

Psalm 133 Living together in unity

Introduction

- A short Psalm, only 3 verses, but “One of the most beautiful descriptions of Christian unity that has ever been written”.
- In what circumstances do we live together with other people? Think family outings, holidays, work, sports teams, leisure activities, church groups ... A very relevant topic for us all.
- We see many examples of discord: eg strikes for more pay & better working conditions; political parties; media portrayal of royal family;
- This psalm of David might have been written at the time when the tribes of Israel joined together at Hebron and made David King (1 Chronicles 12: 38-40).
- At the annual feasts the pilgrims would travel together to Jerusalem and more and more people would join in along the way from different regions and tribes, all coming together to worship the Lord, singing the Songs of Ascent as they approached.
- One of the marks of a great church is one where the believers live together in unity, and there is a special sense of fellowship to be experienced in the body of Christ. However, the message of living together in peace is equally valid in all sectors of society where there is strife and discord.

1. How good and pleasant it is (v1)

- “Behold” begins the verse in Hebrew and in the ESV, drawing our attention to the importance of this point.
- “Good” or wonderful, excellent, beneficial.
- “Pleasant” or beautiful, delightful, lovely. These words give an insight into the heart of God.
- “Unity” or harmony – we are all different but we fit together and each have our place.

God’s desire and plan is for unity among His people

- Jesus prays for unity for all believers (John 17: 20-23).
- Paul calls for unity in the Body of Christ (Ephesians 4: 3-5).
- The book of Acts describes the early church and its remarkable unity (Acts 2: 42-47).

We live together in harmony as brothers & sisters in Christ

- “Keep on loving each other as brothers.” (Hebrews 13: 1) The people of Israel who first received this psalm were literally brothers with common ancestors, joining together in a pilgrimage to worship God in Jerusalem. As Christians, we are also brothers and sisters, adopted into God’s family with God as Our Father.
- We must make every effort to get on well together, not only with fellow believers but also with everyone (Romans 12: 9-18): “Be devoted to one another in brotherly love ... Live in harmony with one another ... If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.”

2. The blessing of Christian unity is like precious anointing oil (v2)

- God gives Moses a recipe for a holy anointing oil (Exodus 30: 22-33).
- Aaron was Israel's first high priest and is used here to represent all priests and also to point towards God's promise of the Messiah, the anointed one (see Psalm 132). The names of the twelve tribes of Israel were sewn into the high priest's robe (Exodus 28: 11-12). So the fact that the oil is pictured running down from the anointed head of Aaron, down again over his beard and onto his robes can be seen as an image of the whole body of Christ united with Jesus at its head.
- Unity is pictured as an abundant blessing, like the oil which is poured out so richly that it flows freely from the head to the beard and down to the edge of the priest's garments. The same Hebrew verb translated as 'running down' is repeated three times in verse 2, emphasising that the blessing of Aaron's anointing was from God above.
- Oil in the Bible is a symbol of the Holy Spirit. In the New Testament, we learn that God poured out His Holy Spirit on Jesus the Head, and Jesus poured out the Holy Spirit on His body, the church.

3. The blessing of Christian unity is also like the dew of Mount Hermon falling on the mountains of Zion (v3)

- Mount Hermon is in the northern part of Israel, extending along the border of Lebanon and Syria. It is 120 miles north of Jerusalem and Mount Zion, and has three distinct summits, all of about 2,800 metres. It is the highest mountain in Israel and is known for its cool nights and heavy dew.
- This second image illustrates other aspects of the blessings of unity among God's people.
- Mount Hermon has seasonal winter and spring snow falls, which cover all three of its peaks for most of the year. (My photo was taken in March from the Golan Heights.) At the base of the mountain, springs form streams and rivers which merge to become the Jordan river. Below the snow line is a fertile area for plant life, and much of the Israeli-controlled area is a nature reserve.
- The rich dew that covers Mount Hermon is in distinct contrast to the dry wilderness found in other parts of Israel. Mount Zion in Jerusalem is a much smaller mountain, more like a hill, and Jerusalem is hot and dry in the summer months. If the dew of Mount Hermon were to fall there, it would be very welcome and refreshing.
- David established Jerusalem as the centre for Israel's worship. In Jerusalem their unity would be displayed and enjoyed. The favour and blessing of God is compared to dew.
- The description of the dew falling here has the same Hebrew word used for "running down" in verse 2. The dew is another symbol for the Holy Spirit who brings our unity in Christ and comes down from God in Christian fellowship.
- Christian unity is a precious gift of God's grace and a sign of God's blessing. It is there when Christians meet in worship.

Conclusion (v3) A foretaste of heaven .

- Living together in unity is a foretaste of heaven (2 Corinthians 1: 21-22).
- The Lord's Supper is a foretaste of heaven, a beautiful expression of our fellowship with Christ and each other:
*Blessed be the tie that binds our hearts in Christian love
The fellowship of kindred minds is like to that above.*



Mount Hermon viewed from the Golan Heights in March

Psalm 133 NIV *A song of ascents. Of David.*

- ¹ How good and pleasant it is
when God's people live together in unity!
- ² It 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.
- ³ It is as if the dew of Hermon
were falling on Mount Zion.
For there the LORD bestows his blessing,
even life forevermore.

Psalm 133 NLT

A song for pilgrims ascending to Jerusalem. A psalm of David.

- ¹ How wonderful and pleasant it is
when brothers live together in harmony!
- ² For harmony is as precious as the anointing oil
that was poured over Aaron's head,
that ran down his beard
and onto the border of his robe.
- ³ Harmony is as refreshing as the dew from Mount Hermon
that falls on the mountains of Zion.
And there the LORD has pronounced his blessing,
even life everlasting.

Psalm 133 ESV

A Song of Ascents. Of David.

- 133** Behold, how good and pleasant it is
when brothers dwell in unity!
- ² 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!
 - ³ It is like the dew of Hermon,
which falls on the mountains of Zion!
For there the LORD has commanded the blessing,
life forevermore.