

Psalm
“Oil and Dew”
Psalm 133

We'll continue in our series looking at the Psalms. Obviously not all of them, but certain ones. The last time I preached in the evening, I looked at Psalm 78, which is the second longest psalm. So now Psalm 133, depending on which versification and whatever translation you use, the first vacations are the same. It's the second shortest, tied with Psalm 134. So that's kind of a bookends approach in terms of length. But believe me, I can make Psalm 133 long. I'm not going to, but I could. It's not what they train us to do in seminary but sometimes it might seem that way. Psalm 133, again, is a psalm of a sense you may remember. Maybe it's probably easiest for us to consider the Psalms of a sense as sort of the Pilgrim playlist as, pilgrims were sending up to Jerusalem. Lots of discussion about how they might have been applied, but that's probably the simplest and most, way to understand that, as the pilgrims would sing the Psalms on their way to the holy city. Psalm 133 is particularly striking. It's one of my favorites, and I know you don't grade scripture. And that's not what I'm doing. But it is such a beautiful and striking image that we have. This is God's word. Please pay careful attention. It's holy and inerrant.

Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity. There's like the precious oil on the head, running down on the beard, on the beard of Aaron. Running down on the color 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.

Let's pray again,

O Lord, if unless your Holy Spirit comes, we will not hear your word. We will not understand Your Word, and we certainly will not apply it. But you are a God who delights in our understanding what you have revealed. And so we ask for your spirit then to give us understanding and joy in the word that you have revealed to us, an assurance that you will empower us to receive it and to live it, and to be satisfied in it to your glory. We pray in Jesus name,

Amen.

Well, brothers fight. If you are and have a brother. I don't have to tell you that. Sisters fight too. But not being a sister, I can't speak to that with any authority. but I have two brothers, and I am the youngest of those three brothers. And we fought. My brother Doug is six years older than me. Jimmy is three and a half. Now, when you get older, that that span is not that significant. But when I was five, I might as well have been in the cradle. And there is no greater albatross

than a little brother when you want to go and hang out with your friends. I would see Doug and Jimmy playing and their buddies. They just seemed so cool and I wanted to be a part of it. And so I would I would try to tag along. I remember one time in particular, it just stands out so sharply to me that Jimmy turned around and looked at me. I must I must have been about five, he said, Robbie, because that's who I was in those days. I think I heard mom calling you. She said she had a surprise for you. Well, you know who doesn't love surprises? And so I went and looked for my mom, and I said, Jimmy said you had a surprise for me. And she said, honey, I don't have anything for you. I just just oh, she was so ruthless. and I just looked at her and then I ran back to the porch and there were Doug and Jimmy running down the road, you know? Yeah. Oh, exactly.

Well, I got my revenge. I would play with their stuff while they were going. Model airplanes, model battleships, electric race cars. I wouldn't break them, but I would move them just enough so when I came home, they were. They were. It was clear I had messed with it. Well, that wasn't really very smart because they were bigger than me. And then they in turn did other things. To me, one of the things they loved to do the most was get my dad's Sanyo reel to reel tape from player, start tickling me, record it, and then play it back at half speed and laugh at me. We still have those tapes. Well, we grew up and, I'm bigger than both of them now. But we love each other. Yes, brothers fight, and most everybody can speak from experience if you have siblings about situations like that in your own families, and as time passes, it usually is something you look back at with some affection. Although your stories might not always match up. But family disunity is ultimately not a laughing matter. It's one thing to have squabbles, but another to have disunity. Family reunions that are anything but a reunion. And sometimes they just stop altogether because they're just too hard. A sister you haven't seen in years. A son who will not respond. Estrangement is hard. You may have even given up trying because of the state of things and thinking it doesn't really matter. And though our theology sometimes says God is in charge, we hurt in the span and space of waiting to see what God will do.

Or maybe in some cases it's worse. And I have known of some. The first biblical story about brothers, of course, ended in murder, family disunity, broken relationships. Hard.

But on the other side of the coin, all solid, secure and peaceful relationships are a blessing, particularly when we are able to say to one another, there's no place like home, especially when that unity has been hard won and you fought through things together to a winning solution and seeing God's grace at work. Knowing how hard it is for families to get along sometimes it's truly an amazing thing to be able to say, *behold how good and how pleasant it is when brothers dwell together in unity.*

But there is a relationship that's far more profound than the relationship of human families. And it is this family that's represented here, people who are gathered from different perspectives,

liberal views, conservative views, quiet people, loud people, introverts, extroverts. Amen-ers and non amen ers, which means Baptists and Presbyterians all gathered together in one spot. And what do you have? Amazingly enough, the Bible calls it a family. And it's us. It's the church. It's the people of God, drawn together in the bond of Christ, in the gospel of grace, bound by the spirit in a common confession and common life. And we must then live together as the family that we are, because God has made us family.

Now, there's no specific indication of when and why David wrote this psalm, but it's reasonable.

To conclude, it was written either during a time in which David was thankful for the peaceful unity, that it settled upon Israel after conflict, and there were many opportunities for David to look back with that kind of thankfulness in his reign in life, or when, in the midst of strife and division literally among his family, even, that he longed for this unity and peace because he had tasted it, because he believed it was something that God had called them to. Even if the situation is the latter, it's also reasonable to conclude that David had tasted of that unity of which he writes, and that's why his experience here is so important. Either way, though, this is the assurance of God in His word, of the reality of the goodness and the pleasantness of family unity among God's people.

Now, I'm going to structure our study tonight on this psalm by looking at two whats and one how.

First, what family do we belong to? Now, I'm not going to spend a whole lot of time on that. It should be obvious to us. But when it comes to looking at Scripture, we should never take anything for granted. David speaks in verse one of brothers, this brotherhood is covenantal. God had covenanted with Abraham and his descendants to be his God and his children's God. That covenant promise grew throughout the succeeding covenants, as God developed his people and prepared them to go into the land he had promised Abraham. And there's an obvious bloodline involved. It is an ethnic family or brethren. And so this physical family, though being covenantal, is also spiritual. These were, after all, the covenant people of God. For this reason, spiritual brotherhood continues to belong to the new covenant believers as well. We are Abraham's descendants because we have received the promise of the covenant as well.

We're going to go quickly through this. So you might want to write down Romans nine verses six through eight. If you can turn there quickly. That's great. but you don't have to, because I'm not going to dwell long there.

This is what Paul says.

They're not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring. But through Isaac shall your offspring be named. This means that it is not the children of the flesh. You are the children of God, but the children of the

promise are counted as offspring, those who belong to God through the promise, the promise of faith that Jesus is in fact the one who was promised ultimately to Abraham.

Paul specifies it further. Galatians three. This is verses 26 through 29.

In Christ Jesus you are all sons of God through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ, there is neither Jew nor Greek. There is neither slave nor free. There is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you are Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

So therefore, through Christ as believers, we belong to the family of God. I do feel like I'm preaching to the choir on this and that we would understand that because blessedly, we are. Our church has had wonderful teaching and great discipleship. But the second one is not quite so straightforward forward.

So it really ought to be. And that is what does unity really mean? What do we really mean when we talk about unity, particularly brothers dwelling together in unity? And as we apply that to the church? Fair question. Now, I admit, sometimes I get a bit nervous when people talk about unity, because I wonder if what is being sought is a unity that is at the expense of the truth. That's been an issue throughout the ages in the life of the church. Specifically, the move to say that you particulars about doctrine, well, they're divisive and they're not that important. And everyone who professes Christ ought to just bury all the hatchets, not in each other, just join hands and sing Kumbaya and we'll be unified. That's really behind much of the modern ecumenical movements that seek to reduce Christianity to its lowest common denominator, making it an easy to swallow pill. That's all profession with no confession. Well, that's not biblical unity, because it too often dispenses with those doctrinal truths that are crucial to our growth, to our health and growth as the body of Christ. So then, is living together in unity just a matter of agreeing upon and accepting a certain set of scriptural truths, doctrines that we all agree upon? Well, partially, it certainly is that we're constantly encouraged by Scripture to search the scriptures in order to be able to discern the truth and reject false teaching, and doing so allows us to unite over a common confession. It's why we have creeds. It's why we use them to remind ourselves and to proclaim that which we are united in, together now and across the ages with the Body of Christ. *Jesus Christ, the Son of God died for our sins. He was crucified, dead, and buried, but rose from the dead on the third day. There is no other name under heaven by which men, women, and children can be saved. And through the power of His Spirit as his people, we are to live by the power of that same spirit, demonstrating the reality of God by our lives in repentance and faith and repentance and faith.*

As we grow to believe that justification really is true, our sins are forgiven, and he has given us His Spirit so that we might be empowered to live in a godly and righteous way. So we must have

the unity of common confession. Now, again, I think that's something that we would all already agree upon. And so at this point you're thinking, yes, I know that. I agree with that, but we must have the unity of life together. And that is what this Psalm 133 speaks of -- this text is precisely what David is speaking about. And it's amazing. Now, if you have the ESV, you'll see a text note, at least in my Bible, it's an old ESV, so maybe it's been corrected in some of the newer ones. Verse one notes that the word unity is missing, meaning it could be translated as simply dwell together. Translators have inserted the word unity because the Hebrew more strictly and perhaps more, says how good and how pleasant it is for brothers indeed to dwell together. Now there's a little Hebrew particle that's translated in deed, and it's emphatic. It draws attention to the fact that it's one thing for people to dwell together in the same location. But it's another thing for people, specifically brothers indeed, to dwell in togetherness, a huge difference.

It's like having a roommate in college. When you get one assigned to you, you live together, you dwell together. But if your roommate is nocturnal and you are not, you are not indeed dwelling in togetherness. In fact, you are not together at all. It's in this flesh to flesh reality of living with one another as brothers and sisters that are thicker than blood bond in Christ is strengthened. It's tested. It's proven. So to say. We must have the unity of life together is ultimately to say that because of our bond in Christ, our lives are bound together in gospel grace. This bond does not run away or abandoned. It may bend, but it doesn't break in its strength. It supports the weak in its weakness. It leans on the strong. And all of these things can only happen among a people who are doing life together. Says that God commanded the blessing of life evermore in Zion. In the church. Where we are able to encourage, strengthen, build up, support and we can only do that together.

Think of how many times the New Testament speaks about one another. The only way you can be with one another is what ? is to be with one another. You can't do it individually. You can't do it separately. When our kids were little and by that I mean probably under 8 or 9, they would often squabble. And we lived in a yard in Pensacola that had huge, beautiful live oaks dripping with Spanish moss, and the moss would fall on the ground, particularly after a tropical storm or a hurricane. And the tree branches in the yard. And whenever the kids would fight, we, rather than separating them, we would unite them. We would give them a task together, go out in the yard and pick up the sticks. They had a task. They were to be unified and they had to do it together. Well, who's in charge? Well, we had to put somebody in charge, work together and don't fight. Some people say, well, that's crazy, but almost invariably not every time, but almost every time. I can only think of a few that it didn't happen. Sooner or later we would hear them out there laughing, which meant they weren't accomplishing the task, because they were usually poking each other. And we had to be careful because that would soon turn into another argument but we did that frequently, and they learned to work things out together. Separating

them did no good. Bringing them together is what brought them together to serve one another and to be one together.

Now, I would like you to turn with me to Colossians three, and that passage of Scripture is one of my favorites when it comes to life in the church. Colossians three verse 12, as Paul speaks about having the mind of Christ in the sense of setting our minds on things above, where Christ is, because we are united to him. Then saying something similar as we've looked at it already in Galatians, talking about there being neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, but we were all in Christ. He says, put on then verse 12, *as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another. And if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other, as the Lord has forgiven you, so that you also must so you also must forgive. And above all, these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful.*

I love this passage, the whole passage together, even to the end of the chapter, because it candy coats nothing. The more you get to know people, the more you get to know, so to speak, their sins. And we need to realize that just as you or I begin to see each other's faults more clearly, somebody else is beginning to see your faults and my faults more clearly. If I have to bear with someone, surely someone's bearing with me. Just ask Lisa, because we're bound together as sinners we're going to see those things. But God has designed the body so that we might be together, so that we then may be able to do those things which we've been called to do, to bear with each other, to forgive each other, indeed, to dwell together. And you can't just do those things on a surface level, living together.

Now, my guess really, is that at some level, all of us again, know that everything we've looked at so far is true. You assent to that. God calls us to live together as brethren, as family. But even as we know it, the thing that's probably rising up in our own hearts and minds is, yeah, I know that. But it's so hard. Why? We fall short over and over again. So this is the how? How do we live together as the family we are? And this is the point where we have to turn what we know to be true, and act out of that knowledge into faith, not resting on our feelings, or better, because we believe the feelings will just follow, that we just do it anyway. But believing that God will also make our feelings match our actions.

Essentially, we learn to live together as the family we are by believing we are blessed to be family. I can remember saying when I was almost a teenager, I wish I had another family. I didn't think my family was cool. I loved rock and roll and my family...Well, and in those days, little laughter. They did use the word square. They just weren't cool. And we lived in a little podunk town in upstate South Carolina. I was just embarrassed to be a part of that family, and I wanted to leave.

Of course, now I know that it was a blessing, and it is a blessing to be a Looper, to belong to my family. And that is what we are. And not being embarrassed by our family, our brothers and sisters, but know that we're blessed to be a family. Ultimately, our actions flow out of what we believe to be true and truly living together as the family we are rests on the depth of our conviction that being joined this family really is a blessing and not a burden.

Now, if you're hearing he ain't heavy, he's my brother right now. You're not far off from that. That's exactly what we're talking about. Look at verse one again in Psalm 133, and I'm phrasing it with sort of my own translation. My Hebrew is horrible. Glad we have an Old Testament scholar here so he can correct me. Behold how good and how pleasant it is when brothers dwell in deed together in coupling good and pleasant, David brings together both that which ought to be highly valued, that is the good, and that which is intrinsically desirable, that is, it's pleasant.

Now, this is important because there are things that are good, that are not necessarily pleasant, and there are things that are pleasant that are not necessarily good. Exercise is good, but exercise isn't always pleasant. I mean, that's why we say no pain, no gain. The end result there may be pleasant, but the action itself isn't always. But it's good. Healthy food is good, but it isn't always pleasant unless it's breaded and fried, and then it isn't healthy and means it's not good. Well, there are things that are pleasant, but not good. For example, in the same way, giving in to temptation is at the most basic level, pleasant, if only for a moment. But it isn't good, is it? It not only yields bad consequences, it also itself is disobedience, even rebellion. Especially when we know the good to do and we don't do it. But David says that the family of God truly living together is both good and pleasant. It is both highly valued and is highly desirable, and they come together. Now. I think there's something innate in our fallen nature that causes us to struggle with this. With believing that what God calls us to is both good and pleasant. We feel like the Christian life sometimes is eating our peas, and you just have to do it. And it's not much fun. Isn't it really the case that we tend to suspect that that God is calling us to something good and that pleasantness is probably going to be later, or maybe only even heaven?

Some of you are old enough here to remember that classic old Life Cereal commercial. Two boys, you're sitting looking at a bowl of life cereal, and the conversation goes like this. What's this stuff? Some cereal. Supposed to be good for you? Did you try it? I'm not going to try it. You try it. I'm not going to try it. Let's get Mikey. Yeah, he won't eat it. He hates everything. And of course, what does Mikey do? He eats it. He likes it. It's both good and pleasant. Well, it might be a silly illustration, but it's true. If God is who he says he is and he is. And if God does what he says he will do and he does, then we have the sure confidence of believing that his calling us to live together as brethren, even when it is hard and when hard things happen, it's a blessed thing. It's not just good and right, but it is pleasant and desirable, something that ultimately satisfies and even gives us life as we live together, bearing with that person that you're tempted

to view as unbearable, refusing to receive or spread a bit of gossip, forgiving a brother or sister as Christ forgave you. Believing the best when we're tempted just to suspect ill motive. All of these are not just good to do. They bring God's grace front and center to our hearts so that we may embody and model the gospel. And that is pleasant. And it is life giving to me, to you, and to the whole body.

Now, what David does next here, I think, is remarkable. And it's what makes the psalm so striking. He uses two similes that would have been obvious to the people in his day, but are a little odd to us. They relate what this true family unity is like, and those similes are oil and dew. And do look at verse two. *It that is when brothers dwell together in unity 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 Herman which falls on the mountains of Zion. For there the Lord has commanded the blessing. Life forevermore.*

In this first simile, David makes a priestly comparison. Now, before the priests could perform their sacrificial duties, they had to be consecrated, washed and anointed with a specially pure and spiced oil that was specifically for these sacred responsibilities. And now this was a symbol of God's Spirit. And the anointing here represents God setting the priests apart to perform their sacrificial work. Aaron was the first High Priest. And so when David says that unity is like oil upon the beard running down on Aaron's beard, he's saying that unity in the family of God is the result of God's holy work by his Spirit, and it's itself a blessing, a setting of the people of God apart for their priestly work, both in the Old Testament Exodus 19 and the New Testament. First Peter two quoted in Exodus 19. God calls his covenant people *a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of his darkness into his marvelous light.* Now the connection between the oil of anointing and the Holy Spirit is all through the Bible. That's why in the Old Testament prophets prophesied about the coming of the Holy Spirit in terms of being poured out on God's people as at Pentecost. Romans five, Paul speaks of God's love being poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. So unity is the result of the work of the Holy Spirit among us. And the priestly image in Psalm 133 points ultimately to the finally final priestly work of Christ, who in his death and resurrection united us to himself.

But each of us, in our own individual union to Christ, are also bound by the Holy Spirit to one another. And that's a profound and mysterious reality. But it is a reality. As believers in Christ, we have a spiritual bond to one another. We are one in Christ, even if we don't always look it, we are. That's why Paul says in Ephesians four verses one through three, *I therefore a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you've been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the spirit, in the bond of peace.*

When we don't walk in humility, we don't walk with gentleness and patience. When we do not intentionally bear with one another in love, whether we realize it or not, we are actually assailing the unity of the spirit. We're disdaining the bond of peace that he established in his grace. I think you could even say, essentially, that we are acting like entire priests, because we are breaking up that bond. We don't seek to do that. But if we are not eagerly maintaining that bond and that unity, then we are working against him. So we could say that Psalm 133 and one sense is calling us to see, as that since we are, by God, spirit, one, we must indeed dwell together as brothers in the same ways. Galatians five says, *since we live by the spirit, we must keep in step with the spirit*. It's the same concept because this is who we are. We must live like this. It is the sacred reality of what God has made us to be.

Now the second simile is fascinating also because of what it tells us about life. Verse three. *It is like the dew of Hermon which falls on the mountains of Zion. For there the Lord has commanded the blessing. Life forevermore.*

Now Mount Hermon was the tallest mountain in ancient Israel. It's not currently in the geographical border of modern Israel, but it's on the border of Lebanon and Syria. But then it was over 9000ft tall, and its environment is vastly different from that of the mountains of Zion in the area of Jerusalem. It even boasts a ski resort. I've not been there, but I've seen it in the distance and times of the year. Of course, you can see it covered with snow. It's a very different looking place, but as is often the case in higher elevations, the dew on Hermon was apparently particularly heavy. So heavy that it was drenching almost like rain.

One of my favorite places in the whole world is Grassy Cove Top in the shining Rock wilderness off the Blue Ridge Parkway, western North Carolina. I love it because it's a refreshing place to be. It's remote, but when the blueberries come in in early August, there's nothing like it. Where else can you eat blueberries alone? Bears who are eating blueberries and they don't care about you because what they want is the berries. There's a kind of oneness there.

I remember one morning in particular, it got down to 39 degrees. This is the first week of August, and we got up early and the sun was just coming up. And as we went through the rhododendron thickets and the and the blueberries, the dew was thick and we were soaked. But as we ate those ice cold blueberries, we were refreshed and didn't care that we were wet later would get hot. And that actually helped. But the dew was so thick.

The connection to Mount Zion is not intended to be somehow physical, in the sense that somehow there's a dew sharing going on. But David is making a comparison just as the dew on Hermon enlivens, the grass on the mountain gives it life, and there's refreshment before the heat of the day escalates. God's family dwelling indeed together brings refreshment of God's grace to bear, and it invigorates. It enlivens us.

Now note in both of these similes the extravagance -- in the first oil is lavishly poured, not sparingly sprinkled over Aaron's head so much that it runs down over his beard, over his garments, down in his robes, even to the hem. In the second, the dew again is drenching, almost like rain.

What a beautiful and powerful way to communicate the lavish, extravagant nature of God's grace in the church. Yes, we are sinners, but where sin abounds, grace super abounds, and he pours his mercy over us and drenches us, as it were, with the grace we need to repent when we fail, and to give us strength to live in love among one another.

Note where both of these images are ultimately grounded. Aaron's priestly work is in the temple where God's Spirit is poured out on his redemptive and his redemptive work. The life giving refreshment of God's grace falls upon and even emanates from the mountains of Zion, where the Lord has commanded the blessing life for evermore from his people. By making this connection, David is proclaiming that God's grace through his anointed priest who was not ultimately Aaron, but the one Aaron pointed to Jesus and his presence among his people, Zion, even the church. They are alone, the ground and the power of true unity. In short, only in the gospel is the power of God in Christ by His Spirit among the people he is set apart to dwell indeed together.

And this Psalm is filled with such striking images. But unfortunately, all too often the prevailing images in so many of the congregations that I work with through Lamp Stand is that of hurt, division, ugliness. And that's why we must never take this for granted. The unifying work of God among us as a body of believers is an amazing thing. We need to slow down and savor its reality when it happens, whenever we experience it, when we see it, note the blessing. And one of the ways we learn to live together as a family of God is by beholding the beauty of the blessing. That's why David says what he does at the very beginning. Behold, look at this now it's easy for us to miss the impact of the word behold, because today we view it just like it's a quaint way of speaking, in an ancient way of speaking. But no, it means look, it's the same thing we do when we exclaim to others to stop what they're doing, just see something that seizes our attention. Look at this. And that is what's going on here. Look at this group, sinners. Look at us! So many differences. One body. Look at this body. Loving these brothers, these sisters loving one another. Serving one another in their weakness. Lifting each other up. Behold. Look at it. It's beautiful.

I love how Charles Spurgeon demonstrates the nuances of this directive exclamation. Look, he says, it is a wonder seldom seen therefore behold it, it may be seen, for it is the characteristic of real saints. Therefore fail not to inspect it. It is well worthy of admiration. Pause and gaze upon it. It will charm you into imitation. Therefore note it well. God looks on with approval. Therefore consider it with intention.

Behold how good and how pleasant it is when brothers indeed dwell together.

Let's pray.

Oh Lord God, you have been our blessing over the years through hard and difficult times, through exciting and blessed times. You are the one who unifies us and brings us together in Christ by your Spirit. And we are so grateful for what you have done among us. Give us the grace to pause and behold it, and to give you glory, to not take it for granted, but in that reality ourselves. To grow in your grace and to love one another from the heart, because it is good and pleasant for us to do so. We thank you. In Jesus name.

Amen.