

Psalms 113:1-3

“Unity in the Lord”

Psalm 133:1-3

¹ Behold, how good and pleasant it is
when brothers dwell in unity!^[a]

² 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!

³ It is like the dew of Hermon,
which falls on the mountains of Zion!
For there the LORD has commanded the blessing,
life forevermore.

Introduction

“Unity in the Lord”

This is "camp" season. Unfortunately, this summer many of the camps are not being held because of the coronavirus. When I say "camp", there is the type of camping that is outside in a tent with bugs, but the camp I'm thinking of is one with a pool and chapel and air conditioning and tatami rooms and futons and beds.

Several years ago, I was volunteer staff for an English Bible Camp at such a place. There weren't many campers. In fact, there were more staff than campers. I began to think, "Why am I here? I'm not really needed."

However, an amazing thing happened at that camp. Afterwards, A young Japanese fellow said to me, "I would like to be baptized." I was so surprised. I said to him, "I'm so glad. By the way, what caused you to come to this decision?" He said, "When I saw the way the staff worked together and the joy they had, I wanted to get baptized."

I still didn't understand. How did the joy of the excessive staff relate to his desire to get baptized. He was a Christian and had been attending church. He and I had been meeting every week for what we called "Life Change Group." We would share what we were learning from the Bible and how we were applying it in our lives. We would talk about sin that we needed to confess.

He told me during that time that he was serving in the church, but he was not experiencing joy. He was just doing what he was supposed to. However, when he came to camp, he realized through the joy of the excessive staff that he was missing out. He wanted that joy, and not just to receive it, but to tell others around him about it through his own baptism.

Wow! Wow! Wow! I just marveled. What if I had decided not to help at that camp. I would have missed out on the excessive joy of the staff in the Lord Jesus. Camp is tiring. You don't sleep much. You are always with people. People who are selfish and noisy, myself included. It is not easy. But God used it.

That is why today, I want to speak from Psalm 133. Three verses: "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 the collar of his robes! It is like the dew of Heron, which falls on the mountains of Zion! For there the Lord has commanded the blessing, life forevermore."

This is an interesting short psalm. You are probably thinking, "Please make your message short too."

This psalm was likely written by David about the time he became king of Israel. Listen to II Samuel 5:1-3. "Then all the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron and said, 'Behold we are your bone and flesh. In times past, when Saul was king over us, it was you who led out and brought in Israel. And the Lord said to you, "You shall be shepherd of my people Israel, and you shall be prince over Israel.'" So all the elders of Israel came to the king at Hebron, and King David made a covenant with them at Hebron before the Lord, and they anointed David king over Israel."

The leaders were of one heart and mind. Perhaps David was recalling this as he wrote this psalm.

This psalm was likely sung as a song when the Jews traveled together to Jerusalem every year to worship. They came from many different places and different lifestyles. But they all came with one purpose: to worship God.

So, three verses, three points: 1) Unity in the Lord is good and pleasant. It is a taste of heaven. It is true shalom. 2) It is Excessive. 3) It is Life Forever. It never runs out.

1. Unity in the Lord is good and pleasant. It is a taste of heaven. It is true shalom.

What is unity in the Lord? Good question! Or, just what is unity? It is thinking the same thing about something. Having the same mind, the same goal. If you are hiking up a mountain as a group, you all have the goal of reaching the top, even if you take different trails to get there.

In a wedding ceremony, there is a unity candle. The bride and groom each have a candle that they each use to light one "unity candle." This signifies that even though they are two people, they are becoming one as husband and wife. They are going together now in the same direction, having the same values and purpose.

By the way, why do so many marriages fail? I was talking to a guy at the tennis court the other day, and he said, "Yeah, my wife is a bother to me, so we decided to live separately." I prayed to God to help me know what to say. Then I said, "Why does the Bible say, 'It is not good for man to be alone.'" He thought about this for a little bit, and then said, "Well, probably because man needs a helper." Spot on! I was glad he could admit that much, but yet they are not able to carry it out.

If we could talk more, I would like to say to him, "The truth is, marriage is more than just a commitment to each other, it is a commitment to God, who created marriage in the first place." Both husband and wife believe God and obey him, and that in itself has huge implications for the marriage relationship. They are experiencing unity in the Lord.

What does unity look like in the church? Listen to these verse from Acts 2:42-47. This is after many people had believed and were baptized.

"And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved."

This is the church having unity in the Lord. To a certain extent, the excessive camp staff experienced this. We met together, prayed together, ate together, slept together and praised God together. We got tired together and became irritated together. But, we shared our weaknesses and confessed our sins. We went to the cross together and received the grace of Jesus. That was what Koji saw and was attracted to, and wanted to be baptized. It was the Lord who gave us that unity. This unity is in the Lord, not ourselves.

Why does verse one say that dwelling together in unity is good and pleasant? The first answer is because our unity is in the Lord, and not ourselves. We could never do it ourselves. When we try, we only fail. However, when we open our hearts and bring our failures to Jesus and confess them, based on his death and resurrection, our failures are forgiven, our hard hearts are transformed and we are given unity. Hard hearts bang into each other. Soft hearts can become one.

2. Unity in the Lord is excessive, more than enough, more than we deserve.

In verse two, the image that David has of this unity is precious oil running down on the head, face and beard, on Aaron's beard, all the way down on the collar of his robe.

Why in the world this image of oil? Well, first of all, it is precious and unusual. We are not naturally inclined to have unity. It isn't normal. Our opinions are scattered. We have jealousy and hatred in our hearts. We hold grudges against people. We can't get along. And then, with the mention of oil, David was probably thinking of his own anointing as king of Israel. It was a special oil.

If we research this a little, we find out that in the Old Testament, this anointing oil was fragrant and sacred. Listen to Exodus 30:23-25. "Take the finest spices: of liquid myrrh 500 shekels, and of sweet-smelling cinnamon half as much, that is, 250, and 250 of aromatic cane, and 500 of cassia, according to the shekel of the sanctuary, and a hin of olive oil. And you shall make of these a sacred anointing oil blended as by the perfumer; it shall be a holy anointing oil."

So, this oil was a special fragrance and holy, only used on priests (such as Aaron, who was the first priest) and kings, when they were anointed.

But, according to John Piper, an American pastor, although it was definitely fragrant and holy, more importantly, it was excessive. Usually, in anointing a priest or king, it would only be poured on the head. But here, it not only came on his head, but kept on coming down onto his face, and then on down to his beard, and even to his robe. It was excessive! We may think of it as being messy, something we have to clean up, but

David thought of it in a positive manner. It was more than needed, more than deserved. It was a gift.

Aaron was a sinner. David was a sinner. The people were sinners. We are sinners. But yet through the sacrifices God gave them holiness. And now we through Jesus receive forgiveness of sins and holiness. We don't deserve it.

That is the way we need to treat unity in Christ. Any amount is excessive. We don't deserve it. Often we think, "We don't have enough unity. We need more." That may be true, but it isn't the point of this psalm. The point of this psalm is that any unity we have in Christ is a gift. It is first of all a gift from Jesus on the cross. From the cross, he says to us as sinners who have rejected him, "I want to have fellowship with you. I want to be your friend. I want to be with you." This is good and pleasant. This is excessive, so much more than we ever dreamed or imagined.

Just in praying together, we experience unity in the Lord. Worshiping, singing, breaking bread together expresses our unity in the Lord. We are humble. We are contrite. We are thankful. We know that all we are is from God.

Recently, we had our mission's family conference. Since we couldn't meet altogether, meet online in various hybrid groups. One place had 10 people, another five, and others just one person. I was in a group of ten people. Since we were at a camp facility, one evening just the ten of us had a time of singing praises. We shared God's Word and sang several songs. No one was worried. No one was in a hurry. No one was jealous of anyone else. No one was comparing themselves with others. It was truly good and pleasant to praise God together in unity. A taste of heaven.

3. Unity in the Lord is refreshing, life-giving, and it lasts forever.

David gives another interesting image of unity in verse 3. "It is like the dew of Hermon, which falls on the mountains of Zion! For there the Lord has commanded the blessing, life forevermore."

Why does David compare unity with dew? First of all, let's learn about these two mountains.

Mt. Hermon is 2,814 meters high. It is located on the border between Syria and Lebanon. It usually has snow on it. Mt. Zion, on the other hand, is only 765 meters high and is located in Jerusalem, just outside the walls of the Old City. Mt. Zion is 200 kilometers south of Mt. Hermon, and does not get nearly the amount of moisture as Mt. Hermon does.

So, in other words, the snow and rain and dew that Mt. Hermon receives is very life-giving. So in David's mind, that life-giving moisture comes all the way over to Jerusalem, to Mt. Zion. I'm sure that David had traveled in both places many times. He knew the freshness of Mt. Hermon, and the dryness of Mt. Zion. But he also knew what Mt. Zion symbolized. It was the holy mountain of God. It was where Aaron the priest made sacrifices for sin so that man would be reconciled to God.

But why does David compare unity with dew? Because that is where life that would result in unity would come through Jesus Christ. Christ would come down from heaven and eventually die in Jerusalem. Because of his death, we can be reconciled to God, and the prejudice between Jews and Gentiles is broken down, and they can be joined

together. I'm taking this from Ephesians 2. Christ would come and through his shed blood on the cross, the wall between man and God is broken down, and the walls between people are broken down. This is the gospel of peace. The dew is Jesus Christ. It is a blessing that will last forever.

After the triple disaster of March 11, 2011, journalist/writer Philip Yancey visited Japan at least 11 times. Elaine and I went to hear him speak on his 11th time at a church in Sendai. He spoke about the question, "Where is God when it hurts?" He has written a book on this, and it is also available in Japanese. It is entitled The Question That Never Goes Away.

His answer to that question, "Where is God when it hurts?" is: God is with us in our pain. He doesn't take it away. People die. Children die. Disasters happen. God allows them, but he has by no means abandoned us. In our pain, he wants to be with us. In our pain, he wants to unify us. He longs to shower us with his excessive grace. Then we can overflow with his fragrance and joy to those in pain and suffering. We can bring the gospel of Jesus. We are so blessed with the gospel of Jesus. Through the church we receive a taste of heaven. It is the abundant life that quenches and heals our thirst.

Prayer

"Lord, who came down from heaven, like the dew, your refreshing, abundant blessing has come down upon us. It is hard to believe that you really want to live with us who are selfish, self-gratifying and irritating. Thank you for your cross that is able to heal our hearts, and quench our deepest thirst. Please heal us today. Thank you for your gift of unity, that because you have perfect unity, you are able to give it to us. May we be the kingdom of God on this earth. In the power of Jesus' name. Amen."

Blessing

"The Lord bless you and keep you;
the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you;
the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace."

As God's family, let's experience his unity.

In the way we work, in our joy and in our sorrow, may we show people the way to Jesus. He dwells in us.