

Ascend:
The Sweet Song of Unity
Psalm 133

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Introduction to Text: This morning we are continuing a series called, “Ascend.” This series is an expositional study of Psalms 120-134. Each of these Psalms has the heading “Song of Ascents.” Most believe that these are songs that worshippers sang as they made their way to Jerusalem for thrice annual special times of worship. If this is so, then we learn a great deal about what was on their hearts as they approached worship and thus understand what should be upon our hearts as we prepare to worship or just give attention to the subject of worship. We have considered one each Sunday for the weeks of this summer. We are approaching the end. Today, we are studying Psalm 133 and next week 134.

Psalm 133 points us to a beautiful truth that I think ought to be close to the heart of every Christian and every church. This Psalm deals with the subject of unity—especially that unity that bonds fellow believers.

Text: How good and pleasant it is
when brothers live together in harmony!

² It is like fine oil on the head,
running down on the beard,
running down Aaron’s beard
onto his robes.

³ It is like the dew of Hermon
falling on the mountains of Zion.
For there the LORD has appointed the blessing—
life forevermore.

Introduction: One of the most famous public feuds of American history is the feud between the Hatfields and the McCoys. The origin of the conflict, according to historians of such, dates back to the Civil War era. The specific feud arose between William Anderson (Devil Anse) Hatfield and Randolph McCoy and their respective families on both sides of Tug River that separates Southeastern Kentucky and Southern West Virginia. After the Civil War, McCoy filed a lawsuit alleging that Devil Anse had stolen his horse. Though Hatfield protested his innocence, when Asa McCoy, the brother of Randolph, was found shot to death, the family suspected a Hatfield had been the murderer. Years of fights, killings, and retaliations followed. Though an extreme example, the story of the Feud of the Hatfields and McCoys illustrates well the problem of disunity.¹

Our text today pronounces a truth as old as time itself. “How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in harmony.” The Message translates verse 1, “How good and pleasant it is when brothers and sisters get along.” H. B. Charles, Jr., in preaching this text said in regards to really how to get at the

¹ Ken Walker, “The Real Family Feud,” *MinistryToday* July/August 2016, pp, 18-24.

meaning of this text, “Consider the inverse: “Behold, how bad and disturbing it is when brothers do not dwell together in unity.”

A Simple Point Concerning Christian Unity

This Psalm is a celebration of unity enjoyed among the followers of God. For us, this text can become a celebration of unity experienced and enjoyed by our church.

In the text, those who have travelled to worship in Jerusalem have enjoyed the fellowship (no doubt the laughter, the cries) through travel. They have enjoyed the combined worship or are contemplating the experience of combined worship, and it has been wonderful. And it becomes a song. This is a song of praise because they are thankful. But it is a song that is a prayer because they want it to continue.

“Good” represents the reality of their experience perhaps from God’s point of view. “Pleasant” represents the reality of their experience from their relational point of view. Good and pleasant is the reward of their unity.

Jesus raises the importance of this idea of unity to a high level in His prayer as is recorded in John 17.

May they all be one,
as You, Father, are in Me and I am in You.
May they also be one in Us,
so the world may believe You sent Me.
²² I have given them the glory You have given Me.
May they be one as We are one.
²³ I am in them and You are in Me.
May they be made completely one,
so the world may know You have sent Me
and have loved them as You have loved Me. (John 17:21-23)

Paul understood the importance of the unity in the church. In addressing the Philippian church he wrote:

If then there is any encouragement in Christ, if any consolation of love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, ² fulfill my joy by thinking the same way, having the same love, sharing the same feelings, focusing on one goal. (Philippians 2:1-2)

Later in this same letter, Paul addressed two individuals: Syntyche and Euodia. Here is what he said to the church about them:

I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to agree in the Lord. ³ Yes, I also ask you, true partner, to help these women who have contended for the gospel at my side, (Philippians 4:2-3)

Notice what Paul did. He addressed the two women, but then he addressed the whole church about these two women. Christian unity is a big deal.

A Simple Picture Clarifying Christian Unity

The Psalmist, after making a declaration in verse 1, offers a description in verses 2 and 3 that employs two analogies.

Fine Oil Running Down Aaron's Beard—In Exodus 29 and 30 when the instructions are given concerning Aaron being anointed as a priest, the idea of the oil is consecration—setting apart as holy.

The Dew of Hermon—The dew of Hermon was well known in these days. Hermon was known for its heavy dew. The water, some 60 inches of annual rain, flowed down to the region below bringing life to an otherwise arid land.

As the oil is to Aaron and the rain (dew) from Hermon, so is the unity among those who love God.

Here are three pictures we ought to get from these analogies. Unity...

- Identifies the Church—As the oil consecrated Aaron as priest, that is set him apart, so unity among the body of Christ sets us apart from the world.
- Refreshes the Christian—As water refreshes the desert, unity refreshes the believer. If you don't believe me, again to go back to the words of H.B. Charles, Jr., think of how disunity, fighting, among believers zaps the life or energy from a believer and a church.
- Paints a picture of Heaven—The last phrase of this psalm gives a foreshadowing of the unity of the saints of God in heaven. You are not going to be able to be mad at a fellow believer in Heaven. We might ought to go ahead and begin practicing that now.

So What?

If I believe this....

Give Praise for the unity of the Church—I want to give God praise today for the unity of our church. We are blessed.

Pray for the continued unity of the Church—We must continue to pray because this is an area where Satan always wants to attack. If Satan cannot defeat us or discourage us from outside sources, he will certainly try to do that from the inside. This is why in John 17, Jesus prayed that we be made completely one so that the world would know that He (Jesus) was sent by God.

Pursue Unity—Romans 12:18 says, "If possible, on your part, live at peace with everyone." Notice the words, "If possible." These words remind us that it must be that sometimes unity is not possible. Sometimes because of immorality, unity is not possible. Sometimes because of false doctrine, unity is not possible. But, if it is possible, and so much as it depends on us, we should pursue peace (unity) with everyone.

Protect Unity—If these things be so, we must work in the church to protect unity. The early church did that. In Acts 6, a dispute arose. The apostles worked quickly to correct the dispute and protect the unity of the believers.

Prioritize the things of Unity—As believers, we must always rally around that which brings the greatest unity—the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We might not agree on everything, but we ought to be able to agree that without Jesus, people are going to Hell; with Jesus, people are going to Heaven. We prioritize that for the glory of God and the unity of our church and mission.

That appears to be what happened to solve the feud between the Hatfields and the McCoys. The story is not as widely known, but the feud began to subside about 1911. Dyke Garrett, a farmer and circuit-riding preacher, known as “The Mountain Preacher” was holding a revival. During that time of revival, he met a tough man known as Devil Anse Hatfield and led that man to faith in Christ. One of the descendants of McCoys says now, “If God can do this kind of work among their families, He can do the same in any family, church, or organization.”²

² Ibid.