

Introduction: (Psalm of Ascent)

Every time we travel to Israel, Nazareth, Galilee, Mt. Hebron, Mt Carmel... , but the main destination for everyone is Jerusalem. So you can sense the excitement as we leave the lowest land based elevation on earth - the dead sea and travel 2500 feet above sea level to Jerusalem.

Since ancient times Jewish worshippers would leave their towns and villages with all their family and friends and head to Jerusalem. There they would give their offerings and the priests would make sacrifices and their sins would be forgiven and then together they would feast and celebrate. It was an amazing event in their lives.

Perhaps because of the elevation and perhaps because they were going to meet with God - pilgrims would describe this journey as going UP - ascending - to Jerusalem.

And they would sing songs along the journey, (songs of ascent) one of the songs, or psalms they would sing was Psalm 133.

SLIDE 1

Psalm 133 NKJV

1 Behold, how good and how pleasant it is

For brethren to dwell together in unity!

2 It is like the precious oil upon the head,

Running down on the beard, the beard of Aaron,

Running down on the edge of his garments.

3 It is like the dew of Hermon,

Descending upon the mountains of Zion;

For there the Lord commanded the blessing—

Life forevermore.

And although it is one of David's shorter songs, it is one of my personal favorites. And today we get to unpack some of its beauty:

PRAY:

Now this might come as a surprise to you, but family road trips can be stressful.

Las Vegas- I thought about driving – it’s only 28 hours (3 days)

But then I thought about our Sunday morning 8 minute drives to church and I decided the extra expense was well worth it.

Road trips can be stressful,

Now imagine if you were not just traveling with your kids, but also all the neighbors and their kids.

It would be chaotic. Perhaps that’s why they started the tradition of singing it on a road trip – just to remind kids and adults to people to stay pleasant and patient with each other and to use kind affirming words and to not tease your sister or call your brother mean names.

SING IT

But this is not the only purpose of this psalm.

This psalm does more than entertain and distract them and remind them as they move toward Jerusalem, it points them forward into time to Jesus.

I believe Jesus is the “life forevermore” blessing

But let’s start at the beginning

SLIDE 2

Behold, how good and how pleasant it is

For brethren to dwell together in unity!

We know from personal experience how difficult it is when families DON’T experience unity. But what a joy when they do.

It is like a song sung with multiple harmonies - Each singing their specific note, but together creating a beautiful sound.

Good and pleasant

And he uses two images that are unfamiliar to us, but would have made absolute sense to the travelers making their way to worship

1. Priest – Aaron – the first high priest at his anointing.

SLIDE 3

It is like the precious oil upon the head,

Running down on the beard, the beard of Aaron,

Running down on the edge of his garments.

Precious oil – it wasn't ordinary oil – It was infused with different spices to give it pleasant smell.

So not only could you see it glistening on the head and beard, you could smell it, as it ran over the face you could taste it, and if you got some on your fingers you could feel it.

It was a delight to the entire spectrum of senses.

This is HOLY oil – oil for a specific purpose . This oil is oil of consecration.

All the priests got a sprinkling of oil

But the CHIEF PRIEST would have oil poured over him.

Starting with his head and it would run down his head into his beard it would then drip down to his chest and onto something called a breastplate

Slide 4

PHOTO: Priest with Breastplate

This breast plate was made up of 12 different types of jewels – representing each of the 12 tribes of Israel – 12 different tribes, united there above the chest and the heart of the high priest.

Are you tracking with me?

The oil would flow down his beard and over these stones – uniting them with the anointing and making them holy, and then down to the hem of his garment.

Running down running down

From the highest point to the lowest point –

that oil would run down and leave a mark, a scent, a feel, on everything it touched.

And to make sure the singers understand how magnificent and expansive the blessing of unity is- he gives another illustration.

Slide 5

It is like the dew of Hermon,

Descending upon the mountains of Zion;

Because of the way David writes this, you might think, the mt Hermon is part of the mountains of Zion at Jerusalem

It is not- it is nowhere near Jerusalem

Hermon is in the far north – up on the Syrian border.

5 hr drive (Jerusalem to Hermon) walking 61 hours

Now if you travel with us to Israel someday – you will get to visit mt. Hermon – it is the highest mountain peaks in Israel and the snow melt and intensely heavy dew feed the Jordan and fill the sea of Galilee.

You may not picture snow in Israel, but Mount Hermon is also called the "snowy mountain," the "gray-haired mountain", and the "mountain of snow"

Ski resort there

Slide 6

PHOTO: Mt Hermon Ski Resort

The region of Mt Hermon is cool, verdant and lush, Jerusalem is hot dry and dusty

Hermon gets its water from the heavens – the rain and dew and snow

Jerusalem gets its water from wells dug deep underground – (The Gihon Spring)

But listen:

The Gihon Spring – the Gihon spring is dependent upon the water tables far below the city and the water tables are regulated by water levels in the sea of Galilee, the sea of Galilee is fed by the Jordan and the Jordan is fed by the Dan and Hasbani Rivers – which are created by the runoff from Mt Hermon.

The blessing of rain and dew way up at Mt Hermon, leaves an impact all the way down to the very bottom of that nation.

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Some people may mistake unity for uniformity – everyone agreeing on everything. But that is neither the point nor possible.

“2 Jews/3 opinions”

Where people live in unity, we don’t have to press for uniformity.

At the Bedford Campus we have wealthy and struggling families, we have singles and married couples, we have red and blue families, we have farmers and city folks. We have folks who like creamer in their coffee and those who take it black.

The unity we experience isn’t created by removing all those differences, unity is created when we focus on what is shared.

And what is shared is the new life we have through Jesus:

And it’s worth caring for and protecting:

Slide 7

Eph 4:3 - 6

Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. 4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism; 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

Paul would tell us – if we keep our eyes on what is shared, we will find ourselves living in a place of (commanded, decreed, ordained, appointed) blessing, a place that is good and pleasant.

What we share is Jesus –

We are the church – (Ephesians 5) our head is Christ (Literally – the anointed one)

Slide 8

Hebrews 9:11

But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, - the commanded blessing

But he commissioned us to extend his blessing to the farthest reaches.

But it can't happen if we don't make unity a priority.

Unity was a priority for Jesus:

Slide 9

John 17:21 NIV

(I pray) that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me

And if they believe in me, then they experience the fullness of the promised blessing:

Life forevermore.

Closing:

Jesus entered a world that was divided and angry – but he invited those who had ears to hear to come into a new place – a kingdom where Samaritans cared for Jews, where least were treated like the first, where the lost and the prodigal were welcomed home with open hearts and open arms.

And through the cross - the cross that tore down divisions and broke down walls (EPH 2:4) he made it possible for all of us - to join him on this road trip through life.

He didn't say it would always be easy

“To live above with saints we love, oh, that will be such glory. To live below with saints we know, well that's a different story!”

But when we respond to the invitation of Jesus to truly follow him, he leads us all together into beautiful good and pleasant places.

What a blessing! And a beautiful foretaste of glory divine, even life forevermore.

PRAY