

HOPE CHURCH, 31 August 2008
HOW TO GUARANTEE GOD’S BLESSING – PSALM 133

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INTRODUCTION – PSALM 133 IN CONTEXT

This psalm is part of the mini-series of fifteen psalms in Psalms 120-134, known as the “Songs of Ascents” [Hebrew shiyr ha-ma:aloth]. We saw last week that these fifteen psalms were sung by pilgrims going to Jerusalem for the three pilgrim festivals of Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles, and we recognised that they are arranged into five chapters each containing three psalms:

“CHAPTER”	THEME	Where we are now	God’s intervention	Our destination & goal
Chapter 1	Dealing with distress	Psalm 120	Psalm 121	Psalm 122
Chapter 2	Mercy and justice	Psalm 123	Psalm 124	Psalm 125
Chapter 3	Home sweet home	Psalm 126	Psalm 127	Psalm 128
Chapter 4	Handling hostility	Psalm 129	Psalm 130	Psalm 131
Chapter 5	Being blessed	Psalm 132	Psalm 133	Psalm 134

These psalms are relevant to us as we are “pilgrims” on a journey towards God, to our final home, to the heavenly Jerusalem. We’re not there yet, and these psalms offer challenge and encouragement along the way.

Last week we looked at Psalm 121 from the first “chapter”, showing us how God helps us to deal with the difficulties we face as we make our pilgrimage towards him. This week we look at one from the last “chapter”, Psalm 133, which gives a glimpse of the blessing we can look forward to at our journey’s end. And God is gracious to offer us an early foretaste of that blessing now, if we meet one simple condition!

This is a psalm about unity, something wonderful which God promises will lead to guaranteed blessing!

THE CHALLENGE – VERSE 1

“Behold how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell together in unity.”

“Hine ma tov oo ma na’im shevet achim gam yachad.” (popular Israeli folk song)

Each word is important, with depths of meaning:

- hine behold, a surprise, WOW!
- tov intrinsically good, right, the best
- na'im pleasant, sweet, delightful
- achim brothers, in the widest sense = those related, kindred
- yashab dwell, settle, sit in peace, abide, endure, remain (permanence)
- yachad together, joined, alike, at one, a unit
 - Related to *achad* = number one. Used in Deuteronomy 6:4 "Hear O Israel the Lord your God is one Lord". Also used in Hebrew version of John 17:11 & 21 "I pray for them that they may be one even as we are one." God wants his people to enjoy the same type of intrinsic unity that exists between members of the trinity!!

Literal translation:

Wow! What a surprise it would be to see those related by a common family bond settling down in permanent peace together and remaining in one heart and mind. This is something intensely right and beautiful which will be a delight when you see it.

Obviously this applies to natural families – it is wonderful to see a united family that loves one another and lives in peace together. But there is a wider application, to God's family – the pilgrim people coming together at the end of their pilgrimage = us! Wouldn't it be both wonderful and surprising to see God's family permanently living together in peace and unity?!

YES BUT HOW? VERSES 2-3a

To help us understand what kind of unity he is looking for, God has given us two pictures in Psalm 133 (similes). "It is like..."

The precious anointing oil (verse 2)

"It is like the precious oil upon the head, running down upon the beard, upon the beard of Aaron, running down on the collar of his robes!"

This oil is described in Exodus:

- 29:7, 30:22-33, 40:9-15. Poured on Aaron and his sons to ordain them as priests, and poured on the tabernacle and its contents to mark them as holy
- 30:22-25 describes how to make this oil. 30:31-33 says it is a unique formula, not to be copied by man or used for ordinary purposes

How much oil was used? By the jugful! It was poured “upon the head, running down to the beard, upon the beard, running down onto the collar”. Repeated flowing text, phrases in waves, it just keeps coming! [not like our gentle dab when we anoint with oil for healing or dedication!]

Unity is like this oil:

- a unique gift from God
- made to God’s recipe, can’t be imitated or manufactured by human effort or wisdom
- those touched by it are set aside for God’s purpose
- given generously, by the jugful (not sparing dabs)
- starts at the head, overflows onto the body (Jesus first, then us)
- oil is a symbol of joy and blessing, also a symbol of the Holy Spirit – unity brings joy and blessing through the work of the Spirit

Dew from Mount Hermon (verse 3a)

“It is like the dew of Hermon falling on the mountains of Zion”

Dew is refreshing and life-giving, especially in desert country like Israel.

Dew is a symbol of God – Hosea 14:5-7 “I will be as the dew to Israel, he shall blossom as the lily, he shall strike root as the poplar, his shoots shall spread out...”

Dew from Mount Hermon falling on Mount Zion???

- these are 120 miles apart (see map) – for dew from Hermon to fall on Zion is physically impossible, would take a miracle
- Hermon is in Syria, Zion is in Israel – enemies, no connection between them

“Hermon” means blunt, cut-off, pointless, doomed, secluded. “Zion” is from root meaning dry, parched, barren, desert, arid, a solitary wilderness.

Many of us feel cut-off, flat and pointless.

Others are dry and barren, in a solitary wilderness.

Can God create a life-giving relationship between the cut-off and the barren? It would be a miracle – but the unity that God offers is like that! Only God could do it!!

SO WHAT? (VERSE 3b)

Unity is a gift from God given in abundance to mark us out as his people (like the anointing oil). And it creates a miraculous connection between people who are naturally separated, far apart, little in common (like the dew of Hermon falling on Zion).

God makes an amazing promise to those who live in this type of unity.

- there – where his people are dwelling in unity
- commanded – guaranteed by his divine order. “God said ... and it was so.”
- blessing – complete well-being, prosperity, goodness in every area of life
- life – *chai* = actively alive, growing and developing, reviving
- for evermore = “to the vanishing point”, always, perpetual

PSALM 133 – CONCLUSION

Unity either in a natural family or in God’s family is a generous gift from God and a miracle, which leads to great blessing.

But note there are clearly different responsibilities:

- God’s responsibility is to give unity. Aaron didn’t anoint himself, he received anointing, Moses poured the oil on him. It’s a physical impossibility for dew from Hermon to fall on Zion, requiring a miracle if it is to happen.
- Our responsibility is to dwell in it – live it out in practice. Ephesians 4:3 “Be eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace”. God gives it, we maintain it.

Psalms 133 is a challenge for us to do our part in order to discover the blessing God wants to give us:

- Verse 1 – we need to “dwell together in unity”, our active response
- Verses 2-3a – we need to receive the oil and dew, God’s anointing and refreshing, a gift and a miracle
- Verse 3b – only then can we enjoy the promised blessing

This has far-reaching implications – **attitudes and actions**

Three levels of application for us:

- Natural family – it is truly a wonderful thing to see a family living in peace and harmony and unity, it’s a blessing from God and a miracle.
- Individual Christians – we are members of God’s family, brothers and sisters with one Father (Ephesians 4:4-6). We can’t choose our family, but God is looking for us to be united together. How do we treat other Christians, within our own church as well as others we know? Respect, acceptance, love, support?
- Local churches – there is also a corporate application here, God wants different churches to relate together in unity. What could we achieve if we came together in unity for worship, witness and work?

This is important – God wants to bless us, but he will only do so if we are dwelling in unity. We may need to forgive others, seek reconciliation, make restitution, be humble, mend broken relationships. We should also be positive, reaching out, making the first move, building bridges, actively seeking unity. And where we find it, let's dwell in it, maintain it, preserve it, build it, practise it.

Only then will we know the rich and abundant blessing which God has promised.