

Psalm 133-134 “A Song of Ascents: The Blessing”
Psalm 130, 132, 133, 134
Hebrews 13

July 3, 2011

Strong connection between the place (Zion) and the people (priests) and blessing

Psalm 132 on the establishment of the place that has been the focus of the Psalms of Ascents

Psalm 133 on the source of blessing – the Aaronic priesthood

Psalm 134 on the blessing from Zion

Sing Psalm 132
Read Hebrews 13

What is a blessing?
But what does it mean “to bless” someone?

Many epistles end with a benediction.

Hebrews 13 concludes with a benediction – a blessing –
that fittingly concludes his “priestly” epistle.

*Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus,
the great shepherd of the sheep,
by the blood of the eternal covenant,
equip you with everything good that you may do his will,
working in you that which is pleasing in his sight,
through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.*

A blessing is stated in the optative –
expressed in English by the word “may” –
“may the God of peace...equip you.”

1. The Aaronic Blessing: Life Forevermore (Psalm 133)
A Song of Ascents. Of David.

The idea of blessing has been quite prominent in the songs of Ascents.

The noun is only used in one other place in the songs of Ascents (9 times in the whole Psalter):

In Psalm 129:8, we saw the negative:

speaking of the wicked and how they are like grass on the housetops
that withers and is useless,

Psalm 129 says that those who pass by the wicked

Do not say “the blessing of the LORD be upon you!”

Nor do the harvesters reply, “We bless you in the name of the LORD!”

The verb “to bless” is far more common (used 75 times in the Psalms):

124:6 says “blessed be the LORD, who has not given us as prey” to our enemies

128:4-5 says that the man who fears the LORD shall be blessed from Zion.

132:15 says that God will abundantly bless Zion’s provisions

And then Psalm 134 uses the word *three times*,

“Come, bless the LORD...” (v1)

“bless the LORD” (v2)

“May the LORD bless you” (v3)

What is the blessing in Psalms 133 and 134?

In Genesis there are three parts to the Abrahamic blessing:

The Promised Land,

The Promised Seed,

The promise that through Abraham all nations will be blessed.

In Psalm 133 the blessing is articulated far more simply:

life forevermore.

chayyim ad ha’olam

literally, “life unto the ages.”

So the blessing of the songs of ascents is nothing less than “life forevermore.”

And Psalm 133 says that this blessing of “life forevermore”

is experienced here and now

when brothers dwell together in unity.

a. The Goodness of the Unity of the Church... (133:1)

Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!

It is *good* when brothers dwell in unity.

When God created all things, he declared them “good.”

In the same way, God declares the unity of brethren “good.”

And God also declares the unity of brethren “pleasant.”
This is a great word in Hebrew.

It is used 13 times in the OT –

David says that Jonathan was “pleasant” or “lovely” (2 Sam 1:23)

David himself in 2 Samuel 23:1 is referred to as the
“sweet [or lovely/pleasant] psalmist of Israel.”

In Psalm 16 David says that his inheritance has fallen in “pleasant”
or “lovely” places (v6);

and that pleasures forevermore are at God’s right hand (v11).

Psalm 135:3 will assert that God himself is lovely/pleasant.

Psalm 147:1 says that it is lovely to praise the LORD.

And in Song of Songs 1:16 the woman asserts that her beloved
is “lovely.”

In other words, this word is used regularly throughout the OT scriptures
to refer to manly beauty – masculine loveliness.

Behold, how good and how beautiful it is
when brothers dwell together as one.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the first use of this word “to dwell” in the bible
is Cain, when he dwelt east of Eden after he had killed his brother, Abel!
It is the word used to speak of how Abraham and Lot could not “dwell together”
but had to separate in Genesis 13 because of the conflict between their herdsmen.

The idea of “dwelling together” does not mean that they must live in the same house (or tent),
but rather that they must share a common land – a common grazing area, for instance.

When you think back to the quarrels between Cain and Abel,
Abraham and Lot,
Jacob and Esau,

truly it is a beautiful thing – a thing worthy of the title “good” –
when brethren dwell together in unity.

Brotherly unity is fragile and very easily fractured.

A harsh word – a cutting joke –
a pattern of ignoring each other or disrespecting each other –

these things create the ugly relationships that characterize most of humanity.

But this shall not characterize you!

In commenting on this passage, Calvin says,

“So long as animosities divide us, and heart-burnings prevail among us,
we may be brethren no doubt still by common relation to God,
but cannot be judged one
so long as we present the appearance of a broken and dismembered body.”
(Calvin, Commentary on Psalm 133)

So Psalm 133 says that the blessing is “life forevermore” –
and we participate in that life
as we dwell in good and beautiful unity together.

Because when brothers dwell in unity
you begin to experience “life forevermore.”

It’s not just a “picture” of life forevermore –
(the pictures are found in the anointing oil and the dew of Hermon in v2-3)
no, when the people of God dwell together in unity
you *experience* the blessing of “life forevermore.”

It’s worth remembering that whenever Psalm 133 was written,
it was written at a time when God’s people were *not* dwelling together in unity!

(unless David wrote it during the three years of his reign when things were going well!)

David’s own sons are notorious for raping their sisters,
killing their brothers,
and seeking to overthrow their father’s throne.

Behold, how good and how beautiful it is when brothers dwell in unity!

But this brotherly unity is not just about brothers sharing their inheritance well.

Ezekiel 37 speaks of how one day God will reunite the “two sticks”
of Israel and Judah – and make one stick.
Just after speaking of the Valley of Dry Bones –
and how God will restore life to the dry bones of Israel –
God says to Ezekiel,
‘I will make them a single nation in the land, on the hills of Israel,
and one king shall be king of them all.
Never again shall they be two nations,

and never again shall they be divided into two kingdoms (Ezek. 37:22).’

And as we saw in Ezekiel 37,
this points beyond itself to how God would make one new man
out of both Jew and Gentile.

I bring up Ezekiel 37
because Ezekiel 37 is all about hayyîm ‘ad-hā‘ôlām
life forevermore.

God says in Ezekiel 37:26-28
“I will make a covenant of friendship with them –
it shall be an everlasting covenant with them –
I will establish them and multiply them,
and I will place My Sanctuary among them forever.
My Presence shall rest over them;
I will be their God and they shall be My people.
And when My Sanctuary abides among them forever,
the nations shall know that I the Lord do sanctify Israel.” (JPS translation)

Life forevermore is found in the present age as the people of God dwell together in unity.
If you are not experiencing this abundant life –
I would ask you, “how are your relationships with your brothers? (Or sisters?)

I knew two men once who would have nothing to do with each other.
Old hurts lay between them.
They simply didn’t speak to each other.
You might think that if they just stayed out of each other’s way,
that would be best for all concerned, right?
The church could go on and function just fine –
with each in his own sphere, right?

It doesn’t work that way!

When the arm says to the kneecap, “I have no need of you,”
the arm can’t go anywhere.

The church cannot function properly when the parts of the body are out of sync with each other.
It’s not that you have to be “best buddies” with *everyone*!
It’s rather that you have to *love* one another – and work together in harmony with them.

When there is conflict between brothers (even silent conflict!)
the whole body suffers.

You might say,
“but pastor, you don’t know what she said!”
“you don’t know what he did to me!”

Now, it’s true that he or she might need to repent for something that he or she said or did.
But what he or she said or did
does not excuse *you* for how *you* responded!

Okay,
so we’ve got this cycle of sin and retaliation going.
(And even *ignoring each other* is sinful retaliation –
given the *love* that we owe to one another in Christ!)

What is the solution?

Verse 2 gives us the solution in a picture:

b. ...Like the Precious Oil on Aaron’s Beard (133:2)
The good and beautiful unity of brethren dwelling together

*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!*

Last time we heard about how the priests of the LORD are clothed with righteousness (132:9)
and salvation (v16).

And we saw that when the priests are clothed in righteousness and salvation
(through the blood of the sacrifice)
then all the saints “shout for joy.” (v9, 16)

Here the Psalmist chooses a different image:
the anointing of the high priest.

The high priest was chosen to represent all Israel when he went into the Most Holy Place.
He alone could go into the Holy of Holies,
once a year on the Day of Atonement,
and make atonement for the sins of the people. (Leviticus 16)

The anointing of Aaron is described in various places in the OT:

Exod 29:7 = “You shall take the anointing oil and pour it on his head and anoint him...[Aaron]”
Exod 30: 23-25, 30 = “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 . . . You shall anoint Aaron and his sons, and consecrate them, that they may serve me as priests.”

Lev 8:12 = “And he poured some of the anointing oil on Aaron’s head and anointed him to consecrate him.”

Aaron was consecrated as high priest
so that he might be the visible unity of Israel
as he *alone* entered the Holy of Holies
on behalf of Israel.

The anointing of the high priest
prefigured the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon our Lord Jesus in his baptism,
as Jesus prepared to enter the heavenly Holy of Holies,
offering his own blood as the atoning sacrifice that removes our sins.

When Israel saw the precious oil –
literally the “good oil”
(remember “how *good* it is for brethren to dwell in unity”?)
when Israel saw this *good* oil running down on the beard of the high priest,
they were to see a picture of their unity *in him*.

And when we see Jesus – crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death –
we see our unity *in him* –
as Paul says,
“when Christ, who is your life, appears,
then you also will appear with him in glory.”

This blessing of life evermore – life everlasting –
is nothing less than the life of Jesus himself,
the life of God himself,
prefigured in the anointing oil running down on the collar of Aaron’s robes.

As Paul says in Romans 8:11 –
“If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you,
he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies
through his Spirit who dwells in you.”

We’ll look more at the story of Levi tonight in 1 Chronicles 6...

But in verse 3, the Psalmist suggests another simile:

c. ...Like the Dew of Hermon (133:3)
It is like the dew of Hermon, which falls on the mountains of Zion!

This is a beautiful picture of divine refreshment –

the dew of Hermon falling on the mountains of Zion.

Hermon is far to the north –
it is also a far higher mountain!
As such, it gets more dew!

In earthly terms, Zion is not nearly as spectacular as Hermon.
Hermon is 9200 feet above sea level –
more than twice as tall as any other mountain in the region –
the tallest mountain around Jerusalem is around 2700 feet!

But when brothers dwell together in unity,
it is like the dew of Hermon falling on the mountains of Zion!
It is refreshing!

It is satisfying.
It is good!
It is beautiful!

It fills the heart with great delight!

Why?

Because *there* (in Zion) the LORD has commanded the blessing:
Life forevermore.

Life forevermore points us beyond this age to eternal life –
the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting –

but life forevermore does not wait for the resurrection of our bodies.

Life forevermore begins with brethren dwelling together in unity.

2. Blessing the LORD: The Blessing from Zion (Psalm 134)

A Song of Ascents

Psalm 134 concludes the songs of Ascents with a call to bless the LORD,
and a final benediction:

“may the LORD bless you from Zion,
he who made heaven and earth.”

Psalm 134 also points forward to Psalm 135,
as Psalm 135 opens and closes by imitating the language of Psalm 134.

But Psalm 134 concludes the songs of Ascents by tying together the themes that we have seen, themes of Zion, blessing, the house of the LORD – the pilgrim theme of Psalm 121 and 122 now concluding as the pilgrims prepare to depart.

a. Bless the LORD from the House of the LORD (134:1-2)

*Come, bless the LORD, all you servants of the LORD,
who stand by night in the house of the LORD!
Lift up your hands to the holy place and bless the LORD!*

The original setting is not entirely clear.

Who are the “servants of the LORD”?

Are they the priests who serve in the temple?

Other Levites?

The worshipers who have gathered to praise God in the evening?

If the “house of the LORD” refers to the inner court,
then it would have to refer to priests or Levites,

on the other hand,

if “lifting up your hands *to* the holy place” is correct,
then the people lifting their hands are not *in* the holy place,
but are raising their hands *toward* it –

in which case we could be talking about the worshipers.

The nice thing is that the NT application remains the same either way!

Since you are both priests and worshipers,
the application is that *you* are to “come, bless the LORD,
all you servants of the LORD.”

This may seem counter-intuitive to some of you!

How can *I* bless the LORD?

If the greater must bless the lesser,
then we cannot bless God!

I want you to think back to what we saw in Psalm 129,
regarding the exchange of blessings between the farm-workers and the passers-by:

“The blessing of the LORD be upon you!”

“We bless you in the name of the LORD.”

Remember what Boaz said to his laborers:

“The LORD be with you!”

and they replied,
“The LORD bless you.” (Ruth 2:4)

Boaz is undoubtedly “greater” than his laborers!
And yet they bless him!

Why?
Because he has blessed them.

Psalm 134 calls us to “bless the LORD”
because he has so richly blessed us!
Psalm 134 does not mention all the details
(Psalm 132 has already done that!)

But Psalm 134 calls us to lift up our hands to the holy place –
and for them, that referred to the earthly temple,
the place where God forgave their sins and brought refreshment –
and for us, the holy place is the right hand of the Father,
where our Lord Jesus Christ, the great high priest,
intercedes for us with his precious blood.

(Incidentally, lifting up your eyes and your hands in prayer is a *good thing!*
Sure, it’s okay to close your eyes and fold your hands –
but since the scripture *says* to lift up your eyes and your hands,
that is at *least* as appropriate!
I won’t say that everyone *must* raise their hands –
since I don’t think that is the point here!

But the physical act of lifting your hands and lifting your eyes
should remind you that you are lifting your heart up to the LORD.)

b. May the LORD Bless You from Zion (134:3)

May the LORD bless you from Zion, he who made heaven and earth!

You can see the roots of our communion thanksgiving here in Psalm 134.
The LORD be with you.
And also with you.
Lift up your hearts.
We lift them up to the Lord.
Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.
It is right to give him thanks and praise...

The call and response of Psalm 134
joined together with the harvest blessing of Boaz

forms the heart of our eucharistic thanksgiving.

We bless the LORD because the creator of heaven and earth has blessed us,
by sending his only begotten Son
to be the atoning sacrifice for our sin,

so that we might dwell together as brethren – in unity.

The blessing: life forevermore –
comes to us from the God who made heaven and earth –

but it comes to us, when we “bless the LORD.”

In other words,

when we come to praise God and give him thanks for his great works in Jesus Christ,
he blesses us;
when we live together in unity, seeking not our own interests, but the interests of others,
he blesses us.