

Brotherly Love

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Date: 01 January 2000

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[0 : 00] We can turn to the Book of Psalms and 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 Jew of Hermon, which falls on the mountains of Zion. For there the Lord has commanded the blessing, life forevermore.

As we can see from the title of the psalm, it's one of the songs of ascent or the songs of degrees. This set of psalms begins with 120 and goes on to 134. And they were a collection of psalms, as I'm sure we know, that were sung in one way or another by the various tribes as they gathered annually to go to the feasts in Jerusalem.

[1 : 33] And taken together, they picture to us very important aspects of the religious life of God's people.

I mean, we can imagine them, for example, in Psalm 120, as they described themselves as living in Masek and Kedur.

These locations are not beside each other. It's impossible for one person to live in both places at the same time because Masek is in Turkey and Kedur is in Arabia.

But they picture the distance that sometimes God's people feel from the place where they would love to be.

And of course, the place where they would love to be is with his people worshipping God. So there in Psalm 120, we find them, in a sense, moaning that they are living amongst those who are not for peace.

[2 : 49] And then in Psalm 121, there's a picture of them journeying up to Jerusalem and contemplating the various enemies that may harass them on that journey.

And in order to help them make the journey, they focus on the God who made the heavens and the earth.

And in Psalm 122, as we sang, they are now arrived at the city of Jerusalem and they are full of joy when they are welcomed to come to the house of God.

And then in the remainder of the Psalms in this collection, we are given various insights and descriptions of certain things that happened or that they saw during their time in Jerusalem worshipping God together.

And here at Psalm 133, they're coming towards the end of their time there. And this is their response as to having enjoyed all these blessings that have come their way and met with all the thousands of God's people that gathered there to worship God.

[4 : 10] they respond by singing this wonderful Psalm, Behold how good and how pleasant it is when these brothers and sisters too come together to dwell in unity.

And the contrast, as it were, between Psalm 133 and Psalm 120 is very marked. And it is interesting to contemplate that one reason for their optimism as they now face the future is the fact that they have met together with God's people in the public way that he authorized.

As we know, the children of Israel were commanded to go up to Jerusalem three times a year to keep the feasts that God had laid down.

And obviously there's a message there for us that if we feel isolated and lonely and if we're disturbed by living amongst those who are not for peace, then the answer is to come to God's appointed means where his people are and be refreshed by observing the unity of his people.

Now it's not clear, obviously, when David wrote this Psalm, but I suppose one likely occasion for it was when he became king of the United Tribes.

[6 : 03] We can recall that at the beginning of his reign, there were still 10 tribes that were kind of loyal to the house of Saul, but eventually they all came to acknowledge his right to rule.

And perhaps that was the time when he wrote it. But whenever he wrote it, it was something that was so striking that he composed this Psalm to celebrate it.

And by using the word with which it begins, behold, here is saying it's something worthy of admiration.

Here is something that's unusual, unusual, but here is something that we should admire. We don't usually behold or focus on or contemplate things that are ugly.

When we see something that's ugly, we turn our eyes away. And I suppose when he is saying here that the thing to which we are to gaze on is brothers in unity.

[7 : 38] By implication, it's not a good thing to look on when brothers are not in unity.

unity. Here is a wonderful thing. And of course, one reason why it's wonderful for God's people to be together, even if we take it from the experience of David, when there were those opposed to him to begin with.

When it comes to the people of God today, the wonderful thing about it is that all of them at one time were an animosity against the King, against Jesus.

But here they are now in unity and it's a marvelous thing. And therefore, we are to look on it with pleasure and delight.

in the psalm, we see something of the purpose of God for his people.

[9 : 01] What does God want of us? Well, there's many answers could be given to that question.

but if there is an order of importance, then it's not too difficult for us to work out that here is one of them for brothers, for his people, to dwell in unity.

We know from the book of Proverbs that there are seven things that God hates and one of them is the person that shows, that sows, sorry, sows dissent among his brothers.

So here's God's purpose for his people, to dwell together in unity. unity. It's something to be enjoyed because the psalmist here is saying it was pleasant.

This was something that refreshed him and revived him. I just want to think of one or two things as we go through the psalm.

[10 : 32] First of all, I want to think a bit about this wonderful relationship that's described here for others. And then I want to say one or two things about the illustrations that are used to depict its preciousness.

These illustrations are the oil that ran down the head of Aaron and the Jew that came down on the mountains of Israel.

And then thirdly, I want to make one or two comments about how these things work out in our lives together. What does it mean to dwell together in unity?

unity? We can say at this stage, as we are thinking of unity, we are not thinking of uniformity.

There is no connection between unity and uniformity. uniformity demands that everybody be the same.

[12 : 00] And of course that is stifling. But unity allows every person within the bond to contribute what they have to the unity of the people together.

So first of all, this wonderful relationship here of brothers. I just want to say four brief things about them.

Each of them had a grim past. And each of them has got a privileged present. And each of them has got a wonderful future.

And each of them has got practical responsibilities now. So each of them had a grim past.

Where did the ones that David was looking at, where did they come from? Well, we know where the children of Israel came from.

[13 : 19] They had been in slavery in Egypt. They had been in bondage, cruel bondage. They had nothing to live for in a sense.

Their lives seemed to be heading nowhere and each day was a burden. Aaron. But then God sent a deliverer, Moses and Aaron, and they, by his great power, rescued his people from the bondage in which they were in.

So they had a grim past. A past that was so sad that they had to remember their deliverance every year.

God did not want them to forget where they had been when he had come to their rescue. And that experience of the literal Israel is only we could say a faint picture of the sad and grim situation that each of God's people that each Christian was in.

Because we too were enslaved. Our sins may not have been public sins. Nobody may have been able to point the finger at us and say that we were guilty of such and such sins.

[15 : 01] But that in a sense as far as where we were is concerned. It's not the point. Before we were rescued by the deliverer that God sent, his own son Jesus, we were in a grim situation.

All of us were the children of wrath, even as others. we were being led about by the devil, doing his will enslaved.

People talk about freedom. But apart from Jesus, the only freedom that people have is to sin.

And until Christ sets them free, they are slaves. But that's what happened.

Jesus came and he came to redeem us from our life of slavery. And he came to snap the chains, to set us free.

[16 : 40] And we are liberated from a grim past. to and as we gather together as brothers and sisters in unity, we remember where we were.

That we were slaves. And as we gather here today, three we look at each other and we say, yes, you were once a slave, but now I see you're free and I rejoice.

we are not only set free from our grim past, but we are given great privileges in the present.

The people of Israel, when they were set free from Egypt, they were delivered into an environment, into a country, where they would be free to worship God and to serve him.

They weren't just liberated to do what they now wanted. Instead, they were to develop this relationship with God that he had rescued them from their sins in order to have this wonderful relationship.

[18 : 28] They were to know God as their deliverer, certainly, but they were to know him as more than that. There are many ways in which people can know God.

They can know him as their creator, as Christians obviously can know him as their deliverer, but there's still more. This great God who rescued Israel from their slavery wanted to be with them.

One of the saddest verses in the Old Testament is when God says to Israel, I wanted you to call me father. And so often they didn't.

Once or twice they did certainly as Isaiah says there in 63 8 16 for you are our father, our redeemer from of old is your name.

But now O Lord, you are our father, we are the clay, you are the potter, and we are the work of your hands. And however dimly Israel grasped God as the father, it's so different for us.

[19 : 58] Because to us has been given the great privilege of knowing the great creator. The power spoke of this great precious intimate relationship.

and it's something we're never to lose sight of. These children of Israel at one time their identity was slaves.

Then their identity became sons. And it's true of us as well. we're no longer slaves.

We're sons and daughters of the heavenly father. And we have access to his presence at all times.

He cares for us. He's working everything for our good. He chastises us. And when we see each other how good and how pleasant it is, to see the children of the father.

[21 : 25] Now they've got a magnificent future. If we had said to a person in Egypt, do you know the day is coming when one of your kings will be the wisest ruler on the earth?

They would have laughed. But that happened. Eventually in the kingdom of David, Solomon came with his great empire.

The land of Canaan was to become the envy of the earth. And even the queen of Sheba came to see it and said the half has not been told.

But their predecessors were slaves. And to us who were slaves of sin but who are now the children of God is promised a great future.

We have a wonderful inheritance. We are heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ. And as we meet together and we see each other and we say behold how good it is to meet with the heirs of God and with the joint heirs of Jesus and how pleasant.

[22 : 55] and as the Queen of Sheba said about Solomon's kingdom the half has not been told her.

Then as we come together as brothers the half has not been told us. Because it does not yet appear what we shall be.

But we know that when Christ appears we shall be like him. We are going to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled reserved in heaven for you.

So we meet together as the heirs of a magnificent future. And we come together as those who have practical concerns who care for one another.

We read there in 1 John chapter 3 how important it is to share with one another. And of course in the day of judgment these things are going to come up as Matthew 25 tells us when the king sits on the throne and says you did this, you did that, you did this for me.

[24 : 18] And they are going to say when did we visit you and when did we care for you. and as much as you did it for the least of these, my brothers, you did it for me.

So we rejoice together and taste the pleasantness of being God's children. God's love.

And secondly there's these two illustrations that are used here of the oil and the dew. Now it may be that these travelers on their way up to Jerusalem had tasted the beneficial effects of the dew as it came down day by day because they were traveling through hot and dusty countries.

And no doubt they had read or been told many times about the way that Aaron and subsequent high priests had been anointed into God's service.

And I don't think it's reading too much into the passage to see here in these two symbols of oil and dew references to the Holy Spirit.

[25 : 45] I don't think it's too difficult to see that in it. As we know the spirits compare to many different things. He's a wind, he's water, he's fire, and he's oil, and he is dew.

Nor do I think it is reading too much into it when it refers to the anointing of the high priest, to turn our eyes away from Aaron, and to look at our high priest and his anointing.

And as we sang there in Psalm 45, that when Jesus returned in triumph to heaven after his wonderful victories on earth, that he turned there and he was welcomed into heaven, and the Psalm 110 says, sit at my right hand to make your enemies your footstool, and at the same time, Psalm 45 tells us, he was anointed with joy, with the oil of joy, that's the Holy Spirit, above his brethren.

And as with Aaron, when the plenteous oil was poured upon him, and it ran down his shoulders and down his clothes, and it ran over the names, of the children of Israel, that were on his shoulders, and that were on his breastplate.

The oil, symbolizing the oil that went on the head, also went to the members. And in a far more profound way, when Jesus was anointed in heaven with the Holy Spirit.

[27 : 52] Remember, he said to his disciples, it is essential for you that I go away, for if I go not away, the comforter will not come to you. And he said, I will pray the Father, and he will give you another comforter.

And Jesus went back to heaven and received the Spirit, and the Spirit that was poured upon him flowed down to his church on the day of Pentecost, and it's been flowing since.

And the unity and the harmony that marks the people of God today comes through the work of the Holy Spirit, given to Jesus, and sent by Jesus.

So into this world of sin comes this heavenly experience as the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus, the Spirit of the elder brother permeates throughout his body, the church.

And the Spirit of Jesus in our hearts says brother. I suppose the other illustration of the Hermon and Zion, it points to other details of our union, or of our unity, I should say, and our togetherness.

[29 : 45] For a start, they were miles apart. Hermon's the way up in the north, and Zion was towards the south, but still the Jew came in them both.

That's a picture that wherever we are, the Jew will come to us. Further, Hermon was a high mountain. You can go to Israel today and ski on it.

Hermon was high. The mountains of Zion were relatively low, but the same Jew fell on them both. It doesn't matter how high you are as a Christian.

what your gifts are. They may put you head and shoulders above other Christians, but when it comes to the Jew, the ones with the lesser gifts also have them.

So we gather together, not as people who have got greater or lesser gifts, we gather together as those who are touched by the Jew that comes down onto us.

[31 : 07] And of course, the reason why God sent the Jew was refreshment. And of course, we can see that in oil as well. And as a result of the Jew coming onto the mountains of Israel, there was growth.

growth. And these things are pointing to the fact that the Holy Spirit comes for us to grow in unity.

And that Jesus, our High Priest, that a major focus of his intercession in heaven is on our unity. And we see that from John 17, don't we, pray that they would be one.

But what does it mean to live out this unity day by day? I just want to mention one or two features of what I suspect are parts of Christian unity.

The first one I would mention is this, forgiveness. Forgiveness. Jesus, in the Lord's prayer, the family prayer we might say, for he says, his disciples asked us, teach us to pray.

[32 : 38] And one of his statements there is, forgive forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.

As we come together, in order for there to be unity, we have to say to any who have offended us, or annoyed us, or done something to us, we have to say to them, I forgive you.

After all, that's what the elder brother says to us. forgiveness, and without this spirit of forgiveness, there's no pleasantness.

I forgive, is what we all see, in order to experience the unity. I suppose connected to that, to in order for there to be unity, there has to be trust in one another, commitment to one another, willingness to believe that others can know the Lord's guidance and help just as well as we can, but in order to ensure, not to ensure, but in order to, as it were, help that to happen, we pray that the elder brother would strengthen our brethren to serve him.

together, as we gather together in unity, we tell to each other what Jesus means to us.

[35 : 04] Our fellowship, as we all know, is not about the weather, nor where we plan to go for our summer holidays, our fellowship is in the things of Christ.

And as we come together, those redeemed by Jesus, and we share with each other what Jesus has done for our souls, there's a pleasantness.

What do we have to say about Jesus today? Can we say about him?

He's altogether lovely. And I don't mean say it to ourselves, and I don't mean say it to Jesus, but can we say it to one another?

Share with each other what Jesus has done for us, what he means to us.

[36 : 34] and when we do these things, this togetherness, this pleasantness becomes a foretaste of heaven, because that's what they do in heaven.

They focus on Christ, the elder brother. Now, finally, where is this unity shown?

Well, I suppose there are several answers could be given to it, to that question. But there's one place above all else where this unity is displayed, and that's at the Lord's table.

some of us may be tempted, some of us who are Christians may be tempted not to go to the table. But if you want to receive the help of your brothers, you have to be with them. joy to the hearts of your brothers, you have to be with them.

[38 : 06] any of us who are Christians, or should say all of us who are Christians, whether we've been to the Lord's table before or not, if we are Christians, we should come to the table, not only to tell the world that we are Christians, but to encourage our brothers, and to give to them a foretaste of heaven.

So, as we come to the end of this sermon, I would appeal to you, if you are a Christian, and you don't intend coming to the table, come to it.

Your brothers will be glad to see you. And your elder brother will meet with you in a way that you haven't yet met.

So, come. Shall we pray? Lord, we give thanks that in this world of disunity, and this world of conflicts, wars, that you have created your own family.

Sadly, Lord, we know that there's divisions in it, that help us here, as we gather together, to have that spirit of unity that would be good and pleasant, and that would experience your blessing, as we're assured there in the psalm, that when unity happens, that there you command the blessing.

[40 : 17] Lord, come, and give us that unity, and also the blessing that flows from it. For Jesus' sake, amen.

Amen.