.** Following a new priesthood and a new covenant would come a new blessing. Just as God blessed Aaron with oil and Zion with the waters of Hermon, so he will again rain down his grace and his mercy.

Only moving from Old Covenant to New Covenant this water would not be composed of Hydrogen and Oxygen, it will be the living water that God gives us in his Son.

*Psalm 133 in the Key of C(hrist)*

Whereas the Songs of Ascent were originally offered as pilgrim prayers based on the promises of God, they became promises fulfilled in the person and work of Christ.

For while Psalm 132 is a song about David's longing for God to dwell in Zion, Psalm 132 is fulfilled not in a place but in a person called Immanuel. God had not simply come to live among men. He became a man! David wanted to build a house for God, but God wanted something else. God wanted to come and dwell with men as a man!

Here's the point when we read Psalm 133: we must remember what David longed for and the Exiles prayed for has been given to us in Christ. In his life, death, and resurrection, he has made us one.

In Ephesians 2:14–16 we read that Jesus is our peace. He doesn't just make peace or announce peace, *he is peace!* All who are in him have peace with God and one another. As a result, Jesus prays in John 17 for his people's unity. He prays we would be one as he is one, and he gives us the Spirit of Truth to make us one! Then at Pentecost, this prayer is fulfilled as he gives his Spirit to his church (cf. Eph 4:1 – 7). Thousands receive his Spirit, and the anointing overflows. In his resurrection, Jesus received the right to send the Spirit to the ones for whom he died.

In other words, as our great high priest, he blesses us with the same blessing he received. And what is that blessing? Relationship with the father and unity with one another through the Holy Spirit. So consider the imagery of Aaron and his oily beard again in the Key of C.

Just as Aaron received God's anointing, and his brothers were blessed, so Jesus received all the blessing and shared it with us. The imagery depicted Aaron enjoying the perfumed anointing of God flows to others. This is exactly what happened with Christ and the Spirit.

In this age, we have all blessings—eternal life, intimate knowledge of God, full access to God our Father—in Christ by the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:3). In the age to come, we will receive resurrection life and the enjoyment of dwelling with Christ and all his family.

The church is a preview of that coming eschatological reality. We are members one of another; not because of anything we do on earth, but because the blessing flows down from on high and engulfs us with the Holy Spirit. By that Spirit we have communion with God and union with one another!

Or consider the other image—the dews of Mt Hermon flowing down to Zion. In the words of one archaeologist, after the sun shown on the heights of Hermon, in the evening-time the water-droplets would descend upon the lower mountains, which lie around it. The lower mountains were blessed by the loftier elevation of Hermon! Can't you see it! All the others peaks find life in the waters descending from the heights of Hermon.

So it is with our great king Jesus Christ. All those who gather around him drink the living water he drops in our mouths by way of his Spirit and his Word. To make it personal, He is our elder brother (Hebrews 2). A brother who does not mock us or push our noses in the dirt or call us all sorts of names. He is the kind of older brother we all dreamed of having. I've been an older brother and honestly, I was not a very nice one. I've seen how older brothers treat younger brothers. It is not well!

Some of you have older brothers who have cursed you. Some of you are older brothers who are nothing like Christ. You need to repent.

For all of us, we need to look to Christ as our elder brother. As God's beloved son, he receives from his heavenly father a copious blessing. And instead of hoarding it to himself, he delights to share it with his siblings.

*Don't you love him for that?* Don't you see that he wants to sit with you and shower you with blessings? Don't you want to follow a fraternal king like that? A king who doesn't hold you down in your spiritual poverty, but one who went to the cross to pay for your sins and who rose again to give you life forevermore!

This, Psalm 133 says, is your blessing. Here at Zion where God dwells with man you will find life. This is what you have been looking for all your life. This is what has the potential to change every other relationship you ever have.

Which brings us to our last key change.

#### *Psalm in the Key of F(ellowship)*

When you are loved like this, it gives you a fresh supply of grace to love others! When a church clearly and consistently identifies themselves with Christ, they can begin to live out and experience Psalm 133:1. When a local church centers themselves around Jesus, there is the promise that the heavenly experience of fellowship will follow.

What the world seeks to produce is some kind of sappy, sentimental unity devoid of truth, but what Christ gives is a true family gathered around Jesus. It is here in this union with Christ where you'll find resources to Love One Another.

It is in Christ that life, abundant life, life forevermore is found. Life together is the extension of the life God gives us in Christ. He doesn't give us life to live in isolation. He gives us *his life* so we might do life together. The One Another's are concrete ways we take interest in others, such that our fellow brother or sister's joy in the Lord is our goal. This is true fellowship.

In the weeks ahead, we'll talk about the details of doing life together. Today, we need to marvel at this: How good and pleasant it is when our elder brother dwells with us.

For if Christ is in our midst, we can trust in this fact: We will taste and see the goodness of God as we in Christ's family do life together.